

**Constructing Democratic Institutions in  
Divided Societies:  
The Case of Iraq**

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**Comprehensive Exercise in Political Science**

**March 7, 2005**

Failed democratic transitions in plural societies often result in the bloodiest conflicts and most damaging power struggles in the developing world today. In recent decades, the world has experienced a prevalence of intra-state conflict that is largely a result of ethnic tensions within newly democratized countries. As the final vestiges of the old military regimes fade away, formerly repressed ethnic tensions in many developing countries have exploded to the surface. Widespread violence, systematic repression, coups, bloody riots and even genocide are the modern norms for conflict in such cases. This trend is likely to continue in other multi-ethnic and democratizing countries such as Iraq if preventative measures are not taken. Recognizing the causes of failed democracy in these countries is a critical first step. How can these new democracies better manage destructive internal forces and prevent themselves from descending into fratricidal conflict? The literature on ethnic conflict outlines four major challenges to democratization in multi-ethnic societies. These are the problems of majority dominance, undemocratic competition, ethnic organization, and secession.

Majority dominance is often the most difficult of these challenges to prevent. It occurs as a result of the largest ethnic group's legitimate use and subsequent usurpation of the democratic system to establish a 'tyranny of the majority' (Byman, 2003:52). Shi'a Muslims in Iraq, comprising over 60% of the population, have the potential to use their majority status in such a fashion. Minority groups who are pushed out of the system by larger groups often respond to this exclusion by using violence as their only method of competing for power (Horowitz, 1985: 681). The second challenge is to prevent minority exclusion from descending into violence. Third, there is a strong tendency for political parties to form along ethnic or religious lines, which deepens existing conflicts and can lead once again to majority dominance (Horowitz, 1985: 291). Fourth, when democratic competition exacerbates ethnic rivalries there is also a

tendency for groups that feel excluded to pursue secession as a means of controlling their political fate, this too must be avoided.

The key to guiding ethnic conflict into productive channels is institutional structure. The focus of this paper is the idea that “well-structured democratic institutions allow conflicts to formulate, find expression and be managed in a sustainable way...rather than being suppressed or ignored,” which in turn leads to violence (Reilly, 2001: 5). Democracy in Iraq is more likely to be successful if it enables the former, whether or not it does will depend heavily on institutional design. Experiences of other multi-ethnic democracies can be extremely helpful to determine which institutional combinations work. This paper will test institutional configurations in three other multi-ethnic countries – India, Spain, and Nigeria – to find which institutions have worked in divided societies and which are applicable to Iraq. By analyzing the potential effects of various institutional configurations in these three case studies the empirical section will illustrate the ability of democratic institutions to address ethnic conflict. With this information and additional support from the relevant academic literature on ethnic conflict and democratic institutions, it will be possible to determine what configurations can ensure a lasting democratic rule in Iraq. These institutions will provide representation for all groups yet encourage cooperation and coalition building across ethnic lines in order to address the main challenges of democracy in divided societies.

### **Logic of Institutional Engineering in Plural Democracies**

Creating democracy in Iraq will require meticulous planning and consideration of the implications for each institution regarding the challenges to democracy in plural societies. The four independent variables that address the challenges of majority dominance, undemocratic competition, ethnic rivalry, and secession are the government, electoral, party, and federal

systems, respectively. The configuration of these variables determines whether or not the dependent variable, stable democracy, can take root in a country with so many social and political obstacles to its existence. I use the specification of stable democracy in favor of simple democracy because it implies the existence of a well-established working democratic government that effectively dispenses of its duties and mitigates ethnic conflict as a result. The presence of democracy itself is not sufficient if its institutional structure does not provide good governance. A democratic system of government in Iraq must have a properly tailored institutional design in order to effectively manage the country's unique ethnic situation. Some of the literature on ethnic conflict suggests directing conflict through the political process before it turns to violence (Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2001). The goal of this paper will be to ascertain which combination of democratic institutions will provide stable governance in Iraq by incorporating the major ethnic groups while preventing a tyranny of the majority or popular discontent as a result of perceived inequality.

Much of the ethnic conflict literature calls for multiparty systems in order to accommodate heterogeneous societies such as Iraq's (Glickman, 1995; Horowitz, 1994; Osaghae, 2004; Reilly, 2001).<sup>1</sup> Two party systems put minorities at risk through exclusion, which can lead to violence (Glickman, 1995: 6). Multiparty systems are thus preferable because they make it more difficult for larger ethnic groups to create a tyranny of the majority. Government systems, either presidential or parliamentary, determine the efficacy of multipartism in a democracy, with parliaments being the most compatible with a higher number of parties. Mainwaring (1993) shows that multiparty presidential democracies make stable democracy

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<sup>1</sup> Byman and Pollack (2003) suggest that a two-party system similar to that of the United States would encourage compromise and prevent a tyranny of the majority. I take issue with this statement. A system with weak parties and an indirectly elected executive would alienate an incredible percentage of the population and severely challenge the country's stability. Horowitz's assessment of the propensity for world powers to impose their political systems considers such practices "a serious foreign-policy failure," (Horowitz, 1994; 52).

difficult to sustain because of the rigidity of terms, lack of support in the legislature, and difficulty in forming coalitions that are common in presidential systems. Ethnic divides in Iraq exhibit a clear need for multipartism and a presidential system of government would jeopardize the stability of a multiparty system.

Similarly, a multiparty system's inclusiveness depends upon the electoral system. Multi-ethnic societies require very inclusive electoral systems because the exclusion of groups often results in violence as they attempt to gain power over, not within, the system (Horowitz, 1985). Majoritarian electoral systems promote stability by consolidating legislative power in a single winning majority, while proportional representation (PR) systems often have more party representation in government at the expense of some stability (Shugart and Carey, 1992: 12).

Each system has some desirable qualities. Yet the disadvantages are too severe in both cases for one to hold an advantage over the other. Byman and Pollack claim Iraq needs a system that will promote centralization because PR would prevent inter-ethnic cooperation (Byman and Pollack, 2003: 128). While promoting cooperation to minimize cleavages is desirable, centralizing through plurality elections could have negative consequences. Lipset and Rokkan explain that majority elections in a religiously divided society "could clearly threaten the continued existence of the political system," (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 32). Shugart and Wattenberg (2001) propose the use of mixed-member proportional (MMP) systems as a solution to this problem because they encourage cooperation and provide equal representation without the compromising drawbacks of others. Given the potential consequences of creating an unstable PR or an exclusionary plurality system, MMP is an essential compromise

MMP systems allocate seats in two ways. Representatives are elected at the local level using a single member plurality formula (SMP) and national representatives are elected by party

list. The local plurality seats encourage large inclusive parties as majoritarian systems tend to do while the PR vote dilutes some of the disproportionality created at the local level and gives small parties national representation (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). The end result is a system with incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation on both levels. It limits the number of regional parties with SMP, which has a diminishing effect on the number and size of parties at the national level.

MMP is inherently a system of compromise as it forces parties to be accountable locally and nationally, encouraging moderate policy and coalition building and thus addressing the problems of ethnic party formation. Also, the tiered structure of these systems provides both local and national support for parties, broadening their influence while forcing cooperation among groups. An MMP system's moderating incentives would have a favorable effect on Iraqi parties. Strong, programmatic parties in Iraq are also essential for addressing the needs of all major groups. They represent coherent, cohesive ideologies and prevent the party system from descending into a factionalized mess of small, exclusionary, and personalistic parties. MMP's incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation among and within parties encourage programmatic party formation, which minimize social cleavages, thus avoiding these disturbing problems.

Whether parties are formed along ethnic lines or others, such as class, is a considerable determinant of their ideological and electoral characteristics. In multi-ethnic societies there is a tendency for parties to immediately form along ethnic lines. While they may encourage vigorous competition at first, ethnic parties often exacerbate underlying conflicts and lead to minority exclusion (Horowitz, 1985). There are some scholars, however, who recognize the need to manage ethnic parties because they are unavoidable in most cases. Michael Rubin (2004) acknowledges the possibility that most parties in Iraq will run on religious platforms because society is organized as such and indeed the country's first elections in January 2005 confirmed

this claim. However, there simply exists a greater likelihood that ethnic or religious parties will lead to the exclusion of minorities and create violence as radicals within them seek the support of chauvinist voters. Thus, non-ethnic parties are preferable in Iraq considering the extent and hostility of ethnic divisions.

Finally, ethnically diverse countries often face the difficulty of preserving unity in the face of demands for special recognition by different groups. Federalism is a common answer to this problem among plural democracies. Every lasting plural democracy has some form of federalism to enable the management of ethnic demands (Stepan, 1999: 1). Lijphart (1999) defines federalism as a guaranteed division of power between central and regional governments and its purpose is to protect decentralization, which places significant decision-making power in the hands of regional governments. The various forms of federal systems used by India, Spain, and Nigeria will show how this variable can mitigate ethnic demands, with varying levels of success, by providing groups with some autonomy. However, improperly designed or nonexistent federalism can allow secessionist demands to take hold and tear a country apart. The federal system is thus a significant aspect of any country's institutional structure and will certainly be for Iraq as well.

There is a measure of disagreement in the scholarly literature over whether federal systems that uphold ethnic divisions are more effective than those designed to blur them. Some argue that regional divisions based on ethnicity can help to create unity within a plural society by making it seem less heterogeneous. This is called incongruent federalism because the separate regions do not resemble the country as a whole, making society appear less diverse overall (Lijphart, 1999: 195-6). As a result, social antagonism is minimized by each regions self-identity as a unique part of a greater whole. However, Byman (2003) argues that homogenous

regions prevent the formation of a national identity and instead reinforce differences, threatening the unity of multi-ethnic countries. Unfortunately it is difficult to support either of these arguments from evidence in the literature alone because each has succeeded and failed in real application. However, if democratizing multi-ethnic countries such as Iraq require inclusive cohesion-inducing institutions as the scholars on ethnic conflict suggest, further testing will reveal that such countries would benefit from parliamentary government with a tiered electoral system, strong programmatic parties, and a decentralized federal structure.

### *A Deductive Approach*

Iraq is the most recent case in a long list of multi-ethnic, formerly authoritarian countries to experience democratic transition. India, Spain, and Nigeria are very similar to Iraq in this respect. In addition, each has some institutional traits that might be exportable to Iraq given their previous success. The empirical section of this paper examines how government, electoral, party, and federal systems address the challenges of majority dominance, undemocratic competition, ethnic organization, and secessionism. To do this, I will analyze the cases' current institutions and test the literature's two main configurations in the cases as well. These configurations are: a multi-party parliamentary government with PR, ethnic-based parties, and incongruent centralized federalism; and a multi-party parliamentary government with MMP strong programmatic parties, and congruent decentralized federalism. This approach will allow me to determine which democratic institutions would be most stable in Iraq given their performances elsewhere.

### **Forging Democracy in Multi-Ethnic Societies: India, Spain, and Nigeria**

A brief elaboration of India, Spain, and Nigeria's current systems will help illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of different institutional configurations in real-world application.

Some of these countries' institutions effectively address their specific problems while others fail to do so. This analysis will lay the groundwork for testing the alternative configurations in these cases by showing how each variation of the independent variables can affect democracy in real situations. The success or failure of these different institutions at addressing the challenges to multi-ethnic democracies will show how the suggested configurations will work in the cases' unique societies and provide some preliminary lessons for Iraq as well.

### *India*

India has a multi-party parliamentary system of government, a majoritarian first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, an incredibly varied party system with some ethnic-based and some programmatic parties, and an incongruent centralized federal system. There are approximately four effective parties in the Lok Sabha, or lower house. With over 1,000 different languages and dozens of religions, Indian society is one of "unparalleled heterogeneity" (Manor, 1996: 463). State boundaries in India are drawn on linguistic lines that cut across most ethno-religious cleavages in order to promote cooperation and minimize, but unfortunately not eliminate, the potential for secessionist claims by mono-ethnic states (Manor, 1996: 466). India's federal system "contains the centrifugal forces that can rip apart a multicultural state" and isolates conflict in the regions where it begins, avoiding proliferation to other regions (Hardgrave, 1995: 79, 84). This system maintains a careful balance between the necessities of representation and central control. Most of these institutions are necessary for the preservation of Indian democracy at the expense of representativeness.

The strength of India's government is its central qualities. The government system enables the presence of multiple national parties, which dilute the Hindu majority through inclusion of other groups but provide a solid political core. The majoritarian electoral system is

clearly necessary to deal with the centrifugal tendencies of the many ethnic groups in Indian society. While it is a less representative system, an alternative PR system would create massive fragmentation and could not keep the country together as long as FPTP has done. Unrepresented minorities would likely resort to competing for power through violence instead of joining larger parties as they do now. The multiparty system has been mostly successful at creating multi-ethnic parties, the Punjab Congress being a strong example. India's federal system is essential to its success as a stable multi-ethnic democracy and avoidance of large-scale secession problems.

The creation of a federal system undoubtedly strengthened Indian democracy as it accommodates the unique needs of different ethnicities (Kohli, 2001: 19). However, the system remains highly centralized and groups' demands for greater autonomy are often repressed. India's institutions are somewhat less than ideal for true representative democracy. Yet despite the notable exceptions of Gao and Kashmir, two regions with histories of violent secessionist conflict, they have provided stability and kept the union intact. An Iraqi system with similar traits that can also prevent secession may be desirable.

### *Spain*

Spain is a multiparty parliamentary democracy with a unique federal system that grants special autonomy to the ethnically distinctive Basque and Catalan regions.<sup>2</sup> State autonomy is a crucial feature of Spanish democracy. The constitution granted immediate autonomy to the Basque country, Catalonia, and Galicia whereas other regions gained autonomy through a slower process (Donaghy and Newton, 1987: 101). It employs a limited PR electoral system with many

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars contest that Spain is semi-federal because the Spanish constitution does not explicitly distinguish it as a federation (Lijphart, 1999: 191). Despite this lack of formality, Spain's democracy meets most definitions of a federal state in that it possesses a guaranteed division of power between central and regional governments (Lijphart, 1999: 187).

small districts and the D'Hondt allocation formula.<sup>3</sup> This system favors larger parties and has simplified the structure of partisan competition in Spain (Gunther, 1989: 836). Additionally, there are 3.6 effective parties in the lower house, most of which are nationally based, and all are programmatic because of the compound identities of Spanish voters. Democratic Spain is considered an *Estado de las Autonomías* (State of Autonomies) in that each region is considerably self-governing. This allows the historical nationalities, namely Basques and Catalans, to pursue their interests within the Spanish government thus fostering both regional and national identities within two-thirds of the population (Moreno, 2001: 2-5). Despite the unfortunate activities of the ETA terrorist group, the State of Autonomies promotes unity through diversity with great success in Spain.

Thus, no single group is in a position to create a tyranny of the majority under this system because national identity coincides strongly with others. The multiparty parliamentary government promotes further inclusion, effectively minimizing this first challenge of plural democracies. Spain's limiting electoral system is also very compatible with its multi-ethnic society. The party system is somewhat limited as a result. However, with almost four effective parties and several others receiving representation in the house of deputies, the system appears to work well in promoting programmatic national and regional parties. Spain's asymmetrical federal structure mitigates ethnic demands with less difficulty than India's, although Spanish society is significantly more homogeneous. The central, regional, and local levels of government within the State of Autonomies allow citizens to view themselves as "both Spanish and as Catalan or Basque," but of course some groups within the Basque and Catalan regions continue to demand greater autonomy or recognition by the central government (Guibernau, 2000: 65, 67).

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<sup>3</sup> D'Hondt is a highest average formula that uses divisors (integers of 1, 2, 3...) to assign seats to the party with the highest average of votes at each interval (Jones, 1995: 9).

This may be an unavoidable occurrence considering the extensive efforts made to institutionally accommodate separatist sentiments.

### *Nigeria*

Nigeria, on the other hand, is a good example of a country with an institutional configuration that does not adequately address its divided society. This failure is all the more problematic considering that regional, ethnic, and religious identities are not cross-cutting as in the other two cases, but rather uphold and deepen one another. Northern Nigeria is predominantly a Hausa-Fulani and Muslim region but the Southern Yoruba region is very Christian (Suberu, 2001: 209). There are several dozen other ethnic groups all associated with different regions of significantly smaller size. The failure of Nigeria's institutions to channel these identities explains the significance of ethnic conflict problems and the difficulty of managing them.

Nigerian democracy is undoubtedly the weakest of the three cases, providing a good example of which institutional choices to avoid. The country continues to experience significant governance problems as a result of its poor institutional structure. Its majoritarian presidential system does not provide sufficient representation for its numerous minorities, allowing majority dominance, as we see in the inability of smaller Christian groups to block the introduction of Islamic Shari'a law. Nigeria manages to avoid the deadlock of multiparty presidentialism as majority dominance overrides the characteristic polarization and the electoral system limits the effective number of parties.

The Nigerian house of representatives, in which there are 2.62 effective parties, is elected in single member districts that further contribute to the exclusion of smaller groups because they are highly disproportional. Parties do not define themselves explicitly on ethnic terms, but most

are based in specific regions that strongly correspond to ethnic and religious groups (Dent, 2000: 164). The existence of ethnic parties in Nigeria has contributed to violence on several occasions as electoral exclusion led smaller groups to perceive the political process as a zero-sum game (Ukiwo, 2003: 117-118). As the only federal African state, Nigeria's federal system is improperly designed and remains highly centralized (Dent, 2000: 159; Ukiwo, 2003: 129). It allows for the exclusion of minorities because of the relatively homogenous composition of states, or congruence. This configuration provides inadequate incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation and allows for the incredible levels of almost constant violence and rioting.

### *Iraq*

In order to better understand how the experiences of these countries will apply to Iraq, a brief elaboration of its ethnic and political situation is in order. Like the case studies, Iraq has a very diverse population. The majority of Iraqis are Arab, about 60% of which are Shi'a residing mostly in the South and the rest are Sunni who largely inhabit an area in the country's Northwest region called the Sunni Triangle. Iraq's largest minority is the Northern Kurdish population, which has experienced a history of violent oppression. The presence of these three major groups in addition to the various tribes and familial alliances within them creates a complex power struggle in the vacuum left by Hussein's Baathist regime.

Each group has a different stake in the new Democratic Iraq. Shiite Iraqis view the current situation as a rare opportunity to attain the power of the majority religious group that they have been denied for so long. Traditionally, the Sunnis maintained control over Iraq's government and natural resources. With the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, many Sunnis fear the loss of this power is inevitable and refused to participate in the general elections or even turned to the violent insurgency as a means of voicing their disapproval (Wong, 2004). Some

Kurds advocate complete secession much like the Basques and Catalans in Spain. Rivalry between secular and religious forces, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and Arabs and Kurds dominates the current political landscape. Consequently, party formation in Iraq will most certainly continue along such ethnic divisions unless the proper institutional incentives encourage more programmatic electoral competition.

Ethnic political rivalry could be the least of Iraq's problems if American and Iraqi forces cannot provide the security that rebuilding this war torn country requires. Diamond (2004) explains that a lack of security undermines political, economic, or civil progress because each depends in part on the other and none can occur if citizens are not safe enough to conduct their business. Thus, the success of any institutional configuration in Iraq depends on the presence of a reasonable amount of security. The experiences of India, Spain, and Nigeria will provide some possible means of avoiding such an unfortunate outcome and ensuring successful democratic government in Iraq.

### **Institutional and Societal Comparison of the Cases and Iraq**

The current institutional configurations of the three cases provide some insight for the potential effects of alternative configurations. They also show what we might expect to occur in Iraq when creating similar institutions. All three democracies have varying degrees of federalism to accommodate their unique societies. The more multi-ethnic countries, India and Nigeria, have centralized governments to keep the country intact. However, Iraq would benefit from a gradual decentralization more similar to Spain's, which fosters regional and national identities by providing autonomy to all states. Although centralization may help preserve the unity of the country, it has alienated citizens in India and Nigeria. There are other ways of

preventing secession and creating centripetal incentives; carefully designed federal and electoral systems are the most effective in this pursuit.

Spain's limited PR system affords moderate representation while limiting the factionalization that can occur in more representative PR formulas. This is an attractive possibility for Iraq as factionalization is almost certain to occur. Although more effective parties will be necessary in order to include all of the groups in society. Majoritarian systems in India and Nigeria have performed adequately. India's institutions provide the necessary central strength to hold such a large and diverse society together as a single country. However, the combination of centralized government and SMD is clearly the major causes of unrest and violence in both countries. Until the 1990s India's Congress Party was able to exclude regional parties from significant representation in national government and remained unresponsive to regional demands because of the centralized federal system, preferring to use Presidents Rule to quell regional opposition.<sup>4</sup> As a result, regional parties have caused significant instability at the national level since the 1990s (Brancati, 2003: 12). Considering that two countries with these institutional similarities address their ethnic challenges with such disparity highlights the fact that institutional engineering must be country-specific above all. Each case addresses its problems differently and similar institutions sometimes produce different results because of their unique societies.

The effective number of parties and their ideologies are the major issues confronting India, Spain, and Nigeria's party systems. It appears that the key to preventing ethnic parties is to "breakdown the salience of ethnicity, rather than foster its representation in parliament," (Reilly, 2001: 21). The Indian and Spanish systems foster multiple identities, promoting

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<sup>4</sup> Presidents Rule is an emergency provision that allows India's president and parliament to assume control of a state's government temporarily in order to deal with "political breakdown" or other problems of errant state governments. However, it is more often utilized to disband the ruling party's opposition (Dasgupta, 2001: 65).

cooperation between groups. India has several multi-ethnic parties because language-based districting creates very heterogeneous constituencies (Manor, 1996: 464). The Spanish system is very good at limiting and centralizing parties through autonomous state institutions (Guibernau, 2000: 64). Conversely, Nigerian parties are very ethnically oriented by region as a result of an incongruent federal system that prevents the emergence of Nigerian identity (Suberu, 2001: 157). We can expect to observe similar results in Iraq if such a system emerges. Redesigning the Nigerian federal system into more ethnically and religiously diverse states would allow for a change in the electoral system that currently prevents minority participation, a central cause of widespread ethnic violence. The multiple levels of exclusion that lead to undemocratic competition and violence in Nigeria's current democracy would be disastrous to Iraqi democracy.

This section has illustrated some of the essential strengths and weaknesses of the three cases, showing what can be expected of the many variations in these variables when testing in other countries, and outlined some general lessons for Iraq in terms of the four main challenges to multi-ethnic democracy. The next section will empirically test two institutional configurations designed to produce distinct results in India, Spain, and Nigeria in order to facilitate a more informed recommendation for enabling stable democratic institutions in Iraq.

### **Exploring Institutional Changes in India, Spain, and Nigeria**

Having gained a general understanding of how democratic institutions perform in plural societies, we can apply this logic to testing some alternative configurations. This section will take two institutional configurations from the literature and test them in India, Spain, and Nigeria to find possible lessons for democracy in Iraq. Their different effects will reveal which types of configuration will be most conducive to a successful Iraqi democracy. The first configuration

consists of a multi-party parliamentary government with PR, ethnic-based parties, and incongruent centralized federalism. The second has a multi-party parliamentary government with MMP, strong programmatic parties, and congruent decentralized federalism. For brevity's sake, this analysis will focus on how institutional differences between current and alternative configurations will affect democracy for the case in question. Yet it will also consider their potential affects on the performance of institutions in common, should they arise.

### *First Institutional Configuration*

The first configuration (multi-party parliamentary government with PR, ethnic-based parties, and incongruent centralized federalism) would affect Indian democracy in two ways. First, a change from plurality elections to PR might address India's inclusion problem by reducing the disproportionality of its current system. A loss of some congruency in the Lok Sabha is likely as a result of more parties winning seats. Conversely, Indian politics could factionalize as radical parties gain representation that FPTP elections previously denied them, creating significant stability problems. Second, ethnic parties may be difficult to form in India although PR might allow for this possibility. Individuals have several levels of identity and tend to focus on one or the other as they become salient in their lives, making issue-based politics more prominent (Manor, 1996: 464). This explains the problems Hindu nationalists have had gaining support for their parties (Hardgrave, 1994:83). Should ethnic parties find prominence, however, violence and revitalized separatist movements are likely to ensue as minority populations react to the exclusion by taking to the streets.

Spain could experience some backlash from the first institutional configuration as well. This configuration lacks the programmatic parties and asymmetrical federalism that Spain has needed to appease its distinct nations. A simple federal system of government would be

inadequate in Spain as Basques and Catalans view the autonomy they currently enjoy as a vital aspect of their identity and the Spanish system of government. The fact that some groups within these ethnicities continue to demand greater autonomy supports this claim (Guibernau, 2000: 63). Centralization in Spain would encourage greater support for Basque separatist groups, such as the ETA, whose terrorist activities would bring significant bloodshed to the country. With the issue of Spanish identity unaddressed in the absence of autonomous regions, ethnic parties unattached to the notion of a greater Spain would emerge and might resort to violence if they do not gain enough representation in the legislature. Although it is possible that ethnic parties in Spain would be adequately represented in this less limited PR system and may act no differently than current Basque or Catalan parties, the lack of autonomy could disenchant members of these parties and lead them to take drastic measures after an unsuccessful election. If they are not committed to a united Spain, they will be less likely to support it when denied political representation.

Nigeria's current democratic institutions and the first configuration share federal and centralized governments and ethnic parties, the problems of which have been discussed above. Overall, this configuration will not solve many of the problems Nigeria has addressing the challenges of multi-ethnic democracies. A parliamentary government system is the only change that may produce some positive changes. It would provide much better accommodation for Nigeria's multiple political parties and thus alleviate some of the risk for majority dominance. Introducing a PR electoral formula will not improve Nigeria's ability to address the first two challenges, majority dominance and undemocratic competition. Nigeria's population is almost 50% Muslim and the Christian opposition would be unable to prevent them from implementing Shari'a law throughout the country. While greater representativeness is necessary in this divided

country, pure PR would most likely exacerbate Nigeria's ethnic problems if the system of government failed to address majority dominance, leading to violent undemocratic competition among groups at a similar or greater scale than currently observed. Nigeria's federal system also begs revision. As it is, states are relatively homogeneous and encourage ethnic politics, resulting in Muslim and Christian dominance and fierce competition between them in politics and the streets. The first configuration does not address this problem.

Initial testing reveals the inherent difficulties of institutional engineering in divided societies and gives reason for caution in creating Iraqi democracy. Institutions perform differently between countries and when paired together in diverse configurations. As a result, they achieve varying levels of success in terms of solving the four main challenges to plural democracies. The first configuration achieves mixed results in India, Spain, and Nigeria. Introducing a parliamentary government in Nigeria could help address majority dominance problems but PR elections would open the floodgates to exclusion. Representativeness is attractive in some circumstances, but it has consequences that must be prevented by including minorities. Greater representation alone would hinder governance in India and give Muslims a tyranny of the majority in Nigeria, making undemocratic competition an attractive option to minorities. For these cases, and in Iraq, PR needs limits like those in Spain to push parties towards the center. Simple PR does not provide enough centripetal incentive in these countries. The Shi'a in Iraq would behave like Muslims in Nigeria or Hindu nationalists in India and try to exert their numerical dominance through politics. Thus, an electoral system using a PR formula is an inadequate response to the challenge of undemocratic competition and, in some cases, majority dominance.

Ethnic parties do not address their respective challenges either. Empirical evidence consistently shows support for the literature advocating against them. They have a dangerous tendency to exacerbate conflict between ethnic groups and incite violence as a consequence of electoral failure. In all three cases, they cannot guide ethnic rivalry into constructive channels. We can thus assume that the same would be true in Iraq. Hindu nationalists in India run on an anti-Muslim platform (Hardgrave, 1994: 82). Basque separatists in Spain promote subversion of the Spanish government. Ethnic parties direct Nigerian politics and explain why the country experiences so much violence. Ethnic Parties would be similarly disastrous for Iraqi democracy as they are in the Nigerian case, preventing a strong national identity and promoting ethnic conflict. Certainly, institutional configurations in any plural society should avoid ethnic-based party systems.

The first configuration possesses an incongruent and centralized federal system giving states some power but little autonomy. It holds India together by isolating conflict and placing the powers of conflict resolution in the center (Kohli, 2001: 19). While Iraq is not as heterogeneous as India, federalism will certainly improve its chances for democracy. This configuration's federal system would hurt Spanish democracy by denying Basques and Catalans their much-needed self-governance and compound identities. This is something to consider in the Iraqi case, as its Kurdish population's socio-political situation is quite similar to the Basques' and Catalans'. Nigeria has experienced problems with this federal system as a result of regional homogeneity. Iraq may have similar issues, as its ethnic groups are divided by region as well.

### *Second Institutional Configuration*

The second configuration (multi-party parliamentary government with MMP, strong programmatic parties, and congruent decentralized federalism) has no ethnic parties. In contrast

to the first, it has an electoral system with MMP and a congruent decentralized federal system. This configuration will have a very different effect on the cases' abilities to address the four challenges of multi-ethnic societies and will provide valuable insight for the Iraqi institutional design. In terms of an electoral system, MMP would provide the representation that Indian democracy currently lacks and prevent the fragmentation of PR by limiting the number of effective parties through SMDs. This may promote democratic competition by providing representation locally and nationally. MMP would better manage the cross-cutting identities in India by providing national and regional representation.

Changing the federal system would produce interesting results. Congruent political boundaries not based on linguistic lines would undermine the multiple identities that enable ethnic cooperation. Lumping together dissimilar groups in India could lead to unnecessary antagonism and conflict. This is why the federal structure was changed shortly after independence. Decentralization would be a double-edged sword. One advantage is that conflict would be handled by the states instead of the central government. As mentioned above, the central government has mismanaged conflict situations in the past and is largely unable to prevent conflict in such a vast country (Manor, 1996: 46). Conversely, decentralization might upset the delicate balance between centralization and disintegrating centrifugal tendencies (Hardgrave, 1994: 84). The determining factor of its effect would be the manner of implementation. Holding constant the common institutions, this configuration would improve Indian democracy by preventing majority dominance and undemocratic competition but compromise the relative harmony that currently exists between most ethnic groups.

In Spain the only institutional differences under this configuration are the electoral and federal systems. MMP would have a minimal effect because the Spanish PR formula already

limits the effective number of parties and prevents fragmentation through small districts and the D'Hondt formula (Gunther, 1989:839). The most significant effect is that the nominal-tier would correct the overrepresentation Spain's PR creates in small districts. This configuration thus has a slight advantage of proportionality over the current Spanish system. Congruent federalism, however, would be disastrous in Spain. Effectively denying historic nationalities their autonomy by mixing disparate groups together in political districts, thus compromising national security by provoking secessionist riots and compromising the essential State of Autonomies. The potential effects of this configuration's federal institution alone illustrate once again the volatility of ethnic conflict and need for careful consideration of every institutional choice during transitions to democracy.

In Nigeria the second configuration would create the most radical departure from any of the cases' original systems. Consequently, it could provide a drastic improvement in the government's ability to address the challenges it faces. Once again, multi-party parliamentary government would provide political access for Nigeria's minority populations. The MMP electoral system could produce encouraging changes as well. SMD tiers promote centrism in competition for undecided voters and encourage democratic competition by providing most groups with local representation (Cox, 1990: 12). The list tier would preserve Muslims and Christians need for representation corresponding to their proportions of the population, encouraging their continued participation in the system. Above all, strong programmatic parties are desperately needed and will be the hardest to create in Nigeria. De-emphasizing the importance of region, religion, and ethnic identities through two-tiered MMP could potentially mitigate ethnic rivalries. The congruent federal system this configuration provides is a crucial change to Nigerian democracy. As it stands regional majorities dominate all politics, preventing

access for minorities. More ethnically and religiously diverse states would promote cooperation and dilute majority influence. Much like India, decentralization could be dangerous in Nigeria's heterogeneous society. Yet a gradual and careful process may instill the national identities that Spanish ethnic groups share, giving minorities in Muslim or Christian dominated areas a political voice and reducing the widespread influence of majority groups over time.

The second configuration does not address all of the challenges in each case. It exacerbates problems in some while improving the ability of some to confront the challenges of democracy in multi-ethnic societies. Once again, the effectiveness of any institutional framework depends on the country in which it is implemented. Multi-party parliamentary government clearly performs well in every case study. It is the best defense against majority dominance and Iraq would benefit from its implementation. In terms of electoral systems MMP appears to allow controlled representation better than a Spanish style limited PR formula, which could lead to exclusion in more plural societies such as Iraq. Yet it does not make formation of majority governments more difficult, as closed-list PR would in Spain (Gunther, 1989: 844). In India and Nigeria, MMP provides cooperation incentives that PR does not, while avoiding the exclusion of their current electoral systems. The second configuration's electoral system clearly promotes democratic competition in these cases.

Programmatic parties would improve Nigerian democracy by channeling compound identities fostered by the decentralized federal system into constructive organizations. Nigeria's highly exclusive ethnic party system is a significant cause of violence. Issue-based politics would prevent the bloody conflicts in Nigeria that are also very likely to occur in Iraq if ethnic rivalries find expression in the political process. Finally, A decentralized federal system presents some risks for deeply divided societies such as India and Nigeria. While decentralization could

prevent majority dominance in these cases and perhaps in Iraq as well, careless implementation may lead to their collapse as centrifugal forces in society take hold in an unchecked contest for power. Gradual decentralization following Spain's example, however, would allow regions themselves to manage conflicts, providing the opportunity for its prevention as authority is located closer to the problem. Congruent political boundaries would also create layered identities in Nigeria but hinder them in India and Spain. Compound identities avoid secessionism by giving regions a vested interest in the national government, an essential component for the future of Iraqi democracy (Horowitz, 1994: 53). It is clear that institutions within the second configuration, as well as the first, create different incentives for cooperation and provide valuable lessons for addressing the challenges to Iraqi democracy.

### **Recommendations for Iraqi Democracy**

The experiences of India, Spain, and Nigeria support the fact that divided multi-ethnic societies are the most difficult places to create successful democracy. All of these countries continue to experience violent ethnic-conflict as a result of the main challenges to plural democracies; majority dominance, undemocratic competition, ethnic rivalry, or secession despite the relative success of their government, electoral, party, and federal systems in promoting cooperation. The correlation between the presence of inclusive cooperation inducing configurations and levels of violence is clearly observable. Nigeria's institutions provide the least successful response to these challenges and the country experiences the most bloodshed as a result. India represents a moderate case, addressing some while failing to prevent other causes of violence. Basque separatists such as the ETA are the only examples of such violence in Spain and it is unlikely that any configuration would be able to appease these incorrigible groups. In addition, changing institutional configurations to improve democratic performance yields very

different results in each case. This shows that no configuration is objectively better than another. Country specific conditions are consistently the determining factors of any institution's ability to mitigate ethnic conflict.

For example, Spanish institutions are not necessarily the best choice for Iraq simply because they are the most successful of the three cases. Nor is the second configuration a recommendable set of institutions for Iraq simply because it outperformed the first at fostering stable democracy in the case studies. We cannot expect to observe the same results from one configuration in any given country. Just as the first alternative configuration included the centralization necessary in India to hold the country together and avoid the emergence of damaging centrifugal forces, it would have severe consequences in Spain where decentralization is the cornerstone of its democracy. Institutions that have worked elsewhere will not necessarily address the challenges to multi-ethnic democracy in Iraq if the implications of their implementation are not carefully evaluated.

Considering Iraq's unique society and political situation along with these findings regarding the performance of different institutions in the cases, several recommendations for ensuring stable Iraqi democracy present themselves. First, Iraqi democracy must employ a multi-party parliamentary system of government in order to promote a constructive breakdown of ethnic identities and channel ethnic demands through the political system and prevent majority dominance. There are too many different groups and factions within them for a majoritarian system to work. Presidentialism is thus out of the question because of its inability to accommodate multiple effective parties, as discussed in the literature review.

The second recommendation based on this paper's empirical evidence is for an MMP electoral system. In terms of preventing undemocratic competition through regional and national

representation and channeling compound identities into the political process, this system outperformed the others in every case. In Iraq it would most likely produce a favorable amount of limited representation through regional SMDs and national list-PR, encouraging political competition over violence. Third, programmatic parties are of course preferable to ethnic parties because they foster cooperation and issue-based politics while ethnic parties institutionalize and intensify ethnic divisions (Horowitz, 1985; Hardgrave, 1995). The drafters of Iraq's new constitution must choose an institutional framework designed to encourage more inter-ethnic cooperation by creating incentives for the formation of programmatic parties. Fourth, congruent and gradually decentralized federalism are essential to stable Iraqi democracy. Much like Nigeria, ethnic groups in Iraq are regionally based and incongruence would provoke secessionist sentiments among excluded regional minorities. Decentralization is equally vital considering the unique needs of Iraqi Kurds for autonomy. A centralized federal structure would take away their much-needed self-governance and lead to increased secessionism, as it would in Spain, or even war in this case. Congruence, however, may encourage them to become a less isolated part of Iraqi society and minimize the need for as much autonomy as the Spanish system provides.

While carefully designed institutional configurations can provide the incentives for Iraqi democracy, their success ultimately lies in the hands of the Iraqi people themselves. The country's lingering security problem will make stable democracy impossible to achieve regardless of institutional structure (Diamond, 2004: 2). Democracy can only prevent violence and bloodshed in Iraq once it becomes established as a legitimate form of governance. Continued insurgent warfare and bombings could prevent this from occurring for some time.

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