

Evangelos Liaras
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Department of Political Science
30 Wadsworth St E53-368
Cambridge, MA 02142
liaras@mit.edu

Title:

REVISITING ELECTORAL ENGINEERING: PARTY SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL
REFORMS IN TURKEY, NORTHERN IRELAND, GUYANA, AND SRI LANKA

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Abstract:

Three decades after pioneering work by Donald Horowitz and Arend Lijphart set the terms of the scholarly debate on electoral system design, research on the relationship between electoral formulas and ethnic conflict has produced conflicting results, while international actors are called upon to creatively improvise with every new effort to rebuild a divided society. Using a different study design than those attempted so far, this paper argues that electoral engineering has proven to be a much less fruitful avenue for conflict transformation than experts had originally hoped. Drawing from fieldwork involving data collection and interviews in four countries, the paper summarizes the findings of a dissertation project using a structured four case study comparison of societies with long-term ethnic divisions which implemented major reforms in electoral proportionality. After recording and analyzing patterns of ethnic voting, the ethnic platforms of political parties and their legislative role, the evidence suggests that the change in electoral formula in most cases did not lead to fundamental changes in the nature of the party system, while in many instances electoral formula-induced incentives were overridden by other considerations. Although one of the societies studied (Northern Ireland) has made decisive steps towards conflict resolution, and promising reforms have been introduced in at least two of the other cases (Guyana and Turkey), none of these developments can be convincingly linked to electoral mechanisms. The electoral record in these societies also casts doubt on whether cross-ethnic voting and electorally induced cross-ethnic coalition building has proved to be a boon more often than kindle for the unraveling of conflict. The conclusion is not that electoral reforms cannot produce any result under any circumstances, but rather that the institutional instruments currently available are too crude in and of themselves to engineer structural changes within a reasonable time frame for an external intervenor (give or take a decade or three elections). Given this reality, the author suggests that the terms of the debate should shift from contemplating which formulas are optimal to examining which formulas are more likely to prove disastrous, and focusing more on alternative institutional and extra-institutional instruments (particularly mandatory power-sharing and elite cooptation). The paper finally proposes a typology of classifying political parties and electoral demographics for the possible future creation of a much needed global dataset on ethnic voting.

**REVISITING ELECTORAL ENGINEERING:
Party Systems and Electoral Reforms in Turkey, Northern Ireland, Guyana, and Sri Lanka**

This paper is a condensation of a dissertation project on electoral reforms in ethnically divided societies that is nearing completion. The larger puzzle motivating the study is not new, but it is painfully persistent: can multi-ethnic democracy be designed? Some multi-ethnic societies seem to have attained an envied condition where, despite occasional tensions, democracy and diversity thrive, while other less fortunate ones are struggling with deadlock and violence. Can the latter emulate the former by copying certain political institutions, and if so, which institutions are the most critical? By the 21st century, several conflicts around the world have proven persistent and deadly enough to gain their place in a putative list of places with politics considered too divisive for democracy to easily take root. From Afghanistan and Iraq to Sub-Saharan Africa, and from the Balkans to East Timor and Fiji, every time such a conflict-ridden society makes an effort to transition or re-transition to democracy, either on its own or under international tutelage, institutional choices have to be made. A fundamental one is the electoral system.

A lively academic debate with direct policy implications revolves around the best way to devise electoral systems for divided societies. In the last decade the international community designed the electoral systems of several countries behind closed doors and the choices it made were often criticized for their effectiveness. These debates have furthered our understanding of the problem but they have been largely inconclusive. My objective in this dissertation is to systematize the theoretical insights provided by electoral specialists and to test them in a set of selected case studies in order to answer a central question in this debate: does the electoral system affect the structure of political parties in ethnically divided societies and if so how? The existent empirical literature on electoral engineering consists of either single and loosely structured small-n qualitative studies, or large-n quantitative studies using data sets that are not well suited for answering questions about patterns of ethnic voting. For the empirical portion of my work, I chose to conduct a structured historical comparison of four societies which implemented major electoral reforms: Turkey, Northern Ireland, Guyana, and Sri Lanka. Based on the study of these cases, I am arguing that politicians and voters have not responded to electoral incentives in the ways predicted by existent theories, and that no clear relationship can be observed between the electoral system's proportionality and the ethnic make-up of parties or the types of appeals they make to voters. These findings indicate that the hopes placed in electoral system design for divided societies are unwarranted and that attention among political scientists and policymakers should shift to other peace-building approaches.

The first and largest part of the paper will lay out the theoretical foundations and hypotheses of the electoral engineering literature; it will also propose an alternative typology for political parties in multiethnic societies. The second part will defend the project's methodology and case selection. The third and final part will sketch the evolution of the party system in each

case with respect to the incentives provided by the demography and electoral formula, making summary within and across-case comparisons.

Political Parties in Divided Societies

Since some multi-ethnic democracies have flourished and others collapsed, political scientists for decades have been on a quest to identify institutions and practices that can be transplanted from the successful to the unsuccessful cases. Two broad schools of thought have crystallized in this field. The consociational strand favors maximal recognition and autonomy for groups, quotas and proportional representation, veto rights, and coalition governments. The centripetalist strand, which is admittedly in the minority, favors institutions and practices that submerge ethnic distinctions and encourage cross-ethnic appeals and social integration.¹ The two sides have conflicting recommendations about electoral regimes, within their larger programmatic frameworks for institutionally designing multi-ethnic democracy.

If politics in divided societies are dominated by one issue dimension, and if the distribution of citizens' positions on this dimension is highly bimodal and largely determined by family descent, it follows naturally that the party system will be rigid and not genuinely competitive. Most parties will draw support only from one ethnic group, as civil society infrastructures between groups will be weak or entirely lacking. The relative importance of (and value of appealing to) citizens with ambivalent or moderate views will depend on the exact distribution of the ethnic characteristics in the electorate; but there is an ever-present danger of ethnic outbidding: losing one's voters to a more extremist party or candidate if one reaches out too much to the other groups.² Socially segregated in many other ways, divided societies may also feature segmented electorates, where party competition truly happens only within ethnic groups.³ And yet, it is still possible that parties attempting to bridge or ignore the ethnic cleavage will enter the fray. In fact, this is exactly what international intervenors often hope to see.

Theorizing about the role of political parties under conditions of ethnic division requires typologies of ethnic structure. Donald Horowitz's tripartite categorization of parties as either ethnic, multi-ethnic or non-ethnic has dominated the field for many years.⁴ Ethnic parties are defined as those making appeals to specific ethnicities and excluding others; multi-ethnic parties make ethnic appeals but equally approach all ethnicities; while non-ethnic parties choose to emphasize issues other than ethnicity. Although this typology is established and developed, it has two analytical weaknesses. First, it is based primarily on party campaign rhetoric and perhaps

¹ For fundamental works in each school, see Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

² An idea originally presented by Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle in *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory in Democratic Instability* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1972) and expanded by Donald Horowitz in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, chapters 7-9.

³ What Paul Mitchell has called a "dual party system" in the case of Northern Ireland.

⁴ This is the typology used by Chandra in *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and in CDEI.

cadre composition, but not electoral results, so it is quite possible that a party may be appealing to categories of voters that do not end up supporting it. For example, a party may be using leftist rhetoric on political and economic equality, making appeals to all citizens of a country, and still primarily consist of and be voted by people ascribing to one ethnic group—such is the case of the People's Democracy Party in Turkey. Second, the categorization implies that each party has one ethnic platform before each election. Some parties, however, may speak different languages to different groups or in different constituencies. For instance, a leftist party may be using Marxist language towards all groups, but infuse it with ethnically-relevant rhetoric when speaking to specific minorities—as the Turkish Workers' Party did in the 1960s. Also, a party may have a varied platform and a diverse voter base but attract the overwhelming majority of voters from a specific ethnic group; it may in turn function and be perceived as an ethnic party in areas of the country where ethnic divisions are strong. This has been the case of the Democrat Party with respect to African Americans in the United States, and the Republican People's Party with respect to Alevis in Turkey.

To move around these problems, I propose a different typology of parties based on their electoral success among various groups along two dimensions: congregation and pluralism. Congregation measures how much of one specific ethnic group's vote is won by the party. Pluralism measures how many different ethnic groups the party is winning votes from. In simple cases, this creates a codification with four ideal types:

| | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------|---------|
| | + | Pluralism | - |
| + | Congregation | Magnet | Hegemon |
| - | | Antagonist | Agonist |

Hegemon parties win all or the lion's share of one ethnic group's vote and are not supported by voters of any other group. They may be parties that claim to represent only their group, or parties that tried to but failed to break out of their ethnic power base. Most hegemon parties will be in the former category, and content to maintain their dominance over the group, by virtue of which they can claim to be its sole legitimate speaker. The Unionist Party was the hegemonic party of Northern Ireland's Protestants between the 1920s and the mid-1960s, while the People's National Congress has played the same role for the Africans in Guyana since the early 1960s.

Agonist parties win only part of the vote of one ethnic group and do not have any substantial support outside it. They may be radical champions of an ethnic cause or moderate parties with incidental ties to a specific ethnic community. In either case, their characteristic is that they struggle to gain a larger portion of the general vote (either to capture a bigger or the entire share of their ethnic group and become hegemons, or break outside their ethnic base and

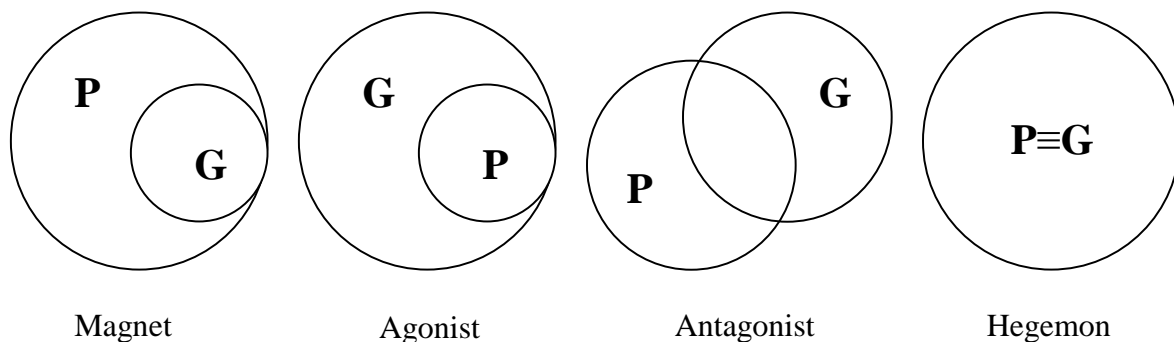
become antagonists). The Federal Party and the Tamil Congress were agonists vying between them for the Tamil vote in the 1950s and 60s. A Kurdish leftist agonist party has been contesting elections in Turkey since the 1990s.

Magnet parties win votes from different ethnic groups but also win the vast majority of the vote from at least one. They may be broadly based multi-ethnic parties whose platform is particularly appealing to one minority group; or they may have grown out of a hegemonic ethnic party that successfully attracted voters from other groups. The former is the case for the Republican People's Party concerning Alevis in Turkey; the latter applies to the Progressive People's Party, a traditionally East Indian hegemon party in Guayna, which now also captures the bulk of the Amerindian vote.

Antagonist parties win a portion of the vote from multiple ethnic groups without commanding the vast majority of the vote of any. They may be genuine multi-ethnic parties trying to overcome ethnic barriers like the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland or catchall parties with populist platforms like the center-right parties in Turkey since the 1950s. Their common characteristic is that they are intrinsic antagonists of all other types of parties. Parties that contest on issues other than ethnicity and manage to mobilize voters of diverse ethnic backgrounds along a different dimension belong to this category par excellence. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was a short-lived example.

A graphic representation of this typology using Venn diagrams is given below.

Figure 1: Venn diagrams of party types; P = party's voters, G = voters of an ethnic group



Electoral Engineering and Ethnic Politics

It has been long understood that different voting rules may favor or disfavor different actors in the political system, and that, in Richard Katz's words, the question of which electoral system to adopt depends on “who you are, where you are, and where you want to go.”⁵ This seemingly relativistic statement translates into a less ambiguous task for an international intervenor in a conflict-ridden society: the intervenor typically has broad leeway in designing

⁵ Richard Katz, *Democracy and Elections* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 308.

and even imposing institutions, the political system is pervaded by ethnic rifts, and the intervenor has a clear preference to overcome them, favoring or disfavoring certain local actors in the process.

The main line of argument in the electoral engineering literature follows the logic

Electoral System → Party System Structure → Ethnic Conflict

The arrows of causation may arguably go in the opposite direction as well, but when international actors advocate or design an electoral system for an ethnically divided society, they are hoping to lead it on a path along this line.⁶ A strong proponent of this belief, Donald Horowitz has argued that “the electoral system is by far the most powerful level of constitutional engineering for accommodation and harmony in severely divided societies.”⁷ Not surprisingly, debates over what electoral formula newly democratizing states should adopt have been particularly heated.⁸ Granted, the scholars involved in these debates have not been simpletons expecting the electoral system to provide a miracle solution. Still, they have expressed considerable hope in its capacity to have an impact. Again, in Donald Horowitz's words, “it should surprise no one that electoral reform cannot work magic on ethnic conflict.... Yet it is extraordinary how much an electoral system *can* do in what seems an intractable situation.”⁹

There are more than ten basic types of electoral systems for parliamentary elections used around the world today.¹⁰ Many more have been developed theoretically, but it is not possible to examine their effects empirically.¹¹ Electoral systems can be categorized in various ways, but their most fundamental feature is their inherent *proportionality*, i.e. how closely the distribution of seats that they produce matches the vote shares that political parties won in the election. A second important aspect of the electoral formula is the degree of choice between candidates that it affords the voter, a concept I will call *ordinality*.¹² Proportionality and ordinality are central to the consociationalist-centripetalist debate. The former favor proportional representation (PR) systems, developed in the Lower Countries and Scandinavia; the latter champion ordinal and less proportional systems like the Alternative Vote (AV) and the Single Transferable Vote (STV), pioneered in Australia and Ireland respectively, which ask voters to rank candidates and motivate

⁶ For the argument for causation in the opposite direction, see Josep Colomer, “It's Parties that Choose Electoral Systems (or Duverger's Laws Upside Down)” *Political Studies* vol. 53 no. 1 (2005): 1-21.

⁷ Donald Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa: Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 163.

⁸ For two notable instances, see the debate between Donald Horowitz and Arend Lijphart on South Africa in *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multi-ethnic Societies* edited by Joseph Montville (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991), and the more recent one between Horowitz and Jon Fraenkel over Fiji in the pages of *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 35 no. 5 (June 2006).

⁹ *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 650-651.

¹⁰ For an introductory survey see David Farrell, *Electoral Systems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001).

¹¹ For a review, see Steven J. Brams, *Mathematics and Democracy: Designing Better Voting and Fair Division Procedures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹² For a discussion of ordinal features of electoral systems and an argument in their favor, see Lauri Karvonen, “Preferential Voting: Incidence and Effects,” *International Political Science Review* vol. 25, no. 2 (April 2004): 203-226.

them to consider their lower-order preferences. PR systems are widely used around the world today, and seem to be the preferred formula in most international interventions to design electoral systems; preferential systems, on the other hand, are touted by several political scientists but used only in a handful of countries. Plurality systems like the Anglo-American First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), which are neither proportional nor ordinal, have the weakest following, although they are arguably the simplest and continue to be used by some of the oldest and largest democracies in the world.¹³ Mixed systems combining FPTP and PR have also received considerable attention after their adoption by a wave of both advanced and young post-communist democracies in the 1990s. Mixed systems have also seen limited use in divided society settings, and it is unclear whether they should be treated as a separate category on their own or simply be categorized by their overall proportionality.¹⁴

Theoretical disagreements extend on both causal arrows, i.e. on what kind of parties different electoral systems produce and on whether such parties are better or ill-suited to manage ethnic divisions. The general consociationalist argument is that minority groups yearn for representation for practical and psychological reasons and disproportional systems will tend to exclude them; centripetalists fear that maximal proportionality leads to a proliferation of mono-ethnic parties, whereas lower proportionality could encourage cross-ethnic appeals and more multi-ethnic parties. Most research so far, including quantitative and qualitative studies, has connected the first with the third link of the causal chain, i.e. explored relationships between electoral systems and levels of conflict. This is probably because datasets on electoral systems and ethnic conflict worldwide exist, but data on the ethnic structure of political parties in various countries are scarce.¹⁵

The results of both qualitative and quantitative research on the relationship between electoral formula and ethnic conflict have not been conclusive either within or across methodologies. Preferential systems are very infrequent, so their study has been limited to single case studies or comparisons of the few countries that use them. Proponents of AV credit it with success in Papua New Guinea and Australia, but the experience of Fiji seems disastrous.¹⁶ STV is still used only in Malta and Ireland (north and south). Most research has therefore been on the effects of proportionality, and the picture there is no more clear. Proportionality and ethnic heterogeneity are known to be positively correlated with the number of parties in the legislature,

¹³ For a defense of plurality see Guy Lardeyret, "The Problem with PR," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 2 n. 3 (Summer 1991): 30-39.

¹⁴ For a discussion of mixed systems, see Matthew Shugart, and Martin Wattenberg eds. *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: the Best of Both Worlds?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). A 2005 survey of electoral system experts reported that mixed systems topped respondents' preferences ahead of STV. See Shaun Bowler, David M. Farrell, and Robin T. Pettitt, "Expert Opinion on Electoral Systems: So Which Electoral System Is 'Best?'" *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol. 15 no. 1 (April 2005): 3-19.

¹⁵ Kanchan Chandra has produced one such dataset for the year 1996. See *A Constructivist Dataset on Identity and Institutions (CDEI)*, <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/chandra/CDEI2005.pdf>.

¹⁶ See Jon Fraenkel and Bernard Grofman, "Does the Alternative Vote Foster Moderation in Ethnically Divided Societies? The Case of Fiji" *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 39 no. 5 (June 2006): 623-651 and Robert Stockwell, "An Assessment of the Alternative Vote System in Fiji." *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* vol. 43 no. 3 (2005): 382-393.

but their effects, if any, on the ethnic structure of parties have not been explored.¹⁷ A medium-n study by Andrew Reynolds on the newly democratized countries of Southern Africa argued for a positive effect of PR on the quality of democracy, but the finding was confounded by differences in economic development and demographics.¹⁸

Large-n studies have explored the association between proportionality and levels of protest and violence, using the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset, and proportionality and levels of voter satisfaction, relying on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset.¹⁹ Two studies based on MAR from two different time periods produced conflicting findings.²⁰ Frank Cohen found a significant negative effect of PR on rebellion but a positive one for multi-partyism for the period between 1945 and 1989; Controlling also for economic variables, Saideman et al. found a significant association of PR with lower levels of both protest and rebellion for the period 1985-1998, acknowledging that the geographic concentration of groups also had a strong impact. In her latest study with an expanded version of MAR with information on ethnic party support for certain parties and inclusion or exclusion from government, Johanna-Kristin Birnir found “there is not a statistically significant difference with respect to violence between plurality and proportional systems” and a negative effect on violence from mixed systems.²¹ Finally, in a study using the World Values Survey, Pippa Norris found no strong support for the claim that PR makes ethnic minorities view the political system more positively.²²

The Role of Ethnic Demographics

Apart from lack of data on the ethnic structure of parties, another major impediment for electoral engineering research is the lack of information on the geographic clustering of ethnic identities in the electorate. Until recently, statistical studies relied on general country-wide measures of ethnic heterogeneity, like the ubiquitous ELF and other competing indexes without a geographic component. In the last decade, a new wave of research has drawn attention to the

¹⁷ See Peter Ordeshook and Olga Shvetsova, “Ethnic Heterogeneity, District Magnitude, and the Number of Parties,” *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 38 no. 1 (February 1994): 100-123.

¹⁸ *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Reynolds could not deny that Botswana, which uses FPTP, is also a successful democracy, although its largely mono-ethnic structure makes for a difficult comparison with neighboring South Africa and Namibia, which use PR. One cannot escape noticing that South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia are also by far the wealthiest countries in the region, in addition to being the most democratic.

¹⁹ It should be noted that CSES, by its survey nature and associated data collection costs, is more limited in geographic scope to MAR, and also does not specifically focus on ethnic divisions.

²⁰ Frank Cohen, “Proportional versus Majoritarian Ethnic Conflict Management in Democracies,” *Comparative Political Studies*, v. 30, n. 6 (December 1997): 607-630; Stephen Saideman et al., “Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1985-1998,” *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 35 no. 1 (February 2002): 103-129.

²¹ Johanna-Kristin Birnir, *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 194-195.

²² Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

importance of geographic clustering for ethnic rebellion and civil war onset, and new datasets are being constructed for the spatial distribution of ethnic groups.²³ These projects, however, are geared towards the study of civil war, not electoral behavior, and at this stage they do not collect information that can be combined with electoral constituency boundaries.

A central idea in centripetalist theory is that ethnically diverse constituencies carry a potential for cross-ethnic appeals. But when electoral constituencies are largely mono-ethnic, or when the larger group constitutes an overwhelming majority, this potential evaporates.²⁴ On the other hand, proponents of PR have suggested that in countries where groups are concentrated in separate ethnically homogenous areas, proportionality, with its multiplicative effect, could encourage the proliferation of parties and a more flexible party system.²⁵

Conceptually, the electoral system must be considered jointly with ethnic demographics to determine the structural incentives facing politicians before an election. Within a given electoral system, the votes of two different ethnic groups of equal population size but different concentrations, if mobilized, may yield completely different numbers of seats in parliament. Of course, constituencies can be drawn in arbitrary ways and malapportionment could produce any imaginable result. In practice, however, most democracies do not engage in extreme gerrymandering, and the international community is unlikely to do so when devising electoral rules for one of its peacekeeping protectorates, lest it completely delegitimize itself. The geographic distribution of ethnic groups therefore creates limitations. Unless voters are arbitrarily assigned to virtual mixed constituencies (a practice used notably in ancient Athens), electoral constituencies drawn on the map are bound to have different potentials for cross-ethnic voting. The simplest way to categorize the demography is along a continuum from lowest (a) to highest (d) cross-ethnic voting potential:

- (a) clustered (ethnic groups form overwhelming majorities in different areas)
- (b) strongly dominated (groups are mixed and one group forms a strong majority)
- (c) weakly dominated (groups are mixed and one group forms a thin majority)
- (d) undominated (groups are mixed and none of them forms a majority)²⁶

²³ Work in this field has originated mostly at Harvard University in the US and ETH in Switzerland. See Monica Toft *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Janina Matuszeki and Frank Schneider, "Patterns of Ethnic Group Segregation and Civil Conflict" Harvard-NBER unpublished paper, 2006; Lars-Erik Cederman and Luc Girardin, "Beyond Fractionalization: Mapping Ethnicity onto Nationalist Insurgencies," *American Political Science Review* vol. 101 no. 1 (February 2007): 173-185; and Lars-Erik Cederman, Jan Ketil Rød, and Nils Weidmann, "Geo-Referencing of Ethnic Groups: Creating a New Dataset," ETH, unpublished paper, 2007.

²⁴ As Benjamin Reilly concludes with regret for Sri Lanka in *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Chappell Lawson, "How Best to Build Democracy: Laying the Foundation for a New Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 82 No. 4 (July/August 2003).

²⁶ This blanket categorization also corresponds to the group-based four-way coding of concentration used in the Minorities at Risk dataset.

In electoral politics, the constituency is understood to be the focus of attention for both voters and candidates. Politicians already involved in political parties and aspiring candidates desiring to join a party or form their own must take into consideration both the electoral formula and voter dispersal when deciding whether to appeal to certain ethnic constituencies. Similarly, voters through their social experience are expected to have a rough idea about the distribution of ethnic attributes in their constituency's population and a basic understanding of the electoral system's workings. They should therefore be able to calculate if mobilizing along a specific ethnic identity will pay off by electing a candidate who can then recognize them as an ethnic kin and represent them or reward them with patronage.²⁷ This may all seem like too high an information requirement. However, in ethnically polarized settings, voters are likely to be aware of their district's ethnic composition for many more reasons other than electoral calculations. Similarly candidates are likely to be aware of the ethnic breakdown of their home constituency, even if official census data are lacking. The electoral system may be poorly understood by voters, and perhaps even by candidates at first, but if it is maintained during several elections, its effects will be observed and probably understood by most.²⁸

Given these observations about the influence of ethnic demographics on electoral incentives, the expected effects of electoral systems should be different at the two ends of the demographic continuum. In electorates characterized by type (a) constituencies, there is no built-in constituency-level incentive to make cross-ethnic appeals. Proportionality, however, should affect the total number of parties entering in parliament. In electorates characterized by type (d) constituencies, reductions in proportionality should create incentives for cross-ethnic appeals as envisioned by centripetalism. In type (b) and (c) constituencies, the dominant group is guaranteed representation regardless of proportionality; the dominated groups, though, may be entirely excluded if the electoral system is majoritarian. The greater the degree of demographic dominance of the large group, the smaller the potential benefit for a political party to appeal to the demographically dominated groups under a majoritarian electoral formula.

The Theoretical Hypotheses

The literature on electoral engineering has progressed with a frequent disconnect between programmatic battles over detailed mechanisms and empirical studies with the eye on the larger prize, i.e. the elliptical link between formula and ethnic conflict. Since the statistical findings on the larger link are inconclusive, it is even more important to take stock and look more carefully at the intermediate causative links, where all the theoretical controversy lies. Based on the same theories, rather than asking if the electoral formula conditions ethnic conflict, analysts could be asking two separate, interrelated questions:

²⁷ This framework is borrowed from Daniel Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* and Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*.

²⁸ Rein Taagepera in "Designing Electoral Rules and Waiting for an Electoral System to Evolve" suggests four elections as a rule of thumb, which I follow in my case studies. See *The Architecture of Democracy*, edited by Andrew Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 248-264.

- i. Does the electoral formula condition certain ethnic structures of parties? and
- ii. Do party systems with different ethnic structures accentuate or mitigate conflict?

These questions have been theorized by some works in formal modeling and case studies.²⁹ Unfortunately, the statistical analysis still lags behind due to the lack of suitable data. In some ways, the elliptical question is simpler because the categorization of electoral formulas by their proportionality is straightforward. Higher proportionality is either associated with lower ethnic violence or it is not. Questions about the intermediate link, the ethnic structure of parties, are more complicated. In this section, I will outline these intermediate hypotheses found in the literature and separate them according to the causal link they address, (i) or (ii).

As explained, the key independent variables in electoral engineering theory are the formula's proportionality and the ethnic diversity of electoral constituencies; both are fairly easy to measure. But there is no commonly agreed way to operationalize the intermediate variable, ethnic party systems. Based on the typology for parties I developed I propose that the two key variables describing ethnic party systems are the effective number of political parties (ENP) and the overall incidence of cross-ethnic voting (CEV). Cross-ethnic voting at the individual level is understood as voting for a candidate from an ethnic group other than one's own. At the collective level, it can be approximated as the total vote share of parties making cross-ethnic appeals and putting forward multiethnic candidate rosters. ENP and CEV are the dependent variables for the first causal link. To demonstrate the correspondence with the party typology, consider what kind of parties will arise for different values of the dependent variables:

| | Low ENP | High ENP |
|----------|---------|------------|
| High CEV | Magnet | Antagonist |
| Low CEV | Hegemon | Agonist |

The following propositions describe the relationships between the variables for the first causal link. I have attached a synoptic buzz name to each one for mnemonic reference.

Proposition 1: The Multiplicative Effect

Increased electoral proportionality will tend to increase the effective number of parties.

Proposition 2: The Multiethnic Effect

Increased ethnic diversity will tend to increase the effective number of parties.

²⁹ See Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, chapters 9 and 14 for a classic attempt, and Kanchan Chandra, "Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability," *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 3 no. 2 (June 2005): 235-252 for a more recent one.

These two effects are widely assumed to be interactive, so that ethnically diverse societies with very proportional electoral systems will have the largest number of political parties. This prediction is supported by large-n studies.³⁰

Proposition 3: The Mixed Constituency Hypothesis

Ethnically mixed constituencies have an in-built potential for cross-ethnic appeals and cross-ethnic voting. The incentive to make cross ethnic appeals increases with ethnic diversity.

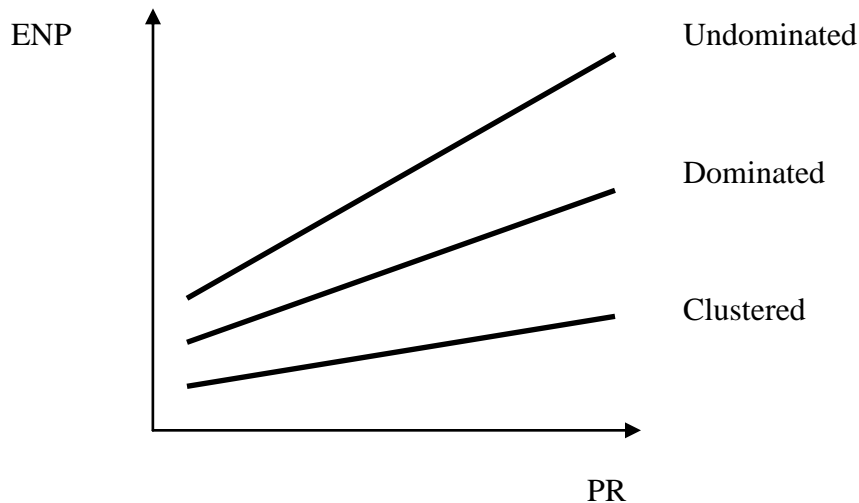
Proposition 4: The Strategic Voting Hypothesis

Low proportionality creates incentives for sophisticated voters to consider their second-best alternatives. This incentive diminishes as electoral proportionality increases.

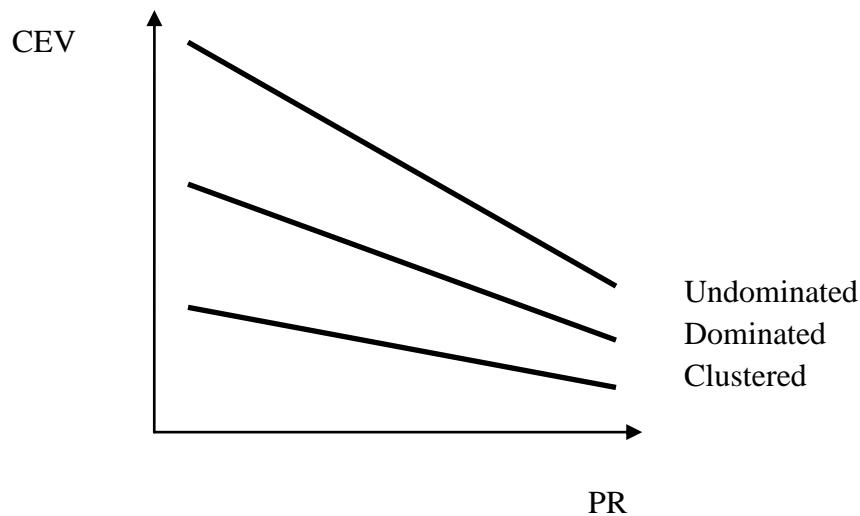
Again, these two effects are expected to be interactive, so that incentives for cross-ethnic voting should be maximal in very diverse constituencies under majoritarian formulas. To the best of my knowledge, this interaction effect has not been the subject of statistical study—which is unsurprising given the lack of data on the ethnic composition of parties and constituencies.

The following graphs visualize the relationships between the four variables by showing how proportionality is expected to affect ENP and CEV under different demographic conditions. The interaction means greater marginal effects (a steeper slope) of a change in proportionality in more demographically diverse settings.

Figure 2: Comparative statics for PR, ENP, and CEV under different demographic conditions



³⁰ Neto, Octavio Amorim, and Gary W. Cox. “Electoral Institutions, Cleavage Structures, and the Number of Parties” *American Journal of Political Science* vol. 41 no. 1 (January 1997): 149-174; Clark, William Roberts and Matt Golder, “Rehabilitating Duverger’s Theory: Testing the Strategic and Mechanic Effects of Electoral Laws.” *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 39 no. 6 (August 2006): 679-708.



A second set of hypotheses, which I have dubbed corollaries, makes the connection with the second causal link regarding the ultimate variable of interest: ethnic conflict.

Corollary 1: Voice to the Excluded (pro-PR)

Higher proportionality reduces the threshold of representation for small minorities, increasing their visibility and bargaining power. When each group receives seats proportional to its population a legitimizing sentiment of 'fairness' for the political system contributes to stability.

Corollary 2: Voice to the Alternative (pro-PR)

Through its multiplicative effect, PR can encourage political diversity, separating moderates from extremists within each group into different political parties, and hence creating more flexible combinations for cross-ethnic coalition governments of moderates.

Corollary 3: Rewards to Moderation (anti-PR)

Parties that rely on cross-ethnic voting will have more moderate positions, bridging ethnic divisions. Higher proportionality favors mono-ethnic voting and hurts multiethnic parties.

Corollary 4: Rewards to Extremism (anti-PR)

A lower electoral threshold will give more leverage to small extremist ethnic parties and lead to unstable coalition governments, whereas less proportional electoral systems will favor large centrist parties with moderate agendas.

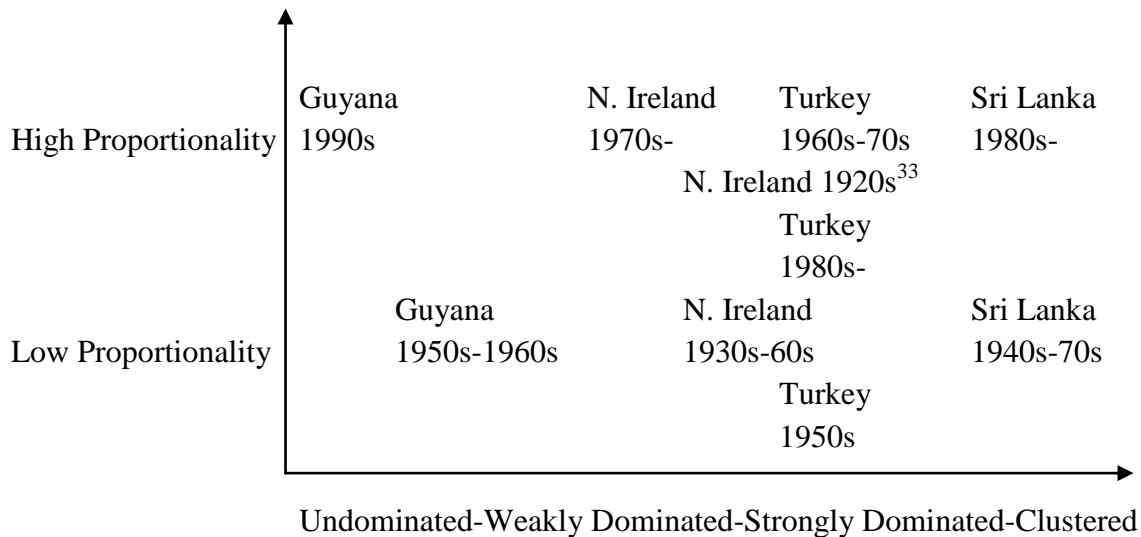
Case Selection and Methodology

Ideally, the aforementioned hypotheses should be tested using data from across the world. However, as noted, such data is unfortunately unavailable today, and creating a worldwide dataset on patterns of ethnic voting is beyond the capacity of a single doctoral student. What I have therefore opted to do in this dissertation is test the hypotheses on a small number of carefully selected case studies, with an eye to maximizing inferential value from a small-n

design. The most promising cases for such an endeavor are societies with significant and persistent ethnic divisions that implemented an electoral reform involving a major change in proportionality. Despite the fact that many countries have changed their electoral system in the last few decades, only four cases fulfill the criteria: Northern Ireland, which switched from STV to FPTP in 1929 and back to STV in 1973, Guyana which moved from FPTP to PR in 1964, Sri Lanka, which implemented a similar change in 1978 (also adopting AV for presidential elections), and Turkey, which introduced one reform from plurality to PR in 1961, and a second one to lower proportionality in 1983.³¹

The study therefore employs a quasi-experimental design with a common treatment for all cases (electoral reform) that is used to examine “before-and-after” effects.³² This choice has two key benefits, one practical and one inferential. First, it simplifies the task of collecting data on ethnic demographics, mapping them on electoral constituencies, and coding parties across a historical period when electoral proportionality remained fairly constant. Second, assuming that the defining ethnic cleavage remained the same across time, the design involves a quasi-experimental set-up with a common treatment (electoral reform). Within-case comparison introduces controls for the type of ethnic cleavage, ethnic demographics (assuming no massive population movements) and general socio-economic development, which have been generally absent from previous case study approaches. The cases display good variation on the two independent variables in the first set of theoretical propositions, proportionality and demographic structure (see Figure 3). This allows for across-case comparisons on the first causal link.

Figure 3: Case study distribution by proportionality and demography



³¹ I am grateful to Dr. Krister Lundell from Abo Akademi in Finland for providing me with his dataset of electoral system reforms since 1946. I dropped as potential cases those where the reform was between systems within the same family of formulas (proportional vs. plurality/majority), like Fiji, which switched from FPTP to AV.

³² Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 166.

³³ Northern Ireland's system is shown as less proportional in 1921-1929 than after 1973 mainly due to the distorting effect of the four seats from the Queen's University constituency.

Considering the second causal link, I have to be more conservative about the inferential value of this structured comparison. The levels of violence have varied in all four cases across time, but the intensities of the conflicts did not reach similar levels—with those in Sri Lanka and Turkey being much deadlier. In the wider political science literature, electoral formulas and social cleavages are seen as major determinants of party systems, but ethnic conflict is more multi-faceted and often internationalized. All four cases have experienced a fair amount of external influence and intervention. I cannot claim that I designed the study with certain selection criteria in mind for the party system as an independent variable, since determining party system structure was the main objective of the research project. Nevertheless, the first causal link is logically prior; the corollaries rest on the propositions, therefore it is necessary to examine first if the propositions hold.

Each case involves a number of identical steps, with the aim of providing a degree of consistency that will facilitate across-case comparison. First, I divide each case into two or three periods between reforms (two for Guyana and Sri Lanka, three for Turkey and Northern Ireland), according to the electoral system in place. I identify the salient ethnic cleavages in the population using ethnographic sources and provide background information for the nature and evolution of the conflict. Then, for each period, I describe the electoral geography, by mapping the ethnic groups onto electoral constituencies as well as I can, combining information from the national census, election and delimitation commission reports, and independent demographic studies. I code the ethnic composition of each constituency and characterize the electoral demography overall, noting whether it would be favorable or unfavorable to the mobilization of each ethnicity. For each period, I study the country's political history, using primary and secondary sources, in order to identify the ethnic composition and platforms of all significant political parties that participated in elections. I track each party's political behavior and evolution on matters related to ethnicity, including possible splits, merges, and coalition agreements with other parties. I collect constituency-level election results and analyze them with respect to patterns of ethnic voting. I use this information to code the political parties by their ethnic voter base according to the typology developed in this chapter. I describe the theoretical expectations in each period (given the electoral formula and demography) and compare them to the actual electoral record. Finally, I compare the pre- and post-reform periods in order to determine whether political party formation and voting behavior confirm or contradict the hypotheses formulated above. Each case study involved extensive fieldwork combining archival research and interview with four tiers of respondents: political party officials, civil society leaders, election observers (eponymously), and ordinary citizens (anonymously).

Turkey

The two minority groups with electoral weight in Turkey are the Kurds, a linguistic minority concentrated in the southeast, and the Alevis, a heterodox sect of Islam whose adherents traditionally lived in east-central Anatolia. Although official census data are lacking or dated, it

is widely estimated that Sunni Turks make up roughly 70% of the population, while Kurds and Alevis each comprise around 15% (with a small degree of Alevi-Kurdish overlap). Kurds are demographically clustered in the southeast, while Alevis constitute a strongly dominated minority both in their traditional homelands and in major urban centers.

After transitioning to multi-party democracy in 1946, Turkey continued to use the strongly majoritarian Party Block Vote formula, according to which all seats in a multimember constituency are won by the party with the plurality of votes. The party system in the 1950s was strongly bipartisan, but the pattern of ethnic voting was counterintuitive. Despite favorable conditions, no Kurdish party emerged, while the majority right-wing Democrat Party (DP) chose to appeal to the Alevi minority. In 1960, a military coup deposed the DP and introduced low-threshold PR. A primarily Kurdish and an Alevi party emerged in the 1960s, but they were both ultimately unsuccessful. Responding to the rise of extreme right-wing Islamic and nationalist parties in the 1970s, the Alevi community opted to support the Kemalist secular Republican People's Party (RPP), forging a relationship that continues to this day. The Kurdish vote continued to be fragmented among various mainstream parties, including the Islamic party and the RPP. Another major coup in 1980 suppressed political parties and imposed a 10% threshold for entry into parliament. This measure should compel smaller political parties to merge, but it still theoretically allowed the possibility of a hegemonic Kurdish or Alevi party gaining seats. Nevertheless, the pattern of ethnic voting since the return of democracy in the late 1980s has remained essentially the same: Alevis supporting the Kemalist left, and Kurds divided along right-wing/religious and left-wing/separatist lines. The Kurdish PKK insurgency received a major blow after the arrest of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999. Later that year Turkey finally achieved candidate status for EU accession, a process which, despite its vicissitudes, has stepped up international pressure for minority rights. Employing a moderate Islamic multicultural agenda, the governing Justice and Development Party (JDP) has attempted to approach both Kurds and Alevis, making much greater inroads with the former than the latter. On the contrary, the opposition RPP has been unable to build a similar consensus with the Kurdish left ever since an unsuccessful experiment in 1990-91 cost it dearly in votes.

Turkey confirms the standard hypothesis on the relationship between proportionality and the effective number of parties, although it took a very long adjustment period of more than two decades for parties to efficiently merge after the introduction of the 10% barrier. The hypothesis concerning cross-ethnic voting is entirely disconfirmed. Kurdish and Alevi support for mainstream Turkish parties remained high in all of modern Turkish political history, while a Kurdish separatist party appeared only in the 1990s and persisted under the least favorable electoral formula. Although JDP has used its electoral standing with Kurds to launch minority reforms, it is not clear that cross-ethnic voting has historically contributed to conflict resolution in Turkey. The absence of similar initiatives in the past points to the positive role currently played by the EU accession process, the gradual growth of civil society within Turkey, and the emergence of a de facto Kurdish government in Northern Iraq.

Northern Ireland

Controversial from its inception, Northern Ireland was carved out in 1920 as a self-governing part of the United Kingdom with a two-thirds Protestant majority and a one-third Catholic minority. Higher birth rates and declining emigration among Catholics has shifted this balance to a very thin 55:45 ratio in recent years. The spatial distribution of the two religious communities creates a weakly dominated demography with significant potential for cross-ethnic voting in many areas. Like Eire to its south, Northern Ireland originally used the proportional and preferential STV system in the 1920s, until the governing Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) replaced it with FPTP in 1929. The outbreak of communal violence in 1969 triggered a British intervention and the reintroduction of STV. Elections took place intermittently during counter-insurgency warfare between the IRA and the British army, until the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and an ongoing peace process rendered Northern Ireland a showcase model for conflict resolution. The plurality electoral formula in use between 1929 and 1969 is typically viewed as another aspect of the Protestant-dominated state. But a more careful assessment of Northern Ireland's electoral history reveals that things are not so clear cut.

Northern Irish politics have been described as a 'dual' party system, each election taking place primarily along intra-ethnic lines with little cross-ethnic voting. From the 1920s until the 1960s the UUP generally commanded the Protestant vote; the Catholic vote was much more fragmented, between the traditionalist Nationalist Party (NP), republican leftist groups, and high abstention. Labor mobilization and socialist discourse provided an alternative policy dimension with the potential to overcome the sectarian cleavage. UUP imposed FPTP primarily to fend off challengers from the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) and independent unionists. Despite discrimination in municipal elections, the Northern Ireland assembly constituencies were not significantly gerrymandered against Catholics. Catholics suffered more from their internal divisions and inability to reach an agreement with NILP on the constitutional question. In fact, FPTP created unique opportunities for an alliance between Catholics and moderate Protestants to sweep the board. This counterfactual scenario, though, remained a chimera. NILP was too afraid to alienate its primarily Protestant voter base, and became increasingly irrelevant by the late 1960s. In response to the prospect of reforms and increasing street violence, both UUP and NP broke up into moderate and radical factions—before the return to PR was anticipated.

Intra-sectarian competition between moderate and radical unionism and republicanism respectively has been the mainstay of Northern Irish politics in the second PR period since 1973. STV and large mixed constituencies provide ample potential for cross-ethnic voting, which has not materialized in practice. While the conflict deescalated since the late 1990s, the moderate parties paradoxically lost ground to the flanks: the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein (SF). After weapons decommissioning and a deluge of aid from London, DUP and SF have now evolved into less radical parties content with mere parliamentary wrangling. Ironically, the political forces that wrecked a very similar the peace process in the early 1970s are now at the helm under the Good Friday Agreement.

Guyana

Guyana, a former British colony, is essentially a Caribbean society on the mainland of South America. Labeled “the land of the six races”, it has never had a clear ethnic majority during its democratic years. Its population today is roughly 45% Indian, 30% African, 10% Amerindian and 15% mixed (most of part-African ancestry). In the 1980s, Donald Horowitz described British Guiana’s political history as a classic case of ethnic party bifurcation.³⁴ What began as a unified anti-colonial movement under the banner of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) deteriorated into a racial duel when PPP’s two main leaders—the Indo-Guyanese Cheddi Jagan and the Afro-Guyanese Forbes Burnham—parted ways. Burnham founded the People’s National Congress (PNC) and took advantage of Cold War tensions to court British and American support against Jagan’s Marxist platform. Until the early 1960s PPP always prevailed in colonial elections conducted under FPTP. Before granting independence, British officials changed the formula to list PR, allegedly to address PNC’s objections that Indians ruled with a plurality of the vote. The first PR contest in 1964 brought to power a coalition between PNC and The United Force (TUF), a predominantly Amerindian party. Forbes Burnham soon established a dictatorship that lasted until the end of the Cold War. In 1992 PPP returned to power with an edge. Its consequent unbroken chain of electoral victories was again marred by PNC riots, inviting mediation efforts by Jimmy Carter and CARICOM. Limited constitutional reforms and the threat of foreign aid discontinuation eventually persuaded the PNC to back down in 2006.

Guyana is the quintessential Horowitzian case of an ossified ethnic party system, but not because all Guyanese vote for an ethnic party of their group. Rather it is so because most people vote along ethnic lines, but the party of the largest group regularly manages to attract other voters as well. After returning to power, the PPP has learnt its lesson and it has loyally courted the Amerindian vote. Unless these patterns of ethnic voting drastically change, the PPP is bound to monopolize government. Realizing that they cannot win elections or annul them in court, the PNC in the last few years has been moving more and more in the direction of pressing for a power-sharing agreement similar to Northern Ireland.

Guyana’s electoral history is not consistent with any of the theoretical hypotheses. It has maintained a two-party system across the two electoral systems, and the effective number of political parties by vote share was actually lower in 1992-2006 than in 1953-1961. Cross-ethnic voting dropped as the PPP-PNC clash poisoned race relations in the early 1960s, but has again risen as PPP grabbed the Amerindian vote in the 1990s. As in other cases, the electoral incentives were insufficient to promote moderation in the face of ethnic polarization. In the late 1950s and early 60s the strategic voting potential of FPTP was insufficient to induce cross-ethnic appeals in highly mixed constituencies. In the 1990s low-threshold PR proved insufficient to encourage alternatives to PPP. It remains to be seen whether the Alliance for Change (AFC), a new multiethnic party formed in 2006, will be able to play this role. So far it has only been able to garner the support of frustrated PNC voters, but not to bridge the racial divide.

³⁴ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Chapter 7.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is perhaps the saddest of the four cases. A former model British colony that squandered its developmental head start, the island experienced a civil war deadlier than Turkey's, which recently came to a climactic end. Its ethnic demography is the most clustered. The Sinhalese make up a three-quarters majority; Tamil speakers are divided into three smaller minorities: Sri Lankan Tamils (14%), Indian Tamils (5%), and Moors (7%). The Sri Lankan Tamils are heavily concentrated in the northeast, while the Indian Tamils, descendants of indentured laborers recruited in India by the British, live mostly in the central highlands. Moors are Muslim Tamil-speakers who claim Arab ancestry. They are dispersed throughout the island, with a particular concentration in eastern province.

At the time of independence in 1947, Ceylon inherited a Westminster-style parliamentary system with FPTP and an uneasy alliance between the main Sinhalese and Tamil political forces, the United National Party (UNP) and the Tamil Congress (TC) respectively. One of UNP's first actions was to disenfranchise the Indian Tamil laborers, both on nationalist grounds and in order to preempt any gains by the leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party (CP). The question of official languages sparked a tragic trajectory of ethnic outbidding. UNP was soon challenged by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which pioneered a Sinhala-only policy; TC was all but eclipsed by the Tamil Federal Party (FP), which championed regional autonomy. A UNP-FP coalition government failed to reach an agreement, and SLFP turned the tables by concluding a pact with the Marxist parties in 1970. CP and LSSP watered down their pro-minority language stance in exchange for a republican constitution that severed ties with the British crown. By the time UNP returned to power and introduced PR in 1978, Tamil rebel groups had begun to form. Deadly riots in 1983 signaled the spiral to a protracted civil war.

Since the 1980s elections in the northeast have been repeatedly disrupted by fighting, but ceasefires and negotiations furnished opportunities for electoral jockeying similar to Northern Ireland and Turkey. Sri Lanka also notably adopted AV for its presidential elections, which could have increased the Tamils' say in the choice of the executive. Like Guyana, however, Sri Lanka flaunts the theoretical hypotheses about electoral engineering. Its clustered demography meant that fair minority representation could also be guaranteed under FPTP, and delimitation commissions were always sensitive to this issue. Curiously, there was more genuine competition for the Sri Lankan Tamil vote under FPTP than under PR. The effective number of parties dropped under PR. While bipolar coalitions led by UNP and SLFP split the Moorish and Indian Tamil votes, Sri Lankan Tamil support again coalesced around a hegemonic party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), campaigning with the symbols of the old FP. Preference voting has not substantially aided cross-ethnic appeals: no Sinhalese president was ever elected thanks to the minority vote. The Tamil Tigers foolishly sealed their fate when they boycotted the 2005 presidential election and deprived the more conciliatory UNP candidate of victory. In the wake of the rebels' defeat, the SLFP now triumphs at the polls without much need for Tamil votes.

Revisiting Electoral Engineering

The common thread across cases is that electoral and demographic incentives proved to be a poor predictor for historical patterns of ethnic voting. Incentives induced by the electoral system also seem to have made little difference for conflict dynamics. Too often they have been superseded by other considerations, with the prospect of ethnic outbidding taking a prominent spot. Among the pool of observations in these four cases, it is hard to find support for the hypotheses linking the electoral formula with the ethnic structure of the party system. One might argue that violence itself could have caused autocorrelation, making electoral incentives less relevant as conflict spirals; but this is not a convincing enough explanation for this failure. The cases are arranged in violence intensity in the same ordering as for demographic clustering, with Guyana, the least violent, failing predictions just as much as Sri Lanka, the most violent.³⁵

Propositions 1 and 4 can each be evaluated first within-case, since countries changed the proportionality of their electoral formula while maintaining the same demographic structure, and then across cases. The truth table below indicates unclear support for Proposition 1 (the multiplicative effect) and no support at all for Proposition 4 (the strategic voting hypothesis).

| | Guyana | Northern Ireland | Turkey | Sri Lanka |
|---------------|--------|------------------|--------|-----------|
| Proposition 1 | Fail | Pass | Pass | Fail |
| Proposition 4 | Fail | Fail | Fail | Fail |

Propositions 2 and 3 can only be evaluated across cases and between similar levels of proportionality, as demographic structure remained fairly constant within cases. The predicted effective number of parties and incidence of cross-ethnic voting should follow the same ordering as ethnic diversity under similar conditions of proportionality.

Proposition 2: The effective number of parties increases with ethnic diversity

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Predicted order of ENP: | Sri Lanka < Turkey < Northern Ireland < Guyana |
| Actual order: Low PR: | Turkey < Guyana < Northern Ireland < Sri Lanka |
| High PR: | Guyana < Sri Lanka < Northern Ireland < Turkey |

Proposition 3: The incidence of cross-ethnic voting increases with ethnic diversity

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Predicted order of CEV: | Sri Lanka < Turkey < Northern Ireland < Guyana |
| Actual order: Low PR: | Northern Ireland < Guyana < Sri Lanka < Turkey |
| High PR: | Northern Ireland < Turkey < Guyana < Sri Lanka |

³⁵ There is a known relationship between ethnic group territorial concentration and probability of violent conflict. See Monica Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

It is clear that empirical observations do not conform to the predictions, with countries expected to exhibit the highest values for party pluralism and cross-ethnic voting actually scoring at the bottom and vice versa. In short, electoral engineering in these four societies does not seem to have made an impact on the ethnic structure of their party systems in ways consistent with existing theories. The overall impact on ethnic conflict, although harder to assess, is also uncertain. Higher proportionality has often simultaneously favored the representation of both moderate and radical parties (cf. the Alliance Party vs. the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party in Northern Ireland, or the Ceylon Workers' Congress vs. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in Sri Lanka) with mutually cancelling effects on conflict dynamics. Also, cross-ethnic voting can be seen as a contributing factor to lowering tensions when a multiethnic party supports moderate policies (e.g. the UNP in Sri Lanka or the JDP in Turkey), but at other times cross-ethnic voting has been simply a manifestation of the conflict, reflecting intra-ethnic rifts that contribute to violence (e.g. the Muslims' support for Sinhalese parties in Sri Lanka, the Kurds' division between right and left or the Alevis' exclusive association with the left in Turkey). Among the four cases, it cannot be said that multiethnic parties were hurt by PR (considering the counter-examples of PPP in Guyana, RPP and the Islamic party in Turkey, UNP in Sri Lanka) or that lower proportionality necessarily favored them.

The distribution of social preferences between ethnic moderation and extremism is essentially exogenous to the electoral process and hard to change through electoral incentives. Of course, this is not to say that such preferences are fixed. No peace process would be successful if that were the case, and the current situation in Northern Ireland and at least partly in Guyana and Turkey speaks to that. But non-electoral international pressures seem to have made the difference, a fact corroborated both by participant observations and within-case inference. The intensity of external commitment to propel the peace process has been the strongest predictor of de-escalation, with Northern Ireland scoring highest and Sri Lanka lowest.³⁶

I believe that this study design constitutes the most structured possible comparison on the impact of electoral reform in divided societies. Can the pessimistic conclusions be generalized to all cases of ethnic conflict? In my opinion, anecdotal evidence from Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, and other parts of the world under international tutelage points to a growing realization that, unlike what political scientists traditionally thought, electoral engineering is actually one of the least powerful tools in the external intervenor's arsenal. It is certainly not powerful enough to effect major changes in the political system within a realistic time frame for the intervenor (give or take a decade or three elections). A more definitive, general answer to the motivating question requires political scientists to collect detailed data on ethnic voting on a global scale. The inclusion of such information in existing datasets would greatly enhance our understanding of ethnic conflict processes and allow us to examine relationships between electoral formulas, party structure, and violence in ways that has not been possible to do so far.

³⁶ This observation is in line with the prevalent thinking in the field on civil war termination. See Barbara Walters, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Sumantra Bose, *Contested Homelands* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

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