

Patchwork Parliaments

Post-imperial Field of Power in the Second Republic of Poland, Greater Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes After the First World War

After the First World War large empires of Central and Eastern Europe gave place to smaller, compact 'nation' states. Some of them were new, some reemerged after a longer period of inexistence, and yet others acquired vast new territories. The Republic of Poland, the extended Kingdom of Romania and the merger Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes emerged in a new form out of various fragments of the bygone empires. As a result, all three states displayed high cultural and institutional variance. They were inhabited by religious or national 'minorities,' and people previously living in various empires were used to different institutions and legal realities. Moreover, local national movements had promoted various Polish, Romanian or Serbian identities. This was a mix making the integration of new states very difficult, in times of heated national aspirations of their newly dominant groups additionally leading to bitter conflicts. Their governments rejected the idea of federation and were reluctant to acknowledge the demands of the national minorities. Various social groups and regional groupings met and debated the emerging polity in legislative assemblies of these reconstructed states. These patchwork parliaments displayed this diversity and served as vehicles to integrate states above post-imperial divisions.

Patchwork Parliaments aims to understand the dynamic interaction between personal, regional and state elements in legislative assemblies in three states composed of parts originating in various empires. It does so by studying (1) parliamentary debates, (2) political divisions and social context of politics in a diversified state, and (3) biographies of envoys coming from different parts of those countries. The project combines new parliamentary studies, historical sociology of empire, and the modified theory of fields originating from sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. I want to understand historical and social conditions of doing politics in a new state, where various types of elites and regional groups compete for power with the help of various resources, or capitals. I venture to compare these three interconnected cases to answer questions concerning unification efforts, crucial debates on the new state, and regionally embedded careers of envoys. For instance, I want to know how parliaments navigated paramount social challenges (labor issues, land reforms, ethnic diversity) in connection with the state integration? How was the diversity of the parliamentary body expressed in the parliamentary debates? What was the impact of regional divisions and diversified populations on cleavages organizing the parliamentary work? How did the sociological characteristics of the envoys, their qualification, and biographies differ between the regions? Was being a politician a profession? What type of elite emerged via the parliamentary career? How were various capitals (economic, cultural, political) used for parliamentary work? How did national diversity and regional identities impact class conflict and revolutionary tendencies? Last but not least, I want to ask whether the state served national elites to fulfill their career ambitions or perhaps was in a way a restoration of the pre-war order destroyed by centralizing encroachment of the military imperial elite during the war. The comparison will help me to trace differences and commonalities, to track causal mechanism, and to offer empirically-grounded theoretical explanations.