

The impact of place, the authors claim, is likely to be obscured if the search for “homogeneous” electoral patterns is conducted at a level where votes are aggregated by province, region or state, and if these patterns are in turn associated with static indicators like socioeconomic status and other census- or survey-derived data, or with concepts like “social capital.” As an alternative to such “compositional” treatments of electoral behavior, they posit a “contextual” approach. This requires attention to the “mediating role” in the determination of the voting decision played by the *milieu*, or the *place*, in which the individual voter resides, or in which he or she associates or interacts with others.

These milieus may include one’s place of residence and the institutions (e.g., family, workplace, church, town, etc.) found there, but they are not necessarily limited to them. Shin and Agnew’s methodology requires “dynamic place configuration”—meaning the identification of “the mix of local and extra-local social and economic influences that come together differently in different places and that change in their conditional effects as the influences themselves are shuffled and displaced over time” (p. 19). The point would be not to “freeze” voting patterns into rigidly defined political or electoral spaces, like those that are labeled “Red,” “Blue,” “White,” or are classified by other labels that give electoral geographical jurisdictions distinctive ideological coloration or party identity.

An overtone that runs through these pages is that one should avoid extrapolating to other political systems the propositions or axioms about politics that may be valid in the United States. The authors simply do not agree that in the case of Italy, evidence is strong that that country’s electoral politics has been “Americanized.” For example, they note (pp. 51–53) that even if Italian television has grown enormously in electoral importance, it does not follow that this medium affects political parties or territorial politics there in the same way. We are once again reminded that the American parties are the outliers, including in the sense that, unlike elsewhere, they do not mediate between state and society.

The analytical chapters show us that if we look differently and more carefully within regions and province, we may well discern patterns that are both different from those found at the more inclusive level and also influenced by factors related to place. In each of these chapters, we find arresting depictions of the variations in electoral “colonization” and “mobilization” effected by the newer political parties in territories once dominated by the Christian Democratic or Communist Parties. We come away from this experience with a somewhat different, and perhaps keener, understanding of expressions like “all politics is local,” or “all parties are patronage parties.”

As the authors show, one aspect of Berlusconi’s political acumen lies in his having created, for geographical reasons, not one electoral coalition but two of them. One of them, in the North, is with Umberto Bossi and his North-

ern League; the other is with Gianfranco Fini and his National Alliance. Results of the 2008 elections basically confirm the book’s major argument.

One might wish that there were more in this book that analyzes variations in the way “dynamic place configuration” generates alternative electoral configurations. But this may be a topic for a sequel. In the meantime, reading this one is highly recommended.

Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond.

By Abdulkader H. Sinno. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007. 352p. \$39.95 cloth. doi:10.1017/S153759270090628

— Barnett R. Rubin, *New York University*

Organizations at War takes a very neglected but vital perspective on insurgencies in general and the series of such wars in Afghanistan in particular. The book applies theories of organization derived largely from the study of firms to understand the performance under different conditions of guerrilla organizations.

Sinno starts with an important point: both casual and scholarly observers often refer to conflicts almost reflexively as taking place among ethnic groups, political ideologies, movements, or interest groups. Such dynamics play a role in recruitment, leadership, and mobilization of resources, but all of these processes take place through institutional structures we call organizations. How organizations mobilize resources, recruit members, carry out activities, train and indoctrinate participants, process information, and learn from experience depends to a large extent on how—and to what extent—they are structured. Insurgent organizations are no exception. While there is a considerable literature on professional military organizations, there is still relatively little on the cases of informal insurgent organizations. Sinno identifies this gap and tries to fill it.

The main variables he identifies in the organization of insurgencies are the degree of centralization of decision making and whether the organization benefits from having a safe haven where the leadership can mobilize without constant security threats. One of the keys to an insurgent organization’s success, he argues, is understanding when and how to centralize in order to take advantage of a safe haven.

Sinno’s analysis is largely developed around the experiences of the mujahidin organizations of the 1980s, which he experienced first-hand as a humanitarian worker. Because of his direct experience and the availability of considerable secondary literature, he makes a convincing case in his comparison of the traditional patronage-based organizations—with their flat hierarchies and decentralized decision making—and the more centralized structures organized by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and Ahmad Shah Massoud. His analysis of the differences between these two centralized organizations explains quite well why Massoud

was able to capture control of Kabul even without the level of external backing that Hikmatyar had, and why he was able to make more effective use of the support he received.

Sinno's explanation of the failures of both the Soviet supported regime and of the mujahidin in power are full of lessons for today. Though to different degrees, both failed to establish centralized command and control mechanisms. The traditionalist mujahidin, of course, failed to make the transition from patronage to centralized organization, while Massoud could never extend his organization beyond the limits of his own solidarity group. Hikmatyar's challenge fell short for similar reasons. On the other side, not only was the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) undermined by factionalism, the Soviet command itself never developed strong coordination mechanisms among the various security agencies or between the military and civilian sides. The parallels with the goings on in Kabul today are, well, spooky.

Sinno's analysis of the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s also succeeds in going beyond previous accounts. While not dismissing the extensive Pakistani assistance the Taliban received after 1994, he notes that Hikmatyar failed despite similar levels of aid. The Taliban's social network, unlike Hikmatyar's, enabled them to overcome the divisiveness of patronage-based organizations while remaining embedded in the society. As a result they obtained better information about their operating environment than their competitors. The transition to a centralized government based on the old Afghan bureaucratic state structure came naturally to them.

The book, based on a dissertation written before the major resurgence of the Taliban in 2006, has less to say about the current situation. But it nonetheless contains some extremely important lessons for scholars and policymakers seeking to understand the protracted conflict. One lesson, which augurs poorly for the international effort, is that an organization must be able both to understand and learn about its operating environment and impose consistent controls, sanctions, and incentives on its members and agents. This goal is what the hydra-headed international presence in Kabul has never been able to accom-

plish. Perhaps even worse than during the Soviet occupation, the fragmentation of the international effort reinforces Afghan factionalism.

Sinno's framework also sheds light on how the Taliban have recently made effective use of their safe havens in Pakistan, their limited external support, and the various embedded relationships (religious, tribal, familial) to fashion a new structure that seems to meet its purposes remarkably well. As Sinno points out in analyzing the Taliban's earlier performance against the United Front or Northern Alliance, they developed a centralized form of military organization that enabled them to mobilize resources and move them around much more flexibly than any other guerrilla force in Afghanistan.

Sinno's analysis of attempts by the Najibullah regime to coopt the mujahidin is also full of important lessons. The main obstacle to such cooptation, according to Sinno, was not rigid ideology, but the organizational structure of most of the resistance organizations, whose vulnerability to defection prevented leaders from making coherent agreements. In fact, Sinno notes, only the most centralized and ideologically cohesive resistance organizations, those of Hikmatyar and Massoud, made successful agreements with various communist factions. On the other hand, Najibullah's attempts at coopting commanders never led to any coherent result, regardless of the commanders' political affiliations.

This finding should end the current search of U.S. policymakers for a "moderate Taliban" that can be broken off from the insurgency. Of course such moderates can be found, almost as easily as they can be replaced. The real hope for a political solution, however, lies elsewhere: in political negotiations with the centralized Taliban leadership. That leadership lacks centralized operational control, but its policy-making role is undisputed. For now it cannot escape the influence of al-Qaida and the veto of its Pakistani sponsors. But countering those factors should be the focus of efforts at reconciliation, and not searching for non-existent and probably useless moderate Taliban. For the Taliban remains a formidable organization, and Abdulkader Sinno's *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* is a formidable account of why.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspectives. Edited by Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 330p. \$90.00 cloth, \$34.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759270909063X

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International institutions play a central role in world politics. Over the past two decades, the theory of international

institutions has been one of the most vibrant areas of research in international relations. Curiously, however, regional institutions—except for European institutions—occupy an insignificant place in institutional theories. Focusing on regional international institutions, this volume, edited by two distinguished international relations scholars, addresses two puzzles that are central to theories of international institutions. The first puzzle deals with the source of institutional design. Specially, how do regional institutions vary in design and what explains their varying designs? The second puzzle deals with the effects of institutional design.