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greater the collective danger, the greater the likelihood that politically apathetic group members will go to the polls.

Attention to turnout can be single-minded. Elsewhere, nonethnic parties divide their electoral energies between two tasks: mobilizing known supporters and appealing for uncommitted votes. These two are not necessarily the same thing. In fact, there is often a tradeoff between whipping up party loyalists to get them to the polls and soliciting the support of those whose loyalty is uncertain. Pandering exclusively to the concerns and prejudices of loyal supporters may well drive away uncommitted or potential crossover voters; sweet reasonableness and moderation may be required to convert the uncommitted to the party cause.

All this is different in an ethnic party system. In such a system, mobilizing known supporters and appealing to marginal voters are effectively the same thing, for there are virtually no uncommitted votes to be had on the other side of the ethnic boundary. What is uncertain is not how a voter will vote if he votes—a Creole will vote for the Creole party, an Ibo for the Ibo party, and so on. In such a party system, all that is uncertain is whether a potential voter will vote. Accordingly, turnout becomes all-important, and there is no electoral reason to be moderate about ethnic appeals.

As the mobilization of all group members to vote imparts a census-like quality to the electoral count, so the ethnic appeals that push voting rates up also raise the pitch of ethnic conflict and increase the danger of violence. No doubt politicians will later find that it is easier to kindle a fire than to quench one, but in the census-type election ignition takes untrammeled priority. Hence, apen jahṭ becomes the order of the day—or, in the more direct Creole lyric of a Trinidad calypso: “We don’t want no coolie [East Indian] premier. We don’t want no roti government.”

98. Coolie, originally a Tamil word, was the early pejorative term for the East Indians who came to work the sugar estates as indentured laborers. Roti, which means bread in several Asian languages, refers in Trinidad to a widely sold snack food, stuffed with curried potatoes. Its Indian origins make it a convenient vehicle for a disparaging quip at the expense of the DLP.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Competition and Change in Ethnic Party Systems

The realignment process we have just observed for Guyana and Trinidad is reminiscent of two hypotheses advanced by Sartori. 1 The first states that the appearance of one or two mass parties undermines party atomization in the rest of the party system. To compete with the mass party, other organizations need to merge into more solid parties. The second hypothesis, framed with Europe in mind, states that when a religious party becomes a mass party with an outspokenly pro-clerical orientation, this sets in motion a chain reaction in party formation. Parties form to take sides on the secular-religious dimension. The chain reaction, Sartori asserts, is likely to have a centrifugal impact.

There are echoes of these hypotheses, suitably modified for ethnicity rather than religion, in Guyana and Trinidad. Certainly, the consolidation process was quite visible, and it occurred hand in hand with the formation of parties that lined up along ethnic boundaries as soon as the ethnic character of one of the parties was established. The appearance of the first mass parties quickly undermined the position of the former personalistic parties and locally influential independents, forcing them to join together. In this respect, their reaction was no different from the behavior of other organizations in adversary relationships. These typically imitate each other’s structural innovations, the better to engage in struggle. 2

As I have shown, a realignment of this sort does have a centrifugal result. In some ways, moreover, it is likely to go beyond the consequences forecast by Sartori. In Afro-Asian societies, an ethnic realignment will exclude other bases of party cleavage, and it will therefore produce a party system with at best a very limited sort of competitiveness. These characteristics and consequences of ethnic party systems, together with the possibilities for further change in the party system, form the subjects of this chapter.

ETHNIC PARTIES AND
THE PREMISES OF THE LEFT

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of ethnic parties is the extent to which they preempt the organizational field, crowding out parties founded on other bases. Left parties have been particularly affected by this. Over and over again, socialist intellectuals in the developing world have organized parties intending to do battle on class lines, only to find that their potential followings had rather different ideas about the identity of the enemy.

The plight of the Guyanese People’s Progressive Party in this respect is quite typical of many other Left parties. Led by Marxists, the PPP was initially conceived as a party of “progressive elements”3 aiming simultaneously at independence and socialism. The party’s strong ideological commitments resulted, as we have seen, in the suspension of the constitution by the British in 1953, as well as in the loss of what Jagan called “native capital support for the party.”4

The defection of Burnham and the resumption of elections made it imperative for the PPP to consider what compromises were required for success at the polls. As parties were being reordered along ethnic lines, it became more important than previously to insure that the PPP did not drive East Indians away by overemphasizing its socialist commitments. In a secret speech to a party congress in 1956, paralleling Krushchev’s famous secret speech of the same year, Jagan reminded his party that it must not “overestimate the political understanding of the people or underestimate the emotional appeal of racialism.”5 At the same time, he referred to party leaders who openly favored schemes to which the East Indian population was opposed (notably, the West Indian Federation) as being “utopian.” The 1956 speech provided, in short, the doctrinal underpinning for reliance on the Indian vote.

Jagan later rationalized this reliance by emphasizing the “progressive role” played by the Indians in Guyana:

The Indians and the Negroes play diametrically different roles in British Guiana and East Africa. In East Africa, Indians and other Asians were used as the middle-class buffers by the British ruling class against the African national movement. In British Guiana, on the other hand, the Indians, because of economic and cultural suppression, have by and large played a progressive role in spite of communal tendencies.6

The effect of the policy adopted by the PPP in 1956 was enormous. Indian religious leaders, as well as businessmen, teachers, and rice farmers, affiliated with the PPP. When the PPP returned to office in 1957, its agricultural and commercial policy reflected the dependence of the party on its Indian constituency.7 From time to time, the PPP was torn between those cadres who saw the party as an instrument of revolutionary change and those who saw it as a vehicle for East Indian interests.8 But the choice Jagan had made in 1956 was not reversed.

Jagan was neither the first nor the last Marxist politician to compromise a universalistic ideology for the sake of ethnic support. Nor was Jagan’s doctrinal rationalization unique. Quite independently, the same compromise and the same doctrinal adjustments have been made by Left parties in other ethnically divided societies.

Sri Lanka provides a very clear example, because its Left parties were among the strongest of the electorally oriented Marxist parties of Asia. It was the language issue that tested their ethnic neutrality. At independen-

8. There were many battles fought in the party over this. Jagan repeatedly was forced to defend the Creole party chairman, Brindley Benn, a fanatical Marxist, against attempts to replace him with an East Indian. Young ideologues of the party’s Progressive Youth Organization were also unhappy with the PPP’s surrender to Indian interests; they periodically challenged the party’s “communal elements.” Sunday Graphic (Georgetown), July 4, 1965. But Jagan viewed such challenges as “Left deviations” that he was not prepared to countenance.

5. Ibid.
cence, English was the official language of Ceylon, but many politicians favored replacing English with Sinhala and Tamil, the two main languages of the island. Both the Communists and the Trotskyites had espoused a policy of equal treatment for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. This policy came under great pressure with the surge of Sinhalese ethnic sentiment that brought to power a government led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1956. A central concern of the movement that propelled Bandaranaike to power was the demand to make Sinhala the sole official language of Ceylon, to the detriment of Tamil. When the Trotskyites and Communists reaffirmed their support for linguistic parity, they began to lose supporters, and their public meetings were broken up by mobs of “Sinhala Only” proponents.

In the face of this pressure, the Communists gave way relatively early. Shortly before the 1956 election, the Ceylon Communist Party, increasingly isolated in the surge of Sinhalese sentiment, abandoned its policy of linguistic parity. The policy of parity had, the party concluded, “caused a temporary separation between the [Sinhalese] nationalist and working-class movements . . . .” \(^9\) Correcting this “mistake” involved the recognition that there was no real working-class movement in the Tamil areas and that the Sinhalese were more “anti-imperialist” than the Tamils. Accordingly, it was “progressive” to adopt Sinhala as the language of administration and to compel non-Sinhalese to learn it. \(^10\) This conclusion was no doubt fortified by the fact that, though a single Communist candidate had won a seat in the Tamil area in 1956, the support of the Communist Party lay heavily in the Sinhalese South.

The Trotskyites (the Lanka Sama Samaj Party) arrived at a similar position more slowly. In 1963, a “United Left Front” was formed, consisting of all the Marxist parties. A condition of admission to the Front was that the LSSP switch to a policy of Sinhala Only. This it did with little dissent and few defections. Although its leaders conceded that, “in the abstract,” linguistic parity is the correct position for a Marxist party, the LSSP, too, suddenly discovered that there was an element of “class struggle” in the quest of the Sinhala-educated to secure official recognition for their language. “The Sinhalese petite bourgeoisie is radical—it wants a change,” said an LSSP leader,\(^12\) whereas the allegedly more prosperous Tamil petite bourgeoisie was conservative. The Tamils were less involved in the class struggle than the Sinhalese, who were more keenly interested in displacing the English language and the English-educated class from power. Consequently, the struggle for Sinhala Only was “progressive with some reactionary aspects.” \(^13\) Predictably, the little Tamil support for the LSSP had withered when its language policy changed. The Trotskyites became an exclusively Sinhalese party.

There is a striking coincidence between Jagan’s formulation that the East Indian position is “progressive in spite of communal tendencies” and the Sri Lanka Marxist conclusion that the Sinhalese struggle is “progressive with some reactionary aspects.” Progressive and reactionary are, of course, characterizations initially employed in Marxist analysis with respect to the positions of social classes in the historical process. Needless to say, the ethnic groups being compared—Creoles and Indians, Sinhalese and Tamils—spanned social classes. In conventional Marxist thinking, whole ethnic groups, at least unranked ones, could scarcely be said to occupy a class position at all. By redefining ethnic interests in terms used to characterize class positions, it became ideologically permissible to justify the reliance of a left-wing party on the support of a single ethnic group—even if some doctrinal gymnastics were involved in the redefinition.

Such a redefinition of ethnic positions in para-class terms reflects a fundamental alteration of the strategy favored by the Left in ethnically divided societies. So long as ethnic tensions remained in the background of politics, it was possible for left-wing parties to advocate bridging ethnic divisions by building alliances across ethnic lines. These alliances were to be based on the common class interests and allegiances of workers and peasants of the respective ethnic groups. No matter that it was much easier to plan these class-based alliances than it was to construct them: it was at least possible to speak of their desirability without incurring serious political costs.

An increase in ethnic conflict changes this. Attempts by the Left to span group boundaries become electorally costly. Potential supporters

12. Interview, Colombo, July 29, 1968. The SLFP was likewise characterized by another LSSP leader as “a radical petit bourgeois party,” and on these grounds it was permissible for a revolutionary party to align with the SLFP, as Lenin had not hesitated to align with the Social Revolutionaries, who were also petit bourgeois. Interview, Colombo, Aug. 10, 1968.
of a left-wing party want to know on which side of the ethnic conflict the party stands. This demands an abandonment of the former Left strategy if the parties are to survive. The labeling of entire ethnic groups as progressive or reactionary may be a travesty of Marxist thinking, but it is a method of avoiding the electoral costs of strict ethnic neutrality in a political system in which all parties have come to be identified with the claims and aspirations of particular ethnic groups.

The Guyanese and Ceylonese Marxists have not been alone in adapting to ethnic pressures successfully. Wherever parties have been ethically based, Left parties that have retained a substantial measure of electoral support have also been rooted in one or another ethnic group—with or without the benefit of doctrinal rationalization. In Malaysia, the Labor Party, which began as a reformist party modeled on the British Labor Party but became Communist-dominated by the late 1960s, was able to gain electoral success only by espousing specifically Chinese causes; its membership, too, was virtually entirely Chinese. The Communist Party of India in the Punjab was largely a Sikh party—indeed, largely a party of the prosperous Sikh peasantry of the Jat caste—and it accordingly supported the Sikh demand for a separate state within India. In Kerala in the 1950s, the CPI was dependent on the votes of the Ezhava caste. The Ezhava are officially defined as “backward,” a legal status that enables them to secure a variety of government benefits. When the Kerala CPI supported a change in the definition of backwardness that would have made income, rather than caste, the criterion, the Ezhava protested. The party quickly gave in. In an ethnic party system, the choice for a Left party is to adapt and become essentially an ethnic party or to wither and die.

Nonetheless, there have been parties operating in such an environment that have made concerted efforts to retain class as their organizing principle and to develop interethnic support. Their experience is not encouraging.

In the period following World War II, the Malay Nationalist Party sought to define Malay politics in class terms. It opposed the privileges of the traditional Malay rulers and of the aristocratic class, and it advocated cooperation across ethnic lines, seeking alignments with Chinese political parties. By 1950, the MNP was quite discredited in Malay opinion, eclipsed by the United Malays National Organization. UMNO drew its leadership from the aristocracy, its sustenance from solid roots in Malay society, and its political advantage from its readiness to define politics in ethnic rather than class terms.

In Northern Nigeria, a comparable contest was fought in the 1950s and '60s between a conservative and a radical party, with much the same results, for much the same reasons. The Northern People's Congress was a party controlled by Hausa-Fulani emirs and aristocrats. It advocated the Northern cause against Yoruba and Ibo aspirations. By contrast, the Northern Elements Progressive Union aligned with the Ibo-dominated National Convention of Nigerian Citizens in the country as a whole. In the North, NEPU advocated fundamental change in traditional social relations. It even spoke of “class struggle.” Like the Malay Nationalist Party, NEPU proved less able than its competitor to rely on ties of traditional deference for political support, and its perception of the main lines of social conflict was sharply at variance with that of the Northern electorate. It suffered recurrent electoral defeat.

Although NEPU and the MNP were both ethnically based parties that sought interethnic cooperation, there have also been attempts to found explicitly interethnic parties based on class ties. These have fared poorly in ethnically divided societies.

The Workers' and Farmers' Party of Trinidad, founded in 1965, is as good an example as any. The WFP was led by politicians drawn from the ranks of the DLP and the PNM. One leader was East Indian, the other Creole. They were joined by a third founding member, the president-general of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. The party's strategy was to secure the votes of the mainly Creole oil workers and to use the influence of the East Indian leader in his community, as well as the success of the oil workers' union in gaining labor concessions, to attract the support of the predominantly East Indian sugar workers. The objective was a strong, labor-based, multiethnic party.

The strategy failed completely. The PNM's prediction that the Trinidadian electorate was 'asleep at the party of the races' and that the WFP would become the 'people's party' did not come true. The WFP received only 0.5% of the vote in the 1966 elections. The PNM won a clear majority of seats. The WFP leaders were indicted for sedition and sentenced to life in prison. The party was dissolved.

19. I am drawing here on interviews with WFP leaders in Trinidad in 1965. The party also published a weekly paper called *We the People*, in which its strategy was spelled out. See, e.g., "Weekes and C.L.R.: A Conversation," *We the People* (Port-of-Spain), July 23, 1965, p. 2.
dad Treasury would be swelled by the lost deposits of a plethora of unsuccessful candidates in the 1966 elections was fulfilled by the WFP in every constituency. Not only did the WFP fail to win the votes of the sugar workers, but it did not make any showing even in the oil districts. The union leader ran fourth of four candidates in his home constituency, polling exactly 4.9 percent of the vote. The East Indian leader lost the constituency he had won for the DLP by two-to-one in 1961, this time attracting only 3.6 percent of the vote. Other party leaders did even worse. Clearly, the voters believed that Creole political power and Indian political power were mutually exclusive alternatives. Once ethnic interests were organized into ethnic parties, there was no room for a party founded on completely different assumptions about the appropriate lines of social conflict.

ETHNIC PARTY SYSTEMS, NONETHNIC PARTIES, AND INDEPENDENTS

I have highlighted the dilemma faced by left-wing parties operating in an ethnic party system, because the argument has sometimes been made—and it is grounded solidly in Marxist doctrine—that the “real” lines of social cleavage are not ethnic lines at all. More often than not, therefore, the impetus to ignore or to cross ethnic lines in party organization emanates from the Left. The electoral survival of socialist parties only when they espouse ethnic causes, and their conspicuous electoral failure when they do not do so, attests to the preemptive power of ethnic party systems when they emerge in Asia and Africa.

Yet, if left-wing parties provide the clearest examples of the inability of parties that are not ethnically based to break into an ethnic party system, they do not provide the only such examples. Nonethnic parties of the nonsocialist variety have had the same experience. In Trinidad, not only did the left-wing WFP fail at its maiden election in 1966; a conservative nonethnic party, the Liberal Party, also polled an insignificant share of the vote. The Liberals were composed mainly of former DLP leaders, both Creole and Indian. They won not a single seat. Ethnic party systems are as inhospitable to right-wing parties that attempt to ignore or surmount ethnic lines as they are to left-wing parties that do so.

The rise of an ethnic party system also precludes a significant role for independent candidates or for popular personalities who have defected from ethnic parties to run on other tickets. With ethnic groups polarized, it is a risky course for voters to register a preference for even a popular candidate of their own ethnic group if that candidate is not affiliated with the party of that group. Ethnic representation is channeled through ethnic parties. Victorious independents or members of minor parties, however popular they are locally, dilute ethnic party strength and thus also dilute ethnic group strength.

This point could be demonstrated by tracing the electoral fortunes of independents and defectors in a number of countries, but again the Trinidad election of 1966 serves very well as a laboratory for the electoral manifestations of an ethnic party system. There were many contests involving recently resigned party leaders and local notables. The results were dramatic. Independent and maverick candidates were uniformly defeated.

Prominent Indian leaders who ran without DLP endorsement included Bhadase Maraj, president-general of the sugar workers’ union, head of the Hindu Maha Sabha, former leader of the DLP, wealthy benefactor and ward heeler of the Indian community. Maraj ran as the only candidate of the virtually defunct People’s Democratic Party and won only 10 percent of the votes cast in his constituency. Three other well-known East Indians, all defectors from the DLP, were defeated in their own former constituencies. One received under 5 percent of the vote; another, only 217 out of 8,584 votes cast; and the third attracted fewer votes than even the PNM candidate in an overwhelmingly Indian constituency.

Creole politicians who were unaffiliated with the PNM fared equally poorly. T.U.B. Butler, who had led the oilfield strikes of 1937 that constituted the first stirrings of Trinidad nationalism, still had a following in the oil refinery region in the 1950s. He had been elected to the legislature in 1950 and 1956. As soon as strong ethnic parties emerged, he and his Butler Party were consigned to oblivion. Most of the party’s following went to the PNM. In 1961 and 1966, Butler himself was overwhelmingly defeated by PNM candidates. So, for that matter, were other Creole notables running on Liberal tickets.

No doubt there are exceptions. In some countries with ethnic party systems, party mavericks have on rare occasions been able to hold their own seats, at least where the basis of their earlier support was the firm grip of family influence on a rural constituency. Yet the general point remains. As ethnic party systems grow, the stakes become too high and
the pressures toward the census-type election too strong to permit the luxury of representation outside the ethnic parties. That is not to say that each group must have one and only one party. As we shall see, there are sometimes forces that work toward the emergence of more than one ethnic party per group. Whatever the number of parties, ethnic party systems leave little room for parties organized without regard to the preeminence of ethnic issues in a severely divided society or for politicians aiming to struggle for ethnic interests outside the ethnic party. In such a system, there is a single axis of political conflict and a single way of pursuing that conflict: through the ethnic parties.

THE COMPETITIVE CONFIGURATION: SEGMENTED ELECTORATES

Ethnic parties function in a segmented electoral market. If party competition is taken to mean competition for support from the electorate, rather than all forms of interparty rivalry, then party competition in an ethnic party system occurs within ethnic groups but not across ethnic group lines. Nothing is as responsible for the conflict-promoting character of ethnic party systems as this configuration of competition. Let us look first at party competition within groups and then at the absence of party competition between groups.

Within-group party competition can be intense, and it can result in the replacement of one ethnic party by another party representing the same group. In Sri Lanka at the 1956 election, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike won a resounding victory over the United National Party that had brought the country to independence. Both were Sinhalese parties, but the SLFP had made a convincing case with the Sinhalese electorate that the UNP had been neglecting Sinhalese interests.

Competitive concerns can influence the behavior of an ethnic party even when it effectively dominates the scene. It is fatuous to assume that followers follow wherever leaders lead. Rather, they follow only if they are being led in a direction they believe is preferable to the available alternatives. The existence of lively intraethnic party competition, as I shall show, attests to the rise of alternatives when followers begin to disapprove of the direction in which ethnic parties are taking them. Ethnic party leaders, including leaders of dominant ethnic parties, often entertain understandable apprehensions that an intraethnic competitor party will steal their clientele from them. Many of the actions taken by seemingly secure ethnic parties can be understood in this light—as measures to prevent competition from emerging and to defeat it if it does emerge. Consequently, it is possible for a party to adopt a competitive posture even without active party competition.

That posture explains much about the preemptive way ethnic parties treat non-party organizations that also aim to promote ethnic group interests. In the developing world, these organizations run the gamut from so-called “tribal unions” in Africa to associations of “vernacular-medium” teachers, of Buddhist or Muslim clergy, and of language activists in Asia, not to mention ethnically differentiated chambers of commerce and trade unions. In their infancy, ethnic parties required the active support of such organizations. As the parties grew strong, however, they became the chief spokesmen for ethnic interests, often displacing those ethnic associations that had previously served as all-purpose ethnic interest groups. The League of Coloured Peoples in Guyana, for example, atrophied as the PNC assumed the role of advancing Creole interests across the board. More specialized organizations could not be dispensed with so easily. Ethnic parties usually attempted to convert these organizations into transmission belts for party policy and instruments of electoral mobilization.

One thing ethnic parties did not readily countenance was the survival of politically autonomous ethnic associations. If, for example, a Malay language organization could formulate its own set of linguistic policy priorities, it could also accuse a Malay party of doing too little for the language of the Malays. Politically powerful ethnic interest groups pose a danger to an ethnic party, because they may transfer their organizational allegiance and abet the rise of a competitor party within the same ethnic group. Accordingly, it is prudent for an ethnic party to control the activity of ethnic interest groups, while at the same time taking over their functions of ethnic interest representation. Against this background, Almond’s earlier quoted remark that particularistic parties resemble inter-


est groups takes on heightened meaning. The ethnic party is the interest group.

The desire to prevent the emergence of party competition is perfectly familiar in party systems that do not center on ethnic conflict. But there is a difference. If a nonethnic party loses the support of an ethnic group that previously voted heavily for the party, it becomes weaker; but the party may pick up compensatory support, perhaps from other groups not favorably disposed to the party’s former ethnic supporters. Loss of the support of an ethnic group does not necessarily threaten to put a nonethnic party out of business. An ethnic party, on the other hand, is exclusively dependent upon the support of its group. It has little ability to diversify its electoral support. If an ethnic party is discredited and loses the support of the group it represents, for failing to protect the interests of that group, recouping the loss will be difficult. This is partly because the ethnic cause has an element of sacredness to it. The charge of neglecting it may carry an indelible stigma. It is also because group members will usually hesitate to divide their support between more than one ethnic party if that will benefit the ethnic enemy—as it often will. Competitive comebacks for ethnic parties cannot be counted on.

The likely inability of an ethnic party either to defray competitive losses by diversifying its clientele or to recoup them means that competitive threats tend to look like genuine matters of survival to party leaders. If the competition succeeds, the party may actually die. The desire to control ethnic interest-group activity is just one part of these competitive apprehensions.

The competitive behavior of an ethnic party is limited to its own ethnic group. That is the very meaning of segmented electorates. But how does this differ from limitations on party competition that are common to all party systems? Surely, in other systems, left-wing parties do not compete for right-wing voters, and vice versa. Yet there are differences, and they are important differences for the impact an ethnic party system has on ethnic politics.

Sartori has pointed out that there are two systemic reasons why parties may fail to compete with each other. The parties may not be positioned along the same issue axis; for example, one may be a religious party, another a working-class party. These two parties arose out of different sets of conflicts, and their followings, oriented toward different issues, respond to different electoral stimuli. Alternatively, the parties may be positioned along the same issue axis, but at such disparate points that there is no transferability of votes between them. This is illustrated by the case of the left-wing and right-wing parties mentioned a moment ago. Their voters may well be moved by common issues, but their positions may be literally poles apart. The ideological distance between the parties, in other words, may be so great that no appeal made by one of the parties could induce followers of the other to support it. Parties may thus fail to compete either because they are not in the same issue space or because, although they are in the same space, the distance between them precludes the transfer of votes.

Either of these reasons may prevent party competition in Western Europe, where there is typically more than one issue axis. In the ethnic party systems of Asia and Africa, where parties are in the same issue space, typically only the second reason for lack of party competition exists. Nonetheless, it operates to limit party competition sharply. As we shall see, it is the element of ascription that makes the difference.

Using European data, Sartori suggests that the transferability of votes from one party to another is a matter of party distance. Voters locate themselves roughly at some point along the party spectrum. Parties are then perceived by given voters as being more or less compatible with their preferences. Parties located close to a voter’s location on the spectrum are regarded by the voter as plausible competitors for his vote. Of course, even here there are some voters who are irrevocably committed to support one party and one party alone. Still, other voters are more open to competition for their vote. But, among these, each voter will only move along the party spectrum up to a certain point, after which he will not consider transferring his vote. Obviously, what is postulated here is a graduated relationship between vote transferability and party distance.

The case of ethnic parties is different, because that relationship is not graduated: it is either-or, not more-and-less. There is a qualitative distinction between the parties, depending on their ethnic identity and that of the voter; it is not a matter of degrees of distance. A voter is either Creole or Indian, Sinhalese or Tamil, Bakongo or Mbochi—and the same is true of the parties. Consequently, where parties are ethnically

based, the competitive cutoff is a sharp precipice, not a gradual slope. Ethnic voting means exactly this: no vote transferability across ethnic lines. Observed a PNM cabinet minister at a party rally in the early 1960s, "I do not see any DLP faces around." By this, of course, he meant he saw no Indian faces.

We are now in a position to see exactly why ethnic party systems tend to foster rather than to moderate ethnic conflict. The competitive configuration is crucial in this. From the standpoint of competition, ethnic party systems are characterized by three main features that bear on conflict.

First, there is one principal issue axis—the ethnic conflict axis—which preempts others. All parties are positioned on it. This means that there is little relief from the ethnic character of politics in the form of alternating issues. Hence, divisive issues can cumulate in the party system, and all voters are identified with parties that have taken a stand on the main divisive issues.

Second, there is party competition, or the possibility of it, within ethnic groups. The possibility of intragroup party competition creates strong incentives for parties to be diligent in asserting ethnic demands, the more so when they consider the life-or-death implications of that competition for the party's fortunes. Outbidding for ethnic support is a constant possibility.

Third, because ethnicity is a largely ascriptive affiliation, the boundaries of party support stop at the boundaries of ethnic groups. There are many working-class Tories, 25 but there are very few Hindu Akalis—to take an example from among the least rigidly ascriptive ethnic groups and parties. In an ascriptive system, it is far more important to take effective steps to reassure ethnic supporters than to pursue will-o'-the-wisps by courting imaginary voters across ethnic lines. The near-impossibility of party competition for clientele across ethnic lines means an absence of countervailing electoral incentives encouraging party moderation on ethnic issues. 26


26. Again, the contrast with nonethnic parties—even those with heavy doses of ethnic voting—is instructive, for small influsions of competition across ethnic lines can make a significant difference. In New Brunswick, Canada, for example, the Conservatives have had little support from French-speaking Acadians. Yet that minimal support can be the difference between forming a government and not forming one, and this has encouraged the Conservatives not to oppose programs the Acadians demanded. Concludes P. M. Leslie from this experience: "... if a party is even marginally dependent upon support from an ethnic minority, ostentatious rejection of its demands will incur an electoral penalty." "The Role of Political Parties in Promoting the Interests of Ethnic Minorities," Canadian Journal of Political Science 2 (Dec. 1969): 419–33, at 426. If, however, a party is not even marginally dependent on the support of such a minority, then the more ostentation in rejecting its demands, the more secure the party gains with its own supporters, and indeed the greater the electoral turnout of its ethnic supporters may be.

FIGURE 2. The Direction of Competition in Nonethnic and Ethnic Two-Party Systems

Key: Each rectangle represents a party.
Dotted lines indicate the potential location of new competitor parties in ethnic party systems.
Hatched lines indicate the probable location of floating voters (defined below).
Arrows indicate the direction of competitive appeals, convergent or divergent.

Note: From the figure, it is clear that the two nonethically based parties form part of a single competitive system. Floating voters, potentially available to support either party, tend to be located between the parties. Competition, and thus the nature of competitive appeals, brings the positions of the parties closer together. By contrast, the two ethnically based parties are not in the same competitive system. Since the parties are ascriptively defined, no significant number of floating voters is located between them. Competition, if it comes, will be located on the flanks in the form of new parties appealing for support within each ethnic group. Voters who may shift party allegiances are located at the extremes. The threat of such competition drives both parties to protect their flanks, thus pushing their positions apart.

In fact, ethnic two-party systems, such as those described for Guyana and Trinidad, are anything but moderate. It is a fundamental mistake to view such a two-party system as being similar to the two-party systems of, for example, Britain, the United States, or New Zealand. The critical differences between them lie in the realm of party competition, as Figure 2 shows. In the nonethnic two-party systems, competition makes the parties converge; they compete for undecided or shifting voters whose views lie between the positions of the two parties. This creates a pull toward moderation. The competition of the two parties is centripetal.
This is not true, as Sartori has noted, for parties perceived "as being alien and extraneous," for they do not gain votes by strategies of convergence. Floating voters are not situated between the parties. The party system becomes bifurcated. The position of one party is the negation of the other: one party stands for Creole power, another for Indian power. Here, then, is a two-party system founded on antagonism and, in general, furthering it.

There may be extrinsic reasons for ethnic parties to exercise caution in the untrammeled pursuit of ethnic advantage. Depending on each party’s share of votes and legislative seats, there may be a need to cooperate or coalesce with other parties across ethnic boundaries in order to form a government. Once in power, an ethnic party may likewise temper its response to ethnic constituency demands because the responsibilities of governing seem to require that such demands be balanced against other goals with which they may be in conflict. Economic development objectives are often in this category; their attainment may require concessions to ethnic groups heavily represented in particular sectors of the economy. The fear of civil disorder may also induce moderation on the part of an ethnic party. (Immoderation by ethnic parties has frequently helped provoke disorder—in Nigeria in 1964–65, in Sri Lanka in 1977, in Congo [Brazzaville] in 1958–59, and in Guyana in 1962–64.) These and other concerns may indeed provide counterweights to the immoderate thrust of electoral politics in ethnic party systems. The point here, however, is that nothing in the competitive equation requires moderation. Moderation is dependent upon the vagaries of forces extrinsic to competition.

The main features of the ethnic party system are readily summarized: stable parties, unstable politics. Support of parties in such a system is heavily ascriptive. The parties act as the organizational expression of the ethnic groups they represent. As the groups advance mutually exclusive claims to power, so, too, do the parties. The ultimate issue in every election is, starkly put, ethnic inclusion or exclusion. The census quality imparted to elections, as well as the high stakes involved, raises electoral turnouts until there is a decisive test and tends to make more people more actively partisan than would otherwise be the case. Where there are two parties representing two ethnic groups of unequal numbers, as described for Guyana and Trinidad, only demographic change, drastic

within the ethnic group. The fifth condition is the effect of the formal
incentive structure on party proliferation.
Here I intend to deal only with the first three of these. I shall touch on
the leadership question in passing and reserve the incentive structure for
fuller consideration when we consider devices to reduce ethnic tensions in
Chapter 15. In any event, subethnic divisions, differences regarding
conflict relations, and the calculation of how many parties a group can
afford are by far the most important determinants of intraethnic party
proliferation or its absence.

The apparent cohesion of ethnic groups in times of tension should not
be mistaken for social homogeneity. Within an ethnic group, there are
nearly always ascriptive subdivisions based on differences of caste, clan,
language, religion, or region. These subdivisions I refer to as “subeth-
nic,” because they are present at a level below the principal lines of
politically relevant group boundaries. Of course, what is only “subeth-
nic” now can become the main politically relevant affiliation later, de-
pending on changes in political context.

The importance of subethnic divisions for party politics is easily dem-
onstrated by use of a few examples. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese are
divided into a number of castes. The defection of a particularly cohesive
Sinhalese caste faction (the Salagama) from the ruling United National
Party in the 1950s played a considerable role in the opposition landslide
of 1956. Eight years later, the Salagama leader C. P. de Silva and a bloc
of fourteen members of parliament, most of them also Salagama, crossed
the aisle again, bringing down the government of the Sri Lanka Freedom
Party on a vote of no confidence.28 In Malay parties, state of origin plays
a significant role. The fortunes of politicians and their supporters are
scrutinized to see if Malays from the state of Johore are ascendant over
Malays from Kedah, or vice versa. Among the Sikhs, both caste and
region of origin have been important. Sikh Harijans, fearful of domina-
tion by the powerful Sikh Jat community, often preferred Congress to
the Akali Dal, while in the 1960s the Akali Dal itself split into two, the
support of each rump based largely on one or another region of the
Punjab.29

28. For these events, see H. B. W. Abeynaik, The Parliament of Ceylon, 1965 (Col-
and Political Weekly (Bombay), Mar. 27, 1971, pp. 709–10; J. C. Anand, “Punjab Politics:
A Survey (1947–65),” in Iqbal Narain, ed., State Politics in India (Meerut: Meenakshi
Prakashan, 1967), 242–43.

Subethnic divisions fit easily into accepted conceptions of party fac-
tions, one basis for which is often said to be “affinity based on . . .
common origins.”30 When parties are ethnically based, subethnicity also
makes a major contribution to the creation of new ethnic parties. It is
possible to postulate a continuum of intragroup homogeneity-heteroge-
ney. The more cohesive an ethnic group is, the more likely it is that
there will be only one ethnic party; the more fragmented, the more likely
it is that more than one ethnic party will emerge.

At the more cohesive end of the continuum, groups may even resist
party proliferation in the face of electoral incentives. The adoption of
proportional representation in Guyana had, as we shall see in Chapter
15, no significant effect on the existing East Indian and Creole parties.
It had been hoped by the British (who imposed PR) that the new electoral
system might weaken Jagan’s Indian support, perhaps by splitting Mus-
lims off from Hindus. However, the migration of Indians to the West
Indies long antedated the upsurge of Hindu-Muslim rivalries in India.
Consequently, with the partition of India in 1947, Indian Muslims in
Guyana did not become “Pakistani,” as overseas Indian Muslims else-
where did. By the 1960s, Hindu-Muslim divisions among Guyanese In-
dians were no longer very prominent; Hinduisim and Islam merely rep-
resented “alternative ways of being Indian.”31

It might be said that submerging these residual differences was re-
quired because neither Indians nor Creoles could afford a party split
while the other group remained solidly committed to only one party.
This is true as far as it goes. Political interest and the overriding Creole-
Indian cleavage reinforced the insignificance of the Hindu-Muslim divi-
sion. Yet it is also true that, at the fragmented end of the continuum,
ethnic groups have split into two or more parties, based in large part on
subethnicity. Such splits have occurred even when it was manifestly con-
trary to the political interest of the group to do so. In 1977, for example,
there was a party split among Indians in Fiji right after their party had
won the largest number of seats in parliament.32

The Yoruba represent a conspicuous case of subethnic schism. A com-
posite people, the Yoruba fought a number of internecine wars in the
nineteenth century, and their divisions along lines of ancestral city con-

30. Raphael Zariski, “Party Factions and Comparative Politics: Some Preliminary Ob-
31. Chandra Jayawardena, Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation (London:
Athlone Press, 1963), 23.
32. R. S. Milne, Politics in Ethnically Bipolar States (Vancouver: Univ. of British Co-
Ethnic Groups in Conflict

themselves subjected to sharp accusations of splitting the ethnic group, contrary to its interest. Where modest subethnic divisions exist but where, on the other hand, a split would not necessarily weaken the political position of the group, intraethnic party competition often emerges.

A considerable number of cases is consistent with these generalizations. Divisions among the Ibo ran less deep than those among the Yoruba. Neither could "afford" a party split, but whereas the Yoruba party split anyway, the Ibo in the 1960s never did. On the other side, groups with significant majorities can afford a second party, and often they produce one. The Sinhalese, the Burmans and Northern Sudanese before military rule, and the Hindus in Mauritius all have had lively intraethnic party competition. In Mauritius, it was largely caste that divided the Hindu parties. In the Sudan, sectarian and regional differences, coupled with divergent views toward Egypt, formed the basis of party proliferation. In Burma, policy differences were more important. A variety of overlapping cleavages spurred the competition in Sri Lanka. But in each case the luxury of more than one ethnic party could be indulged because, despite conflict with other groups, these groups formed strong electoral majorities. As Simmons notes for Mauritius, party competition among the Hindus emerged as soon as it was clear that a Hindu party would win a safe majority in any event. Then the question became "which Hindus?" and caste differences surfaced.

When ethnic parties split off from multiethnic parties, they often proceed (as I noted earlier) in an anticipatory way, before the development of a contentious ethnic issue. This is not usually true when intragroup party competition begins. Ethnic parties that split off from multiethnic parties fear that if they fail to do so, new, ethnically based competitors will preempt their position. Hence, they must move early. The emergence of more than one party per group, however, encounters the opposite danger, that group members will accuse leaders of the new party of needlessly dividing the group. Breach of unity is a particularly potent


charge when it applies to a backward group that already feels itself to be weak in those attributes that are necessary for intergroup competition. Consequently, intragroup party proliferation usually awaits the emergence of an ethnic issue that spurs party formation and assures the new party some following.

Such an issue generally relates to intergroup relations. Unless party proliferation is practically ordained by the existence of sharp subethnic divisions, the pivotal event at the point of intraethnic party formation is usually an accusation that the existing ethnic party has sold out group interests by its excessive moderation toward other ethnic groups.

The history of Sri Lanka contains vivid examples of intragroup party proliferation that show the interplay of ethnic issues and subethnic cleavages. At independence in 1948, the country was ruled by the United National Party (UNP), mainly Sinhalese in support but containing a few Tamil members. In addition to the Left parties, there was also a small Tamil Congress and a Ceylon Indian Congress representing, respectively, Ceylon Tamils and Indian Tamils.38

The Tamil Congress split first, over the question of citizenship for the Indian Tamils. Shortly after independence, the UNP introduced legislation to deprive the Indian Tamils of citizenship and the right to vote. Although the Ceylon Tamils had little contact with the immigrant Indian Tamil community (the two reside in quite separate areas), the citizenship and franchise laws were viewed as foreshadowing second-class citizenship for all non-Sinhalese. Despite these apprehensions, the Tamil Congress leader, G. G. Ponnambalam, joined the cabinet. Another group in his party remained in opposition and became the nucleus of the Federal Party, a party that advocated a federal state to maximize Tamil interests in the North and East, where Tamils are concentrated. For many years, the Tamil Congress consistently opposed a federal solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic problems, arguing that the Tamils could achieve more by exerting pressure at the center.

The belief that the Tamil Congress had sold out the interests of the Indian Tamils spurred the formation of the Federal Party. But many other forces were also at work. Before independence, there had been differences within the party over the exact shape of the proposals made by the

38. Wriggins, Ceylon, 105. The Ceylon Tamils are descendants of migrants from South India hundreds and even thousands of years ago. So-called Indian Tamils migrated much more recently. Here, however, our concern is with the Ceylon Tamils. This account of party competition among the Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils is based both on the Wriggins book and on interviews I conducted in Sri Lanka in 1968.

party to the Soulbury Commission that drafted the independence constitution. Intertwined with these differences were resentments about Ponnambalam's peremptory style of leadership. Then, too, the Christian minority among the Ceylon Tamils divided, Catholics tending to support Ponnambalam, whose brother was a priest, Protestants tending to support the Federal Party leader, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, a Protestant.

For a time, the Tamil Congress remained ascendant. But in 1956 the UNP shifted its position on the language issue and began to advocate that Sinhala alone should become the official language. The Tamils who had previously cooperated with the UNP were discredited, and the balance of power in the Tamil community shifted from the Tamil Congress to the Federal Party. In the 1956 election, Ponnambalam alone, of all the Tamil Congress candidates, retained his seat. The Federal Party emerged with a substantial majority in Tamil areas, including the Tamil portions of the Eastern Province, which the Congress had failed to penetrate. From then on, the same pattern of Federal Party ascendancy prevailed until the Congress and the Federalists finally merged in the early 1970s.

The emergence of party competition among the Ceylon Tamils illustrates very well the mutually reinforcing character of policy differences regarding the appropriate Tamil response to Sinhalese demands, differences of leadership style, and differences of religious and regional—subethnic—affiliation. The precipitating issues were discrimination against the Indian Tamils and the advisability of joining the UNP government, but the split was sustained by all of these conditions.39

On the Sinhalese side, there was a comparable split, fostered by a comparable set of converging conditions. The UNP had embraced a variety of organizations, one of which was the Sinhala Maha Sabha, an association representing Sinhalese Buddhist interests. Its leader was S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, scion of an illustrious family that apparently regarded itself as superior in status to the family of D. S. Senanayake, leader of the UNP and prime minister at independence. When it became

39. It should be noted that the Ceylon Tamils are a minority of only 11 percent—though they sought the support of the largely Tamil-speaking Ceylon Moors (another 5 percent). Yet, if the Tamil community could ill afford division, inhibitions on splitting the Tamil vote could be overcome by the strength of personal animosity toward Ponnambalam, the sense that the Tamil Congress really had sold out the birthright of the Tamils, and the fact that the Ceylon Tamils were, for the most part, territorially concentrated. Under a first-past-the-post electoral system, territorial concentration meant that a slight but consistent edge in competition for the Tamil vote would give the Federal Party a disproportionately large parliamentary delegation and so free it from any real responsibility for having weakened the power of the Tamils by dividing their vote.
clear that Senanayake was grooming a member of his own family to be his successor, Bandaranaike joined the opposition and formed his own Sri Lanka Freedom Party. This was in 1951.

As leader of the Maha Sabha, Bandaranaike had associated himself with the claims of segments of the Sinhalese community that had grievances against both the English-speaking, disproportionately Christian elite and the Tamil minority. Language issues were part of his differences with the UNP leadership, committed as it was to a gradual transition to Sinhala and Tamil for official purposes. Nevertheless, these issues were not prominent at the time of the split, and Bandaranaike's party, the SLFP, did not gain broad support until language issues became prominent. In the 1932 election, the SLFP won nine seats to the UNP's majority of fifty-four.

In the years following, however, Bandaranaike dropped his support for parity between Sinhala and Tamil, and he espoused the Buddhist cause with increasing fervor. Ultimately, the UNP was forced to declare its support for a policy of official status for Sinhala, to the exclusion of Tamil, and to welcome the new Buddhist political activism. The UNP shift cost it all of its Tamil support, but without offsetting Sinhalese gains. In 1956, the SLFP, in coalition with a number of Left parties, rode to power on a landslide of Sinhalese ethnic sentiment.

Clearly, divisive ethnic issues were entangled with family rivalries and leadership aspirations. So, too, were Sinhalese subethnic cleavages. As indicated earlier, the UNP command had offended leaders of the Salagama community, who transferred their loyalty to the SLFP. Bandaranaike was also able to tap low-caste resentment at Goyigama domination of the UNP; on the whole, non-Goyigama Buddhist priests lent their support to the SLFP, while Goyigama priests tended to favor the UNP. There were other factors as well, such as Bandaranaike's astute cultivation of locally influential Sinhalese elites: ayurvedic physicians, Sinhala-educated teachers, and village headmen.

In both the Sinhalese and Tamil cases, the ethnic issues that formed the cutting edge of intragroup party competition involved the accusation of a basic sacrifice of group interests by the established ethnic party. In both, the new ethnic party took a more extreme stand on divisive interethnic issues. This gave the established ethnic party a choice. It could adhere to its former, moderate position, at the risk of losing considerable support, or it could cover its flank by adjusting its position to meet the competition. The Tamil Congress did the former and never regained its previous ascendancy. The UNP, however, saw quickly that Sinhalese Buddhist feeling was strong, and it changed its position on ethnic issues dramatically. In the first years after 1956, segments of the UNP became quite anti-Tamil. This in turn solidified the position of the Federal Party on the other flank, for it gave evidence that both major Sinhalese parties stood for an unyielding policy of Sinhalese exclusivism. However, the shift in UNP position also gave rise to a lively and enduring intra-Sinhalese party competition. Beginning with the 1956 election, the UNP and SLFP, sometimes in coalition with smaller parties, have alternated in office no fewer than six times.

The Sri Lanka materials show very clearly the centrifugal character of intraethnic party competition. They also, of course, tend to confirm the apprehensions of ethnic party leaders that their moderation in interethnic relations will be rewarded by members of their own group with the formation of a competing party that takes a more unyielding position. Apprehensions, however, are one thing—a competing party already in existence is another. If the formation of a competing party is merely apprehended, party leaders can still take risks for the sake of interethnic harmony. Statesmanship is not precluded. But if party competition is already keen, the obstacles to interethnic accommodation may prove insurmountable.

This certainly seemed true in Sri Lanka. The 1956 election polarized Sinhalese and Tamil opinion. For nearly a decade thereafter, no Tamil entered the government. Sinhala Only legislation was passed by the Bandaranaike government shortly after it took office, with few safeguards for the Tamils. Tamil protests were met with Sinhalese violence in 1956 and again in 1958, when most of the island was subjected to a wave of killing. An attempt by Bandaranaike to compromise Sinhalese-Tamil differences with the Federal Party leader in 1957 was thwarted by an onslaught from the formerly conciliatory UNP, from Buddhist monks, and from Sinhalese activists. As the Tamils were increasingly excluded from the public life of the country, the Federal Party turned to tactics of peaceful noncooperation, culminating in a two-year state of emergency in Tamil areas. On both sides, intraethnic party competition had produced a politics of outbidding on ethnic demands that made reconciliation difficult.

Much the same process could be traced for intragroup competition (particularly of the two-party variety) in other countries, such as the Sudan and Burma, where the results were even more disastrous.\(^{41}\) The 1960 election in Burma was rather like the 1956 election in Sri Lanka, resulting in a victory for Burmese ethnic sentiment that spurred secessionist insurrections among the various non-Burmese groups. Sudanese party competition also gave a fillip to secessionist warfare. In the early 1950s, the two main Northern Sudanese parties had begun to compete for Southern votes. The Liberal Party, a Southern party, sought an alliance with one of the Northern parties. All of this was quickly undone in the first flush of divisive demands. Neither of the major Northern parties proved willing or able to respond to Southern fears of domination. As in Sri Lanka, a policy of ethnic exclusion gave rise to a Federal Party, which captured nearly all the Southern parliamentary seats in the 1958 election. The ultimate result of centrifugal competition was the civil war that began in 1963 and lasted nearly a decade.

In short, if there are two groups, each represented by one party, stalemated results, with all the consequences described for Guyana and Trinidad. But if intragroup competition provides each ethnic group with its own two-party system, the centrifugal character of the competition may so increase the distance between the positions of the groups as to propel them toward violent outcomes, including secession.

Figure 3 depicts the tendency of intragroup competition to widen the gap between the positions of the groups. Here is another reason for the opinion, commonly expressed in deeply divided societies, that ethnic differences were relatively mild until the politicians went to work on them. In a sense, this popular impression is quite correct, for this is one of the points at which it can be seen just how big a difference party politics makes in ethnic conflict.

Party competition, however, can cut both ways. In Sri Lanka, the outcome so far has been more moderate than in Burma or the Sudan, stopping short of a full Tamil attempt at secession. This, too, can be explained by intense competition. At times, the Sinhalese parties, having divided the Sinhalese vote, have had to bid for Tamil support—or anticipated they might have to do so. For a long period, this kept the Tamil parties closely attuned to the parliamentary system and served to counter the centrifugal force of intragroup electoral competition. The possibility remained open that Tamil demands might be met within the framework of a government based on interethnic coalition.

This is the other side of proliferating parties. Where there is more than one party per group, it may become difficult for any one party to gain power alone. If so, interethnic coalitions may be necessary, just as they might if there were several main groups, each represented by one ethnic party. Moreover, fluidity is introduced by the unpredictability of electoral outcomes. When an ethnic group is represented by two or more parties competing for its votes, election results need not be a straight reflection of ethnic demography. There is the possibility of three- or four-way contests, plurality victories, and perhaps disproportionate minority representation. All of this can mitigate the census quality of elections.

Intraethnic party competition can thus be ambivalent in its consequences. Where there are two main parties per group, competition is conducive to a politics of intragroup outbidding.\(^{42}\) Alternatively, the

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42. I emphasize here the two-party character of the competition, which is very common, because the splintering of a group’s support in many different directions has rather different effects, as I shall show in Chapter 10 with respect to the Malaysian Chinese.
allegiances of the electorate may be distributed in such a way as to foster a politics of interethnic bargaining. Both tendencies, in fact, can coexist—the one manifested primarily before elections, the other after. This, however, puts us a bit ahead of ourselves, for it launches us into a consideration of interethnic coalitions, which forms the next chapter.

From Tripolar to Bipolar: Reducing the Number of Contestants

I have intimated at various points that a system with only two ethnic parties, one per group, is especially conflict prone. Now I want to make this more explicit by pursuing the notion of fluidity of outcome introduced a moment ago. In this case, however, fluidity derives from the existence of three rather than two main groups.

The implications of triposity should by now be apparent. The sense of clear-cut exclusion and inclusion is likely to be less absolute than where there are only two ethnic parties. Three parties create the possibility of rotating coalitions and with it the hope that being excluded today does not necessarily mean being excluded indefinitely. Bifurcation, however, provides good reason for the excluded minority party to depart from the electoral road to power—since that road in fact does not lead to power. Such a party may turn to extreme strategies, as indeed the Guyanese opposition did in the period between Jagan’s reelection in 1961 and his defeat in 1964.

On this score, it is instructive to compare the experience of Guyana with that of its neighbor, Surinam, similarly composed ethnically except that Surinam has a 15 percent Javanese population and some smaller minorities in addition to its Creoles (more than 30 percent) and East Indians (about 37 percent). From 1966 to 1973, the Javanese, represented by two parties, provided a degree of flexibility in the party system by alternately aligning with Creole or Indian parties to form governments. From 1966 to 1969, the major East Indian party found itself in opposition, but it then displaced the major Creole party in power from 1969 to 1973. While this fluidity prevailed, Surinam had none of Guyana’s ethnic violence and instability.

In 1973, however, a serious change occurred. The various parties united into two clear-cut ethnic clusters, one of them embracing the Creole parties and a Javanese party, the other comprising the East Indian

less cohesive than the others, as the Javanese proved to be in Surinam and as the Yoruba did in Nigeria. As the other two groups solidify their support behind their two ethnic parties, the less cohesive group continues to spread its support among two or more parties (Surinam), or it may actually split into two parties where formerly it was represented by one (Nigeria). Either way, the two competing parties of the less cohesive group are likely to be mutually hostile, and so it is natural that each of them will link up with the party of one of the other two groups. Hence, the third group ends up on both sides. This process is depicted in the following diagram, in which the letters stand for the respective ethnic groups:

Parties: A Party, B Party, C₁ Party, C₂ Party
Alignments: A Party + C₁ Party versus B Party + C₂ Party

At this point, the stage is set for bifurcation. With the less cohesive Group C split, the other two groups become the only significant antagonists.

An alternative route to the same result begins with three ethnic parties and has the two largest groups vying for the adherence of the third. One of these contestants ultimately succeeds, absorbs the third party, and reduces the number of parties to two. This was the course followed in Congo (Brazzaville).  

However it occurs, the reduction of the contesting parties to two sap party maneuvering of all flexibility. From then on, the sights of each ethnic party are fixed, not on a quest for coalition partners but on the struggle to defeat, and even destroy, the other ethnic party. This, then, is a most important change within ethnic party systems. For this reason, change from three to two ethnic parties is likely to be the harbinger of even more drastic change. Ethnic party systems often give way to something else, especially once the number of ethnic parties is reduced to two. Avoiding bifurcation may well be an important goal of ethnic policy.

CHANGE TO OTHER SYSTEMS

Ethnic parties and party systems are often building blocks of other regimes. It is easy to see why, once the character of two-party ethnic party

44. On the common tendency for three to become two in a conflict situation, see Coral Bell, The Conventions of Crisis (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), 64.

systems is clear and the likely direction of changes within ethnic party systems is known.

Since two-party ethnic party systems consign the minority party to perennial minority status, they generate keen dissatisfaction among members of the excluded group. Since such systems are usually suffused with tension and violence, the satisfaction of leaders of even the majority party is tempered by the threat of instability. By and large, the initiative for change inheres in these two sets of sentiments, and they also suggest the respective directions the change will probably take.

If leaders of the ruling party genuinely aim to reduce tension, or if they use ethnic instability as a pretext to limit party rivalry, they are likely to move toward a one-party system. Sometimes one-party systems emerge as a result of rigged elections under the guise of continuing democratic party rivalry (Guyana and Sierra Leone after 1968). Sometimes the electoral process is abruptly terminated, with the losing party dissolved or merged in the interest of "national unity" (Congo [Brazzaville], 1959–63; Togo, 1958–63). One-party systems are a common outgrowth of ethnic party systems, as I shall explain in Chapter 10.

The same result—an authoritarian regime that reflects the interests of ethnic groups previously represented by one of the ethnic parties—can also be achieved by military intervention. Coups have indeed demolished ethnic party systems, again typically after tense, polarizing elections. This is a subject that will receive full-dress consideration in Chapter 12.

One thing is already clear at this point. Regardless of whether an ethnic party system falls victim to civilian or military authoritarianism, whether party rivalry is suppressed by those who have already captured power through the party or by those who have been shut out of power, an ethnic party system is highly vulnerable to being transformed into an authoritarian but no less ethnically partial regime.

There is, however, another possible transformation for an ethnic party system—to a regime at once less authoritarian and less ethnically exclusive than military and single-party regimes are apt to be. I am referring here to a party system composed of both ethnic parties and multiethnic coalitions.

These, then, are the three principal directions in which ethnic party systems seem likely to move: toward single-party regimes that conceal their limited ethnic base, toward military regimes that do the same, and toward more fluid party arrangements that encourage the formation of multiethnic parties and coalitions even while ethnic parties remain. Only
the last of these possibilities is really deserving of the name “party sys-
tem.” It stands at least a chance of breaking the stalemate that ethnic
party systems produce. Not surprisingly, multiethnic parties are the
strongly preferred option of political leaders who value both ethnic har-
mony and democratic party competition. But it remains to be seen
whether, in a deeply divided society, multiethnic parties and coalitions
can put back together what ethnic party systems have helped pull apart.

CHAPTER NINE

Multiethnic Coalitions

On the face of it, there is much to commend the commonsense view that
parties and coalitions that reach across ethnic lines, embracing the vari-
ous groups in conflict, will somehow have the capacity to bridge ethnic
differences. There are, to begin with, the deep failings of ethnic party
systems, the centrifugal character of competition within them, and the
feelings of exclusion that are fostered when the party of one group is in
power indefinitely and the party of another is in opposition indefinitely.
Violence in Guyana, Congo (Brazzaville), Zanzibar, Pakistan, Sierra
Leone, and Guinea, among others, can be traced to the ascendancy of
one ethnic party over another. Secessionist movements in Nigeria, the
Sudan, Burma, and Chad owed much of their impetus to the changing
fortunes of ethnic parties, to intraethnic party competition (with its cus-
tomary ethnic outbidding) pushed to extremes, or to the dissolution of
party ties that extended across ethnic lines.

Multiethnicity is the term I shall apply to ties across ethnic lines, even
if there are only two ethnic groups involved. Multiethnicity in party
organization presumably requires mutual restraint and reciprocal
concessions. It may be accompanied by the sobering responsibility for
governing a divided society. Compromise policies may emerge; feelings
of exclusion may give way to a sense of power sharing. The apparent
decline of a multiethnic party or coalition is typically received with pop-
ular expressions of deep foreboding and has been the occasion for out-
breaks of ethnic rioting in Malaysia, the Sudan, Zaire, and various In-
dian states. If ethnic parties frequently exacerbate conflict, perhaps
parties built on multiethnic foundations will have the incentive and the
power to alleviate ethnic tensions. That, at all events, is the promise of
multiethnic organization.

These expectations are not necessarily misplaced, but they are too
sweping. Multiethnic arrangements come in several packages. Their