



**Nationalism in  
International Context**

**2. Ethnic Conflict Regulation II -  
Consociationalism and Electoral Engineering**

9 October 2012

# Dealing with Differences

## **I—Methods for *eliminating* differences:**

- a) genocide
- b) forced mass-population transfer
- c) partition and/or secession (self-determination)
- d) integration and/or assimilation

## **II—Methods for *managing* differences:**

- a) hegemonic control/ethnic democracy
- b) arbitration (3<sup>rd</sup> party intervention)
- c) federalism and cantonisation
- d) consociationalism

# Democracy and Ethnicity

- Democracy is especially about power to the people (i.e., majority rather than elite rule)
- But **‘the people’ may be divided** into firm ethnic (or other) blocs
- Divisions matter less when they are tradeable interests and when there are few ‘permanent majorities’ (i.e., crosscutting cleavages)
- **Ethnic divisions** more **‘zero-sum’** in nature than interests.

# Democracy in Divided Societies

- Democratic principle of equal representation of individuals (**‘one person one vote’**; all can vote)
- **Collective ‘rights’**: majority group implicitly ‘recognised’ (symbolically represented by the state) and dominant in decisions
  - **Problem** if a group is consistently losing under ‘one person one vote’ or goes unrecognised (i.e., Catholics in N.-Ireland 1922-72; Scotland under Tories in 80s?)
- Underlies **federal principle** in USA (Senate v. president); also underlies consociationalism
- Ideas of individual rights can **clash** with ideas of collective rights

# Consociationalism and Collective Rights

- About **power-sharing between ethnic groups**, all of which are recognised as having collective rights
- **Typically between 2 main groups** in a divided society since heavily multi-ethnic situation often leads to cross-cutting alliances
- Clash between **collective rights and individual rights** (esp. for those who do not identify with their ethnic groups but rather as ‘individuals’)
- Tension between **drawing ethnic extremists into politics** and **dragging people away** from voting their ethnic interests.

## d) Consociationalism

- Four features of consociational democracies
  1. **Grand coalition** government, incorporating the political parties
  2. **Proportional representation**, employment and expenditure rules throughout public sector
  3. **Community autonomy** norms under which ethnic communities have self-government over those matters of most profound concern to them;
  4. **Constitutional vetoes** for minorities

# Grand Coalition

- **Centrepiece** of consociationalism
- Based on **broad consensus** rather than competition
- Inclusive rather than narrow winning party
- **Cabinet** is often the nexus of cooperation and consensus; can even mediate among parties in parliament
- Sometimes **extra-cabinet institutions** (ad hoc councils)
- Consensus (government of national unity) **even** prevails **in non-divided societies** during times of crisis (UK and Sweden, during WWII)

# [ctnd.] Grand Coalition

- Idea is that in societies that are divided, all parties have an **incentive** to maintain peace and stability and not just to compete
- Each ethnic bloc (or other bloc) forms a ‘pillar’ or segment, with an **elite at the helm** (i.e., the Netherlands’ (former) four pillars)
- **Elites have leeway** and prestige to make decisions behind closed doors that the rank-and-file will accept. Elites can appreciate broader ramifications and make compromises

# Community Autonomy

- Like federalism, except **non-territorial**
- **Autonomy over areas of strong concern** to the ethnic group, often education, language, culture, religion
- Often **constitutional rules** stipulating that the minority has power in these areas of law
- Money from centre helps **support autonomous parallel institutions.**

# Proportionality

- The idea that civil service positions and government spending are distributed on the basis of an ethnic group's proportion of the population
- Can also apply to cabinet posts
- Also reflected in **proportional representation** electoral systems which tend to turn out parliaments which reflect the ethnic composition of the population
- Sometimes, there are **provisions** for minority over-representation in order to allow minorities to off-set a larger group's dominance of (e.g., Belgian cabinet 1970).

# Mutual Veto

- Mutuality of veto puts a check on its flagrant abuse (i.e., ‘minority tyranny’)
- Can be **written or unwritten**
- Operates on the basis that votes which prevail **without the support of a bloc** are **illegitimate**
- I.e., 1970 - Belgian law that majority of both French and Flemish-speaking representatives must approve changes to education & schooling laws.

# Criticisms

- Undemocratic
- Illiberal
- Entrenches ethnic politics
- Inegalitarian
- Non-fraternal, lack of national unity
- Inefficient
- Elitist
- Leads to instability

# 1. Undemocratic

- Little vigorous opposition due to consensual rather than competitive nature of decisionmaking
- **Counter:** criticism can be targeted against specific figures in the opposition rather than the opposition bloc as a whole
- **Counter:** may be the best alternative in a strongly divided society

## 2. Illiberal

- Ethnic segments/pillars tend to organise individuals' social and political lives
- Deviance and **'floating'** becomes **difficult** and often stigmatised
- Hard for new issues and cross-cutting cleavages to emerge
- Dissent from community difficult

### 3. Entrenches Ethnic Politics

- Consociationalism compels legislators, parties and electors to identify with ethnic group rather than individual interests or other cleavages
- **Counter:** though consociationalism helps ethnic groups organise and make society more plural, ethnic identity pre-dates consociational arrangements
- **Opponents' rejoinder:** consociationalism creates ethnic divisions where they were once weak

## 4. Unequal

- Focus on equal treatment of groups can **overlook inequalities** of treatment of individuals
- Can overlook regional, class and other inequalities
- Can allow ethnic segments to practice certain forms of inequality (i.e., differential treatment of women, certain regions)
- Different rules for different groups tends to lead to **loss of a common standard** for individuals
- Consociationalism stands between unitary democracy (high equality) and international diplomacy/UN (almost no redistribution).

# 5. Disuniting

- National unity suffers if ethnic segments become focus of loyalty
- The ‘negative peace’ of consociationalism ensures less fraternity than the ‘positive peace’ of working together
- **Counter to liberty-equality-fraternity critique:** consociationalism is the only democracy that is realistically attainable. Better than non-democratic peace or segmental strife.

## 6. Inefficient

- Mutual veto can immobilise decisions
- Proportionality over merit in civil service reduces efficiency, promotes patronage
- Community autonomy leads to multiplication of layers of government and facilities
- **Counter**: some efficiencies (i.e., subsidiarity), but overall, inefficiency in short run is better than antagonism and breakdown in the long run
- **Counter**: decisions are slower, but can be just as effective in the long run.

## 7. Elitist

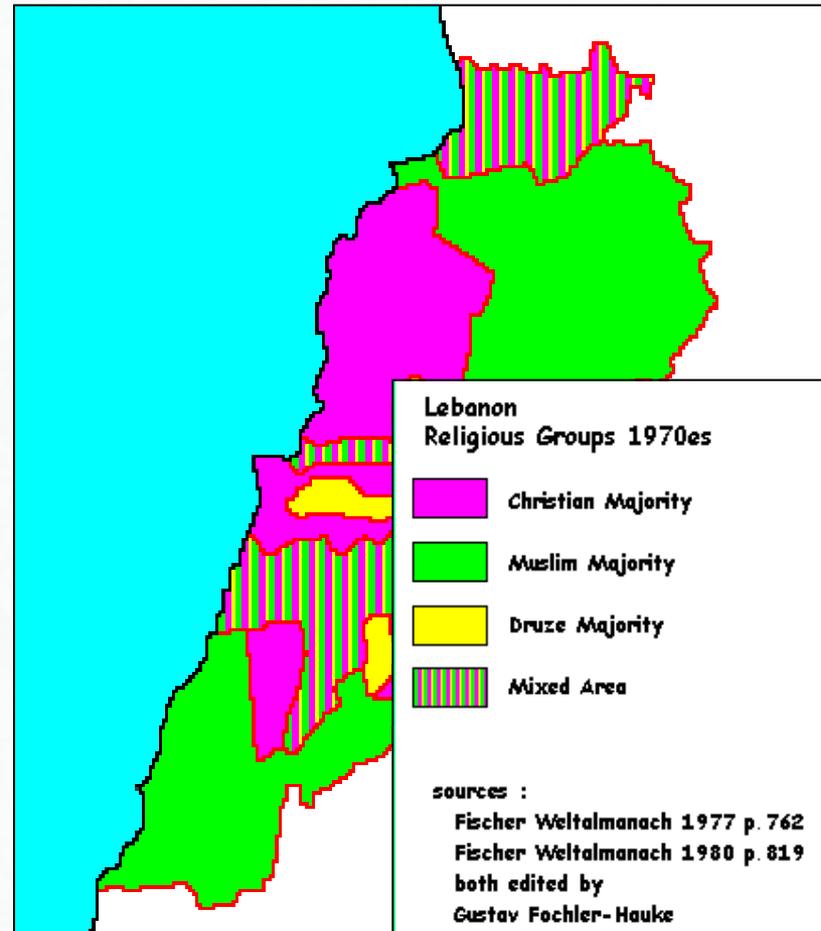
- Decisions are made by elites behind closed doors which detracts from public deliberation
- **Counter:** Popular opinion sets *de facto* limits to what elites can do
- **Counter:** Public opinion may mutually exclude solutions.

## 8. Unstable

- Disaffection with govt. performance can translate into disaffection with regime type, leading to revolutionary pressure
- **Counter:** new protest parties can easily form and get seats under PR;
- **Counter:** consociationalism can always be disbanded, as in the Netherlands post-1965.

# Consociationalism in Practice

- **Mixed record.** Some failures (i.e. In Lebanon), but others have succeeded.
- **Better than alternatives** of majority domination, bloody partition, secessionist warfare, forced transfer and genocide.
- **May be only option** for democracy in many areas.
- Criticised for **entrenching ethnic politics.**



# Ethnosymbolists vs. Instrumentalists

- **ETHNOSYMBOLISTS LIJPHART, O'LEARY/MCGARRY**  
→ ethnic identity is there and we **need to be realistic** and recognise it. If we do not, conflict will result
- **INSTRUMENTALISTS DIXON, NORDLINGER**  
→ consociational arrangements **deepen ethnic divisions** where these may have been lightly held. If we recognise ethnicity we entrench it. The ideal is to get people to live together and see past their ethnicity, to cooperate and encourage moderation.

# Electoral Engineering

- One element of consociationalism is proportionality: which is ensured in elections through \*PR
- Other options: \*majoritarian system, \*mixed system, \*incentive-based system

# Majoritarian Systems

- **First-past-the-post** (UK, US) - winner takes all. You only need to win a plurality (largest number of votes) not a majority (over 50% of vote)
- **Runoff** (France) - two separate rounds (elections). Only top two candidates run in the second round, candidate needs 50% + 1

# [cntd.] Majoritarian Systems: AV

- **Alternative Vote (AV) - Australia:**
  - Voters vote in order of preference for all the candidates on the ballot paper
  - Candidates require 50% + 1 to be elected

# Proportional Representation: List

- PR - List: common in Western Europe:
  - Vote for party not candidates
  - Vote % translates into same % of seats
  - Different forms:
    - National list vs. constituency lists
    - Electoral formulas
    - Ballot structures

# Proportional Representation: STV

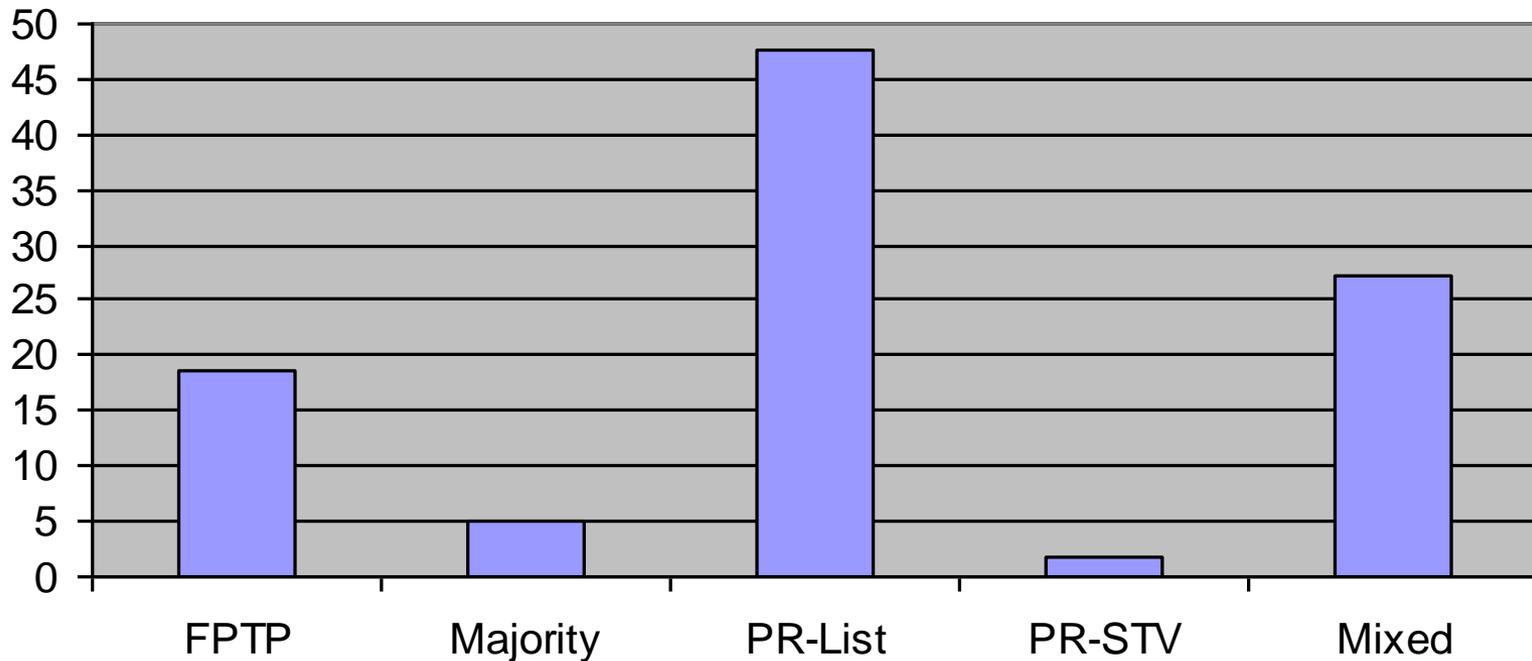
- PR-STV is the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ form of PR
- Used in Ireland/NI, Malta, Australia (upper house)
- Vote is for candidates - rank order as many as you like
- Candidates must pass a threshold to be elected
- Electoral districts are multi-member, so it is easy to win a seat and hence less need for parties to compete outside their ethnic base
- Votes of those who fail to meet threshold are reallocated until required number of candidates are elected in a constituency

# Mixed Systems

- Mix of majoritarian and proportional representation (i.e., Germany, where 50% FPTP and 50% PR (Closed) List)
- Two main variants:
  - mixed-member proportional (Germany-added majoritarian elements by district representation)
  - mixed-member majoritarian (Ukraine-proportional and majoritarian results added up).

# Most Countries Use Some Form of PR

**% of Countries using electoral systems**



# PR alone does not make up Consociationalism

- Lijphart could name only four truly consociational regimes outside Europe: Lebanon, Malaysia, Suriname, Dutch Antilles
- Not one had the hallmark Grand Coalition
- **So de facto few consociational democracies exist**, but many countries embody quasi-consociational principles.

# Incentive-Based Systems

- Horowitz advocates this as an alternative to consociationalism where possible
- Majoritarian systems encourage parties to compete for the centre and thus aid moderates at expense of fringe; in consociationalism, incentive is to compete on the hardline flanks
- **Vote pooling** rules. Types:
  - PR with proviso that must have x% of the vote in all regions/constituencies (Indonesia)
  - AV: 50+1 threshold in each constituency
    - Though majoritarian, vote pooling here forces the majority to compete for some transfers of votes from minority parties

# Problems with Incentive-Based Systems

- Majoritarian principle will **alienate ethnic minorities** looking for guarantees of representation
- Incentive-based system can **alienate majority ethnic groups** if they lose to moderate coalitions (e.g., 2000 Fiji coup led by Fijian extremists)
- Few constitutional agreements can bring aggrieved minorities into politics unless there are guarantees, so there is little enthusiasm for incentive-based systems in divided societies.

# **Crux of the Issue**

- Are ethnic divisions **primordial** / ethnosymbolically rooted, or are they instrumentally **fungible** and modern?
  - If the former, then consociationalism makes sense.  
If the latter, then it doesn't.
- Is the aim to bring **extremists to the table** or can we **push for moderation**?
  - If the former, then consociationalism makes sense.  
If the latter, then it doesn't.

# Change is Possible

- Decline of consociational arrangements in the Netherlands post-1965; Newfoundland post-1960s;
- These cases suggests that **social divisions need to decline first**;
- Northern Ireland: on the other hand, Dixon and Horowitz allege that Good Friday Agreement entrenches ethnic voting and has emasculated moderate SDLP and UUP.

# Other Risks in Consociationalism

- **Demographic change** (Lebanon) upsets neat formulas
- Decline of deference to party elites leads to **circumscribed ability of elites to reach compromise** (Northern Ireland)
- Atmosphere of trust may not prevail to encourage players not to abuse veto and other consociational provisions.