

Abstract

Native nation building is a phenomenon largely neglected by mainstream political science. There are empirical and theoretical gaps in the study of political structures of Native nations. The empirical focus of this dissertation is on the rebuilding process of the White Earth Nation located in northwestern Minnesota. The objective is to investigate the long-term process of White Earth governance in order to get insights into the background of the present state of the White Earth institutional stalemate. I trace external and internal factors that influenced the formation, preservation, and transformation of the White Earth government established as part of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act provisions in 1936. To understand this process, it is necessary to include the historical context of the White Earth constitutionalism from 1913 to the present. I analyze some hitherto unknown archival materials using a flexible theoretical framework which I designed specifically for the purpose of studying the White Earth nation-building process. This case-specific framework eclectically uses a combination of theoretical approaches of Native American studies, genealogy, Vincent Pouliot's practice tracing, and new institutionalism. My findings suggest that the White Earth constitutional reform stalemate is the result of a combination of path-dependent dynamics and a deep internalization of outwardly imposed governing structure.