

Divide and rule

Divide and rule (Latin: *divide et impera*), or **divide and conquer**, in politics refers to an entity gaining and maintaining political power by using divisive measures. This includes the exploitation of existing divisions within a political group by its political opponents, and also the deliberate creation or strengthening of such divisions.^[1]

Definition

The phrase *divide and conquer* (from the latin *divide et impera*) first appeared in English around 1600.^[1]

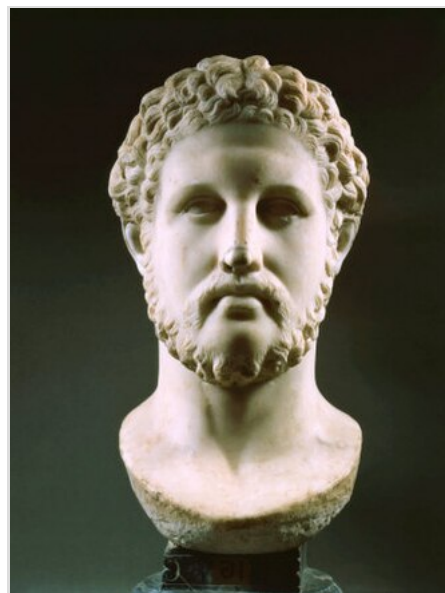
The strategy of division and rule has been attributed to sovereigns, ranging from Louis XI of France to the House of Habsburg. Edward Coke denounces it in Chapter I of the Fourth Part of the *Institutes of the Lawes of England*, reporting that when it was demanded by the Lords and Commons what might be a principal motive for them to have good success in Parliament, it was answered: "*Eritis insuperabiles, si fueritis inseparabiles. Explosum est illud diverbium: Divide, & impera, cum radix & vertex imperii in obedientium consensu rata sunt.*" ("You would be invincible if you were inseparable. This proverb, Divide and rule, has been rejected, since the root and the summit of authority are confirmed by the consent of the subjects.")

In a minor variation, Sir Francis Bacon wrote the phrase as *separa et impera* in a letter to James I of 15 February 1615. James Madison made this recommendation in a letter to Thomas Jefferson of 24 October 1787,^[2] which summarized the thesis of *The Federalist*^{#10}:^[3] "Divide et impera, the reprobated axiom of tyranny, is under certain (some) qualifications, the only policy, by which a republic can be administered on just principles."

Divide et impera is the third of three political maxims in Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795), *Appendix I*, the others being *Fac et excusa* ("Act now, and make excuses later") and *Si fecisti, nega* ("If you commit a crime, deny it"): ^[4] Kant refers this tactic when describing the traits of a "political moralist."

Politics

In politics, the concept refers to a strategy that breaks up existing power structures, and



Tradition attributes the origin of the motto to Philip II of Macedon: ^{See Tfd}Greek: διαίρει καὶ βασίλευε *diáirei kàì basíleue*, in Ancient Greek, meaning "divide and rule"

especially prevents smaller power groups from linking up, causing rivalries and fomenting discord among the people to prevent a rebellion against the elites or the people implementing the strategy. The goal is either to pit the lower classes against themselves to prevent a revolution, or to provide a desired solution to the growing discord that strengthens the power of the elites.^[5]

The principle "*divide et impera*" is cited as a common in politics by Traiano Boccalini in *La bilancia politica*.^[6]

Economics

In economics, the concept is also mentioned as a strategy for market segmentation to get the most out of the players in a competitive market.^[7]

Historical examples

Asia

While the Mongols imported Central Asian Muslims to serve as administrators in China, the Mongols also sent Han Chinese and Khitans from China to serve as administrators over the Muslim population in Bukhara in Central Asia, using foreigners to curtail the power of the local peoples of both lands.^[8]

Some Indian historians, such as politician Shashi Tharoor, assert that the British Raj frequently used this tactic to consolidate their rule and prevent the emergence of the Indian independence movement, citing Lord Elphinstone who said that "*Divide et impera* was the old Roman maxim, and it should be ours."^[9] A *Times Literary Supplement* review by British historian Jon Wilson suggests that although this was broadly the case a more nuanced approach might be closer to the facts.^[10] On the other hand, Proponents of Hindutva, the ideology of the current and recent Indian governments over the years, stress strongly Hindu-Muslim conflict going back centuries before the arrival of the British.

The classic nationalist position was expressed by the Indian jurist and supporter of Indian reunification Markandey Katju, who wrote in the Pakistani paper *The Nation* in 2013:^[11]

Up to 1857, there were no communal problems in India; all communal riots and animosity began after 1857. No doubt even before 1857, there were differences between Hindus and Muslims, the Hindus going to temples and the Muslims going to mosques, but there was no animosity. In fact, the Hindus and Muslims used to help each other; Hindus used to participate in Eid celebrations, and Muslims in Holi and Diwali. The Muslim rulers like the Mughals, Nawab of Awadh and Murshidabad, Tipu Sultan, etc. were totally secular; they organised Ramlilas, participated in Holi, Diwali, etc. Ghalib's affectionate letters to his Hindu friends like Munshi Shiv Narain Aram, Har Gopal Tofta, etc. attest to the affection between Hindus and Muslims at that time. In 1857, the 'Great Mutiny' broke out in which the Hindus and Muslims jointly fought against the British. This shocked the British government so much that after suppressing the Mutiny, they decided to start the policy of divide and rule (see online "History in the

Service of Imperialism" by B.N. Pande). All communal riots began after 1857, artificially engineered by the British authorities. The British collector would secretly call the Hindu Pandit, pay him money, and tell him to speak against Muslims, and similarly he would secretly call the Maulvi, pay him money, and tell him to speak against Hindus. This communal poison was injected into our body politic year after year and decade after decade.^[11]

Historian John Keay takes a contrary position regarding British policy, writing:

Stock accusations of a wider Machiavellian intent to 'divide and rule' and to 'stir up Hindu-Muslim animosity' assume some premonition of a later partition. They make little sense in the contemporary context. 'Divide and rule' as a governing precept supposes the pre-existence of an integrated entity. In an India politically united only by British rule – and not yet even by the opposition which it generated – such a thing did not exist. Division was a fact of life. As Maulana Muhammad Ali would later put it, 'we divide and you rule'. Without recognising, exploring and accommodating such division, British dominion in India would have been impossible to establish, let alone sustain. Provoking sectarian conflict, on the other hand, was rarely in British interest.^[12]

General S.K. Sinha, former Vice-Chief of Army Staff, writes that contrary to what the notion of divide and rule would predict, the British Indian Army was effectively integrated:

The undivided army was a unique institution set up by the British in India... [A]ll combat units, except Gorkhas and Garhwalis, had a mixed combination of Muslims and non-Muslims. They fought wars together and lived as friendly comrades in peace, owing loyalty to their regiments. Political developments with the emergency of the Congress and the Muslim League did not affect them. The Indian Army was totally apolitical till June 3rd 1947... In fact, during the Partition holocaust and till that date, both Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers remained totally impartial in dealing with communal violence. After June 3, 1947 things started changing.^[13]

French Algeria

The Kabyle myth is a colonial trope that was propagated by French colonists in the French Algeria based on a supposed binary between the Arab and Kabyle peoples, consisting of a set of stereotypes of supposed differences between them.^{[14][15][16]}

The myth emerged in the 19th century with French colonialism in Algeria, positing that the Kabyle people were more predisposed than Arabs to assimilate into "French civilization."^{[15][17]}

Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire often used a divide-and-rule strategy, pitting Armenians and Kurds against each other. This strategy no longer worked in the Republic of Turkey because the Armenians were eliminated in the Armenian genocide.^[18]

Europe

- Herodotus, (Histories, 5.3) claimed that the Thracians would be the strongest nation in the world if they were united.
- Athenian historian Thucydides in his book History of the Peloponnesian War claimed that Alcibiades recommended to Persian statesman Tissaphernes, to weaken both Athens and Sparta for his own Persian's benefit. Alcibiades, suggested to Tissaphernes that '*The cheapest plan was to let the Hellenes wear each other out, at a small share of the expense and without risk to himself.*^[19]
- Tacitus in Germania. chapter 33 writes "Long, I pray, may foreign nations persist in hating one another and fortune can bestow on us no better gift than discord among our foes."
- During the Gallic Wars, Caesar was able to use a divide and conquer strategy to easily defeat the Gauls, exploiting their fractious nature of their tribal society. Although the remaining Gauls were later united under Vercingetorix their resistance was not enough to stop the conquest.^{[20][21]}
- In Revolutions of 1848, the governments which were being revolted against used this tactic to counter the rebels.^{[22][23]}
- The colonial authorities in British Cyprus often stirred up the Turkish minority in order to neutralize agitation from the Greek majority.^{[24][25]} This policy intentionally cultivated further animosity between the already divided Greek majority and the Turkish minority (which consists of 18% of the population) in the island that remains divided to this day after an invasion by Turkey to establish the state of North Cyprus (which is only diplomatically recognized by Turkey).^[26]
- The partition of Ireland in 1921 has been claimed as an intentional implementation of this strategy by David Lloyd George, although the religious divisions in Ireland were notorious and of long standing.^[27] The Stanford historian Priya Satia claims that the partition of Ireland was in ways a patch-test for the partition of India in 1947.^[28]

Colonialism

According to Richard Morrock, four tactics of divide and rule practiced by Western colonialists are:^[29]

1. The manufacture of differences within the targeted population;
2. The amplification of existing differences;
3. The use of these differences for the benefit of the colonial empire; and
4. The carry over of these differences into the post-colonial period.

Foreign policy

Divide and rule can be used by states to weaken enemy military alliances. This usually happens when propaganda or disinformation are disseminated within the enemy states in an attempt to raise doubts about the alliance. Once the alliance weakens or dissolves, a vacuum will allow the

hostile state to achieve military dominance.

The divide and conquer strategy is similar to the notion of a wedge strategy.

United States

Some analysts assert that the United States is practicing the strategy in the 21st-century Middle East through their supposed escalation of the Sunni–Shia conflict. British journalist Nafeez Ahmed cited a 2008 RAND Corporation study for the U.S Armed Forces which recommended "divide and rule" as a possible strategy against the Muslim world in "the Long War".^[30]

Israel

Professor Avner Cohen, a former Israeli religious affairs official, publicly acknowledged that Hamas was "Israel's creation."^[31] Similar statements have been made by Yasser Arafat.^[32]

Assertions of Israeli support for Hamas date back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period marked by significant political upheaval in the Middle East. Former Israeli officials have openly acknowledged Israel's role in providing funding and assistance to Hamas as a means of undermining secular Palestinian factions such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Brigadier General Yitzhak Segev, who served as the Israeli military governor in Gaza during the early 1980s, admitted to providing financial assistance to the Muslim Brotherhood, the precursor of Hamas, on the instruction of the Israeli authorities. The aim of the support was to weaken leftist and secular Palestinian organizations.^[33]

Israel contributed to the construction of parts of Islamist politician Ahmed Yassin's network of mosques, clubs, and schools in Gaza, as well as the expansion of these institutions.^[33]

Shlomo Brom, retired general and former deputy to Israel's national security adviser, believes that an empowered Hamas helps Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu avoid negotiating over a Palestinian state, suggesting that there is no viable partner for peace talks.^[34] Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right lawmaker and finance minister under Netanyahu Government, called the Palestinian Authority a "burden" and Hamas an "asset".^[35]

Russia

Some consider that contemporary Russian affairs also have characteristics of a "divide and rule" strategy. Applied domestically to secure Vladimir Putin's power in Russia,^[36] it is used abroad in Russian disinformation campaigns to achieve "regime security, predominance in Russia's near abroad, and world-power status for Russia".^[37]

See also

- Soft power
- Hard power
- International relations

- Political realism
- False flag
- Destabilisation
- Identity politics
- Black propaganda
- Might makes right

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