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DEMOCRACY IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES

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Democratization is a worldwide movement, but it is neither universal nor uniformly successful where it has begun. Some authoritarian or semidemocratic states may be untouched by the democratic movement; others may find ways to thwart the movement at the outset; still others may move along a democratic path, only to have the changes aborted. There are many reasons, of course, why democratization and democracies may fail, among them the resistance of entrenched civilian or military elites, the absence of conducive social or cultural conditions, and inaptly designed institutions. In many countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, a major reason for the failure of democratization is ethnic conflict.

Democracy is about inclusion and exclusion, about access to power, about the privileges that go with inclusion and the penalties that accompany exclusion. In severely divided societies, ethnic identity provides clear lines to determine who will be included and who will be excluded. Since the lines appear unalterable, being in and being out may quickly come to look permanent. In ethnic politics, inclusion may affect the distribution of important material and nonmaterial goods, including the prestige of the various ethnic groups and the identity of the state as belonging more to one group than another. Again and again in divided societies, there is a tendency to conflate inclusion in the government with inclusion in the community and exclusion from government with exclusion from the community.

Ethnically divided societies thus have a special version of the usual democratic problem of assuring decent treatment of the opposition. Opposition to government is always susceptible of portrayal as resistance to the popular will. An ethnically differentiated opposition can easily be depicted as consisting of particularly dangerous enemies: historical enemies, enemies who do not accept the current identity of the state, enemies who are plotting to break up the state or to steal it for their own group—as indeed they may be, given the crucial importance of state power and the costs of exclusion from it.

Where ethnic relations undergo significant improvements during an authoritarian period, that is very likely to improve the prospects for democracy. Relations between Thais and Chinese in Thailand and between Mainlanders and Taiwanese on Taiwan were hostile and even violent after World War II. Several decades later, those relations were far less prone to conflict, and rates of intermarriage were higher than is typical of deeply divided societies. These changes facilitated democratization in both countries, because they reduced the fear that each group had of the other. At the other extreme, most African countries remain severely divided, and ethnic divisions have proved a major impediment to the attainment of stable democracy all over the continent.

Democracy has progressed furthest in those East European countries that have the fewest serious ethnic cleavages (Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland) and progressed more slowly or not at all in those that are deeply divided (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and of course the former Yugoslavia). It is true that the first group of states was more prosperous, had at least some democratic traditions, and had closer ties to the West. But there is also a direct relationship between ethnic conflict and nondemocratic development in the second group. The use of ethnic hostility by former communists in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia to support ethnically exclusive regimes and authoritarian tendencies is well known. The heavy-handed Slovak regime of former communist Vladimír Mečiar is hardly comparable to the regimes in Croatia and Serbia, but it does have a record of attempting to control the press, pack the Constitutional Court, and limit the language rights of Hungarians in the south of the country. The democratic movement in Romania, which received its strongest impetus in multiethnic Transylvania, was quickly transformed into a narrower Romanian nationalism, occasionally inclined to xenophobia, especially fearful of the Hungarian minority, and conducive to the continued governmental role of former communists. In Bulgaria, an anticommunist parliamentary plurality, attentive to popular fears of the Turkish minority (and of other Muslims), was unable to form a stable government by coalescing with the Turkish party. When the government lost a vote of confidence, it was succeeded by a party of ex-communists who had led the anti-Turkish agitation and who then embarked on a series of purges of the administration and the press. Ethnic conflict has fed authoritarian tendencies in Eastern Europe, as it has elsewhere.

Although it is widely recognized that ethnic conflict makes both the initiation of democratization and the practice of democracy difficult, the nature of the difficulties, especially the extent to which they are structurally embedded and not readily amenable to sheer exercises of good will, is rarely specified. Ethnicity poses obstacles at the threshold of democratization and obstacles after the threshold is crossed. In a variety of ways, direct and indirect, ethnic conflict can be conducive to authoritarianism, and, in at least equally various ways, democracy can facilitate either majority rule and the exclusion of minorities or minority rule and the exclusion of majorities. None of this is to say that nothing can be done and that fatalism is the appropriate response. Things can be done—for some deeply divided societies are relatively democratic—but there are good systemic reasons why it is difficult to produce institutions conducive to the emergence of multiethnic democracy.

Before laying out the difficulties, perhaps it is best to make clear that severely divided societies lie at one end of a spectrum. At the other end are fluid societies that have long contained groups whose descendants have blended into the general population (various immigrants in the United States and in France) or whose interactions have been at relatively low levels of conflict (English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish in Britain and Australia). In the middle is a category of more severely divided societies, where groups have strongly held political aspirations and interact as groups but where several favorable conditions have moderated the effects of ethnic conflict. In these countries, external forces have historically tended to foster internal integration; several other cleavages (religion, class, often region) compete for attention with ethnicity and are reflected in the party system; and ethnic issues emerged late in relation to other cleavages and to the development of parties, so that party politics is not a perfect reflection of ethnic conflict. Among these countries are Switzerland, Canada, and Belgium—all, significantly, federations. It is difficult to generalize from these structurally advantaged countries to severely divided societies, such as Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka, where the issue of birth identity does not alternate with others, where external forces are neutral or disintegrative, and where parties reflect the ethnic cleavage. In such countries, democracy is always difficult.

Obstacles at the Threshold

Before democratization can proceed, the old regime must either agree or be forced to change; or, if it is defeated, the victors must agree among themselves to a democratic dispensation. In many severely divided societies, these conditions cannot be met. The delicacy of the ethnic issue may combine with an established leadership's contentment with the status quo to induce that leadership to pass up opportunities to democratize. Even opponents of the leadership may sense the possibility of worse alternatives to the status quo, some of which may be precipitated by democratization. Alternatively, an ethnically exclusive regime may resist a change that will bring its ethnic opponents to power by democratic processes. If a new beginning is brought about as a result of ethnic insurgency, democracy may be aborted as some ethnic contenders sense that others will have the advantage in a democratic regime.

It may seem curious that movements for further democratization have largely bypassed some semidemocratic or semiauthoritarian states in Southeast Asia. Yet these delicately balanced regimes, more democratic in the case of Malaysia, less in Singapore and Indonesia, are cases in which popular discontent is not at the same levels that were reached in Thailand, Burma, and the Philippines. Despite ethnic favoritism, the question of inclusion and exclusion is somewhat blurred in the former set of countries, and the regimes themselves would be firmly opposed to further democratization. Even at the height of the worldwide democratization movement, the question was hardly raised in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia—which is testimony to the ability of partial satisfaction (a sense that ethnic exclusion could be much worse) coupled with regime strength to preempt change.

More sharply exclusive regimes generally need to be more active if they are to thwart change. Ethnically exclusive regimes come in two general varieties: bifurcated polities, in which roughly half or more than half the state rules the rest; and minority-dominated polities, in which the base of a regime has progressively narrowed, particularly after the end of competitive elections, so that one or two small groups rule the majority. In either case, there is likely to be resistance to any change that might bring ethnic opponents to power.

Bifurcated regimes often have unpleasant memories of elections, for the parties of their ethnic opponents may have won them. Accordingly, there is little inclination to facilitate a recurrence. Togo and the Congo Republic both have northern regimes (based, respectively, on the Kabrai and the Mbochi) that came to power after military coups reversed the ethnic results of elections. Neither regime has had a special desire to accommodate a democratic process it identified with its southern (Ewe or Lari) opponents. Consequently, both took steps to disrupt the process.[1]

More narrowly based regimes willing to use draconian methods—Zaire, for example—have also been able to thwart democratization. Most others have resorted to manipulating the process. Kenya, with its Kalenjin-dominated minority government, finally succumbed to Western pressure and conducted a multiparty election. But the incumbent president, Daniel arap Moi, was able to use a combination of intimidation, violence, and ethnic divisions among the opposition to win both the presidency and a parliamentary majority on a plurality of votes, mainly from his own group and several other small ethnic groups. The result is a regime that continues to exclude the two largest groups, Kikuyu and Luo. Likewise, Cameroon's President Paul Biya, presiding over a government supported mainly by Beti and Bulu and opposed by all the rest, benefited from an opposition divided along ethnic lines and an election boycott by a major party. Biya put together a legislative coalition in which his party is dominant, and he won a plurality in a presidential election. Thereafter, he arrested his main opponent. The same narrowly composed authoritarian government thus continues to rule. In a dubiously conducted election in Ghana, the military ruler, Jerry Rawlings, won the presidency, supported by 93 percent of the vote in his own Ewe-dominated area, but polling less than one-third in Ashanti, thus reviving an earlier polarization.

Manipulation does not succeed everywhere. In Benin and Zambia, narrow regimes yielded to popular pressure for free elections, which they then lost. These, however, are the exceptional cases, and, as we shall see, what they gave way to cannot be characterized as multiethnic democracy.

A great many armed insurrections are aimed against ethnically-based regimes. Where they have not succeeded militarily, they have also generally provoked countermeasures, reducing rather than enhancing democratic prospects. That has been true in Sri Lanka and Sudan; certainly, the minority insurgencies in Burma are among the main reasons the regime fears democratization. Even if the insurgents win or at least win sufficiently to force concessions, the results can still be disappointing for democrats. In Liberia and Somalia, the victory of the insurgents produced only further ethnic violence and warfare. In Zimbabwe, the victory of the Patriotic Front, which led to independence, then generated warfare by Robert Mugabe's Shona-led regime against Joshua Nkomo's Ndebele opposition, until Nkomo capitulated to the one-party state. The Afghan civil war has produced something like a de facto Tajik and Uzbek state in the north and a Pushtun state in the south, neither with democratic inclinations. A similar result may follow ultimately in Tajikistan, where ethnically differentiated forces have been fighting since shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Insurgency is not conducive to the establishment of democratic institutions.

Even under the most favorable conditions, the defeat of authoritarian regimes on the battlefield does not mean that the victorious insurgents will be able to make a democratic transition in a divided society. Those favorable conditions were certainly present in Ethiopia. Tolerant, democratic inclinations were in evidence. Two of the three major insurgent groups, Tigrayans and Oromo, had agreed that the third, Eritreans, were entitled to their own separate state. For the rest, the new rulers in Addis Ababa had planned a democratic Ethiopia that would accord considerable autonomy to the remaining ethnic groups. But then the Oromo leaders accused their Tigrayan former partners of attempting to rig the 1992 regional elections. The Oromo, the most numerous ethnic group in the country, proceeded to begin a new insurgency.[2] Their withdrawal created a *fait accompli*: over 90 percent of the seats were won by the Tigrayan party and its allies. With Tigrayans dominant in the armed forces, Ethiopia, conquered by a broad-based insurgency, is ruled by a relatively small minority. As we shall see, similar results can be achieved without insurgency.

Narrowing the Boundaries of Community

The problems of inclusion and exclusion do not disappear when new institutions are being adopted and put into operation. At these points, conceptions of the scope of the political community will limit the participation of some groups in the institutions of the new regime.

One of the ironies of democratic development is that, as the future is being planned, the past intrudes with increasing severity. In this field, there is no such thing as a fresh start. In ethnic relations, history often leads to exclusive conceptions of community. Take the question of who belongs here. The answer usually turns on who is thought to have arrived here first and where "here" actually is. Those who think their ancestors arrived earlier are likely to demand political priority by virtue of indigenousness over those deemed to be immigrants. Similarly, it is common to demand that a given territory be considered part of one "world," rather than part of another nearby. The implication is that those inhabitants who are identified with the "world" in which the territory is properly located have priority over those who are not so identified.

Asia is full of such claims: that the Sri Lankan Tamils really belong to South India, that the Bengalis are illegitimately in Assam, that the Southeast Asian Chinese are immigrants, that the Muslim Arakanese in Burma are actually Bangladeshis, that the Mohajirs in Karachi are not proper Sindhis. In Eastern Europe, questions of belonging are highly charged with historical memory. Two of the largest minorities—Hungarians and Turkish and other Muslims—are thought to be present only as relics of a Hapsburg or Ottoman domination that for centuries repressed those who are now tempted to exclude them in turn. The former Soviet Union has a special variant of these struggles over belonging. Not only are the Russians and other Slavs who migrated to non-Slavic republics considered to be settlers identified with a discredited imperial regime, but some of the areas in which they often form majorities lie outside Russia only because of territorial boundaries constructed by the Soviet regime on grounds increasingly regarded by Russians as capricious and therefore alterable. As a result, the attempts of Moldovans, Kazakhs, or Estonians to exclude Russians from the community can be met with Russian efforts to detach territory from the excluding state.

In Moldova, the less-than-two-thirds of the population that speaks Romanian managed to declare their language the official language of the new republic. The assumption, understood as such by Russian, Gagauz, and Ukrainian minorities, especially in the Trans-Dniester, is that Moldova is for Moldovans.[3] Much of Moldova was taken by Stalin from Romania in 1940 and incorporated in the Soviet Union. But Trans-Dniester was not part of the pre-1940 Romanian territory; it was instead split off from the Ukraine. Most of its Russian population settled there after 1940. To Romanian-speakers, the recency of the Slavic immigration compounds the illegitimacy of the settlers' claims. To Trans-Dniestrians, the illegitimate amalgamation of the two lands in 1940 means that their territory does not belong to Moldova. The claim to have arrived here first is thus countered by the claim that here is not here at all.

These underlying issues of the social and territorial boundaries of the community surface in the construction of new democracies. If the regime on Taiwan were still seriously considered to be simply the locus of the mainland government in exile, it would be illegitimate to have it ruled by Taiwanese; if, on the other hand, Mainlanders were still considered to be merely sojourners, their continued participation at the center of power would be in question. The fact that both of these questions of where and who have more or less been resolved has greatly facilitated multiethnic democratization on Taiwan. Comparable questions have not been resolved between Lithuanians and Poles in Lithuania, between Kazakhs and Russians in Kazakhstan, or among Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians in Georgia. The migration of Russians to republics along the European, Central Asian, and Siberian periphery of the former Soviet Union has given rise to a great many measures to treat them as less than full members of the community: violence in Tuva, settlement restrictions in Yakutia, weighted voting in Tatarstan, restrictive citizenship in several republics. In Latvia and Estonia, both with large Russian minorities, substantial bodies of opinion at independence favored the repatriation of Russian settlers; in Estonia, the citizenship law disfranchised 42 percent of the population.

The boundary of the political community is an issue that manifests itself in the answer to three questions: Who is a citizen? Among citizens, who has what privileges? Whose norms and practices are symbolically aligned with those of the state? Beyond admission to citizenship, then, there is the question of special provision for the admission of one group more than another to educational institutions, to the civil service, or to the armed forces. Where belonging is contested, special provision is an indicator of political priority. And so is a language law that makes Georgian the official language of Georgia or Kazakh the official language of Kazakhstan, displacing competing languages. These policies symbolize the priority of the group speaking the official language, and they reflect restrictive conceptions of indigenousness. In the case of Georgia, they are the outcome of long disputes over whether Georgians or Abkhazians arrived in the territory first and whether all groups that arrived in Georgia after 1801—allegedly, Ossetians and Azeris did—ought simply to be dispossessed.[4]

The Georgian case makes clear some of the connections between ethnic conflict and authoritarian rule. The more deeply the post-Soviet regime became mired in policies designed to exclude minorities, the more autocratic it became as well. Extreme forms of ethnic exclusion require a legal framework that is ultimately inimical to democratic principles. They make it impossible to apply uniform conceptions of representation or to treat like cases alike. If, in addition, the excluded groups adopt unlawful methods of protest, there is likely to be a spate of statutes and regulations authorizing arbitrary arrest and search, detention without trial, and restrictions on freedom of expression. Political leaders who advocate ethnically extremist positions are also more inclined than ethnic moderates are to support authoritarian measures.[5] This is another way in which the pursuit of ethnic conflict is likely to foster authoritarianism.

Inclusion and Exclusion

There is yet a further obstacle to constructing a democratic multiethnic community after the process of democratization has begun in a severely divided society. This obstacle does not derive from such overtly restrictive conceptions of community as those based on indigenousness. Rather, it derives from the inherent difficulty any regime has in maintaining the inclusiveness of a polity superimposed on an ethnically divided society. Africa has relatively few claims to group priority by virtue of indigenousness, but it is nevertheless suffused with problems of ethnic inclusion and exclusion.

Zambia was widely regarded as a major African success in democratization, largely because the incumbent president, Kenneth Kaunda, reluctantly acceded to free elections, did not rig them, and conceded defeat when he lost. Such an assessment, however, supremely

exalts form over substance, for neither the outgoing nor the incoming regime has had the ability to keep all the major groups included. In fact, the new regime has begun to repeat the very same process of exclusion that narrowed the base of its predecessor.

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Like Frederick Chiluba, the winner of the 1991 election, Kaunda had earlier acquired power (in his case, from the British) at the head of a party with broad multiethnic support. Of the half-dozen major groups, none of them comprising more than a fifth of the population, only the Ila and the Tonga in the south supported the opposition. Soon after independence, however, ethnic factions arose within the ruling party. After they were defeated in party elections, Lozi leaders joined the opposition. At this point, Kaunda took defensive measures to counter the alleged overrepresentation of Bemba in the party leadership. Discontented Bemba, who believed they had played a leading role in the independence struggle, then formed their own party. As the opposition grew, the ethnic scope of the ruling party contracted, until Kaunda declared a single-party state that simultaneously ended the electoral threat to his rule and disguised the narrow base of his party, confined by then largely to the Nyanja of the east. When elections finally were held, nearly two decades later, Kaunda won all of the seats in the Eastern Province and only a handful elsewhere. An interethnic opposition, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), won the rest in a landslide.

In little more than a year, the cycle began again. Claims were made that Bemba had received an unfair share of government and party appointments; a Lozi and a Bemba minister were sacked; another Lozi and an influential Ila minister resigned. A new Bemba-based party was formed. Several regions were being organized against the government. By early 1993, the regime declared a state of emergency, citing a plot allegedly involving members of Kaunda's family. The former, broad-based opposition was well on the way to replicating Kaunda's minority-dominated, authoritarian regime.

Quite clearly, the breadth of the MMD's multiethnic support against Kaunda at the time of the 1991 election was a function of the transitory nature of the contest in which it was engaged, just as Kaunda's own initial support against the colonial regime did not long survive the departure of the British. In each case, victory marked the beginning of an ethnic struggle, in which group leaders contended for the domination of the new regime and peeled away from the multiethnic party as they were defeated. Such parties, left with minority support after the postindependence struggles, typically outlawed the opposition, declared a single-party state, pronounced the single party to be ethnically inclusive, but in fact kept power in the hands of minorities that could not have kept it had elections continued to be held. This was true not only for Zambia, but for Kenya, Cameroon, Uganda, Chad, the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mauritania, and Sierra Leone, among others. In each case, the single party was a mask for ethnic domination.[6] If events in Zambia now seem to be following a similar course, that is because the same forces and the same dynamics are present. Why should they have changed merely because new elections were held?

What drives the cyclical processes of inclusion and exclusion is the changing context. It is not difficult to conclude that the colonial regime, or the Kaunda regime, or the Moi regime is ethnically exclusive and undemocratic. Even that is no guarantee that those who oppose it will unite at the polls, as Moi's victory in Kenya and Biya's in Cameroon show. Even if opponents do unite, that is not because they have suppressed their differences, but because those differences are not yet relevant. They become relevant only when it is time to decide who will rule. At that point, the question of group desert comes into play: the Nyanja are better educated and thus qualified to rule; the Bemba were more committed to ousting the former regime; the Lozi have been denied the regional autonomy promised them at independence. Each of these claims produces a hostile answer from others.

Now it is perfectly understandable that a party that wins three-quarters or more of the votes cast in a general election, as the Zambian MMD did in 1991,[7] may face a problem of distribution: it has too many supporters—or, rather, the old regime had too many opponents—and some of them will soon be disappointed. But, once the disaffection begins, why were Kaunda and others in his position unable to brake the slide, in order to end up with a diminished majority rather than the narrow minority regimes with which they were ultimately saddled?

The answer is that some regimes are able to stop at a point at which roughly half the state's ethnic groups are pitted against the other half. These are the states in which affinities among groups produce the bifurcation of north against south, or of Christians against Muslims, or of one core group against others, such as Mbochi against Lari in the Congo or Kabrai against Ewe in Togo. Where such obvious affinities and disparities are present, the resulting bifurcation often produces severe polarization and conflict. This polarization generally results in a narrow election victory, in which nearly half the state feels excluded and from which it may call upon the military to deliver it. This is roughly the history of Nigerian politics that led to the coups of 1966 and the Biafran war of 1967 to 1970. But such bifurcating affinities and disparities are not always present, and it may then become difficult to stop the slide toward minority rule of the sort represented by Zambia and Cameroon. Moreover, if the rulers of a regime can convince themselves, by proclaiming a one-party state or by some other means, that they will not have to face a free choice of the electorate again, the narrowness of the regime is a great distributive advantage: there are fewer claimants for what the state offers. Eventually, however, excluded majorities may feel the need to take up arms against the regime, as they did against Idi Amin's minority regime in Uganda and as they have periodically done against Hafez al-Assad's in Syria.

When democratic elections produce ethnic exclusion, undemocratic reactions to it can be expected. In Benin, like Zambia touted as a model of redemocratization, the 1991 elections brought out the same three-way ethnic rivalry that had manifested itself after independence. Each of the three main presidential candidates received between 70 and 80 percent of his first-round support from his home region. In the French-style runoff, this was compressed into a north-south struggle, in which the victorious candidate won nearly 90 percent of the southern vote and the defeated candidate won nearly 94 percent of the northern vote. A year later, northern-dominated army units attempted a coup and then a mutiny, as they had done with greater success decades earlier, the last time an exclusively southern government came to power. The extent to which military rule in Africa is a function of the ethnic failures of electoral politics can hardly be overestimated. The current round of elections is no more secure against those failures than the earlier, postcolonial round was.

Democratic Institutions and Undemocratic Results

As the example of the Benin presidential runoff suggests, political institutions and decision rules can make a major difference in ethnic outcomes. The Benin runoff converted a tripolar contest into a bipolar one. The federalism of Nigeria's first republic contributed significantly to north-south polarization; the differently structured federalism of the second republic was not conducive to the same result. Malaysia's heterogeneous constituencies combined with some idiosyncratic circumstances to propel formation of a multiethnic coalition; Sri Lanka's homogeneous constituencies produced Sinhalese governments with no reason to include the Tamils. There are many institutions compatible with democracy in the abstract, but not all of them are conducive to multiethnic inclusiveness.

As a matter of fact, much of what passes for the usual democratic rules either does nothing about ethnic exclusion or actually fosters it. Those rules may work well enough where ethnic cleavages are not sharp, so political affiliations are fluid, and majorities and minorities can be made and unmade. The same rules work differently where divisions are seen to be ascriptive and therefore immutable and where, as is common in such societies, political parties are ethnically based. Consider five paradigmatic cases of the relations among voters, parties, and election results—all in the context of free and fair elections.

1) One set of voters, represented by one party, comprises a majority of votes, and its party wins a majority of seats in a parliamentary system. If the rules of contestation are working to keep open the possibility of alternation in office, the minority need only wait for another day to augment its ranks and reverse the result. But suppose the majority and minority are fixed rather than fluid, because each thinks of itself as a group defined by birth and possessing affinities and interests not shared across group lines. Two consequences follow. Parties that span group lines will be difficult to organize, and in the existing bifurcated situation alternation in office is highly improbable. The textbook case of democratic majority rule turns quickly into a case of egregious minority exclusion. In ethnically divided societies, majority rule is not a solution; it is a problem, because it permits domination, apparently in perpetuity.

2) Examine next a more subtle, equally disturbing version of the same problem. Suppose there are three parties, two with 40-percent support each and one with 20 percent. Divided over strategy, the 20-percent party splits, the slightly larger segment lining up with one of the 40-percent parties to form a government. Predictable power relations put the smaller partner in a distinctly inferior position, such that the larger party nearly rules alone. Now a minority rules the rest, but in a situation of such instability that new elections can produce a different configuration—unless, of course, these parties represent ethnic groups whose members will generally not support parties across group lines. In that case, minority rule may prove durable.

3) So far I have ignored any disparity between votes cast and seats won. Problems 1 and 2 would be unaffected by proportional representation: it has been postulated that the seats won are proportionate to party strength. But suppose an Anglo-American plurality electoral system, in which a seat is won by whichever candidate receives the largest number of votes, even if less than 50 percent. Parties can easily put together majorities under such a system with less than half of the total vote. Margaret Thatcher's Tories, thrice elected with significant parliamentary majorities, never received more than 44 percent of the vote. We might think of fairer ways to conduct British elections, but no one thinks the possibility of democratic alternation in office is shut off under this system. If Britain were an ethnically divided society, however, and the Conservatives, Labourites, and Liberal Democrats each represented a single ethnic group, the claim of permanent tyranny of a minority would be extremely plausible.

Now if the first case involved a too-faithful reflection of ethnic divisions, resulting in the inclusion of the majority and the exclusion of the minority, the two cases of minority rule result from distortions due, respectively, to the distribution of cleavages within the 20-percent group and to the way the electoral system converts votes to seats. And if the electoral system distortion were removed—for example, by proportional representation—problem 3 would simply become a variant of problem 2. It would, however, still be a problem.

There are two other sources of distortion that can produce minority rule as a result of procedurally free and fair elections. One possible source is federalism; another derives from the dynamics of coalitions.

4) Suppose, in a federal system, there are three states or provinces, one significantly larger than the other two, so that its population is equal to that of those two combined. The largest group in the largest state has two-thirds of the voting population in that state, but one-third in the country as a whole. There is no significant devolution of power below the state level. Since the largest group in the largest state dominates politics in that state, the growth of minority-based opposition parties is inhibited there, for they could never hope to control the state. In national elections, the votes of that large state are sufficient to provide fully 50 percent of the parliamentary seats for its regionally based party, which then has every prospect of forming a government. In this way, a regional majority—but a minority nationally—has used its control of its home state as a vehicle for minority rule. It has, in a sense, received a seat bonus from federalism comparable to the one that plurality elections often provide the largest party.

5) Coalition politics can also produce minority rule. Assume that several ethnic groups all divide their votes between two or more parties, each of them representing only that group. One of the groups, however, is larger than the others; it comprises about half the total population, and it divides its vote between two parties in a ratio of two-to-one. Other groups divide their vote among several parties more or less evenly. The largest party thus receives two-thirds of the votes of the largest group, totaling about one-third of all votes cast. That party becomes the core of a governing coalition that includes at least one party from each of the other groups. All other parties are left in opposition. By dominating the coalition, the core party can essentially rule the country with the support of two-thirds of its group, one-third of the voting population. In a plurality electoral system, it will win more than one-third of the total seats on its one-third of the vote, but that merely enhances its already favorable position. None of this would ordinarily raise any eyebrows, except that this party is ethnically based, and the policy output of the coalition is thus skewed in favor of its group.

As a matter of fact, none of these possibilities is hypothetical: each depicts politics in some multiethnic society.[8] In each, the democratic problem results from the fixity of party boundaries, which end at group boundaries, even though some groups are represented by more than one party. To be sure, some of the exclusions produced by these configurations are more egregious than others. If majorities shut out minorities clearly and permanently, as they did repeatedly in Sri Lanka, it is not surprising that the sense of exclusion might ultimately produce large-scale violence. If minorities or pluralities shut out majorities, or even if they shut out pluralities or other minorities, as they did in Nigeria because of its asymmetric federalism, the result is also likely to be instability. If, however, minorities or pluralities manage to coopt fractions of several other groups in a coalition, as the leading Malay party has in Malaysia,[9] the result may not quite be seen as complete exclusion, but as a galling, frustrating partial exclusion—not a *casus belli*, but not an arrangement that generates intense loyalty to the system either.

In every one of these illustrations, the results could be brought about under conditions perfectly consistent with the procedural assumptions of democracy. The results are an artifact of the interaction of demography with the rules of the game. Purely procedural conceptions of democracy are thus inadequate for ethnically divided polities, for the procedure can be impeccable and the exclusion complete.

There are possibilities for changing the rules of the game to make them function better in such societies—and to foster inclusiveness—though this is never easy. Whether we mean by democracy the realistic possibility of contest and alternation or participation that is more inclusive than the mere prospect of alternation implies, this much is clear: the fixed character of allegiances is what permits majorities to exclude minorities and minorities to exclude majorities. There are, then, only two problems of democracy in severely divided societies: majority rule and minority rule. Those two problems, however, cover a great deal of territory.

Democratic Remediation

In the face of this rather dismal account, first of the concrete failures of democracy in divided societies and then of the inadequacy of most decision rules and institutions to deal with the conditions underlying these failures of inclusion, one is tempted to throw up one's hands. What is the point of holding elections if all they do in the end is to substitute a Bemba-dominated regime for a Nyanja regime in Zambia, the two equally narrow, or a southern regime for a northern one in Benin, neither incorporating the other half of the state?

For some, the answer to this dilemma is to remove ethnicity from politics. The assumption is that class or ideology is a more genuine basis of political alignment or that ethnicity is, for all purposes, poisonous to political health. A recent example of this tendency is the decision of the Nigerian military authorities to permit only two parties, one social democratic and one conservative, both by fiat multiethnic. The artificiality of this solution, its premise that ethnicity performs no legitimate political functions, and the unlikelihood that such powerful affiliations can simply be written out of the political process all stamp it as unwise. Ethnic affiliations provide a sense of security in a divided society, as well as a source of trust, certainty, reciprocal help, and protection against neglect of one's interests by strangers. In divided societies, the sense of an ethnic group as a community and its competition with others to constitute the whole community create a strong impetus toward party organization along ethnic lines.

> ***"Ethnic affiliations provide a sense of security in a divided society, as well as a source of trust, certainty, reciprocal help, and protection against neglect of one's interests by strangers."***

For others, the answer is to develop norms of ethnic inclusiveness, manifested in a single, grand coalition following rules of proportional distribution and allowing group vetoes of collective decisions. Among the many defects of this solution, there is one that it shares with the abolition-of-ethnicity solution: *ex cathedra*, it simply advises participants in ethnic conflict to put their conflict aside. Why a party that thinks it can win might do this for the benefit of its opponents is, at the least, mysterious. Moreover, the wholly inclusive grand coalition runs squarely into the problem of distribution. If, under these decision rules, everyone is included, if distributive shares are fixed, and if minorities that would be voiceless if left in opposition are accorded not merely a voice but a veto, what is the reward of winning? As we have seen, the election of a too-inclusive multiethnic government (as in Zambia) merely marks the commencement of a new struggle for inclusion and exclusion. The recurrent character of that struggle suggests that these decision rules will not be adopted and, more importantly, will not survive if adopted. It is one thing to demand acknowledgment that those left in opposition are merely outside the government but not outside the community; it is quite another to require that no one be left outside the government.

Since multiethnic parties like the Zambian MMD tend to decompose in severely divided societies, interethnic coalitions have much to commend them. But even if they can be formed, coalitions that include everyone are unlikely to be durable in divided societies. Two other types are possible, and it is worth thinking about how they can be fostered. Significantly, both do their compromising before elections.

The first, exemplified by Malaysia, is the multiethnic coalition flanked by ethnic parties that oppose the coalition's compromises. Some members of all groups are in the coalition, but it is not a grand coalition. The coalition was formed before independence, in the 1950s, at a time when the roughly 50-50 division between Malays and non-Malays created electoral uncertainties. Without a coalition, it was doubtful that the leading Malay party could have won the forthcoming municipal elections, in which Chinese votes would be crucial, and, after Chinese were granted citizenship, the postindependence parliamentary elections as well. In other words, electoral incentives were at the root of the coalition. The coalition then assumed a permanent form and ran candidates on a single slate, so that they could benefit from the pooling of Malay and non-Malay votes in any constituency. The only way to pool votes across ethnic lines was to present a moderate face to the electorate, so voters of one group could be induced to vote for candidates of another. Hence the coalition was dependent on compromise.

From the very beginning, Malay parties on the flank objected to compromises with the Chinese, whose citizenship they thought illegitimate. Non-Malay parties on the other flank objected to anything other than full equality for all citizens. Inside the coalition, the strong Malay claim to indigenousness and the larger number of Malay voters supporting the coalition weighted outputs toward the Malay side, particularly after 1970. Indeed, the rules of the game itself—such as constituency delimitation—were also subject to the greater power of the Malay partner, so that the power of the non-Malays in the coalition eroded. Nevertheless, the coalition was and is at least a guarantee against total exclusion.

The coalition system in the Indian state of Kerala also emerged in idiosyncratic circumstances, and it has suffered less slippage and ethnic skewing over time. Kerala has four main politically influential groups: Christians, Nairs (high-caste Hindus), Ezhava (low-caste Hindus), and Muslims. In the 1950s and 1960s, it became clear that no one or two groups could rule the state alone. Eventually, the state settled into a system of competing coalitions, each more or less inclusive of some members of all the major groups, though in varying proportions over time. Although all groups sooner or later exercise some power, this is not a grand coalition; there is always a powerful opposition. A group or a leader of a fraction of a group, discontented with what is offered by one coalition, can offer its support to the alternative coalition, which might weight group interests differently. In constituencies with varying degrees of heterogeneity, votes are pooled across ethnic lines to support coalition candidates.

The program of each coalition is necessarily a compromise whose exact shape depends on the relative weight of its participants. But in this deeply divided society, exclusion is most unlikely to be permanent: the coalitions are fluid. Moreover, the existence of competing coalitions encourages splits within ethnic groups, so that one fraction might align with one coalition, another fraction with the other. Fluidity begets fluidity. In a country increasingly beset with every form of ethnic violence, Kerala is a conspicuous exception.[10]

The exceptional character of Kerala is not due to an absence of conflict or bitterly contested issues. Quite the contrary: the disadvantaged Ezhava community has longstanding grievances against the Nairs; Hindus and Muslims fear each other; and both fear the power of the Christians, who in turn suspect the Nairs of harboring intentions to dominate. Kerala's coalitions do not follow from moderate conflict; instead, the coalitions moderate the conflict.

Four conditions underpinned the growth of Kerala's competing coalitions. First, the state's multipolar fluidity made it clear that some form of coalition was inevitable. Second, the coalitions made (and make) preelection agreements and, since they each ran a single slate, allocated seats centrally. Consequently, as in Malaysia, voters in one group had to be induced to vote for candidates of another—which can only happen if there is compromise on ethnic issues. Third, whereas Malay claims to priority left only opportunities on the ethnic flanks and divided the party spectrum into three parts—Malay, interethnic, and non-Malay—no group in Kerala could claim to be more indigenous than any other. As a result, disappointed claimants could turn to a competing coalition rather than being relegated to root-and-branch opposition to compromise *per se*. This rendered the system less liable to dangerous swings of ethnic discontent. A change of government simply brings a different multiethnic coalition to power. Fourth, the coalitions were, in the first instance, centered around national-level Indian parties that were ostensibly nonethnic: Congress and the Communists. Ethnic groups kept their own state-level parties, but some leaders also entered these national parties. Had Kerala not initially possessed these nonethnic vehicles for ethnic aspirations to begin the process of compromise and coalition, one wonders whether the state's politics would have developed in the benign way it has.

Building Accommodative Institutions

Idiosyncrasy, then, played a major role in the formation of both the Malaysia and Kerala coalitions. It is not surprising that few other accommodative institutions of these kinds can be found in severely divided societies. It is not that we are wholly ignorant about how to structure electoral systems to build in incentives for interethnic accommodation or how to create federal states so as to reduce bifurcation and enhance multipolar fluidity. Ethnic alignments are sensitive to political context; if multipolar fluidity is present, means can probably be found to preserve it. Politicians are notably responsive to political incentives, and if preelection vote-pooling coalitions are what divided societies need, means can be found to those ends, too, in at least some conflict-prone polities. But little effective planning has been done to promote accommodative institutions. Virtually by accident, Malaysia and Kerala show that where ethnic parties have strong political incentives to compromise, they will do so. Elsewhere, the few efforts at promoting interethnic accommodation in a concerted way have largely taken the form of constitutional prescriptions, *dehors* the political incentive structure, for a minority veto, or disproportionate minority influence in government, or a separation of powers, or parties that are forbidden to make ethnic appeals. The shallow foundations of most of these proposals—their insufficient grounding either in the ongoing interests of politicians or in a careful diagnosis of what was likely to go wrong—virtually assured their failure.

Constitution makers in new democracies have often been content to restore the very institutions that were conducive to the previous ethnic breakdown, or else to look for inspiration to the institutions of either the former colonialists or more broadly to the apparently successful major democracies of the West. Unsurprisingly, Francophone states tend to have borrowed French institutions; Anglophone states tend to have borrowed British institutions. And more than a few provision merchants from the United States have sold ready-made constitutional clauses to Africans, Asians, and East Europeans eager for their talismanic value, even though they had been fashioned for the conditions of American democracy rather than their own. As the recent wave of democratizations now runs its course, it is not too soon to say that a major opportunity for constitutional planning for interethnic accommodation has largely been lost, and the emerging results are there for all to see. This is a serious foreign-policy failure for the United States and for the Western world more generally.

That is not to say that the exercise would have been easy. If the key is to secure the adoption of electoral and governmental structures that give politicians incentives to behave in one way rather than another—and this *is* the key—there are still many obstacles to achieving this result. Most of the time, political leaders sense some advantage in pursuing conflict rather than accommodation and so would be loath to accept institutions that structure incentives differently. Furthermore, spotty innovations that create a few incentives in one direction are often overcome by other innovations that create countervailing incentives.

A coherent package, even a redundant package, of conflict-reducing techniques is required.[11] Such a package would include electoral systems to create ongoing incentives for interethnic cooperation and for preelection coalitions based on vote pooling. For many countries, there would also be provisions for federalism or regional autonomy. Combined with policies that give regionally concentrated groups a strong stake in the center, devolution can help avert separatism. The skillful division of territory can foster multipolar fluidity where it exists and prevent bifurcation; it can also produce commonalities among similarly situated regional units that cross ethnic lines; and it can give politicians a chance to practice conciliation before they arrive at the center.

"Conciliatory rules put in the form of constraints have often been neglected or overthrown by politicians who found nothing in their self-interest to support them."

All such innovations are difficult to introduce with sufficient coherence to have their intended effect. There are alternative ways to view electoral systems that give priority to goals such as proportionality of seats to votes, or the accountability of representatives, or the mandate and durability of governments—all otherwise worthy goals that, in a severely divided society, ought to be subordinated to the lifesaving goal of making interethnic moderation rewarding. There is the risk that planners may neglect the ongoing incentives facing the politicians who will have to operate the system, and may instead adopt requirements of behavior that are just in the abstract but not firmly anchored in those incentives. Conciliatory rules put in the form of constraints have often been neglected or overthrown by politicians who found nothing in their self-interest to support them. Moreover, a coherent package would have to be approved in a forum to which contestants come to negotiate a compromise. Compromise has many virtues, but consistency of purpose and coherence of outcome are not usually among them. There will therefore generally be some disjunction between what needs to be adopted and the process by which it will be adopted.

There are moments when political leaders see or can be induced to see the advantages of accommodation. One such moment occurred in Nigeria in 1978, when civilian leaders were pondering what institutions should supplant the receding military regime. Chastened by a destructive civil war, they did not know who would be hurt next time if the same conditions recurred, and they behaved as if they wore John Rawls's veil of ignorance. This posture was conducive to some sensible innovations (although some of them were later swamped by institutions with countervailing incentives). In at least some countries redemocratizing after bitter experiences of Soviet or African or Asian single-party or military rule, some leaders might have been induced to adopt a similar posture, and a more careful focus on diagnosis and prescription might have emerged. For most, that moment has passed. As things stand, many countries seem headed for a rerun of their earlier experience.

When Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1979, it soon became clear that more obstacles were arrayed against the project than had been arrayed against the democracy that was launched at independence. A bloated, greedy military had emerged out of the earlier ethnic conflicts, civil war, and authoritarian rule. It would have been highly advantageous to have set democratic, conciliatory institutions firmly on course the first time. The same will generally be true elsewhere. To have failed once makes things more difficult the next time. To have failed twice makes the next time problematic altogether. Many states will soon be in this position. In planning for a state that is to be democratic and multiethnic, earlier is assuredly better.

NOTES

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1. See René Lemarchand, "African Transitions to Democracy: An Interim (and Mostly Pessimistic) Assessment," *Africa Insight* 22 (1992): 178-85.

2. Cameron McWhirter and Gur Melamede, "Ethiopia: The Ethnicity Factor," *Africa Report*, September-October 1992, 30-33.

3. Daria Fane, "Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow," in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121-53; Vladimir Socor, "Moldova's 'Dniester' Ulcer," *RFE/RL Research Report*, January 1993, 12-16.

4. Stephen Jones, "Georgia: A Failed Democratic Transition," in Bremmer and Taras, op. cit., 288-310.

5. See, e.g., Marinus H. van Ijzendoorn, "Moral Judgment, Authoritarianism, and Ethnocentrism," *Journal of Social Psychology* 129 (1989): 37-45.

6. The relations between ethnic conflict and single-party regimes are traced in Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 429-37.

7. For the results by province, see *The October 31, 1991, National Elections in Zambia* (Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and Carter Center of Emory University, 1992), 165.

8. The first case exemplifies Sri Lanka, Sudan, and many other countries where minorities have experienced fairly straightforward exclusion. The second, with variable percentages, depicts roughly what happened after independence in the initially tripolar conflicts of Nigeria and Congo (Brazzaville). Absent unusual institutional arrangements, tripolar contests have tended to become bipolar, as the weakest party chooses to align with one of the other contestants or as the least cohesive splits and divides its support. In parliamentary systems, this is attributable to the strong pressure to attain a majority of seats, which is converted into pressure on a small or less cohesive third group by larger actors. The third case is typical of countries where a cohesive plurality confronts smaller or less cohesive groups in a first-past-the-post electoral system, such as the one Guyana had before the British changed it in the 1960s and the one Kenya now has. Before the change in Guyana, an East Indian-dominated party gained 57 percent of the seats on less than 43 percent of the vote. In the 1992 Kenyan elections, Moi's ethnically limited party won 53 percent of the seats on a mere 31 percent of the vote. The fourth case recapitulates the asymmetric federalism of Nigeria's First Republic (1960-66), which was responsible for the inflated representation of a Hausa-Fulani-dominated party in national politics. When the Northern Region was later broken up into 10 states, it could no longer be used to provide the equivalent of a seat bonus. Hausa-Fulani power in the First Republic was thus magnified by a combination of the conditions described in the second and fourth examples. The fifth case is a reasonably faithful description of the circumstances that have sustained the dominant position of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in the Malaysian coalition, although UMNO receives not more than one-third of the total vote. See note 9 below.

9. In the Malaysian case, the result is facilitated by distortions resulting from constituency malapportionment favoring Malays, as well as the seat bonus from first-past-the-post, so that one-third of the vote or less recurrently secures for the dominant party in the coalition (the United Malays National Organization) between 40 and 50 percent of the seats. (In making these calculations, I have excluded the numerous vote transfers among the coalition partners, which result from the fact that the coalition runs on a single slate.) See *Malaysian General Election, 1990: An Analysis Presented at a Forum Held on October 25, 1990 at Maktab Kerjasama* (Kuala Lumpur: I & J Sdn. Bhd., 1990; computer printout); *Elections in Malaysia: A Handbook of Facts and Figures on the Elections, 1955-1986* (Kuala Lumpur: NSTP Research and Information Services, 1990).

10. See E.J. Thomas, *Coalition Game Politics in Kerala* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1985); N. Jose Chander, ed., *Dynamics of State Politics: Kerala* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private, 1986).

11. I have discussed such techniques in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 563-652, and *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 124-226.