Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems

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Because they channel, aggregate and express political demands, political parties play an important role in the management of conflict in societies divided along cultural, linguistic, religious, regional or other kinds of ‘ethnic’ lines. However, the impact that parties have on ethnic conflict varies depending on the way in which such cleavages are expressed by the party system. Ethnically-based parties, for example, typically claim to represent the interests of one group alone. By making ethnically-specific appeals to mobilize voters, the emergence of such parties often has a centrifugal effect on politics, heightening ethnic tensions. The role of ethnic Serb and Croat parties in undermining the consolidation of democracy in post-war Bosnia is a case in point. By contrast, multi-ethnic parties need to appeal to a broader support base, and thus tend to have a more centrist impact, aggregating diverse interests and de-emphasising mono-ethnic demands. India’s Congress Party is often held up as a classic example of the advantages for social integration and conflict management of a broad-based governing party committed to national cohesion and stability.

Political parties are thus intimately linked to the rise and fall of conflict in ethnically plural societies. But despite the impressive body of scholarship on constitutional engineering that has appeared over the past decade, there has been surprisingly little attention given to the ways in which multi-ethnic parties can be developed and sustained. Political parties have typically been viewed as social phenomena beyond the scope of deliberate institutional engineering. There are several reasons for this. Because political parties in theory represent the political expression of underlying societal cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), parties and party systems have not usually been thought to be amenable to overt political engineering. While some authoritarian states have attempted to control the development of their party system (eg the mandated ‘two-party’ or ‘three-party’ systems that existed under military rule in Nigeria and Indonesia respectively, or

1 For what is still the best discussion of ethnic parties and party systems, see Horowitz 1985.
2 See, for example, Sartori 1994, Diamond 1999, Reynolds 2002.
the ‘no-party’ system that currently exists in Uganda), most democracies allow parties to develop freely. Because of this, parties are generally understood to remain beyond the reach of formal political engineering in most circumstances.

Recent years, however, have seen some ambitious attempts to influence the development of party systems in a range of ethnically-diverse countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Papua New Guinea. In the discussion of these and other cases which follows, this paper presents an initial survey of some the different institutional and political strategies for encouraging the development of broad, cross-regional or multi-ethnic parties and party systems that have been used around the world. First, however, it is necessary to step back and look at the relationship between parties, ethnicity and democracy more generally.

**Party politics and ethnic conflict**

One reason that democracy is inherently problematic in ethnically-divided societies is because of the pressures for politicization of identity issues. Because it is often easier to mobilize support by appealing to ethnic allegiances rather than issues of class or ideology, aspiring politicians have a strong incentive to mobilize support along ethnic lines. Unscrupulous political leaders who ‘play the ethnic card’ can be rewarded with electoral success. As rival parties respond in kind, a process of ‘outbidding’ can easily take hold, pushing the locus of political competition towards the extremes (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). In this way, the presence of ethnic parties can easily lead to increasing ethnic tensions and, in some cases, the outbreak of ethnic conflict.

The extent to which this occurs depends significantly on the extent to which a country’s party system is ethnically-based or not. One reason peace and democracy is more prevalent in mono-ethnic societies than in multi-ethnic ones is due to the particular ways that parties form, develop and campaign in ethnically-divided societies. Specifically, “in ethnically divided and multi-ethnic societies, political parties tend to form around ethnic allegiances. This is particularly the case in multiethnic states where ethnic groups are not heterogeneously dispersed throughout the country, but live in specific geographic
regions” (Freedom House 2000). A recurring feature of democratization in multi-ethnic states in Africa, Asia and the former Soviet Union has been the rapid emergence of parties which draw their support exclusively from one ethnic group or region and are committed to the realization of nationalist or separatist agendas (Ishiyama and Breuning 1998). Given that such parties mobilize support by making powerful emotional appeals to issues of identity, history and survival, it is not surprising that ethnic conflict is often a direct result of the appearance of these ‘ethnic parties’.

A particular danger-point is when a society is in the throes of rapid political change, for it is at this point that exclusive ethno-nationalist appeals are often the first recourse of would-be politicians (Mansfield and Snyder 1995). In such circumstances, the easiest way to mobilize voter support at election time is often to appeal to the root insecurities of the population. Electoral politics can easily turn into a contest between sectarian parties competing on identity issues. There are many examples of this. Post-communist elections in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s resulted in the victory of extremist nationalist parties, committed to (and achieving) the break-up of the federation. The 1993 elections in Burundi, which were supposed to elect a power-sharing government, instead mobilised population groups along ethnic lines and served as a catalyst for the ethnic genocide that was to follow. In post-Dayton Bosnia, the major parties have continued to form along ethnic lines and voters have continued to elect them to power, despite the efforts of the international community. In each of these cases, ethnic politics has had a negative impact on democratization. As Gunther and Diamond (2001, 23-4) write, “The electoral logic of the ethnic party is to harden and mobilize its ethnic base with exclusive, often polarizing appeals to ethnic group opportunity and threat … the ethnic party’s particularistic, exclusivist, and often polarizing political appeals make its overall contribution to society divisive and even disintegrative”.

For this reason, scholars and policymakers alike have frequently identified the need to build broad-based, aggregative and multi-ethnic political parties if inter-ethnic violence is to be avoided and the routines of peaceful democratic politics consolidated in fragile multi-ethnic states. Horowitz (1985, 1991), for example, has consistently advocated the need for broad multi-ethnic parties or coalitions of parties as a key facilitating factor for
avoiding ethnic conflict. Similarly, Huntington (1991) argues that fractionalized and ethnically or regionally exclusive party systems are extremely damaging for democratic prospects and are, consequently, found widely in the failed democracies of the Third World. A particularly dangerous form of party system is that of ‘polarized pluralism’ (Sartori 1976) featuring competition between extremist movements. Under such conditions, the logic of elections changes from one of convergence on median policy positions to one of extreme divergence. Politics becomes a centrifugal game. Such fragmented party constellations are empirically far more likely to experience violence and the breakdown of democracy than more moderate multipartism based on a few ‘catch-all’ political parties (Powell 1982). Indeed, almost all cases of violent civil war in recent years have featured mono-ethnic political parties striving to implement ethnically-exclusive agendas (see Gurr 2000).

The impacts of party system fragmentation go beyond the issue of ethnicity itself. In his classic work on political change, Huntington argued that strong parties are “the prerequisite for political stability in modernizing countries” (1967:412). Comparative research across a range of contemporary democracies supports this: broad-based parties with strong ties to the electorate are associated with higher overall levels of development than other party systems (Powell 1982:101), with party system fragmentation presenting a particular barrier to achieving substantive economic reform (Haggard and Webb 1992). Ideally, a small number of aggregative, programmatic parties capable of translating public preferences into coherent government policy is probably the optimum party system model. Several comparative studies have emphasized the benefits of such ‘moderate multipartism’ for the survival of new democracies. For example, Haggard and Kaufman (1994) found that a two-party system or stable coalition organized on a left-right basis is the most propitious arrangement for democratic durability. Diamond, Linz and Lipset’s 26-nation study of democracy in developing countries concluded that “a system of two or a few parties, with broad social and ideological bases, may be conducive to stable democracy” (1995, 35). In the same vein, Weiner and Özbudun (1987) found that the standout common factor amongst the small number of continuous third-world democracies was the presence of an aggregative party system featuring a small number of broad-based political parties.
The issue of party system aggregation is separate from, but related to, that of ethnic parties. Of course, not all ethnic parties are extremist, just as not all programmatic parties are centrist, and party system fragmentation does not necessarily mean party system polarization. The level of institutionalization of party politics is a key intermediate factor here. By moderating and channeling political participation, institutionalized parties are widely seen as key components in managing incipient conflicts and building a functioning democracy (Huntington 1968). Mainwaring and Scully (1995) argue that party system institutionalization depends on four factors: the regularity of party competition, the extent to which parties have stable roots in society, the extent to which parties and elections are widely accepted as the means of determining who governs, and the extent to which parties are organized internally. By contrast, in inchoate party systems, “party organizations are generally weak, electoral volatility is high, party roots in society are weak, and individual personalities dominate parties and campaigns” (1995, 20). With the exception of electoral volatility, these are also some of the defining characteristics of ethnic parties, which typically have low levels of ideological coherence and programmatic commitment, lack a well-developed organizational structure and membership base, depend on clientelistic mobilization for their electoral success, and tend to be organized around a single charismatic leader (Gunther and Diamond 2001).

Although it is certainly possible for ethnic parties to be successfully institutionalized themselves, they tend to be associated with weak party system institutionalization overall (Randall and Svåsand 2002).

Despite this weight of empirical evidence in favour of aggregative party systems in general, and the bleak assessment of ethnic parties in particular, various approaches to conflict prevention assume and even foster their presence. For example, the guidelines of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) explicitly affirm the right of ethnic minorities to form their own parties and compete for office on an ethnic basis. See, for example, the OSCE’s 1990 Copenhagen declaration at www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/hd/cope90e.htm.
the emergence of new Amerindian parties (Van Cott 1999). By contrast, in Africa and Asia, where new democracies have been literally torn apart under the pressures of tribalism and ethnic mobilization, more effort has been put into retarding or restricting the ability of ethnic groups to form parties in the first place. It is important to recognise this disparity at the outset, as the divergent experiences of different world regions regarding ethnicity and party politics reflects a similar divergence in thinking regarding the best means of ameliorating the dangers of ethnic politics. The contrast here between the developed and the developing world is particularly strong.

The scholarly literature identifies several competing approaches to building sustainable democracy in ethnically-diverse societies. One is to recognize the importance of ethnicity in the political system directly, and to make ethnic groups the building blocks of politics – through, for example, ethnic political parties – which can then be guaranteed representation in a ‘grand coalition’ government. This ‘consociational’ approach is widely associated with the work of Arend Lijphart, of course, and represents probably the best known strategy for managing ethnic tensions in a democratic system (Lijphart 1977). Consociationalism emphasises the need for divided societies to develop mechanisms for elite power-sharing if democracy is to survive the travails of ethnic or other conflicts. The mechanisms for ensuring sustainable power-sharing arrangements are encapsulated in four key features: grand coalition governments in which all ethnic groups are represented; proportional representation of different groups in the distribution of legislative seats and in the civil service; segmental autonomy via federalism or similar devices; and a power of veto over key decisions by minority groups (Lijphart 1977). In terms of electoral arrangements, consociationalists argue for proportional voting systems which enable ethnic groups to be represented in parliament in proportion to their numbers in the general community, allowing ethnically-based parties to form the basis of government (Lijphart 1990). Adroit political leadership is key to the success of such arrangements: ethnic demands are kept in check by elite-level negotiations between the leaders of the various groups. This approach assumes the presence of ethnic parties in divided societies; indeed the basis of consociationalism is that all ethnic groups are free to compose themselves into parties and be represented proportionately in government.
Lijphart developed this institutional prescription from a detailed examination of the features of power-sharing democracy in some continental European countries (the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland), and there is disagreement over how far these measures can work when applied to ethnic conflict in developing countries, if at all (Sisk 1996). Critics also question the assumption that ethnic elites and ethnic parties are willing to act moderately, and that the replication of deep social divisions in the legislature via ethnic parties is a good thing for divided societies, given that much of the evidence from divided societies suggests otherwise (Horowitz 1991). In post-war Bosnia, for example, groups are represented in parliament in proportion to their numbers in the community as a whole, but because the major parties are ethnically-based and can rely exclusively on their own community for their electoral success, they have little incentive to act moderately on ethnic issues, and every incentive to emphasize sectarian appeals. The result at successive elections from 1996-2002 was effectively an ethnic census, with electors voting along ethnic lines and each of the major nationalist parties gaining support almost exclusively from their own ethnic group. Similarly in Guyana, a society polarised between citizens of African and Indian descent, democracy has been undermined by ethnic parties which form either the government or the opposition, despite the use of a highly proportional electoral system (see Reilly and Reynolds 1999).

In contrast to consociationalism, an alternative approach to managing ethnic conflict seeks to move the focus of politics away from ethnicity towards other, less volatile, issues by fostering inter-ethnic cooperation and “making moderation pay” (Horowitz 1991). To do this, politicians need to be made responsive to cross-ethnic pressures, rather than acting solely as the representative of one group alone. Supporters of this approach advocate policies which promote the development of broad-based parties or coalitions of parties, encouraging voters, parties and candidates to transcend ethnic considerations as the defining point of political competition. This involves crafting institutions which de-emphasize the importance of ethnicity in the political process by undermining the potential for mono-ethnic demands. Specific institutions include the use of ‘vote-pooling’ electoral systems which make politicians dependent on several different groups to gain election; devolution via non-ethnic federalism, in order to proliferate points of power;
and the development of non-ethnic or multi-ethnic political parties or coalitions of parties (see Horowitz 1985).

This broad approach has been dubbed ‘centripetalism’, because the objective is to make the focus of political competition centripetal rather than centrifugal (Sisk 1996, Reilly 2001). A centripetal political system or strategy is designed to move political competition towards centrist issues by making politicians seek electoral support from groups beyond their own ethnic community. In my previous work on electoral systems for divided societies (Reilly 1997, Reilly and Reynolds 1999, Reilly 2001), I have illustrated how centripetal strategies can manage ethnic tensions, particularly by using vote-transfer electoral systems which enable a degree of cross-ethnic behavior within the boundaries of electoral politics. I use the term centripetalism as a shorthand for three related but distinct phenomena:

(i) the presentation of electoral incentives for campaigning politicians to reach out to and attract votes from a range of ethnic groups other than their own, thus encouraging them to moderate their political rhetoric and broaden their policy positions in the search for cross-ethnic electoral support;

(ii) the presence of an arena of bargaining, under which political actors from different groups have an incentive to come together to negotiate in the search for reciprocal electoral support via negotiation on vote-pooling deals and hence, perhaps, other more substantial issues; and

(iii) the development of centrist, aggregative and multiethnic political parties or coalitions of parties which are capable of making cross-ethnic appeals and presenting a complex and diverse range of policy options to the electorate.

But how can such party systems be encouraged to develop? My preliminary research on this subject has identified four distinct approaches to the challenge of building multi-ethnic parties and party systems. The first attempts to constrain the development of ethnic parties and reduce the number of parties overall by, for example, requiring parties to demonstrate a broad organizational base. The second rewards inter-ethnic moderation via the design of electoral systems which encourage cross-ethnic or cross-regional vote-
seeking. The third tries to strengthen parties from the top-down via measures aimed at building greater party discipline and organizational capacity. The fourth involves external interventions to shape the nature of party systems in new democracies. A brief description of these approaches follows.

**Constraining Ethnic Parties and Reducing Party Fragmentation**

The most common approach to political engineering of parties and party systems is to introduce regulations which govern the formation, registration and behavior of political parties. Such regulations can ban ethnic parties outright, or make it difficult for small or regionally-based parties to be registered, or require parties to demonstrate a cross-regional or cross-ethnic composition as a pre-condition for competing in elections. Nigeria, for example, requires parties to display a ‘federal character’ by including members from two-thirds of all states on their executive council, and by providing that the name, motto or emblem of the party must not have ethnic or regional connotations. Nigeria has also experimented with other more restrictive party system regulations, ranging from the mandatory two-party system under the military administration of President Babangida to the current rule that parties must win at least five percent of the vote in local elections before they can compete nationally (see Seberu 2001).

Drawing on the Nigerian experience, in recent years some countries – notably Indonesia – have attempted to guide the development of their party systems by more complex strategies. Since the fall of former president Soeharto and the transition to democracy in 1998, over 200 new parties mushroomed in Indonesia, raising concern amongst political elites that the emerging party system was too fragmented, with too many parties, for democratic government to work effectively. Many blamed the fragmented and polarized party system in the 1950s for the failure of democracy then, and were determined not to see it happen again. At the same time, there was an overriding worry, particularly since the breakaway of East Timor in 1999, about the threat of secessionism to the territorial integrity of Indonesia, and the concomitant dangers of regional parties providing a
springboard for separatism. Building a consolidated party system was thus seen as an essential step in countering secessionism and building a consolidated democracy.

To achieve these twin goals – building national parties while resisting separatist ones – Indonesia’s constitutional engineers (particularly the Team Tujuh working out of the Home Affairs Ministry in 1998) developed a complex package of incentives and restraints on party system development. On the one hand, all political parties were required to demonstrate a national support base as a precondition to compete in the 1999 elections. Intending parties had to demonstrate that they had an established branch structure in more than half of Indonesia’s 27 provinces, and within each of these provinces also had to have established branches within over half of all regions and municipalities. These rules were ultimately interpreted relatively liberally, and 48 parties competed at the 1999 elections, although only seven gained significant representation (three of which, GOLKAR, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, and Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, had been the only legally-permitted parties under Soeharto’s reign).

In addition to the provisions encouraging cross-regional membership, there were strong systemic pressures for party amalgamation: parties which failed to gain more than 2% of seats in the lower house of parliament, or at least 3% of all seats in both houses combined, would have to merge with other parties to surmount these thresholds if they wanted to contest future elections. To the surprise of some observers, these merger provision have been enforced in the lead-up to the 2004 elections, meaning that many small parties have had to amalgamate with others. Moreover, the new (2003) party laws go even further than the 1999 ones: in order to compete in the 2004 elections, new parties must prove that they have branches in two-thirds of Indonesia’s provinces and two-thirds of the local government areas (regencies) within those provinces, and each of these regency-level party units must demonstrate that it has at least 1,000 members (or at least one-thousandth of the number of residents in smaller regencies). Given that there are 30 provinces and 416 regencies in Indonesia, these are onerous requirements -- as one commentator noted, if the laws are enforced “parties may, instead of collecting dues from members, be paying them to sign up in future” (Tan 2002: 488).
While the Indonesian laws appear to have been relatively successful in their over-riding aim of preventing separatist parties, encouraging multi-ethnic party formation is easier said than done. Many countries in Africa, Asia and elsewhere have constitutional or legislative requirements which explicitly ban ‘ethnic’ parties from competing in elections, or which require parties to be ‘nationally-focussed’ or similar. For example, in Tanzania the Political Parties Act 1992 requires that parties be ‘national’ in character. A similar law in Ghana requires parties to demonstrate a ‘national character’ before they can be registered by having branches in all 10 regions of the country, and precludes names or symbols which have an ethnic, religious or regional connotation. Togo, Senegal and a range of other African countries have similar rules on their statute books. However, in most cases these are essentially aspirational provisions that are not capable of being enforced effectively. What ultimately makes a party ‘ethnic’ is not the nature of its composition or even the fact that most of its votes come from one group, but the fact that it makes no attempt to appeal to members of other groups.

A more drastic approach to precluding the development of ethnic parties is not just to place restrictions on their development, but to ban political parties altogether. This was a frequent justification for the mandated one-party systems that existed in much of Africa until the early 1990s. Today, Uganda represents the best-known example of such a ‘no-party’ system in action. Under this system, political parties are severely restricted and all candidates for election must run as individuals, not party nominees. President Yoweri Museveni imposed the no-party system in 1986, citing the way in which political parties had inflamed racial and ethnic conflict as the main justification for the new laws. Prior to this, politics in Uganda featured a complex inter-weaving of ethnic and party politics, with parties mobilizing votes on the basis of ethnicity, region, and religion. The instability that this created was widely seen as having led to the Idi Amin dictatorship in the 1970s. Since its introduction, surveys have shown strong public support for the ‘no-party’ system, and international criticism has been surprisingly muted despite the fact that it has allowed the governing National Resistance Movement to monopolize power (see Kasfir 1998). But it is doubtful whether such a system is a feasible long-term solution to managing the confluence of ethnic and party politics, especially given the apparent
tendency of such arrangements to degenerate into *de facto* one-party rule. In democratic settings, party systems cannot be fashioned by government fiat alone.

**Encouraging Moderation via Electoral System Design**

A second approach to political party engineering has been to use the electoral system to try to refashion the party system. There are several ways of doing this. One of the most common is to adopt a closed party-list form of political representation, thus giving party leaders the ability to dictate the composition of their party lists. In some countries, this has enabled a more conscious strategy of multi-ethnicity than would have been possible otherwise. In Singapore, for example, most MPs are elected from multi-member districts known as Group Representative Constituencies, which each return between three and six members from a single list of party or individual candidates. Of the candidates on each party or group list, at least one must be a member of the Malay, Indian or some other minority community, thus ensuring a degree of multi-ethnicity on party slates.4 Similarly, some have argued that the closed-list proportional representation system used in South Africa’s 1994 elections enabled the major political parties to adopt a similarly multi-ethnic approach there by making sure minority candidates were placed in winnable positions on the party list (Sisk 1995, Reilly and Reynolds 1999). In Bosnia, however, reformers have moved in other direction, adopting open-list voting – a move supposed to increase accountability between voters and their representatives and provide space for moderate or non-ethnic candidates, but which comparative experience from other countries suggests can actually impede cross-ethnic behaviour.5

In the Philippines, the 1998 elections saw the first application of a different kind of party-list system designed to encourage diversity, with 20 percent of the parliament elected

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4 A related approach has been used for some time in Lebanon, although there the ultimate composition of the party lists rests with the voters.

5 In Sri Lanka, for example, the introduction of open-list voting undermined moves towards cross-ethnic politics by enabling Sinhalese voters to effectively subvert any attempts to place Tamil candidates in winnable positions on a party’s candidate list. See de Sila 1979.
from special list seats. These seats are not open to established parties but are designed to represent ‘sectoral interests’ and marginalized groups such as youth, labor, the urban poor, farmers, fishermen and women. Any group securing at least 2% of the party-list vote gets a seat, up to a maximum of three seats. However, the list seats have been dogged by problems. In 1998, only 13 of the 52 list seats were filled, as electoral authorities struggled to verify the credentials of elected groups. Following the 2001 elections, the Supreme Court found that most of the groups elected did not in fact represent minorities, and that some indeed had links to the major parties (see May 2002). The lists seats have, however, resulted in more diversity within parliament than would otherwise be the case. Indeed, some have argued that the only way to get genuine party development and accountability in the Philippines is to allocate a much larger portion of the parliament to the party lists, eliminate the provision capping the number of seats available to each group, and allow established political parties to participate in the party-list component of elections (Montinola 1999).

Other electoral system innovations can be used to counter party fractionalization and encourage inter-party cooperation and coalition. In the former category are devices like vote thresholds, which aim to prevent the election of too many small parties in parliament. Probably the most extreme application of this is in Turkey, where parties must attain at least 10 percent of the national vote (and constituency-level thresholds also apply) before they can be represented in parliament, thus discriminating strongly against smaller parties, especially those with geographically-concentrated support bases (Özbudun 2001). In the latter category are vote-pooling electoral systems in which electors rank-order candidates, and votes are transferred according to these rankings. These systems can encourage cross-party cooperation and aggregation by making politicians from different parties reciprocally dependent on transfer votes from their rivals. For example, the single transferable vote system used at Northern Ireland’s crucial 1998 ‘Good Friday’ election enabled ‘pro-agreement’ Republican and Unionist voters to give their first vote to their communal party, but to transfer their secondary preference votes to pro-agreement non-communal parties -- thus advantaging the ‘moderate middle’ of non-ethnic parties and altering the dynamics of a seemingly intractable conflict. A related system, the alternative vote, has been adopted in two ethnically-divided South
Pacific states, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, in recent years. Encouraging the development of a more aggregative party system was one of the primary goals of the electoral reforms in both cases (see Reilly 2001).

A final option for promoting cross-ethnic parties is to introduce distribution requirements which require parties or individual candidates to garner specified support levels across different regions of a country, rather than just their own home base, in order to be elected. First introduced in Nigeria in 1979, distribution requirements have so far been applied exclusively for presidential elections in large, ethnically-diverse states in order to ensure that winning candidates receive a sufficiently broad spread of votes, rather than drawing their support from a few regions only. The original formulation in Nigeria’s 1979 constitution required successful presidential candidates to gain a plurality of votes nationwide and at least a quarter of the votes in thirteen of Nigeria’s then nineteen states. In 1989, this provision was made even more onerous, requiring a president to win a majority overall and at least one-third of the vote in at least two-thirds of all states in the Federation (Suberu 2001). In the event that a single candidate does not meet this requirement, a runoff election is required. The Kenyan constitution provides a similar threshold, requiring successful candidates to win a plurality of the vote as well one-quarter of the valid votes cast in at least five of the eight provinces.

There is significant disagreement amongst scholars and other observers as to the real utility of such measures, with some interpreting them as impotent and even harmful mechanisms which can subvert democratic consolidation, while others seeing them potentially important mechanisms for muting ethnic conflict and ensuring the election of broad, pan-ethnic presidents (see Sisk 1996, 55). The empirical evidence to date reflects this divergence of opinion. In Kenya, for example, president Daniel arap Moi consistently subverted requirements that he receive cross-country support by manipulating tribal politics to ensure the continuation of his presidency, even as his own popularity was falling. Yet the new Kenyan president, Mwai Kibaki, recently won a landslide victory under the same system. Similarly in Nigeria, despite serious problems with the workings of the system in the past, the transitional May 1999 presidential election which swept Olesegun Obasanjo to power appeared to work largely as intended. At the election,
Obasanjo ran on a cross-ethnic platform and in fact gained greater votes outside his own region than within it -- precisely because, it appears, he campaigned on a cross-regional multi-ethnic platform. Obasanjo was re-elected in 2003 under the same provisions.

A related reform has recently been introduced in Indonesia. In 2004, for the first time, a direct national election will be held to elect Indonesia’s president and vice-president. Like the new party laws, the presidential election voting system has been designed to ensure that the most broadly representative candidate is elected. A two-round system will be used, with candidates for the presidency and vice presidency running as a team. In order to avoid a second round of voting, first-round winners must gain over 50% of all votes as well as a minimum of 20% in half of all provinces. This latter provision was borrowed from Nigeria, whose experience has been widely discussed in Jakarta in recent years. Again, the aim is to ensure that the winning candidate not only has majority support overall, but also has broad, cross-regional support as well. In this respect, the presidential electoral law is consistent with the centripetal logic of Indonesia’s new laws on party formation, which aim to promote parties with a cross-regional support base.

**Top-down approaches to party building**

A third approach to building multiethnic parties is what I call the “top-down” approach, which carries the expectation that parties can be ‘built’, to a certain extent, not from below (as is usually the case), but from above. This approach usually focuses on increasing party discipline and cohesion in parliament as a means of stabilising party politics, in the hope that more disciplined parliamentary parties will lead to a more structured party system overall. One way to do this is to restrict the capacity of members to change parties once elected. This practice, which was once widespread in many Asian countries, has been curtailed in recent years by the introduction of “anti-hopping” provisions in states like India, Malaysia, Thailand and Papua New Guinea. These have made it difficult or impossible for a politician elected under one party label to change

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6 The second round of voting, if required, will be a straight runoff between the two leading candidate teams, with no distribution requirements.
allegiance to another party once in office (for a survey of these, see Hassall and Saunders 2002). However, such restrictions have little sway over party defections which take place outside the parliamentary arena.

Another approach is to provide direct assistance to party organizations via public funding to political parties, usually on the basis of their vote share at previous elections, which tends to have the net effect of advantaging existing parties and raising the barrier to newcomers. Free airtime on television and radio is another form of direct assistance to parties. Notably, both forms of public support can also be used to encourage particular kinds of party structures by, for example, specifically discriminating against extremist, fringe or ethnic parties.

In some countries, political parties are so weak as to be essentially irrelevant in the electoral process. In many Pacific Island countries, for example, independent candidates with no party affiliation are the major political force in parliament. In such cases, more ambitious institutional innovation is required. One such institutional innovation has recently been enacted in Papua New Guinea, which has over 800 indigenous languages and thousands of competing tribal groups, making stable government extremely difficult. A package of constitutional reforms introduced in 2001 aimed to stabilize executive government and build a coherent party system in parliament. The reform package represents an ambitious attempt to rework Papua New Guinea’s political system from above by introducing new rules governing the formation, composition and funding of political parties; financial incentives for elected candidates to form themselves into parliamentary parties; constitutional provisions aimed at stabilizing executive government by limiting no-confidence votes against the executive; restrictions on the capacity of party-members to change their support for key parliamentary votes; a new system of party registration and funding; and reforms to the electoral system in order to encourage majority winners, manage inter-group conflicts, and promote female candidates. Taken together, this package represents one of the most far-reaching attempts to engineer the political system undertaken by a democracy anywhere in the world. While
the new laws are now in place, their full effect will not be evident until 2007, when the next Papua New Guinea elections are due.7

**External Interventions**

A final approach to political party engineering in ethnically divided societies has been for external actors to attempt to intervene directly in the development of the party system. This often involves channeling technical or financial assistance from international donor agencies, NGOs, or multilateral agencies to party organizations in those states in which the international community has taken a prominent role, such as new or transitional democracies. Building coherent party systems in post-conflict societies is a particularly difficult process, as parties often form around the very same cleavages which spurred the original conflict, polarizing the political system and leading to a continuation of the former conflict through the new ‘democratic’ political process (Reilly 2002a). Increasing awareness of the problems caused by such polarized or otherwise dysfunctional party systems has lately spurred international actors such as the United Nations and other multilateral bodies – which have traditionally been wary of direct involvement in politics, preferring more traditional kinds of development assistance -- to take a more active role in assisting political party development in some countries.

The most ambitious actors in this field have been the international democracy promotion organizations which have proliferated over the past decade (Carothers 1999). Because they are not bound by the same strictures as multilateral agencies, some of these have attempted to directly shape the development of the party system in recipient countries, including in ethnically-divided ones. In Bosnia, for example, the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute openly and actively promoted and assisted putatively multi-ethnic parties such as the Unified List coalition in preference to nationalist parties such as the Serbian SDS or the Croatian HDZ.8 Also in Bosnia, a range of related reforms to the electoral system and other areas introduced by the OSCE have attempted to undercut

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7 For an extend analysis of the new laws see Reilly 2002c.

8 See National Democratic Institute 1996.
nationalist parties by changing voting procedures and, in some cases, barring individual candidates from election. However, despite some inflated claims to the contrary, the success of such interventions to date has been modest, and ethnic parties continue to dominate the political process.

The vexed problem of transforming armies into parties after a protracted period of conflict continues to trouble international interventions in this field. As one survey of post-conflict elections concluded, “Democratic party building is proving to be a slow process. In all the [post-conflict] countries, political parties are organized around personalities, narrow political interests, and tribal and ethnic loyalties” (Kumar 1998, 218). In Kosovo, for example, the ongoing worry that previous ethnic conflicts fought by armed forces would be replicated in the form of new ethnically-exclusive and violence-prone political parties prompted the OSCE to introduce a network of ‘political party service centres’, intended to support the territory’s nascent political groupings and help move them towards becoming functioning, policy-oriented political parties. Whether such an approach to external party building is actually feasible, however, remains to be seen. Historically, the most successful example of such a transition is probably the armies-to-parties transformation wrought by the United Nations in Mozambique, where a special-purpose trust fund and some creative international leadership succeeded in bringing the previous fighting forces of Frelimo and Renamo into the political fold (Synge 1997). Recent proposals for political party assistance in Afghanistan have also focussed on this kind of approach.

**Conclusion**

It is today widely recognized that parties play a crucial role not just in representing interests, aggregating preferences, and forming governments, but also in managing conflict. The capacity of parties to manage incipient or actual conflicts depends crucially on the nature of the party system and the structure of individual parties. This much is now

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9 See http://www.oscebih.org.
10 See http://www.osce.org/kosovo.
generally accepted. Despite this, viewing parties as malleable entities which can be engineered in the same manner as other parts of the political system remains controversial. While strategies to influence parties and party systems are not new, parties have traditionally been assumed to develop organically, rather than being designed in the manner of other, formal, political institutions.

However, comparative experience suggests that it is difficult to sustain multi-ethnic parties in divided societies without some explicit intervention in the party system. In recent years, such ‘political engineering’ has become an increasingly common means of influencing party system development, particularly in ethnically-plural societies. In contrast to earlier decades, most of the recent innovations in this field have taken place in new democracies, rather than established ones, and have featured centripetal rather than consociational approaches to party system reform. These centripetal approaches have focussed not just on providing incentives for multi-ethnicity, but also on limiting political fragmentation and building more aggregative and stable political systems overall.

Given that many of the reforms have not yet been tested in action, the jury is still out on the success of this approach. However, there are already some clear trends emerging. First, initial attempts to reduce political fragmentation in some of the most important test cases appear to be succeeding, in part at least. Indonesia, for example, has seen a dramatic reduction in party fragmentation today compared to four years ago, when hundreds of new parties appeared on the scene. Some estimates suggest that the 48 parties which contested the 1999 elections could be reduced to just six for 2004 (Tan 2002, 488). Given the new requirements for cross-national membership and support, all of these parties are likely to be broad-based – a significant achievement, given Indonesia’s history and the dangers of acute fragmentation that it faces. Similarly in Nigeria, the mere fact that democracy has survived the stresses of ethnic cleavages through several national elections to date represents at least a partial validation of the political engineering approach.

But moving away from fragmentation has costs as well as benefits. In Indonesia, the new laws clearly benefit incumbent parties by restricting the level of political competition, and place real barriers on new entrants into the political marketplace. In Turkey, vote
thresholds and bans on ethnic parties have not been able to constrain a further fragmentation of the party system (Özbudun 2001). Similarly, the presence of vote-pooling electoral systems has not been enough to stave off anti-system pressures in Northern Ireland or in Fiji (see Reilly 2002b).

A more comprehensive evaluation of the success of party engineering will therefore have to wait. In the meantime, however, three conclusions suggest themselves. First, political engineering has clearly evolved from being focused upon formal constitutional rules to include less formal organizations such as political parties. Second, developing countries are at the forefront of this movement, and (as the diffusion of the Nigerian system to Indonesia shows) in recent years have been clearly the most influential innovators in this field. And third, because many of the new democracies in the developing world are also ethnically plural societies, they face the twin challenge of consolidating democracy while managing the politicization of ethnicity. Large, complex ethnically-diverse states like Nigeria and Indonesia are therefore trying to manage ethnic divisions and consolidate democracy simultaneously, by providing incentives for cross-ethnic accommodation in the context of electoral competition – an audacious experiment in political engineering which is likely to have important lessons for other countries.
References


