

***Conflict at the Polls:
Examining the Relationship Between Electoral System Design
and Ethnic Conflict***

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Electoral systems are more than how votes are counted. They are more than what a ballot looks like, more than where parliamentarians come from. An electoral system is the face of a state's democracy. Or as Farrell notes they are "the cogs that keep the wheels of democracy properly functioning" (2001, 2). It sets the ground rules of not only how people are elected but more importantly, who will be elected. Each system promotes and dissuades certain groups and parties from achieving electoral success. There are numerous ways the system can be altered to help ensure the continued success of certain groups. While many people are familiar with 'Gerrymandering' in the United States and Canada, few look at the system itself. While there has been some work that attempts to promote one system or another as being the most open, the most fair or the most stable, important details such as district magnitude or thresholds are often overlooked when trying to explain the continued success of one party over others.

Where the issues surrounding electoral results takes on increased importance is in deeply divided states. In societies with high levels of ethnic tension or active or latent autonomy movements the issues surrounding who is in government, who is in parliament and who has access to power takes on higher relevance. When it is not just political ideology that is the basis of political parties but ethnicity, access to governmental decision making is paramount to a group's ability to succeed. Political power becomes an end to itself and gaining it not only provides a group with the means to promote their own agenda, it also ensures that an ethnic rival lacks the ability to do the same. One needs only to look at the ethnic violence that occurred in the wake of the contested election in Kenya between the Kikuyu and all other groups for evidence of the power of elections in an ethnic struggle. At the heart of any electoral system is the relationship between

government stability and the ability for all groups to access the system (Taagepera, 2002, 252). This becomes paramount in divided societies when a state must choose if it wants to ensure that all groups are represented in government and if so, how to do so while effectively governing. Here once again we see the importance of understanding the details of electoral system design and their impact on who is elected.

As it is true that political parties that have access to power will work to protect the electoral system that brought them to power, many ethnicities that benefit from a particular system will refine the system to ensure their continued place in society. In some rare exceptions, states that hope to ease their ethnic tensions and resolve conflict, will look to their electoral system as one area that can be manipulated in order to try to placate aggrieved groups. The exact relationship between ethnic conflict and electoral systems is not known. There is no agreement on which systems are best at reducing ethnic conflict and we do not have a clear understanding of the causal relationship between ethnic conflict and electoral design. Does the electoral system predict levels of ethnic conflict, or does ethnic conflict predict the choice in electoral design? These are the questions that need to be addressed. This paper will only begin to address these issues. We will only go as far as to outline what we know as a discipline on this relationship and then propose how to try to better understand and test these theories. The actual test will be completed at a later date when more data is available. At this stage, what is most important is to organize the literature, decide on the most important questions that need answering and then identify how best to answer these questions. This paper will delve into the relationship between ethnic conflict and electoral systems and begin to look for ways to go beyond the current literature to find better answers. It will

take the literature, examine it and then begin to propose how to better test the theories of those who have come before. It will focus on the issue of vote-pooling in Alternative Vote (AV) and Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral systems and propose how to proceed. However, without understanding the work already completed we cannot understand what it is that needs answered. Without a plan, we cannot go forward.

The relationship between ethnic conflict and electoral system design has been discussed and debated but rarely has it been tested. There have been many that have argued that one system or another should be employed to best provide opportunities for minorities to access the political system, but the relative success or failure of these systems is for the most part unknown. One of the best known theorists that attempts to link electoral design with ethnic peace is Arend Lijphart's and his theory of Consociationalism (1969, 1977, 1999, 2004). Consociationalism is Lijphart's recommendation for deeply divided societies.¹ Electoral design is but one aspect of the theory. Lijphart wanted to explain why some democracies succeeded in maintaining ethnic peace while others failed. His conclusion was the states that were successful made "deliberate efforts to counteract immobilizing and unstabalizing effects of cultural fragmentation" (Lijphart, 1969, 212). The theory is based on the sharing of political power and the removal of inter-group competition. This requires power-sharing by all relevant groups and for this to be accomplished Lijphart advocates the use of Proportional Representation (PR). PR allows for more intra-ethnic competition which allows for greater co-operation across ethnic lines and allows for the creation of the 'Grand Coalition' government in which all groups are represented. It also creates a multi-

¹ For the sake of this paper it is not necessary to discuss the other components of Consociationalism in detail. Only the issues relevant to electoral system design and ethnic stability will be addressed. For a full discussion of consociationalism see Lijphart, 1977

party system which, while less stable is preferred to a two party system and the ‘winner take all’ aspect of a two party parliament (Lijphart, 1969). In his later work Lijphart further expands his discussion of Proportional Representation as a tool for ethnic peace. He acknowledges that merely having a PR system is not enough, the details matter. Lijphart argues that the most important issue in any electoral system is the disproportionality the system creates. A PR system is more proportional than a Single Member Plurality system (often referred to as First Past the Post) but with the PR system issues such as the District Magnitude, thresholds and access all effect an electoral system and must be designed in such a way that it allows the greatest level of participation for all groups (Lijphart, 1999). Lijphart’s specific recommendation for PR design is a system that has a:

high, but not necessarily perfect, degree of proportionality; multimember districts that are not too large, in order to avoid creating too much distance between voters and their representatives; list PR, in which parties present lists of candidates to the voters, instead of the rarely used single transferable vote, in which voters have to rank order individual candidates; and closed or almost closed lists, in which voters mainly choose parties instead of individual candidates within the list.
(2004, 101)

Diamond (1999) appears to support Lijphart’s overarching support of the Proportional Representation system as the electoral system that best promotes ethnic peace. Diamond criticizes majoritarian systems as they create a winner take all scenario and do not “discourage politically significant groups from becoming disloyal” (Diamond, 1999, 104). He goes on to say that Proportional Representation “generally provides the best tools for ensuring all groups in a deeply divided society feel included in the political process” and that PR encourages “the development of cross-cutting cleavages that can

moderate ethnic or regional conflict” (Diamond, 1999, 104-105). Diamond however, unlike Lijphart, is not specific in what type of PR system is best or how it should be structured, thus leaving a great deal missing in his analysis.

If there was universal acceptance of the use of Consociationalism generally and Proportional Representation specifically in the prevention of ethnic conflict then this study would not be necessary. Unfortunately, there is no such agreement within the discipline. There are some, such as Brass (1991), Andeweg (2000), Reynolds (2005) and Lardeyret (2006) who contend that consociationalism creates conditions that increase the possibility of instability and conflict. For Brass, Lijphart’s theory makes plural societies ‘more plural’ and decreases the possibility of cross-group co-operation, increasing the chance that democratic stability could be developed (Brass, 1991, 340). Lardeyret focused purely on the PR aspect of Lijphart’s argument. He believes that PR’s greatest strength, its ability to provide representation to minorities, is also its greatest weakness. PR encourages parties to develop around ethnicity, making coalitions more difficult and weakening other societal bonds that can link a country together. He cites Belgium as proof of the dangers of Proportional Representation in deeply divided society (Lardeyret, 2006, 88). Andeweg believes that consociationalism creates a new division in society between elites and the masses and this creates tension. Moreover, Proportional Representation exacerbates this problem by relying on party lists which further empowers the party elites while at the same time leaving the masses in search of other options to represent their interests (Andeweg, 2000, 529). Reynolds is more blunt in his assessment and contends that while consociationalism may be the option of last resort, if used incorrectly, it will cause a dangerous situation to become more so. As he notes:

Consociationalism, while it offers potent conflict-reducing Solutions to divided societies that have no hope of generating accommodation among antagonistic groups, will harden divisions and hence can bring disaster to a country that does in fact have potential for such accommodation. Consociationalism, in other words, is a radical therapy that may well make some patients sicker, and should therefore be used only in desperate cases where other, less drastic methods will surely fail.

(Reynolds, 2005, 57)

Reynolds carries his medical analogy further to suggest that the greatest threat for electoral systems to cause ethnic conflict is in the misdiagnosis of problems due to the fact that the ‘doctors’ fail to account for the specific maladies of the patient and try, like Lijphart, to employ general solutions to particular problems.

Norris (2002) undertook an attempt at quantitatively testing some of Lijphart’s claims on consociationalism. Through a comparison of countries using a variety of electoral systems she tested the gap between the majority and minority groups on their attachment to the political process and political institutions. Her major finding was that she found no strong relationship between minority groups’ support of the political process and countries using List-PR systems (Norris, 2002, 233). She also found statistically what Reynolds discusses generally, that it was not possible to make large, generalizing statements about the relationship between the electoral system and ethnic group satisfaction with political institutions as numerous variables had a modifying effect on the results. Issues such as group mobilization and territorial concentration may be as important as the type of system employed. In fact she outlines how even majoritarian

systems may be able to better protect minority rights in specific situations than a consociational government (Norris, 2002, 235).²

The most vocal critique of Lijphart's confidence in Proportional Representation to avoid ethnic conflict is Horowitz (1985, 2002, 2003). Horowitz describes Lijphart's consociational approach as a "one size fits all" (Horowitz, 2002, 25) solution to electoral design that does not reward political parties that attempt to compromise and build alliances across groups. Rather, he prefers an approach that provides incentives for parties to moderate their position and try to attract voters from numerous regions and groups. Here is where Horowitz sees a danger with Proportional Representation. As he states: "If many social groups are organized into separate parties, each of which can gain a small fraction of the total seats, the likelihood is that political differences will be magnified rather than compressed" (Horowitz, 2003, 121-122). To combat this Horowitz advocates the use of electoral systems that encourage 'vote pooling' because in systems such as these the parties "are marginally dependent for victory on the votes of groups other than their own and that, to secure those votes, must behave moderately on the issues of conflict" (Horowitz, 2002, 23). Horowitz uses the example of Fiji and its use of the Alternative Vote electoral system as an example of successful vote-pooling (Horowitz, 2002). By avoiding ethnic fragmentation, the electoral system can be one of many tools used by the state to promote ethnic peace by breaking down ethnic divisions and replacing them with other less threatening cleavages in ideology or class (Horowitz, 1985, 598-599).

² Norris cites the institutional structures in place in New Zealand to promote the election of Maori during their use of the FPTP system and the seats allocated to specific castes in India as evidence of this (Norris, 2002, 235).

Reilly (2001, 2002) continues with Horowitz's line of reasoning by examining specific cases of electoral system design in divided societies. He contends that preferential voting system such as the Alternative Vote, Single Transferable Vote and Supplemental Vote provide the vote-pooling incentives that encourage ethnic stability. As these systems require the voter to rank their preferences:

such systems can encourage politicians in divided societies to campaign not just for first-preference votes from their own community, but for "second-choice" votes from other groups as well—thus providing parties and candidates with an incentive to "pool votes" across ethnic lines. To attract second-level support, candidates may need to make crossethnic appeals and demonstrate their capacity to represent groups other than their own.
(Reilly, 2002, 158)

These systems provide an 'arena of bargaining' not seen in the divisive Proportional Representation systems. Reilly uses examples such as Northern Ireland, Fiji and Papua New Guinea to illustrate that if there is a large groups of moderate voters, there is the possibility of compromise and cross-ethnic preferential voting (Reilly, 2002, 168). Interestingly, Reilly's later work ignores the subtle differences in preferential design that are available to electoral engineers.³ In an earlier work Reilly stresses that "all preferential systems are not equal, and apparently minor technical differences between the various electoral systems, such as the number of preferences to be marked or the number of seats to be elected in each district, can have major consequences in terms of electoral outcome" (Reilly, 2001, 165). The importance of this point cannot be overstated. As Ishiyama (1994) found in his study of the one and only election in Estonia

³ It is acknowledged that the 2002 piece is a journal article while the earlier work is a much more in-depth manuscript, but this is a critical omission by the author.

to use STV, it was a specific element of the STV system, in this case district magnitude that was the most significant factor in the success or failure of the Russian minority to be elected (Ishiyama, 1994, 190). Reilly puts conditions on success of preferential voting in his earlier work that is not present in his later work. These differences, similar to the differences in PR design may be the root causes of ethnic peace and stability or ethnic conflict.

There is a growing 'third way' in the study of electoral systems and ethnic conflict. It is simply that there are other issues that are more important than the general electoral family. This view can be found in both case or small 'N' studies and large 'N' quantitative studies. For example, Bieber's (2005) analysis of power-sharing successes and failures in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia illustrate that the electoral system and its ability to cross ethnic lines or provide group representation does not matter if there is no effort by elites to use the system as it was designed.⁴ Mozaffar et al. (2003) concentrate on factors affecting the number of political parties in newly developing African democracies. They find that it is necessary to look at both the nature of the groups themselves, in particular their level of geographic concentration, and specific electoral institutional designs. They found that district magnitude in combination with geographic concentration of groups was the best predictor of the number of viable political parties and by extension, the level of cross-ethnic co-operation (Mozaffar et al., 2003, 389). Salloukh (2006) presents an even more challenging problem. In his study of Lebanon he demonstrates that while the system is contested in multi-confessional districts and designed to create multi-faith coalitions, the end result has been the crystallization of

⁴ See also Manning and Antic (2003) discussion of international electoral engineering in Bosnia. Here the authors conclude that the system itself is not important, rather the Bosnia's trust in the system itself will determine if moderates will be elected.

group identity and less trust, democracy and peace (Salloukh, 2006, 637). The cross-cleavage political parties advocated by Horowitz have not developed and the grand coalition of smaller parties loyal to one group advocated by Lijphart does not survive the parliamentary session. In short, in Lebanon according to Salloukh, both theories failed to explain the continued conflict. Lyons (2002) agrees and notes that after ethnic conflict has become violent, there may be no electoral system that is perfect enough to keep the peace. The system must be a part of a much larger set of post-conflict institutions all of which must provide access to power to all sides in the immediate aftermath of a civil war. Due to the reality that some will be denied power due to any electoral system there is the possibility of mistrust and a lack of faith in any system proposed by the electoral losers. Therefore, other structures must be in place to accommodate all parties. As a result, Lyons argues that the “influence of electoral systems is highly contextual and unlikely to alter the outcome of postsettlement elections” (Lyons, 2002, 222).

Finally, there are those such as Cohen (1997), Ishiyama (2000) and Birnir (2007) who all provide large ‘N’ quantitative analyses on the relationship between ethnic and electoral politics. Interestingly, all three use predominantly the Minorities at Risk dataset (MAR) to test their theories. Cohen tests the impact of electoral systems on both high and low level ethnic conflict. He concludes that PR systems low significantly the chances of high level conflict, yet has no impact on low level protest. His findings indicate that plurality systems are not only unable to lower either level of protest they actually increase the probability of conflict (Cohen, 1997, 625). His overarching assessment of the relationship between ethnic political protest and electoral systems is that:

Plurality electoral systems increase the stakes of electoral competition, whereas PR lowers them.

PR decreases the intensity of competitiveness and, consequently, increases the degree of inclusiveness of electoral victory. The dispersion of electoral victory gives disconnected electoral groups a stake in the regime; it politically socializes them and endears them to the regime. Plurality systems excessively emphasize competitive, adversarial styles of electioneering in a country with strained ethnic relations. This emphasis fosters destructive exclusion. (Cohen, 1997, 626)

Ishiyama disputes some of Cohen's findings and does so using the same MAR data but focusing on Eastern Europe and levels of protest rather than all forms of conflict. Ishiyama found evidence that supports aspects of both Lijphart and Horowitz. He notes that while PR can lower and contain the demands for separation by a group, there is no guarantee that a PR election will create proportional results ethnically. It may be necessary to ensure proportionality through "non proportional means" (manipulating the system to fit the particular conditions in the country) to get the desired results (Ishiyama, 2000, 64). Ishiyama also finds however that a strong presidency, as advocated by Horowitz is equally effective in containing these protests. Ishiyama concludes by suggesting, like Reilly, that STV may be the best alternative. He argues that the "trick", it appears is to represent groups proportionally to diffuse protest actions, while promoting systems that accentuate individualism... In other words an electoral system which both promotes representation of minorities (that does not operate using party lists) coupled with voting for individuals as opposed to 'groups'" (Ishiyama, 2000, 65). This linked with a strong president would promote ethnic peace.

Birnir's study concludes that the most important issue in this entire relationship is minority access to decision making. What is important here is that both Lijphart and Horowitz agree on this point. It is how you get there that is important. For Lijphart is the

power sharing in the grand coalition. For Horowitz it is the representation of all groups in the larger parties, thus ensuring representation at the cabinet table. Birnir presents this in a more negative way in saying that there is no evidence to support one theory over another and therefore the system itself is not as important as group representation in government. She notes that: “the ethnic group can be peacefully incorporated into long-term national policies under either permissive (PR) or restrictive (plurality) rules because the ethnic issue does not necessarily have to be represented by an ethnic party” (Birnir, 2007, 206). This is a very serious claim and is one that despite their differences, both Lijphart and Horowitz would refute. The relationship between electoral system, ethnic group and institutional design matters but it is, as the preceding discussion illustrates, complicated and requires further analysis in order to fully understand it. The question becomes: what aspects of the scholars discussed above can be tested in new ways to better test the relationship? As it clear that the majority of scholars fall into either the ‘Lijphart’ camp or the ‘Horowitz’ camp and there appears to be deadlock, one or both of those theories needs to be tested empirically in new ways. This paper will begin the process of addressing how these competing theories can be tested against one another empirically. The area of greatest contention and therefore the logical place to start is Horowitz’s notion of vote-pooling in preferential systems.

Testing Horowitz’s Theories

Empirical tests of Horowitz’s theories have been frustrated by several factors. The most important is the relatively small number of cases. Many scholars, such as Sisk (1996) and Lijphart (1991), have argued that there are too few examples to properly assess the effects of vote-pooling in preferential systems. There are only a handful of

countries that use preferential systems and only a small subset of these are deeply divided societies. As Sisk (1996) points out, “Although vote pooling is theoretically compelling, there is simply insufficient empirical evidence at the level of national politics to support claims that subsequent preference voting can lead to accommodative outcomes” (62). Fraenkel and Grofman (2004) argue that even where accommodative preferential systems have been implemented, “they have rarely been comprehensively adopted or sustained, particularly where there are powerful vested interests” (624).

Reilly (2001) believes that the critics are wrong about the dearth of empirical evidence. “There is a considerable range of evidence from Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Northern Ireland and elsewhere that demonstrates vote-pooling in action” (23). Reilly conducts detailed quantitative analyses of these case studies and finds, among other things, that in countries where a moderate center exists, preferential systems can have a centripetal effect on electoral results and political outcomes. We have adopted a complimentary approach that considers many of the same cases using a different level of analysis. Reilly focuses on national election dynamics and outcomes. Horowitz’s theories are ultimately concerned with the composition of coalition governments, the role of moderate parties in policy making, and the willingness of ethnically opposed parties to work together before and after election results have been tallied. These are important national outcomes but the hypotheses Horowitz develops are theories about the conditions under which interethnic vote-pooling might occur *at the electoral district level*. This means that empirical tests of Horowitz’s theories should consist of detailed analyses of individual races within electoral districts. One of the advantages of adopting this approach is that it greatly increases the number of cases available for analysis.

Vote-Pooling in AV Systems

Horowitz (e.g. 1991, 2004) and others (Reilly 2001, 2002; Fraenkel and Grofman 2004, 2006) have theorized the conditions under which AV is most likely to produce accommodation, vote-pooling and cross-ethnic vote transfers. At the most basic level, the situation in the electoral district must be such that a party is *forced* to “win seats on the marginal votes of voters of groups other than its own” (Horowitz 2004: 508). Several factors must be present before this condition is likely to prevail. First, Horowitz argues that there must be a sufficiently high threshold or parties may be able to win seats with the first preference votes of their own group. This is why he favours AV. The ‘representation’ threshold in an AV system is a majority of the vote within the electoral district. It is ordinarily difficult for any candidate to obtain a majority of the vote even if their supporters make up a majority in an electoral district.

Second, the electoral districts have to be relatively heterogeneous. As Horowitz (1991) points out, they should be “composed of significant numbers of two or more ethnic or racial groups in conflict” (627). If each electoral district contains an overwhelming majority of one ethnic group there will be little need to pool votes across ethnic divides in order to win seats. The structure of the party system might make it necessary for radical parties to attract *moderate* votes (from within the same ethnic group) but there will be little incentive to accommodate voters from other ethnic groups in a largely homogeneous electoral district.

Third, there must be more than one political party vying to represent each ethnic group. Multiple political parties are a necessary precondition for the emergence of what

Fraenkel and Grofman (2006) have called “transethnic centrist alliances.” In a bipolar society the minimum condition for interethnic centrist vote-pooling is a system with at least four parties, with two parties representing each ethnic group. Fraenkel and Grofman (2004, 2006), for example, categorize Fiji’s parties into four main types: radical Indian (rI), moderate Indian (mI), radical Fijian (rF), and moderate Fijian (mF). A viable multiparty system divides the vote *within* ethnic groups. This helps prevent any party representing the dominant ethnic group from winning in single-member districts on the strength of first preferences alone. For example, the Fijian electoral district of Lami is approximately 80 percent ethnic Fijian. If this population voted as a bloc they would easily secure the seat making the vote-pooling potential of an AV system redundant. If the ethnic Fijian vote in Lami is split between moderate and radical Fijian parties it becomes more difficult for any party to secure the seat without making appeals to obtain the second or subsequent preferences of voters from other parties, either from within or outside their ethnic group.

The fourth condition is behavioural and not structural like the other three. Horowitz (2004) points out that for centrist candidates to emerge victorious there must be a “willingness of voters to rank moderate parties associated with the other ethnic group ahead of radical parties associated with their own ethnic group” (509). This underscores Reilly’s (2001) point about the importance of a viable moderate center.

In summary, interethnic centrist vote-pooling is most likely to occur in heterogeneous electoral districts where multiple parties vie for the first preference votes of their own ethnic group, where the threshold to be elected is relatively high, and where voters are predisposed to transfer votes between moderate parties representing other

ethnic groups and not between moderate and radical parties representing their own ethnic group. This is the theory. Tests of this theory should be conducted *at the electoral district level*. National election results – the composition of winning coalitions, or the relative dominance of radical and moderate parties – are of primary interest but these outcomes depend on the dynamics of races within individual electoral districts.

Despite the nature of these hypotheses, most researchers have not conducted detailed analyses of vote-pooling *within* individual electoral districts. Fraenkel and Grofman (2006) are an exception. They collected data on each electoral district for the Fijian elections of 1999 and 2001. They conclude that AV has not helped mitigate ethnic tensions in Fiji and they recommend a more proportional system. Nonetheless, some of their findings *are* consistent with Horowitz’s theoretical expectations. For example, there is some evidence that interethnic vote transfers in Fiji are more common in heterogeneous districts and less common in more homogeneous ones. But what about the relative strengths of moderate and radical parties? When is interethnic vote pooling most prevalent? Under what conditions are interethnic vote transfers most likely to be decisive in determining election outcomes? These, and similar questions, should be analysed systematically. Here is an example of a statistical model that *might* be used to test vote-pooling hypotheses in Fiji:

$$(1) \quad \text{vote-pooling} = \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{ethnic composition} + \beta_{(2-5)} * \text{relative strength of parties} \\ + \beta_6 * \text{election year} + \varepsilon$$

In this model, β_1 is the partial slope associated with the ethnic composition of each electoral district. β_2 through β_5 represent the partial slopes associated with the fragmentation of the party system. This would be measured using first preference vote

percentages for the radical and moderate voting blocs from each ethnic group. In the case of Fiji these would include vote percentages for radical and moderate ethnic-Fijian and Indo-Fijian parties for a total of four variables. β_6 is a dummy variable representing the election year.

The dependent variable could be any one of a number of measures of vote-pooling. One possibility is the percentage of second and subsequent preferences that are interethnic. Horowitz (2004) reports that in 1999, 72 percent of all second and subsequent preferences in ‘open’ seats in Fiji were cast across the ethnic divide (513). If there is variation *between* electoral districts, this measure might be used to explore the conditions under which vote-pooling is most prevalent. The probability of *decisive* interethnic vote transfers might be assessed by using a dependent variable that indicates whether these transfers were required for the winning candidate to secure election in his or her district. In the 1999 Fijian election, interethnic vote transfers were decisive in 18 of 25 ‘open’ electoral districts. In 2001, interethnic voter transfers were decisive in 7 of 25 districts (Fraenkel and Grofman 2006). A third option is to construct a dependent variable that measures the percentage of votes transferred from radical to moderate parties. This would be a test of the strength of centripetal forces within electoral districts. Fraenkel and Grofman (2006) do not report district level data on this measure but they find that many more voters in 1999 and 2001 transferred their preferences from *moderate to radical* parties and not the other way around (647).

The difficulty is that there are, still, only a limited number of cases. In Fiji there are 46 ethnically defined ‘communal seats’. 23 of these seats are reserved for ethnic Fijian candidates and voters; 19 are reserved for Indo-Fijians; 3 are reserved for ‘General

Electors’; and 1 is reserved for Rotumans (Reilly 2001). Elections in these ‘closed’ districts cannot be used to analyse interethnic voting. The Fijian electoral system has an additional 25 ‘open’ seats in which candidates from both ethnic groups vie for votes from the general electorate. This means that a statistical analysis of interethnic vote-pooling in Fiji might, at this point in time, include a total of 75 observations, 25 from each of the last three elections held under the current constitution (1999, 2001, and 2006). This is not a large number of cases but it should be enough to conduct a relatively robust test of Horowitz’s vote-pooling hypotheses.

Empirical tests can be conducted with data from other countries that use AV systems. Papua New Guinea is a deeply divided, heavily fractionalized society that used AV for three elections in the 1960s and ‘70s. When Papua New Guinea declared independence in 1975 they abandoned AV in favour of a Single-Member Plurality system. Researchers such as Reilly (2002) believe this “move had devastating consequences for the nascent political system” (165). Papua New Guinea has recently readopted the AV system and constituency-level results should be analysed to assess levels of vote-pooling in the modern electoral system.

Australia is not a deeply divided society but Reilly’s (2001) analysis illustrates that vote-pooling in that country occurs along an ideological dimension. Australia has used AV to elect the federal House of Representatives since 1918 (Farrell and McAllister 2006). Depending on the availability of data, a constituency-level analysis of Australian election results might include hundreds of data points.

It is difficult to quantify the effects of AV systems on national election results, coalition structures, and policy outcomes because so few countries use these systems to

elect their national governments. Nonetheless, Reilly's (2001) qualitative analyses support Horowitz's theories, *under certain conditions*. The conditions under which AV systems are likely to encourage interethnic, sectarian, or ideological vote-pooling have been thoroughly theorized but these theories have rarely been subjected to quantitative tests. Appropriate tests of these theories must make use of constituency-level data. Fortunately, there are hundreds of potential cases that might form the basis of these, or similar, empirical tests.

Vote-Pooling in STV Systems

Vote-pooling in AV systems has been thoroughly theorized but STV has received much less attention. This is unfortunate because STV, unlike AV, is a proportional system and it therefore has the potential to produce benefits associated with both centripetal theories of accommodation *and* consociational theories of representation. Indeed, one of the concerns about AV is that *even if* it encourages interethnic vote-pooling and moderate accommodation, single-member races are zero-sum games that minority groups are more likely to lose. From this perspective, AV is like any other plurality-majority system and it comes with all the associated risks. In contrast, Reilly (2001) points out that "STV may be particularly apposite for societies in which there are two evenly balanced groups separated by a core group of moderates. In such a situation, STV can ensure not just the proportional representation of the 'moderate minority', but also bolster their influence via vote transfers from the flaks" (147).

STV has undoubtedly received less attention because Horowitz is sceptical of the vote-pooling potential of the system. He believes 'representation' thresholds in STV systems are too low to produce strong vote-pooling incentives. This may be true but so

much depends on electoral system design details and there is evidence that STV *is* associated with vote-pooling, and ethnic (or sectarian) cooperation and accommodation in some political systems (Reilly 2001). It is therefore necessary to more clearly specify the conditions under which vote-pooling in STV systems might be maximized. This will help determine whether or not STV can be used as a “third option” to produce benefits associated with both consociationalism *and* centripetalism.

The dynamics of vote-pooling in STV and AV systems will be affected by many of the same factors. As in AV systems, electoral districts under STV must be ethnically heterogeneous, and perhaps more so depending on the ‘representation’ threshold in the district. As before, multiparty systems that split the ethnic vote should make interethnic vote transfers more common. Moderate voters must also be willing to transfer their votes to moderate parties of other ethnic groups before supporting radical parties of their own group.

There are also a number of considerations unique to STV systems. District magnitude, or the number of seats in each electoral district, is of primary importance. In STV systems candidates must obtain a certain number of votes before they are awarded a seat. This quota is a function of the number of valid votes cast and the number of seats to be awarded in an electoral district. As the district magnitude increase the ‘representation’ threshold decreases (Farrell 2001). Horowitz (1991) points out that if the threshold in an STV district is too low it might be possible for a candidate or party to “obtain representation without vote pooling” (191). In other words, if the district magnitude is too high there will be never be a need to cast second or subsequent preferences across party lines. For example, the Australian state of New South Wales uses an STV system to elect

Senators to the Upper House. The state is comprised of a single electoral district that elects 21 Senators. This design makes the system function in a way that is essentially equivalent to an open-list PR system. Most voters rank order a long list of candidates *within their preferred party* (Farrel and McAllister 2006). This suggests that STV systems with very large district magnitudes will not induce vote-pooling, especially in deeply divided societies where voters have strong political allegiances to their ethnic or religious groups or their ideological comrades.

This does not mean that STV systems cannot be designed to encourage interethnic vote pooling. Some researchers have suggested that, under certain conditions, STV could provide especially strong vote-pooling incentives. Reilly (2001), for example, hypothesizes that in a bi-polar society, parties competing in a three-seat STV district might be *required* to pool votes in order to win the last seat (147). Under this scenario, each major group would presumably win one of the first two seats but would have to rely on lower order preferences from the other group to win the third seat. This is a plausible scenario but these outcomes depend on other factors such as the structure of the party system and the number of candidates each party runs.

What size district magnitude is consistent with meaningful levels of vote-pooling in STV systems? If Horowitz (1991) is right, rates of interethnic vote-pooling should decrease as the district magnitude increases and the 'representation' threshold decreases, *holding other variables constant*. If Reilly (2001) is right, it may be possible to identify an optimal district magnitude (larger than one) that is consistent with maximal levels of vote-pooling in STV systems. These are constituency-level hypotheses that can be subjected to quantitative tests provided the relevant data are available.

Another factor that might affect levels of vote-pooling in STV elections are the nomination habits of political parties. In STV systems parties must decide *how* many candidates to run in each electoral district. Scholars such as Katz (1981) or Lijphart and Irwin (1979) have recommended a strategy of ‘under-nomination’ where parties should run fewer candidates than there are seats in each district to prevent vote splitting. In the Republic of Ireland major parties typically adopt a strategy of ‘over-nomination’ in which they nominate more candidates than the number of seats they can realistically hope to win (see Ishiyama 1994). The number of candidates nominated from each party should affect the incidence of interethnic vote pooling because if there are several candidates from each party in a district, voters can reserve *all* their higher order preferences for their first choice party. This will reduce incentives to cast votes across ethnic, religious, or ideological divides. In a six member district, supporters of a party that has adopted an ‘over-nomination’ strategy might cast their first six preferences for members of the same party. As lower preferences are less likely to be transferred, over-nomination strategies and large district magnitudes should reduce the probability of decisive interethnic vote transfers.

It may be difficult to obtain the necessary data but the STV system used in Estonia in 1990 was particularly well suited to testing these hypotheses. Estonia is a deeply divided society with two dominant groups. Ethnic Estonians make up approximately 60 percent of the population and the non-Estonian population is primarily Russian. The distribution of the population varies widely from region to region, and thus between electoral districts. In North Tallinn, for example, non-Estonians make up a majority of the population. In other cities, such as Tartu, ethnic Estonians are a majority

(see Ishiyama 1994). District magnitude varied widely between districts under the system used in the 1990 election. There were 19 single-member districts, 6 two-member districts, 13 three-member districts, 5 four-member districts, and 3 five-member districts. Ishiyama (1994) conducted a constituency-level analysis of this election and found that, for example, the nomination habits of the ethnic-Russian party OSTK were primarily affected by the ethnic composition of the districts. Ishiyama (1994) does not conduct a systematic analysis of interethnic vote pooling in the 1990 Estonian election, but it should be possible to specify a model similar to the following:

$$(2) \quad \text{vote-pooling} = \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{ethnic composition} + \beta_{(2-5)} * \text{relative strength of parties} \\ + \beta_{(6-9)} * \text{candidates per party} + \beta_{10} * \text{district magnitude} + \varepsilon$$

As in Model 1, β_1 is the partial slope associated with the ethnic composition of each electoral district. As before, the fragmentation of the party system would be measured using first preference vote percentages for each of the major competing parties. Ishiyama (1994) identified three types of “transitional parties” competing in the 1990 Estonian election: 1) broad-based (non-ethnic) “popular front” parties; 2) broad-based Communist parties; and 3) “ethnically particular” parties. All three types competed in the 1990 election and there were at least two major ethnic parties, one representing ethnic-Estonians and the other representing the Russian minority. β_2 through β_5 represent the partial slopes associated with the first preference vote totals of each of these major voting blocs. β_6 through β_9 represent the partial slopes associated with the nomination habits of the political parties. Parties will over-nominate in some districts and under-nominate in others. The best way to capture the impact of nomination strategies on vote-pooling

potential is to simply count the number of candidates fielded by each major party in every district. The last variable indicates the number of seats to be awarded in each district. As before, this model might be regressed on a series of related dependent variables: 1) the percentage of second and subsequent preferences that are interethnic; 2) the incidence of *decisive* interethnic vote transfers; and 3) the percentage of votes transferred from radical to moderate parties.

Unfortunately, STV was used in Estonia in only one election nearly 20 year ago. The election was held *before* Estonia declared independence from the Soviet Union. This will make collecting constituency-level data for this election difficult or impossible. There were a total of 46 electoral districts in the STV system used in Estonia. This is a relatively small number of cases but if the data are available even this small number of cases might be enough to provide some insight into the dynamics of interethnic vote-pooling in STV systems.

Northern Ireland is another case study that should be studied systematically. Northern Ireland is a bi-polar society divided between Catholic nationalists (i.e. pro-Irish) and Protestant unionists (i.e. pro-British). Reilly (2001) finds little evidence of inter-religious vote-pooling in the Northern Ireland elections of 1973 and 1982. The 1998 elections were different. According to Reilly (2001), analysis of this election “strongly suggests that the vote transfer element of STV had a beneficial influence both upon the types of political alliance that could be formed and on the eventual composition of the new Assembly, in which over 70 percent of those elected belonged to ‘pro-agreement’ parties” (137).

There are 108 seats in the Northern Irish Assembly, with representatives being elected from 17 six-seat districts. This is not an ideal case study because the district magnitude does not vary and there are only a small number of districts. Nonetheless, after three recent elections – 1998, 2003 and 2007 – a total of 51 cases might be analysed using data on the ethnic composition of constituencies, the relative strengths of parties, and their nomination habits, to assess the effects of these (and possibly other variables) on vote-pooling dynamics in Northern Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland might provide additional data on inter-sectarian vote pooling in STV systems. Ireland has used STV since 1922. In its current incarnation, the Irish electoral system is comprised of 3-, 4- and 5-member districts and by-elections are fought in (large) single-member districts using AV rules (see Farrell 2001). These data could therefore be used to assess the impact of district magnitude, and other variables, on vote-pooling in STV systems.

Those who study the effects of electoral systems on ethnic, religious, or ideological accommodation are primarily interested in national political outcomes: the relative strengths of parties, the composition of coalition governments, political stability, and policy outcomes. However, Horowitz's theories of vote pooling in preferential systems refer to election dynamics *within* individual electoral districts. The impacts of institutional design on vote pooling across ethnic, religious, or ideological divides must be assessed at this level. This is what we intend to do.

This paper is merely a first step. It has put the literature into context and more importantly, identified where the areas of greatest contention lie. It has not only pinpointed a vital area of discrepancy between the schools of thought, but also identified

a flaw in previous empirical tests that have attempted to engage this debate. By identifying the need to change to level of analysis away from the national level and down to the district level opens empirical doors that previously were locked. We have proposed a test that drastically increases the number of cases available to study and it allows greater nuance to the general and largely descriptive arguments that have been made by those working at the national level. It allows for a greater merging of qualitative analysis of specific systems with large 'N' quantitative analysis of electoral results. The relationship between ethnic conflict and electoral systems is complicated and multi-layered. Any tests of this relationship must mirror that reality. We have only begun this process- the data must be collected and analyzed but we contend that we have begun a process that will shine more light on this debate and bring us closer to a real understanding of the impact of electoral design on ethnic conflict.

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