



International
Science Council



Laudatio Stein Rokkan Prize 2019

The 2019 Stein Rokkan Prize for Comparative Social Science Research has been awarded to Andreas Wimmer in recognition of his book *Nation Building. Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart*, published by Princeton University Press in 2018. Wimmer asks the crucial question why national integration is achieved in some diverse countries while others are destabilized. He argues that nation building is a slow-moving and generational process. Its success relies on the spread of civil society organizations, linguistic assimilation and the states' capacities to provide public goods to its citizens. Empirically, the book spans several centuries and several continents using both pairwise country comparisons and statistical analysis. Wimmer builds on and innovates a long tradition in social sciences concerned with big questions and messy realities. He stresses that:

“Over the past two decades, social science research has begun to focus on smaller and smaller questions for which rock-solid empirical answers can be found, fleeing from the complexity of historical reality into the secure settings of a laboratory or toward the rare occurrences of quasi-experiments that the social world has to offer. Scholars concerned with macro-historical processes who dare to compare across a wide range of contexts find it increasingly difficult to justify their endeavor” (p. xx).

The Jury shares Wimmer's preoccupation concerning the development of the field and, by selecting his work, intends to signal its support for the large-scale study of macro-historical processes. *Nation Building* is deemed by the Jury to be “a very substantial and original contribution in comparative social science research.”

Wimmer's overall argument is that the study of nation building requires “relational theory and nested methods.” The first half of the book demonstrates how the main mechanisms of nation building – slow-moving and generational processes – shape the historical developments in three pairs of country cases. Switzerland and Belgium, both similar in terms of population, location, and linguistic diversity differ in terms of their voluntary organizations. Switzerland's inclusionary and multiethnic voluntary organizations allowed the country successful nation building. The comparison between Botswana and Somalia teases out the centrality of a state capable of providing providing public goods

to its citizens for nation-building. Here, Botswana stands out for its capable state. The last set of paired comparison between China and Russia demonstrates the importance of communicative, or linguistic, integration for nation building. China's common writing system allowed to foster ties between people who spoke different languages. In contrast, in Russia the fragmentation into several languages written in different scripts prevented national unity.

While the paired comparisons demonstrate how the mechanisms work in the historical process, in the second part of the book Wimmer runs a number of statistical analyses on country-level data – “fly[ing] over much more terrain and at a much higher altitude from where not many historic details will be visible, only the mere contours of the political topography” (p.172). Emphasizing the average effects across many countries and years, Wimmer shows that nation building is more likely to succeed if the state elites have the infrastructural capacity to secure public goods thereby becoming attractive partners for citizens, if associational networks are sufficiently developed to build transethnic coalitions, and if linguistic barriers are sufficiently reduced to facilitate exchange of information. These findings, Wimmer concedes, could be challenged if factors like neighboring states, regional hegemony, or attention to elite bargains were to be included.

Successful nation building should also be observed through citizens being able to identify with the nation. Identification with the nation should follow from political representation. In this analysis Wimmer uses surveys that cover 123 countries and represent about 92 percent of the world's population. He argues that political power and representation is more important than the demographic size of minorities and ethnic groups when explaining which individuals are more proud of their nation. Through multilevel analysis, Wimmer shows that national pride follows from political inclusion. National pride is less a matter of the demographic make-up of the population than of power and politics.

Nation building is a powerful, bold and convincing book. Wimmer presents strong theoretical claims and mobilizes different methods, utilizing a range of data spanning centuries, many countries as well as worldwide population surveys to support his claims. Linguistic assimilation, the spread of civil society organizations, and the states' capacity to provide public goods for its citizens are crucial factors in building nations. These capacities themselves are the product of favorable topographic characteristics and historical and historical antecedents. Wimmer's “tectonic” theory of nation-building thus also cautions against a short-termist view on how to support failed states, so prevalent in contemporary foreign policy. While the global trend towards national inclusion is positive, some countries remain caught in a vicious circle seemingly unable to gain any traction toward nation building, and democracy promotion is unlikely to fix this.

Andreas Wimmer's *Nation Building. Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart* is a significant contribution to our understanding of historical legacies, diverse societies, national integration toward the robust and successful building of nations.

The members of the Stein Rokkan Prize Committee taking part in the final deliberations on the 2019 prize winner – Gilberto Capano (Chair), Dorothee Bohle, Gunnar Grendstad, Hanspeter Kriesi, Marina Costa Lobo – were unanimous in their decision.