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ARE INSTITUTIONS THE ANSWER? MITIGATING SECTARIAN PROTEST IN DIVIDED NATIONS

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Abstract. Ethnic violence has increased exponentially in the decades following World War II. As such, it is imperative that cures for the unique ills found in divided societies be discovered. This article seeks to quantitatively investigate the efficiency of formal political institutions in curbing ethnically-based violent protest in divided societies. As such, the dependent variable is the level of violent protest, while the independent variables include: a parliamentary system of government, a proportional representation electoral system, and a federated system. It is my contention that such institutions will significantly lessen incidents of ethnically-motivated violent protest. In addition, this article concludes with suggestions for further research in examining institutional structures and ethnic conflict.

The third wave of democratization has ushered in a global movement toward democracy and the creation of newly independent states. However, the transitions to democracy have not always been peaceful. For all its excitement and reported benefits, this wave of democratization has coincided with an increase in ethnic conflict, particularly in the developing world (Gurr 1993). In order to quell the increase in sectarian violence it is necessary to explore which political institutions moderate violent protest in multi-ethnic societies. By moderating violent protest, it is hoped that more wide-ranging ethnic violence will be prevented.

In all societies, institutions serve as structures which govern human interactions and behavior. Douglass North defines institutions as “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, [institutions as] the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (2004: 3). There are few societies that are more in need of strong institutional structures to ensure stability than those with numerous conflicting ethnic groups. Only through the implementation of specifically designed political institutional structures can a state limit violence between ethnicities.

Two paradigms stand at the fore of institutional design in multi-ethnic societies: the consociational and majoritarian models of democracy. The consociational model contends that, in divided societies, a system of consensus between actors is paramount in the policy-making process. The institutions created in a consociational democracy recognize ethnic divisions as autonomous entities and make those cleavages “the basis for rule in decision making, territorial division of power, and public policies” (Caspersen 2004: 570). Some political institutions found in the consociational model include a power-sharing government, a proportional representation system, and some degree of federalism.

On the other side of the spectrum, the majoritarian model is closely linked with the Anglo-American, or Westminster model, of democracy. The majoritarian model represents a system in which political competition is based upon “electorally competitive elites organized into a governing party and a loyal opposition with the major parties alternating over time” (Sterling 1978: 303). Unlike consociationalism, the majoritarian paradigm argues that political elites will not always agree to cooperate. As such, majoritarianism contends that institutions need to be created to ensure moderation and multi-ethnicity among factions (Horowitz 2004). Political institutions found commonly in a majoritarian model include a unitary government, single-member district electoral systems, and alternating opposition rule over time.

Exploring the effectiveness of institutional structures in divided societies provides democracy scholars with a theoretical basis with which to explore possible solutions to the problems faced by emerging democracies.

Although proven successful in many cases, predominantly in the developed world, majoritarian systems in deeply divided and developing societies may lead to ethnic or cultural conflict (Daalder 1974). By studying varying institutional solutions to sectarian problems, the democracy theorist is better able to prescribe remedies to real-world conflicts and make the new wave of democratization more stable and equitable.

Two claims emerge from the consociational and majoritarian democracy paradigms. First, the consociational institutions of power-sharing government, minority veto, proportional electoral system, and ethnic autonomy lead to lower levels of violent ethnic protest in pluralistic societies. By creating a system in which ethnic groups have access to the political process, violence becomes a less acceptable solution to ethnic troubles. Second, majoritarian institutions, which demand a cross-cutting of ethnic cleavages, lead to multi-ethnic moderation and encourage cooperation in divided societies, thus lessening levels of violent ethnic protest. Of these two claims, I argue that the consociational paradigm serves as better model for conflict moderation in divided societies and limits incidents of violent ethnic protest.

The literature addressing political institutions in multi-cultural societies is vast but can be traced to Arend Lijphart’s *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (1968). Here Lijphart begins to structure his model of consociational democracy by studying the institutions that serve to maintain political stability in an ethnically divided Netherlands. Lijphart builds upon “a familiar proposition in pluralist theory: that social cleavages are moderated if different cleavages cut across one another, but become loaded with conflict if they cumulatively reinforce one another” (Daalder 1974: 606). Lijphart argues that cooperation between the cleavage group elites can effectively serve as horizontal bridges between factions, thus decreasing the potential for violent conflict.

Lijphart argued that a number of criteria must be met for consociational democracy to be successful. First, distinct lines of cleavage must exist. Rather than attempting to erase deeply seated ethnic division, consociational theorists see the divisions as an ingrained aspect of societies and must be addressed as such. Second, the masses must favor a grand coalition maintaining a balance of power between factions. It is here that Lijphart begins to frame his ideas on the importance of elite cooperation.

Lijphart writes:

[a] key requirement is that the leaders of the self-contained blocks must be particularly convinced of the desirability of preserving the system. And they must be willing and capable of bridging the gaps between the mutually isolated blocs and resolving serious disputes in a largely nonconsensual context. (1968: 103-4).

Lastly, a moderate degree of nationalism must exist to encourage cooperation between factions, with a limited amount of stress on the system as a whole (Hudson 1976). A sense of nationalism is necessary to decrease the reliance on ethnic identity and depoliticize ethnicity, which, in turn, makes groups more tolerant of differing groups and lends stability and legitimacy to the state government. With a more unifying identity, fewer incidents of violent protest are apt to occur.

Eric Nordlinger's *Conflict Regulation in Deeply Divided Societies* (1972) builds on Lijphart's description of the consociational paradigm and provides a systematic approach to conflict resolution. Nordlinger establishes six practices used to control conflict between cleavage groups that would subsequently decrease incidents of violent protest in divided societies: the establishment of a stable coalition government, proportional electoral systems, a sense of depoliticization, minority veto, a compromise between groups, and concessions between stronger cleavage groups toward the weaker (Hudson 1976; Lijphart 1977). These institutions may grant ethnic groups a greater and more efficient say in the political process which, in turn, would make violent protest an unattractive alternative.

During the late seventies, a number of important review articles appeared that called for "greater attention to be paid to interethnic bargaining, compromise, balancing, reciprocity and cooperation as techniques for maintaining the stability and integrity of plural societies" in the developing world (Lustic 1979: 329). In *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Lijphart steps away from continental Europe and addresses the problems of consociational systems in the developing world. Influenced by Sir Arthur Lewis' study of thirteen African states, Lijphart argues that majoritarian or competitive systems, if enacted in the developing world, potentially will lead to authoritarian regimes which, in turn, may promote ethnic patronage and paternalistic government (1977: 144). Reiterating the point, Robert Dahl writes, "obviously any system is in peril if it becomes polarized into several highly antagonistic groups. Confronted by severe polarization, competitive regimes are prone to collapse, to a *coup d'etat*, (or) to civil war" (1971: 105).

Dahl, Lewis, and Lijphart do not argue that democracy is a poor fit in divided states but, rather, that the majoritarian model of democracy fits poorly. Lijphart quotes Lewis at length and the passage will add clarity here:

Britain and France are class societies, and their institutions and conventions are designed to cope with this fact. West Africa is not a class society; its problem is that it is a plural society. What is good for a class society is bad for a plural society. Hence to create good political institutions in West Africa one has to think of their problem through the foundations up. (1977: 145).

Consociation theorists build upon the idea of elite cooperation. According to the consociational model, ethnic group elites understand the dangers posed if ethnic conflict continues. As such, it is hoped that the various sectarian leaders will choose to cooperate and adhere to institutional structures that recognize ethnic divisions and promote stability. In turn, under a system which encourages elite cooperation, political elites are less likely to encourage members of their ethnic groups to participate in violent protest.

It becomes rational for the leadership of ethnic groups to enter such institutions, as the long-term benefits outweigh the short-term gains brought through competition. As such, the institutions, once in place, will encourage an environment in which violent protest is viewed as costly and negative.

In reviewing the consociational theoretical literature, Hans Daalder provides a succinct description of the consociational model's emphasis on elite cooperation. Daalder writes, "strongly divided societies can be stabilized by a conscious effort on the part of political elites, provided they deliberately seek to counteract the immobilizing and destabilizing effects of cultural fragmentation" (1974: 607). Indeed, a major catalyst for cultural fragmentation is unmitigated violent political protest. In order for elite cooperation to be successful, elites must forgo the competition espoused by the Anglo-American model of democracy and instead form a union of ethnic elites. For this leadership union to be successful, "they [the elites] must rely instead on forms of proportional representation in which no single actor acquires a mandate" (1974: 607).

In addition to a proportional representation system, the governing regime must grant a level of autonomy to the ethnic groups composing the union. By granting freedoms to the cleavage groups, and imposing the will of the greater union only when doing so is in the best interest of all parties concerned, ethnic conflict and political struggle can be kept to a minimum. In discussing the role of federalism as autonomy, Fukuyama writes, "in politics, federalism (as a form of autonomy) means that government is closer and more visible to the people it is meant to serve, which theoretically should increase accountability and therefore legitimacy and quality of democracy" (2004: 70). As the quality and legitimacy of the political system increases, the levels of disenchantment with the system will fall, thus lessening incidents of violent ethnic protest. Aside from federalism, institutions such as mutual veto and unanimity serve to ensure the autonomy necessary to promote a decline in violent ethnic protest.

Nevertheless, many opponents of the consociational model claim that little chance of consensus exists in a deeply divided society. Barry Weingast offers three reasons why "universalistic limits on government, applying to members of all ethnic groups are difficult to sustain" (1997: 256). First, the values of the different cleavage groups are often at odds, making accommodation difficult. Second, one group may benefit from exploiting another. As such, a collective action problem ensues. Lastly, even if all conflicting groups desire an end to conflict, the actual establishment of a solution palatable to all parties is difficult at best (1997: 256-7).

Horowitz' integrative mode addresses stability in multi-cultural societies and mitigates many of Weingast's concerns. A derivative of the Anglo-American democratic model, integrativism proposes the adoption of institutions that promote competition and majority rule in the hopes of overcoming the deep conflicts that are present in cleavage societies.

Unlike the consociational model, which adheres to the belief that ethnic elites see accommodation as a way to maximize their personal interests and the interests of their particular ethnic group, integrativism views accommodation as complex at best. Horowitz writes:

Policy makers are participants in their societies. As such, they may entertain hostile feelings toward members of other groups. If not, they may still have a view of intergroup relations that sees ethnic conflict as necessary to advancement of the interests of their group. Even if political leaders do not hold such views, they may nonetheless benefit, politically or materially, from continuation of the conflict and be loath to pursue policies of amelioration. (2004: 564).

The integrative model contends that, in order to overcome the self-interested motivations of political elites, a preferential electoral system needs to be created “in which a candidate’s election depends on attracting votes from outside his or her ethnic group” (Caspersen 2004: 571). As such, the integrative approach puts a great value on elections, while the consociational model places more emphasis on the less public negotiations between ethnic group elites.

Aside from Horowitz’s critique of the ability of ethnic elites to cooperate, he argues that the consociational model, although effective in small European nations, has little practicality in the developing world. Horowitz writes:

There are supra-segmental sentiments that tie group members to the Swiss or the Dutch nation in a way that group members are not tied to an inclusive conception of the Lebanese, Malaysian, or Ugandan nation. The European conflicts are thus less ascriptive in character, less severe in intensity, less exclusive in their command of the loyalty of participants, and less preemptive of other forms of conflict. (2004: 572).

As the integrative and consociational paradigms serve as templates not only for conflict resolution but establishing governance structures in real-world multi-ethnic societies, it is imperative to test both models in order to discover the relative effectiveness of these prescribed institutions.

In this study, I argue that the consociational paradigm serves as superior model for limiting the frequency of violent ethnic protest. I analyze the relationship between consociational institutions and sectarian protest. I hypothesize that nations governed by consociational institutions are likely to experience fewer incidents of violent ethnic protest than their majoritarian counterparts.

The data for this project are drawn from the *Minorities at Risk Project*. The study encompasses 233 politically active communal groups in 93 countries each organized by a host of variables and categories. Unfortunately, the *Minorities at Risk Project* does not test the role of particular political institutions on levels of ethnic violence. However, expanding upon Gurr’s project, Saideman et al. attempt a large-N, pooled-time series analysis for the years 1985 through 1998, seeking to examine the impacts of political institutions on levels of ethnic conflict.

Saideman et al. draw their dependent variables from Gurr’s project but have cre-

ated their own explanatory variables. One dependent variable was drawn from the Saideman piece, levels of violent protest, and draws the explanatory variables, electoral system, federalism, and presidential versus parliamentary regime, adapted from the *Minorities at Risk Project*.

As the level of analysis of the Saideman project is that of individual ethnic groups and the level of analysis for this study is the state, the relevant data from the Saideman dataset were aggregated to the national level. In aggregating the dataset, I have collapsed the Saideman dataset to average the levels of violent protest of all ethnic groups in a particular nation. In doing so, the data now will represent a total level of ethnic violence in a particular state rather than levels illustrated by particular groups. By aggregating the dependent variable, we are better able to make assumptions regarding the levels of violent protest in nations at large. Table 3 illustrates the coding for the dependent variable.

Three specific political institutions will be used to represent the consociational paradigm and subsequently serve as the independent variables: a proportional representation electoral system, federalism, and a parliamentary legislative system. Each is binary so as to allow a clear differentiation between impact of consociational and majoritarian institutions on levels of violent ethnic protest.

Table 3: Coding for Dependent Variable Violent Protest

| Violent Protest | |
|--|----|
| None Reported | 0 |
| Political Banditry, Sporadic Terrorism | 1 |
| Campaigns of Terrorism | 2 |
| Local Rebellions | 3 |
| Small-scale Guerilla Activity | 4 |
| Intermediate Guerilla Activity | 5 |
| Large-scale Guerrilla Activity | 6 |
| Protracted Civil War | 7 |
| No Basis for Judgment | 99 |

Source: Saideman et al., 2002.

First, I test the levels of violent protest as a function of the electoral system. A proportional representation system alleviates the polarizing outcomes of a majoritarian system, thus allowing greater participation among marginalized groups. With greater access to political power, groups are less likely to resort to violent protest in order to voice their grievances. In addition, a proportional representation system is conducive to a power-sharing government. Saideman et al. write:

We propose that plurality systems increase group insecurity, because political change can be quite dramatic, and exclusion often results. If groups cannot block objectionable policies, then they may have to engage in either protest or violence to have influence. In a PR system, on the other hand, coalitions can change, but ethnic groups may gain representation and could play a significant role either as a coalition partner or in opposition to the government. (111).

I hypothesize that states with a proportional electoral system will experience fewer incidents of violent ethnic protest than those without a PR electoral system. As such, I expect a negative coefficient will exist between the independent variable and the electoral systems.

I also examine the levels of violent ethnic protest as a function of federalism. The consociational model argues that a degree of ethnic autonomy is useful in promoting stability and moderating ethnic grievances. Federalism can be used to ensure a certain level of autonomy. Lijphart writes, “[The federal] approach is not to abolish or weaken segmental cleavages but to recognize them explicitly and to turn the segments into constructive elements of stable democracy” (1977: 42). As such, federalism can be conducive to the creation of a power-sharing government, one in which all groups are able to participate in the political process.

Aside from access to the political process, federalism decentralizes the state, bringing the state closer to those it is created to represent. In doing so, the state gains legitimacy (Fukuyama 2004). With an increase in legitimacy, groups are less likely to pursue violent ways to voice their grievances. Relying on Saideman et al., I created a binary variable to represent federalist structures in a given state.

I hypothesize that a system with federal aspects will have fewer examples of violent ethnic protest. If ethnic groups are granted rights over their own lives, the costs of violent protest will be great compared to the costs of violent protest in a non-federated system. As such, I expect a negative relationship between the federal variable and the dependent variables.

The final independent variable examines the role of parliamentary and presidential political systems on levels of violent ethnic protest. Saideman et al. argue that presidential systems are more effective in promoting stability and limiting conflict. They contend that “ethnic groups are more insecure, and thus more likely to engage in violence and preemption, when they cannot block policies that might hurt them. The division of powers between president and legislature allows each to serve as a check on the other, even when the same party dominates both branches” (110).

I take issue with this hypothesis, arguing instead that a parliamentary system pre-empt levels of protest by granting greater political participation and representation to ethnic groups. In addition, the coalitional nature of a parliamentary system is conducive to a power-sharing government which will, in turn, limit ethnic strife and violent ethnically-motivated protest. I expect to discover a negative coefficient between the parliamentary/presidential variable and the dependent variables.

In order to test the relationship between consociational institutions and levels of ethnic protest, I subjected the model to a *Least Squares Dummy Variable* (LSDV) regression. This estimator was used to address the unique aspects of panel data and this model in particular. The LSDV regression was used with robust standard errors to address issues of heteroskedasticity. The results of the regression examine the impact of consociational institutions on levels of nonviolent protest. Table 8 illustrates the results.

Substantively, the table is quite revealing. Both variables representing federalism and proportional representation lack statistical significance. The lack of significance for these variables implies that real-world assumptions cannot be made based upon the relationships of these variables and levels of violent protest. However, parliamen-

tarianism plays a significant role in levels of violent protest. The data show that a state with a parliamentary system is apt to score .332 points higher on the scale of violent protest than its majoritarian counterparts. As such, these data suggest that a state with a parliamentary system is likely to have more frequent occurrences of violent ethnic protest than its presidential counterparts. This finding supports the Saide-man hypothesis that presidential systems are more apt to promote stability and mitigate ethnic conflict.

Table 8: Violent Ethnic Protest as a Function of Federal, Parliamentary, and Proportional Systems

| LSDV Regression | Violent Protest |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Federal | 0.108 (0.116) |
| Parliamentary | 0.332** (0.142)** |
| PR System | -0.366 0.340 |
| CONS | -1.28 1.54 |

Notes:

**Designates $p > 0.05$;

Standard Error in Parentheses;

N = 962;

Estimates Obtained by STATA 9.0.

Although the parliamentary variable proved significant, the fact that other variables did not leads to a curious puzzle. Do political systems matter in curbing ethnic violence? What other variables may mitigate sectarian conflict? In short, this article has illustrated that the design of macro-political institutions is not the sole, and perhaps not the best, approach to curbing ethnic violence. Other avenues of research must be pursued. One promising path lies in analyzing the impact of informal institutions on ethnic conflict mitigation. This could be done through an examination of the civil society structures in divided societies, and particularly the impact of non-governmental organizations in developing the infrastructure to implement cross-cutting cleavages. Perhaps the best approach to better understanding ethnic conflict is by moving from a macro- to a micro-level of analysis. Researchers can conduct cost-benefit analyses of various ethnic conflict prevention projects across nations. Through a more “thick” analysis of the true happenings on the ground, best-practice approaches can be studied, evaluated, and disseminated to those operating within divided states, and a more efficient system can be adopted.

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