

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS FOR DIVIDED SOCIETIES

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What kinds of electoral systems can help democracy survive in countries split by deep cleavages of race, religion, language, or ethnicity? As is well-known, politicians in such “divided societies” often have strong incentives to “play the ethnic card” at election time, using communal appeals to mobilize voters. “Outbidding”—increasingly extreme rhetoric and demands—can offer rewards greater than those of moderation. In such circumstances, politics can quickly turn centrifugal, as the center is pulled apart by extremist forces and “winner-take-all” rules the day. The failure of democracy is often the result.¹

Any strategy for building sustainable democracy in divided societies must place a premium on avoiding this depressingly familiar pattern and must instead find ways to promote interethnic accommodation, multiethnic political parties, and moderate, centrist politics. Because elections help shape broader norms of political behavior, scholars and practitioners alike agree that electoral systems can play a powerful role in promoting both democracy and successful conflict management. For example, by changing the incentives and payoffs available to political actors in their search for electoral victory, astutely crafted electoral rules can make some types of behavior more politically rewarding than others. Over the past two decades, such “electoral engineering” has become increasingly attractive for those attempting to build democracy in divided societies.²

While political scientists agree broadly that electoral systems do much

to shape the wider political arena, they disagree deeply about which electoral systems are most appropriate for divided societies.

Two schools of thought predominate. The scholarly orthodoxy has long argued that some form of proportional representation (PR) is needed in cases of deep-rooted ethnic divisions. PR is a key element of *consociational* approaches, which emphasize the need to develop mechanisms for elite power-sharing if democracy is to survive ethnic or other conflicts. Arend Lijphart, the scholar most associated with the consociational model, developed this prescription from a detailed examination of the features of power-sharing democracy in some continental European countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland), and there is disagreement over how well these measures can work (if at all) when applied to ethnic conflict in developing countries.³ Yet there is little doubt that among scholars consociationalism represents the dominant model of democracy for divided societies. In terms of electoral systems, consociationalists argue that party-list PR is the best choice, as it enables all significant ethnic groups, including minorities, to “define themselves” into ethnically based parties and thereby gain representation in the parliament in proportion to their numbers in the community as a whole.⁴

The “Preferential” Option

In contrast to this orthodoxy, some critics argue that the best way to mitigate the destructive patterns of divided societies is not to encourage the formation of ethnic parties, thereby replicating existing ethnic divisions in the legislature, but rather to utilize electoral systems that encourage cooperation and accommodation among rival groups, and therefore work to reduce the salience of ethnicity. One core strategy, advocated by Donald Horowitz, is to design electoral rules that promote reciprocal vote-pooling, bargaining, and accommodation across group lines.⁵ Presidential elections in Nigeria, for example, require the winning candidate to gain support from different regions, thus helping to diminish claims of narrow parochialism or regionalism. Lebanon’s electoral system attempts to defuse the importance of ethnicity by pre-assigning ethnic proportions in each constituency, thus requiring parties to present ethnically mixed slates of candidates for election and making voters base their choices on issues other than ethnicity.

Yet the most powerful electoral systems for encouraging accommodation are those that make politicians reciprocally dependent on votes from groups other than their own. This essay examines the empirical record of one such electoral innovation as a tool of conflict management: the use of “preferential” electoral systems that enable voters to rank-order their choices among different parties or candidates on the ballot paper. All preferential electoral systems share a common,

distinguishing feature: They enable electors to indicate how they would vote if their favored candidate was defeated and they had to choose among those remaining. Such systems include the “alternative vote” (AV) and the “single transferable vote” (STV).

AV is a majoritarian system used in single-member electoral districts that requires the winning candidate to gain not just a plurality but an absolute majority of votes. If no candidate has an absolute majority of first preferences, the candidate with the lowest number of first-preference votes is eliminated and his or her ballots are redistributed to the remaining candidates according to the lower preferences marked. This process of sequential elimination and transfer of votes continues until a majority winner emerges.

STV, by contrast, is a proportional system based around multimember districts that, depending on the number of members elected in each district, can allow even small minorities access to representation. Voters rank candidates in order of preference on the ballot in the same manner as AV. The count begins by determining the “quota” of votes required to elect a single candidate.⁶ Any candidate who has more first preferences than the quota is immediately elected. If no one has achieved the quota, the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated, and his or her second and later preferences are redistributed to the candidates left in the race. At the same time, the “surplus” votes of elected candidates (that is, their votes above the quota) are redistributed at a reduced value according to the lower preferences on the ballots, until all seats for the constituency are filled.

Because they enable electors to rank candidates in their order of preference, such systems can encourage politicians in divided societies to campaign not just for first-preference votes from their own community, but for “second-choice” votes from other groups as well—thus providing parties and candidates with an incentive to “pool votes” across ethnic lines. To attract second-level support, candidates may need to make crossethnic appeals and demonstrate their capacity to represent groups other than their own. Alternately, where a moderate or nonethnic “middle” part of the electorate exists, candidates may need to move to the center on policy issues to attract these voters.

Either way, negotiations between rival candidates and their supporters for reciprocal vote transfers can greatly increase the chances that votes will shift from ethnic parties to nonethnic ones—thus encouraging, even in deeply divided societies, the formation and strengthening of a core of “moderate middle” sentiment within the electorate as a whole. Such negotiations can also stimulate the development of alliances between parties and aid the development of multiethnic parties or coalitions of parties. Scholars have increasingly found that aggregative party systems can help new or transitional democracies achieve stability.

This broad approach to conflict management has been dubbed

“centripetalism” because “the explicit aim is to engineer a centripetal spin to the political system—to pull the parties toward moderate, compromising policies and to discover and reinforce the center of a deeply divided political spectrum.”⁷ A centripetal political system or strategy is designed to focus competition at the moderate center rather than the extremes by making politicians do more than just shop for votes in their own community.

Accordingly, I use the term centripetalism as a shorthand for three related but distinct phenomena: 1) the provision of *electoral incentives* for campaigning politicians to reach out to and attract votes from ethnic groups other than their own, thus encouraging candidates to moderate their political rhetoric on potentially divisive issues and forcing them to broaden their policy positions; 2) the presence of an *arena of bargaining*, in which political actors from different groups have an incentive to come together and cut deals on reciprocal electoral support, and hence perhaps on other more substantial issues as well; and 3) the development of *centrist, aggregative, and multiethnic political parties* or coalitions of parties that are capable of making crossethnic appeals and presenting a complex and diverse range of policy options to the electorate.

Five Cases

A recurring criticism of centripetalism is that there are insufficient real-world examples to support the case for using preferential voting as an agent of conflict management in ethnically divided societies.⁸ Recent years, however, have seen some remarkable experiments in the use of centripetal electoral rules to encourage interethnic accommodation in divided societies as diverse as Northern Ireland, Estonia, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea. Elsewhere, new democracies like Indonesia and Bosnia are actively considering such systems, and even such established democracies as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States are showing increasing interest in the utility of preferential voting as a means of aggregating like-minded interests and combating “vote-splitting” and extremist forces.⁹ A common theme is the desire to “engineer” political behavior by changing the incentives to which campaigning politicians must respond. The following pages briefly survey the combined evidence on this issue to date.

Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is probably the best-known recent example of centripetal institutions encouraging intercommunal accommodation in a divided society, via the use of a preferential electoral system at the crucial 1998 elections held under the “Good Friday” peace process. After 30 years of sectarian violence between Northern Ireland’s Catholic (“nationalist”) and Protestant (“unionist”) communities, the Good Friday peace agreement of April 1998 provided for a range of new

institutions aimed at managing the conflict—among them power-sharing elections, held under STV rules, to a new Northern Ireland Assembly. Although previous elections under similar rules had been held in 1973 and 1982 without achieving the desired effect, the 1998 election resulted, for the first time in Northern Ireland’s history, in the formation of a “pro-peace” government in which nationalists and unionists share power.

The use of preference voting assisted the peace process in a number of ways. First, it provided direct incentives for the major parties to moderate their positions in the hope of attracting lower-order preference votes from moderate voters. The possibility of picking up lower-order transfers was instrumental, for example, in moving Sinn Fein away from violence and toward less extreme policy positions. This movement was rewarded by moderation-inclined voters—as the increased flow of lower-order preferences to Sinn Fein from more centrist nationalist parties such as the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) at the 1998 poll indicated. Similarly, on the unionist side, STV encouraged those voting for anti-agreement unionist parties to transfer their lower-order votes to other unionist parties and candidates, many of them “pro-agreement.”

These vote transfers benefited the center, allowing pro-agreement communal parties—such as the Catholic SDLP or the Protestant Ulster Unionists (UUP) and Progressive Unionists (PUP)—to gain lower-order votes from other pro-agreement forces. The UUP clearly profited from the system, as it gained 26 percent of the parliamentary seats with only 21 percent of the first-preference votes. This process also benefited some of the nonsectarian “middle” parties like the Alliance and the Women’s Coalition, which received lower-order votes from both sides of the political divide and consequently were proportionately overrepresented in the new assembly.

These trends had a beneficial influence both upon the types of political alliances that could be formed and on the eventual composition of the new Assembly, more than 70 percent of which was made up of “pro-agreement” parties. In fact, vote transfers were essential in converting a bare “anti-agreement” unionist voter majority into a “pro-agreement” unionist parliamentary majority. Of course, as Northern Ireland’s rocky history underlines, this may not be enough for the peace process to succeed—but it raises its chances of doing so.

Estonia. Another example of the use of STV in a divided society comes from Estonia, which is split between a majority (60 percent) Estonian-speaking community and a minority (35 percent) Russian-speaking one. Estonia used an STV electoral system for its first post-Soviet national election in 1990. In contrast to Northern Ireland, however, analysis of this “one-off” redemocratization election suggests little in the way of crossethnic voting or vote-pooling between the two communities. Studies found that most Russian electors voted

predominantly for liberal democratic “Russian” parties, and their second preferences “went overwhelmingly to reactionary imperialist Russian candidates rather than liberal but ethnically Estonian ones. Likewise, voters with Estonian first preferences continued with Estonian names.”¹⁰ While there was some evidence of vote transfers crossing ethnic lines, particularly support for Estonian candidates by non-Estonian voters, it is not clear whether this was a reaction to electoral incentives.

Yet there is also evidence from Estonia that using STV early in the transition did help encourage the development of an aggregative, multiethnic party system—itsself a crucial agent of conflict management in divided societies. Some analyses found that STV’s combination of proportional outcomes with individual (rather than group-based) candidacy promoted a broad-based party system in Estonia and restricted incentives for parties to form purely along ethnic lines.¹¹ Other comparative studies of electoral-system choice in Eastern Europe have concluded that optimum strategies of electoral-system design in divided societies should attempt to represent groups fairly while promoting candidate-based (rather than group- or party-based) voting—and hence that STV may be “just the institutional trick” for preventing politicized ethnic conflicts in new democracies.¹²

Had STV been maintained on an ongoing basis in Estonia, it is likely that electoral strategies would have become more sophisticated as political actors learned about the system and its effects. But this was not to be: In 1992, the new parliament abandoned STV and adopted a variant of list PR after several leading parties calculated that such a change would help them. The political effect of STV upon Estonian politics is thus difficult to evaluate, given the quickly changing conditions and the way it was adopted as a political compromise and then discarded for similar reasons. Rein Taagepera points to two general lessons: First, even a country with as limited a recent experience with free elections as Estonia had no problems with the relatively complex STV ballot, and second, “whichever electoral rules one adopts, keep them for at least two elections before getting into the revamping game.”¹³

Australia. One of the most interesting recent examples of the use of preferential voting to foil political extremism comes from the unlikely setting of Australia, one of the world’s most stable democracies. Although not a divided society, Australia has an extremely diverse population, with almost 40 percent being immigrants or the offspring of immigrants, many of whom come from non-English-speaking countries in Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Preferential voting systems are used for all Australian jurisdictions, in the form of single-member AV systems in the lower house and proportional STV systems in the Senate. Over the years, preferential voting has tended to push the Australian political system away from extremes and toward the “moderate middle,” while

also ensuring the election of governments that, in most cases, enjoy majority support. It has also enabled parties to develop partnership arrangements—with the long-running coalition agreement between the conservative Liberal and National parties being the most prominent, but not the only, example. In recent years the other major party, the Australian Labor Party, has also benefited from preference flows from left-leaning minor parties such as the Greens and the Australian Democrats.¹⁴

In most cases, the effect of such vote transfers has been to aggregate common interests on either the labor or conservative side of politics, rather than align those interests against a common enemy. One graphic exception to this rule, however, occurred in the 1998 federal election, due to the rising power of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party. One Nation represented a distinctively Australian version of the populist right-wing racist parties that had appeared in many European countries during the 1990s. First elected to the House of Representatives in 1996, Hanson campaigned on a platform of ending immigration, removing benefits and subsidies to Aborigines and other disadvantaged groups, drastically cutting taxes, raising tariffs, ending all foreign aid, and removing Australia from international bodies such as the United Nations.

Following a protracted period of national and international media attention, the major Australian parties decided to join forces to eliminate what they saw as a dangerous aberration in the political system. One potent way of doing this was by suggesting to their supporters a specific distribution of lower-order preferences. At the 1998 election in Hanson's Queensland district, both major parties instructed their supporters to place her *last* when marking their ballot (in contrast to the more familiar tactic of suggesting that their major-party opponent be placed last).

The result was an instructive lesson in the application of AV rules to defeat an extremist candidate who commands significant core support but ultimately repels more voters than he or she attracts. In a field of nine candidates, Hanson achieved the highest number of first preferences—36 percent—but received very few preference transfers. As the count progressed, almost three-quarters of the Labor candidate's preferences went to a Liberal, who won the seat with 53.4 percent of the overall (preference-distributed) vote, even though he only polled *third* on first preferences. This result, which was repeated in a less dramatic fashion in other districts around the country, saw One Nation largely eliminated from federal politics (although it did win one seat in the Senate). By contrast, under a plurality system Hanson would almost certainly have beaten a divided field of more moderate candidates and taken a seat in the federal parliament. The Australian example thus demonstrates a preventive form of conflict management: the capacity of AV to privilege centrist interests and centripetal political strategies in a potentially divisive situation.

Fiji. One of the most comprehensive recent attempts at electoral engineering using centripetal approaches has taken place in Fiji, a South Pacific island country of approximately 750,000 people divided almost equally between indigenous and Indian Fijians. Fiji's indigenous population is a mixture of the Melanesian and Polynesian groups found throughout the Pacific islands, while Fiji's Indian citizens are mostly the descendants of indentured laborers who came from southern India to work on Fiji's sugar plantations in the nineteenth century under British colonialism. Fijian society and politics have long been characterized by the uneasy coexistence of these two communities, with Indo-Fijians predominating in certain key areas of the economy (particularly the sugarcane industry) and indigenous Fijians owning 90 percent of the land but holding limited economic power.

In 1997, ten years after two military coups brought down an elected government seen as overly close to the Indian community—and in the face of economic stagnation, increasing Indian immigration, and mounting international pressure—a new power-sharing constitution was promulgated that attempted to push Fiji “gradually but decisively” toward multiethnic politics. It featured an innovative package of electoral and power-sharing arrangements designed to promote the development of open and multiethnic political competition, including an AV voting system. By making politicians from one group reliant on votes from the other group for their electoral success, AV could, it was argued, encourage a degree of vote-pooling between rival ethnic parties that would promote accommodation between (and within) Fiji's deeply divided Indian and indigenous Fijian communities.¹⁵

Fiji's 1999 parliamentary election, the first held under the new constitution, provided a practical test for the new system. Early signs were encouraging: Political parties from both sides of the ethnic divide reacted to the changed incentives by making preelection alliances. This meant that the election was effectively fought between two large multiethnic coalitions rather than between monoethnic parties as in the past. Parties representing the interests of Fiji's three designated ethnic groups—indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and “general” electors (European, Chinese, and other minorities)—formed the core of both of these coalitions. Since crossethnic preference exchanges underpinned both coalitions, the new rules also prompted the development of new bargaining arenas that brought together former adversaries from across the ethnic divide, encouraging a degree of crosscultural communication that had been conspicuously absent at previous elections.¹⁶

At the election itself, an unexpectedly strong vote for the Fiji Labour Party, combined with a fragmented indigenous Fijian vote, resulted in a surprise landslide victory for one of these groupings, the so-called People's Coalition. Mahendra Chaudhry, the Labour leader, thus became Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister. Labour ran largely on a

multiethnic, class-based platform and was the only party to gain a good spread of votes in both rural and urban areas, although it was a poor performer in contests for the Fijian communal seats.

A number of other parties appeared to suffer at the hands of the system, however, leading to an imbalanced parliament dominated by Labour and its allies. Popular discontent on the part of many indigenous Fijians at the presence of an Indo-Fijian prime minister continued to simmer, and Chaudhry's sometimes outspoken advocacy of Indo-Fijian rights served to deepen mistrust over such key issues as land ownership. In May 2000, exactly one year after the 1999 election, a group of gunmen headed by failed part-Fijian businessman George Speight burst into the parliament building and took the new government hostage, claiming a need to restore indigenous Fijian paramountcy to the political system. By the time the hostages were released and Speight and his supporters arrested, Fiji had returned to military rule.

In August 2001, however, Fiji went back to the polls under the 1997 Constitution. Again, the election campaign was fought out by two broad coalitions—this time, the “moderates” and the “conservatives.” This election, held under the same AV electoral system, resulted in a quite different outcome, with the incumbent government of military-appointed indigenous Fijian prime minister Laisenia Qarase emerging victorious.

As this uncertain history shows, preferential voting has had mixed success in stimulating the core objective of peaceful multiethnic politics in Fiji. On the positive side, the new opportunities for interelite bargaining and crossethnic vote pooling were exploited by party elites from both communities. In combination with the expectations of places at the power-sharing cabinet table, this served to cool significantly the rhetoric of the 1999 campaign. But the outcome of the 1999 election was highly disproportional, with the Fiji Labour Party dominating. At the 2001 election, however, these imbalances were less in evidence, but so was crossethnic political behavior. Overall, the introduction of preferential voting appears to have played a modest but ambiguous role in breaking the old habits of monoethnic politics in Fiji. Whether it will serve to promote multiethnic politics in the future remains to be seen.

Papua New Guinea. Another Pacific country, Papua New Guinea, offers perhaps the most compelling case for the use of preferential voting as a means of conflict management in ethnically diverse societies. Papua New Guinea is a country of exceptional ethnic fragmentation, with some 840 languages spoken by several thousand competitive ethnic “micropolities,” reflecting enormous ethnic, cultural, and regional divisions. Indeed, more languages are spoken by Papua New Guinea's 5.1 million people than in all of Africa. Despite its amazingly fragmented society, Papua New Guinea also has one of the longest records of

continuous democracy in the developing world, having maintained a highly competitive and participatory form of democratic governance since 1964.¹⁷

In terms of electoral systems, Papua New Guinea's first three elections—in 1964, 1968, and 1972—were conducted under AV rules inherited from Australia, its colonial administrator until independence in 1975. These rules were replaced at independence by a plurality system—a move that had devastating consequences for the nascent political system.

Politics in Papua New Guinea is strongly influenced by the fractionalized nature of traditional society, which is composed of several thousand competing “clans”—extended family units—that form the primary (and sometimes the only) unit of political loyalty. Electoral contests are focused on the mobilization of clan and tribal groups, rather than around issues of public policy or ideology, and thus often have the effect of underlining the significance of basic clan and ethnic attachments. Since independence, elections have also encouraged a “retribalization” of ethnic groups, in which the economic importance of gaining political office has led to increasingly rigid group boundaries and burgeoning interethnic armed conflict.¹⁸ Elections are thus one of the primary ways in which traditional enmities are mobilized in contemporary Papua New Guinea.

This was the case under both AV and plurality elections, and it remains the case today. The difference in pre-independence elections held under AV rules was that the electoral system appeared to encourage a degree of vote-pooling, cooperation, and accommodation among the country's many small tribal groups, rather than the violent competition that has become the norm over the past decade. Vote-pooling in pre-independence elections took place in three primary ways, all of which were predicated on the assumption that most voters would invariably give their first preference to their own clan or “home” candidate. The most common and successful method was for candidates who had limited “home” support to campaign widely for second-preference support among rival groups. For this strategy to succeed, candidates needed to be able to sell themselves as the “second-best” choice—which meant, in general, someone who would look after all groups fairly—and to campaign as much for second preferences as for first ones. A second strategy was for candidates with significant existing support bases to reach out to selected allies for secondary support. Traditional tribal contacts and allegiances could thus be utilized to create majority victors. A third strategy, increasingly common by independence, was for groups and candidates to form mutual alliances, sometimes campaigning together and urging voters to cast reciprocal preferences. Not only were these alliances a response to the incentives presented by AV for campaigning on a common platform, they also appear to have encouraged political

organizing and can thus be seen as the forerunners to the establishment of political parties.

All of these patterns disappeared in 1975 when preferential voting, seen as a “colonial” imposition from Australia, was replaced with a plurality system. With no incentives for cooperation, elections almost immediately became zero-sum contests between rival tribal groups. Most seats were contested by scores of clan-backed candidates, resulting in winners being elected on the basis of increasingly minuscule vote shares. At the most recent national election in 1997, over half of all seats were won with less than 20 percent of the vote, and 15 with less than 10 percent. Related factors of electoral violence and “vote splitting”—friendly candidates with little hope of winning the seat standing in order to “split” an opposition vote—have also become a problem under the plurality system. Under AV, the winning candidates in many electorates were those who cultivated the preferences of voters outside their own local area. Today, such spreading of the net is almost inconceivable in many parts of Papua New Guinea, as the very real physical risks of campaigning in a hostile area tend to overshadow the (marginal) possibilities of picking up significant numbers of votes there.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, this state of affairs has encouraged a strong push for a return to the pre-independence AV electoral system. In January 2002, following several failed attempts, Papua New Guinea’s parliament voted decisively to return to a form of “limited” preferential voting for elections after 2002, with voters required to list at least three preferences. Along with moves to strengthen executive government, weed out corruption in politics, and promote the development of political parties, this move was seen as part of a last-ditch effort to turn around Papua New Guinea’s vibrant but chronically unstable democracy. The main benefits of the electoral system reforms, however, are likely to be changes in electoral behavior and a reduction in conflicts and tribal violence at the local level.

Evaluating the Evidence

All of these cases provide important empirical evidence for evaluating claims that preferential electoral systems can, under certain circumstances, promote cooperation among competing groups in divided societies. This in itself is an important conclusion, as a recurring criticism of centripetal theories in general, and of the case for preferential voting in particular, has been a perceived lack of real-world examples. Apparently similar institutional designs, however, also appear to have had markedly different impacts in different countries. In Northern Ireland, for example, it is clear that vote transfers assisted the process of moderation in the breakthrough 1998 election. But the evidence from elections held under similar rules in 1973 or 1982—or, for that matter,

from Estonia's 1990 election—is much more ambiguous. Similarly, Papua New Guinea's experience with AV in the 1960s and 1970s was markedly more successful than that of its Pacific neighbor, Fiji, more recently. Why?

A key facilitating condition appears to be the presence of a core group of *moderates*, both among the political leadership and in the electorate at large. Centripetal strategies for conflict management assume that there is sufficient moderate sentiment within a community for crossethnic voting to be possible. In some circumstances, the presence of vote-pooling institutions may even encourage the development of this type of moderate core, via repeated interelite interaction within bargaining arenas. But it cannot invent moderation where none exists. It is likely that a major factor in the success or failure of centripetalism in Northern Ireland was the lack of a moderate core in earlier elections and its clear presence in 1998. This is reflected in part by the fact that, in the 1998 election, far more votes were transferred from sectarian to nonsectarian “middle” parties than across the ethnic divide *per se*.²⁰

The argument that preferential election rules induce moderation rests on the assumption that politicians are rational actors who will do what needs to be done to gain election. Under different types of preferential voting rules, however, “what needs to be done” varies considerably, depending on the electoral formula in place and the social makeup of the electorate. For example, if candidates are confident of achieving an absolute majority or winning the required quota of first preferences, they need only focus on maximizing votes from their own supporters in order to win the seat. In cases where no candidate has outright majority support, however, the role of second and later preferences becomes crucial to gaining an overall majority. Thus some scholars such as Horowitz favor majoritarian forms of preferential voting like AV over the proportional variant of STV, since the former's threshold for immediate victory is higher. In addition, Horowitz's case for “vote pooling” is based on the purported possibility of crossethnic voting—that is, the assumption that even in deeply divided societies some electors will be prepared to give some votes, even if only lower-order ones, to members of another ethnic group. In Northern Ireland, however, while vote transfers played an important role in promoting accommodation, these ran predominantly from anti-agreement to pro-agreement parties on the same side of the sectarian divide, or from sectarian to nonsectarian “middle” parties, rather than across the communal cleavage between unionists and nationalists.

Second, *continuity of experience* appears to be a critical variable. The evidence suggests that successive elections held under the same rules encourage a gradual process of political learning. Structural incentives need to be kept constant over several elections before the effects of any electoral package can be judged—particularly with preferential systems, where the routines of deal-making and preference-

swapping by politicians, and the understanding of these devices by voters, take time to emerge. In the world's two longest-running cases of preferential voting—Australia and Ireland—it took many years for the full strategic potential of vote-transfers to become clear to politicians and voters alike (in fact, rates of preference-swapping in Australian elections have increased steadily over recent decades), while Estonia's preferential system may have been so short-lived that voters and politicians never became adjusted to it.

Third, the *social context* in which elections are held appears all-important. Countries like Northern Ireland and Estonia feature “bipolar” splits between two large and relatively cohesive ethnic groups, both of which were effectively guaranteed representation under STV's proportional election rules. But in 1998, Northern Ireland also had a third group: the middle, nonsectarian parties that were not clearly bound to either community. By advantaging the representation of this group, STV promoted outcomes that would not have been likely under AV or other majority systems, or under party-list PR. In other cases, however, where there is greater ethnic heterogeneity or a much smaller nonethnic center, STV may not work so well—indeed, it did not work well in Northern Ireland's previous elections. All this suggests that a key element of any electoral-engineering prescription must be a careful understanding of the prevailing social and demographic conditions—particularly the size, number, and dispersion of ethnic groups.

The importance of ethnic demography is highlighted by the cases of Fiji and Papua New Guinea. In Fiji, most open electoral districts—which are supposed to encapsulate a “good proportion” of members of both major communities—are drawn in such a way as to become the exclusive preserve of one ethnic group or the other. Thus genuine opportunities for interethnic cooperation at the constituency level are rare, and most contests provide no opportunity at all for crossethnic campaigns, appeals, or outcomes. Indeed, only six seats were genuinely competitive between ethnic groups in the 1999 election, while in the rest clear Indian or Fijian majorities prevailed.²¹

Contrast this with the situation in Papua New Guinea, where the extreme fragmentation of traditional society means that most districts feature dozens of small tribal ethnopolities. To be elected under a preferential majority system like AV, candidates had no option but to amass votes from a range of groups beyond their own. Under such conditions, candidates had a strong incentive to behave accommodatingly toward rival groups. Not surprisingly, electoral violence was much rarer under the AV system than under the more recent plurality rules, which lacks such incentives.

Such cases remind us that divided societies, like Tolstoy's unhappy families, tend to be divided in different ways. Yet it is surprising how many “one-size-fits-all” conflict-management packages have been

recommended for divided societies without sufficient understanding of the structure of the society itself. Differences in ethnic demography need to be matched by differences in constitutional designs across different regions. African minorities, for example, have been found to be more highly concentrated in contiguous geographical areas than minorities in other regions, making it difficult to create ethnically heterogeneous electorates.²² Contrast this with the highly intermixed patterns of ethnic settlement found in many parts of Europe (the Baltics), Asia (India, Singapore, Malaysia), and the Caribbean (Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago), in which members of various ethnic groups tend to have more day-to-day contact with one another. In such contexts, electoral districts are likely to be ethnically heterogeneous, and ethnic identities will often be mitigated by other crosscutting cleavages, so that centripetal designs which encourage parties to seek the support of various ethnic groups may very well break down interethnic antagonisms and promote the development of broad, multiethnic parties. Such prosaic details can determine the success of centripetal approaches to the management of ethnic conflict.

NOTES

1. For good discussions of the interaction between ethnicity and electoral politics, see Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); and Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1996).

2. See, for example, Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Donald L. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes* (London: Macmillan, 1994); and Benjamin Reilly and Andrew Reynolds, *Electoral Systems and Conflict in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: National Research Council, 1999).

3. See Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*; and Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, 27–45. See also Donald L. Horowitz, “Making Moderation Pay: The Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management,” in Joseph V. Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), 451–76.

4. Arend Lijphart, “Electoral Systems, Party Systems and Conflict Management in Segmented Societies,” in R.A. Schrire, ed., *Critical Choices for South Africa: An Agenda for the 1990s* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10–13.

5. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; and Donald L. Horowitz, “Making Moderation Pay.”

6. The formula used divides the total number of votes in the count by one more than the number of seats to be elected, and then adds one to the result. For example, if there are 6,000 votes and five members to be elected, the quota for election is $6,000 / (5+1) + 1$, or 1,001 votes.

7. Timothy D. Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 19.

8. See Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, 44, 62; and Arend Lijphart, "The Alternative Vote: A Realistic Alternative for South Africa?" *Politikon* 18 (June 1991): 91–101.

9. In 1998, the British government's Jenkins Commission unveiled a proposal for "AV plus": a mixed system with 80 percent of seats elected by AV, and the remaining 20 percent elected from a PR list to balance proportionality. In May 2000, a form of preferential voting was used for London's first-ever mayoral elections. In the United States, preferential voting is becoming an increasingly prominent electoral-reform option in a number of states, including New Mexico and California. Both Alaska and Vermont have upcoming ballot initiatives aimed at introducing the system, and on 5 March 2002, voters in San Francisco passed and initiated adopting the alternative vote for all future city elections.

10. Rein Taagepera, "STV in Transitional Estonia," *Representation* 34 (Winter 1996–97): 31.

11. See John T. Ishiyama, "Electoral Rules and Party Nomination Strategies in Ethnically Cleaved Societies: The Estonian Transitional Election of 1990," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 27 (June 1994): 177–92.

12. John T. Ishiyama, "Institutions and Ethnopolitical Conflict in Post-Communist Politics," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6 (Autumn 2000): 65.

13. Rein Taagepera, "STV in Transitional Estonia," 36.

14. See Benjamin Reilly, "Preferential Voting and Its Political Consequences," in Marian Sawer, ed., *Elections: Full, Free and Fair* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2001).

15. See Constitution Review Commission 1996, *The Fiji Islands: Towards a United Future* (Suva: Parliament of Fiji, 1996).

16. See Brij V. Lal, *A Time to Change: The Fiji General Elections of 1999*, Department of Political and Social Change Discussion Paper 23, Australian National University, 1999, 6.

17. See Benjamin Reilly, "Democracy, Ethnic Fragmentation, and Internal Conflict: Confused Theories, Faulty Data, and the 'Crucial Case' of Papua New Guinea," *International Security* 25 (Winter 2000–2001): 162–85.

18. Andrew Strathern, "Violence and Political Change in Papua New Guinea," *Pacific Studies* 16 (December 1993): 41–60.

19. Bill Standish, "Elections in Simbu: Towards Gunpoint Democracy?" in Yaw Saffu, ed., *The 1992 PNG Election: Change and Continuity in Electoral Politics* (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1996).

20. See Richard Simmott, "Centrist politics makes modest but significant progress: cross-community transfers were low," *Irish Times* (Dublin), 29 June 1998.

21. See Nigel Roberts, "Living up to Expectations? The New Fijian Electoral System and the 1999 General Election," paper presented to Citizens Constitutional Forum, Suva, Fiji, 18 July 1999.

22. James R. Scarritt, "Communal Conflict and Contention for Power in Africa South of the Sahara," in Ted Robert Gurr, ed., *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1993).