

Structuring the State: The Formation of Italy and Germany and the Puzzle of Federalism.
Daniel Ziblatt. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 220 pp. \$39.95
(cloth).

Daniel Ziblatt's *Structuring the State* is a welcome new addition to the growing literature employing comparative historical analysis. Ziblatt's examination of German and Italian unification processes is full of interesting theoretical insights. But *Structuring the State* is not only valuable for its theoretical and historical lessons. Ranging from Iraq to the EU, the analysis of founding moments and federalism is bound to be of interest to an

audience beyond students of comparative federalism and historical institutionalism.¹ Ziblatt wants to explain why federalism was the vehicle for national unification in Germany, while it failed to take root in Italy. What makes this an interesting comparison is the fact that Prussia was powerful enough to create a unitary state but refrained from doing so, while weaker Piedmont led a unification process that ended with a unitary state. As Ziblatt puts it: "Why did Prussia, a military heavyweight, make concessions to southern Germany to establish a federal state, while the much weaker Piedmont conquered southern Italy to establish a unitary state" (141)?

Ziblatt proposes an explanation that builds on what Michael Mann calls "infrastructural capacity," that is, the ability to tax, maintain order, and regulate society. While Prussia could rely on the infrastructural capacity of the constituent German states, the infrastructural weakness of constituent Italian states made the imposition of central authority a necessity. This is an argument that turns the conventional idea on federal origins on its head. The widely held view is that stronger states with political, military, and economic capacity will seek to establish unitary regimes, while federalism is often the result of an inability to impose uniformity. But Ziblatt's conclusion is that "federalism was not a second-best strategy adopted when necessary. Instead, federalism emerged when possible, while it was unitary structures that were viewed as necessary" (142). In other words, Germany became federal because it could afford to rely on the infrastructural capacity of its constituent units. Meanwhile, following the political vacuum after the collapse of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, Italians had no option other than (re) establishing political order through the creation of a unitary state. As a result, Ziblatt's "study finds that the most decisive factor in such moment of institutional creation is the preexisting supply of regional political institutions, shaping which strategies of institutional creation are possible and desirable" (144).

The comparison in *Structuring the State* is not only theoretically interesting, but it is also a good example of a thickly contextualised investigation that does not sacrifice theoretical generalizability. In this respect, the study fits with the so-called "historic turn in the human sciences" (McDonald 1996). Ziblatt should be applauded for successfully taking on such a risky endeavor. This is the type of work that is too historical for fans of decontextualized large-*n* studies, and too variable-based and social sciency for students of nineteenth-century European political history. But at the end of the day, Ziblatt does an outstanding job in presenting the comparison without losing either audience. However, what should have been at the core of the book is relegated to a note in the end: "Any effort to quantify complex historical processes will generate resistance from historians who know the cases well. Conversely, for quantitatively minded social scientists, the reliability and validity problems inherent in my historical data may prove equally frustrating. My account treads precisely in this treacherous domain of applying basic statistical techniques to historical data" (175).

Structuring the State is a top-quality contribution to the field of comparative politics and more specifically the origins of federal governance. However, there are a couple of points that would have benefited from further discussion. There is no question that the comparison is a fascinating one that brings out useful theoretical and substantive lessons. Yet occasionally Ziblatt appears to try a little too hard to present the two cases in symmetrical form: Prussia and Piedmont against Bavaria and the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. An important element that this symmetrical comparison ignores is the fact that German unification was a process that did not end with the establishment of the Kaiserreich, while Italian unification—save for Rome—was more or less complete. There were pan-German sympathies in the Habsburg territories of Bohemia and Moravia, in Austria proper, in German-speaking Switzerland, in Luxembourg, in the Limbourg province of the Netherlands, and also among numerous German-speaking communities scattered throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Federalism was therefore an open-ended process that was to remain accessible to those left out of the 1871 Kaiserreich. In addition, German-speaking states shared a preexisting federal tradition in the form of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. In the context of pan-German nationalism, unification was more than a Prussian-led endeavor. Interestingly, *Structuring the State* starts with a quote from Heinrich Treitschke, who was originally from Saxony but *who* believed that Prussia's lead was the only way to bring about unification. The Prussian predominance in the Kaiserreich has led many observers to question the federal principles which supposedly characterized the political structure. For example, Karl Heinz Walper has labeled the federal structure of the Kaiserreich as a "federalism of appearance" (*Scheinföderalismus*) (Walper 1966, 24). The Italian case study on the other hand, would have benefited from further elaboration as to how Italian regions like Lombardy and Tuscany, which had infrastructural capacity, ended up in a unitary system.

An additional although minor problem in *Structuring the State* involves the historical evidence presented. These are mostly based on citations from history books on nineteenth-century politics. That being said, the book is full of informative and useful footnotes. One tiny stylistic problem in presentation is the occasional repetitiveness in restating the main argument about infrastructural capacity. But perhaps this message concerning the limitations of political intentions in the face of structural factors beyond control is one that requires to be repeated whenever new federal systems are designed in various experiments throughout the world.

Note

1. For an overview of the recent boom in comparative federalism literature, see Jan Erk (2007). "Federalism as a Growth Industry." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 37 (2):1–17.

References

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