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# THE ETHNOCRACY TRAP

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The fighting in Syria has led policy makers in many countries to begin planning for what will come after the end of President Bashar al-Assad's dictatorial regime. Calls for a "representative government" have come repeatedly from U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton. Other U.S. officials have specified a "need" to ensure that whatever comes next contains representatives of the Alawites, the minority religious sect from which the Assad family and its inner circle spring.<sup>1</sup> The intense focus by the United States and other liberal democracies on *ethnic* (or in the Syrian case, *ethnosectarian*) representation as a means of building representative government is highly problematic.<sup>2</sup> Such advocacy tends toward the creation of what I term here "ethnocracy" rather than liberal democracy.

Ethnocracy has become widespread enough that we should be asking whether and how it might fit into the panoply of regime types recognized by political science. The introduction of ethnocratic regimes in order to promote democracy after violent conflicts has sometimes coincided with decreases in violence. Yet ethnocratic institutions bring new and stubborn obstacles that render transition to liberal democracy difficult. Ethnocracy is a problematic solution at best, and liberal-democratic powers should think twice before promoting it.

What makes an ethnocracy? It is a political system in which political and social organizations are founded on ethnic belonging rather than individual choice. Ethnocracy, in this sense, features: 1) political parties that are based foremost on ethnic interests; 2) ethnic quotas to determine the allocation of key posts; and 3) state institutions, especially in education and the security sector, that are segmented by ethnic group.

Ethnocracies are generally parliamentary systems with proportional or semiproportional representation according to ethnic classifications. Contrasting political platforms—e.g., socialist-liberal, secular-religious, left-right, and the like—are of secondary importance to ethnic-group membership. The ethnic bases of political parties are often mandated by law.

In ethnocratic regimes, the heads of government are determined first by ethnic affiliation and only then by other means of appointment. Bosnia has a rotating presidency in which a Croat, a Serb, and a Bosniak (often Bosnian Muslim) are elected to serve concurrent four-year terms, but with each taking an alternating eight-month turn at the reins. In other places, high offices may be assigned by ethnic group but without rotation. In Lebanon, decades-old arrangements originally imposed by a foreign power (France) dictate that the president is always a Maronite Christian, the parliament speaker a Shia Muslim, and the premier a Sunni Muslim. In Northern Ireland, the first minister and deputy first minister share equal responsibilities, with the former coming from a Unionist (primarily Protestant) party and the latter from a Nationalist (primarily Catholic) party. In Belgium, the Council of Ministers must have equal numbers of Flemish- and French-speakers. In Lebanon, Bosnia, and Belgium, moreover, even civil-service posts may be filled via ethnic quotas.

Ethnocratic regimes often segment education and the security services by ethnic group as well. Public schools group children in separate classes by ethnicity and may make little if any effort to educate them according to a common statewide curriculum. Slots in the military and police may also be designated primarily along ethnic lines rather than with a view to experience, merit, or other criteria.

Can an ethnocracy be democratic? Because political parties may be allowed to compete with one another, such systems may enjoy some freedoms of political expression, representation, and the press. Thus ethnocracies often have overlapping features with electoral democracies. Yet liberal (as opposed to merely electoral) democracy and ethnocracy differ on the important principle of individual political rights and the ways in which those rights are manifested in state and political institutions.

Ethnocracy is, in essence, a type of hybrid regime, with a mix of democratic and nondemocratic features. Although certain aspects of electoral competition are built into the system, it guarantees *ethnic*—rather than countrywide—winners in all elections and in top state positions. In some sense, therefore, ethnocracy falls short of the minimal democratic standard which dictates that positions of power must be determined by a competitive vote.

In a liberal democracy, representation is based primarily on individual and not group rights. All individuals, regardless of race, religion, gender, or other differences, are viewed as equal under the law and are

free to participate in political parties and to elect leaders based on their political preferences. Flexible, countrywide, civic-oriented electoral and educational institutions, while at times imperfect, are designed to include all individuals equally. Discrimination based on group membership is outlawed, and power is systematically divided in order to guard against majority or minority tyranny.<sup>3</sup>

### **“Ethnocratic Drift”: The Case of Belgium**

Although full-fledged ethnocracies (in my sense of the term) are not common, by considering whether ethnic segmentation exists in parties, state posts, and institutions one can detect trends toward the adoption of ethnocratic principles even in places that would not necessarily spring to mind as falling under the “ethnocracy” rubric. The situation of Belgium merits some attention in this regard as a case of what we might call “ethnocratic drift.” By most measures, the country counts as a liberal democracy.<sup>4</sup> Yet over the last half-century, its main political and social institutions have gradually become more ethnocratic. Behind the change has been a vocal and intense Flemish-speaking minority that has managed to advance its own version of an ethnocratic agenda even though a majority of Belgians cannot be described as supporters of ethnocracy.<sup>5</sup>

According to the definition presented here, Belgium shifted from a consociational regime to an ethnocracy in the 1970s after two major political events. First, the last major bilingual political party, the Social Democrats, split along ethnolinguistic lines. (The Christian Democrats and Liberals had already fissured into Flemish and Francophone factions in the late 1960s, and today even the Greens are linguistically divided.) Second, the constitutional reforms of 1970 shifted the government to a “fully fledged power-sharing system” whereby equal numbers of Flemish and French speakers must be present in the Council of Ministers, the highest courts, the upper ranks of the military, and the Federal Parliament.<sup>6</sup>

In Belgium now, as mandated by the ethnofederal provisions of the 1993 Constitution, there are no countrywide political parties. Outside of Brussels, the only bilingual district, parties may operate only in their respective language zones. Moreover, education has been segregated along ethnolinguistic lines, as monolingualism is enforced in most schools from the primary level through university. Media, sports, and cultural organizations are segregated by linguistic group. The divisions have become so pronounced that when, in 2006, the Francophone public-broadcasting corporation announced as a prank that Belgium was being dissolved, many people assumed that the report was true. And yet Belgium still has very low levels of corruption, a high standard of living, a free press, and free elections.

In what category, then, does Belgium fit? Is it a democracy or an ethnocracy? My answer would be that it is both—most ethnocracies have democratic features—but that with the continuing hollowing of the center in order to placate a powerful minority, Belgium has been moving toward the more extreme end of the ethnocracy continuum.

### Clarifying the Terms

Having discussed the special case of Belgium, further clarification of the term ethnocracy is still necessary in relation to its other uses and to similar terms. Ethnocracy has been used in a variety of conflicting ways. Some use it synonymously with the term “ethnic democracy” to describe the politics of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Still others have employed it to refer to abusive authoritarian regimes that are dominated by one ethnic group. Such cases include those of Uganda under Idi Amin, Syria under the Asads, Burma under its ethnic-Burman military junta, and Algeria, where Arabs dominate Berbers.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of etymology, the word “ethnos” does not contain within its root a limitation to one single “ethnos.” Furthermore, the suffix “kratos” (denoting rule or government) also does not designate singularity. To limit the definition of ethnocracy, literally “rule by ethnic group,” to those regimes where only *one* group dominates needlessly limits the scope of the type of regimes that the label describes. Technically, then, the term that I present here is poly-ethnocracy as opposed to mono-ethnocracy. In such regimes “ethne,” or ethnic groups, rule rather than individual people. We can therefore apply the term poly-ethnocracy—or, more simply, “ethnocracy”—for regimes that are structured around multiple ethnic groups and have competitive elections.

Ethnocracy is related to, and indeed can be considered a “diminished subtype” of, consociational democracy.<sup>9</sup> Arend Lijphart defines consociational democracy as “government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy,”<sup>10</sup> where “elite cooperation is the primary distinguishing feature.”<sup>11</sup>

Consociational democracy can be distinguished from ethnocracy in two fundamental respects. First, as originally introduced to characterize governance in the Netherlands (and later extended to Austria, Belgium, and Switzerland) consociational systems were not based exclusively on ethnoreligious or linguistic-group membership.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, consociational democracy in the West European states fostered nonmajoritarian decision making and dialogue between segments of plural societies, but because of significant cross-cutting cleavages of political affiliation, class, religion, region, or language, individuals could express different aspects of their political identities in ways that were not exclusively ethnic, even under consociational structures.

In an ethnocracy, by contrast, there is little if any possibility of mean-

ingful political expression other than through membership in a single ethnic group. Second, the primary empirical signifier of a consociational regime is elite cooperation across segmented cultural divides, often in a “grand coalition.” In ethnocratic regimes, such cooperation is frequently absent. The rigid nature of subnational, ethnically based political institutions undermines the bases of national consensus (as further explained below).

Consociationalism as an empirical type that describes several West European regimes can be differentiated from consociationalism as a normative type. The normative type of consociationalism takes the basic empirical features of consociational democracies and transforms them into rules of conflict management to be advocated by outsiders as a way to resolve problems in deeply divided societies (often in postconflict developing countries).<sup>13</sup> Consociationalism as a normative type is similar to empirical (and normative) ethnocracy in that both take ethnic identity to be in the decisive sense something primordial, stable, and bounded rather than something that can be influenced by human decisions (such as whether to make it a matter of great political moment or not).

Lijphart is explicit in basing his theory on an assumption of immutable identity in multiethnic societies, claiming a “tenacity of primordial loyalties.”<sup>14</sup> Such theory and advocacy are based on what Rogers Brubaker would call groupist assumptions: “the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis. . . . [despite] widespread acknowledgement that ‘cultures,’ ‘communities,’ ‘tribes,’ ‘races,’ ‘nations,’ and ‘ethnic groups’ are not bounded wholes.”<sup>15</sup> Thus advocates of normative consociationalism and ethnocracy see ethnic groups as fundamental units both of societies and of scholarly analysis, and advocate the construction of political systems based on subnational primordial assumptions.

In sum, poly-ethnocratic regimes—ethnocracies in my sense—have parties and elections, but are not *liberal* democracies. They may be related to consociational regimes, but lack the cross-cutting cleavages and elite cooperation that are the hallmarks of classic consociationalism. Contemporary advocates of consociationalism and ethnocracy tend to assume that ethnicity is a primordial category, and that institutions ought to reflect this assumption. But ethnic groups vary significantly in composition, boundaries, and “groupness,” and thus cannot be assumed to be “like units” either for empirical analysis or for policy purposes. Ethnic identities are cultural forms of expression that can be mobilized, politicized, and reified in state institutions—or not. Ethnicity as a basis for politics is not a given; it is a choice.

The main benefit of ethnocracy is that it allows ethnic groups freedom of political expression, which may help (for a time at least) to prevent ethnic tensions from turning violent. The main mechanism for ensuring group rights is equal (or sometimes more than equal) representation of

certain ethnic categories in political institutions. This mechanism, along with group-oriented electoral laws and constitutions, promotes party formation along ethnic lines. Ethnocracy can have the advantage of at least securing a seat at the table for historically oppressed groups that might otherwise be shut out. Thus the benefits of ethnocracy—discouraging violence, encouraging the correction of past abuses, and including the excluded—appear to be substantial, at least in the short term. But there are significant drawbacks too.

### The Drawbacks

To begin with, ethnocracy shares all the well-known shortcomings of consociationalism. Lijphart himself warns of the immobilism, inefficiency, instability, and possible reification of social cleavages in such regimes.<sup>16</sup> Ethnic elites are often given to polarization and extremism; relying on them to calm group conflicts is a shaky way to build a peaceful, stable society. But beyond the flaws that it shares with consociationalism, ethnocracy has six serious drawbacks of its own.

First, *individuals* (as opposed to designated groups) are not free to express themselves on an equal footing in the political arena. This flaw runs both “up” and “down” the system: Individual voters neither feel free nor have any incentive to choose representatives from other ethnic categories, and elected officials have little or no reason to seek votes outside their own groups. Political interests become secondary to ethnic expression. The organizing principle of ethnicity tends to leave out people of mixed heritage (a large class in Bosnia, for instance) or those who do not think that ethnic or ethnosectarian affiliation should be so salient (such as secular elements in Lebanon).

Members of smaller minority groups may be virtually frozen out in various ways as well, as has been the case in Belgium, Bosnia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland. In Bosnia, people of Jewish descent are not legally permitted to run for high office because they fall outside the three constitutionally designated national groups. In such regimes, moreover, the freedoms of individual expression and association—including the freedom to change one’s political affiliation—are curtailed. In a liberal democracy, anyone can switch political allegiance at any time and for any reason. In an ethnocracy, this can be all but impossible: One cannot easily stop being a Croat or a Walloon the way one can stop being a Social Democrat, a Green, or a Tory.

Second, religious-based ethnocracy stifles the emergence of a secular state. In such regimes, there tends to be no separation of church and state because religion is often the primary organizing principle for ethnoreligious parties, and therefore for governments. Ethnocratic regimes thus pit social categories against each other in the political arena. When structures are legally divided by ethnic quota systems, religion is also infused

into state structures. As a result, there is little freedom of expression for people belonging to other faiths, mixed faiths, or those of no faith when the dominant faiths are conflated with state and government structures.

In secular liberal democracies, voluntary religious organizations form an essential component of civil society. In such regimes, individuals are free to express themselves as members of religious or ethnic groups through civil society organizations. In ethnocracies, rather than civil society exerting a cross-cutting or moderating impact on political processes, society (or its religious component) in effect overwhelms those processes. Secular democratic states developed in order to give freedom to all religions, which enabled the emergence of civil society—whether religious or secular. In ethnocracies of the sectarian sort, both freedom of religious expression and the development of civil society more generally are curtailed by the state.

Third, ethnocratic systems are subject to severe inner discord. Like consociational regimes, ethnocracies count on elites to compromise with one another. But given that political leaders are selected based on ethnicity, compromise is often rendered difficult. The difficulty stems from the persistence of “ethnic outbidding” or “flanking”: When ethnic leaders express moderate views toward other ethnic groups, this creates an opening for rival leaders within their own respective groups to cry “sellout!” and complain that group interests are not being pressed hard enough.<sup>17</sup> The upshot is often a competitive spiral toward extremism, as ambitious politicians in every party vie to make ever more extravagant demands and promises regarding ethnic issues. Interethnic accommodation may suffer the collateral damage. In severe cases, the state can experience deadlock as rival ethnic groups squabble over how to form a government. After recent elections in Belgium, Bosnia, and Iraq, it took more than a year to put together governing coalitions (Belgians witnessed 541 days of deadlock).

Fourth, the frequent dearth of elite compromise in ethnocratic regimes invites or in some cases necessitates outside intervention. In Northern Ireland it has come from the United States and Great Britain; in Lebanon, from Syria and the UN; in Bosnia, from the EU; and in Iraq, from the United States. Ethnocracy in practice looks very similar to the colonial governing mechanism of “divide and rule,” which was designed to ensure that the colonial power could remain in place as governor and arbiter of disputes. In situations where the external arbiter desires to exit (as is the case of Britain in Northern Ireland, the United States in Iraq, and the EU in Bosnia), bolstering ethnocratic rule will most likely not produce the desired outcomes.

Fifth, ethnocracy is bad for business. In a typical ethnocracy, in order to acquire a business license or have a contract legally enforced, one must “play ball” with one or more political-economic machines or bureaucratic mini-empires set up along ethnic lines. The implications for



enterprise and economic development are predictably dire. Bosnia has stagnated compared to its neighbors as bureaucrats seek to guard ethnic preserves within the economy and to block rival groups from advancing. In Lebanon, ethnosectarian divisions overlain with class stratifications have worked to dampen society-wide economic advancement.

Sixth, it may be harder to arrive at liberal democracy from ethnocracy than from other starting points. In an ethnocracy, society is formally segmented and organized against itself (in a standard authoritarian regime, by contrast, society can organize in opposition to the regime's elite). To borrow a page from Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, we might say that ethnocracy offers too little in the way of "autonomous political society" or a "useable state."<sup>18</sup> A congeries of mutually suspicious ethnic fiefdoms is not promising material for a democratic polity.

Ethnocracy may offer a way to dampen interethnic conflict in the short term, but at the cost of buying problems for later. Worse still, the problems become very hard to solve once ethnocratic institutions are put in place. It is therefore puzzling that ethnocracy promotion has become so popular, especially in recent years.

Ethnocracy promotion has a long history, and its acceptance among policy makers, scholars, and pundits has been growing since the end of the Cold War, even though experience has not yielded much evidence of its vaunted benefits. Policy makers in liberal democracies such as France, Great Britain, and the United States have been strong advocates of building ethnocratic institutions. In the academic realm, Arend Lijphart cites 35 scholars who are "sympathetic" to the adoption of consociational rules in divided societies.<sup>19</sup> In recent deliberations over constitutional forms for Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, pundits have been vociferous in their support for ethnocratic institutions.<sup>20</sup> The history of ethnocracy promotion on the part of liberal democracies is long, deep, and difficult to summarize. Nevertheless, several of the most important examples—the roles of the French government in constructing the state in Lebanon, of the United Kingdom and the United States in Northern Ireland, and of the United States in Bosnia and Iraq—are worth highlighting.

Under the Ottomans, what is now known as Lebanon was a place where religious communities had some religious-based representation and autonomy in an unquestionably nondemocratic system. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War I, France ruled under a League of Nations mandate and ushered in a "confessional democracy" with a state bureaucracy divided by religion.<sup>21</sup> The French drafted the 1926 Constitution. It was modeled on the presidential system of France's Third Republic, with the distinction that key state positions and the civil administration were to be determined by religion, weighted in favor of Maronite Christians. The French high commissioner held supreme power.

The 1926 document became the basis of the 1943 National Pact adopted upon Lebanon's independence. The Pact further specified and entrenched an ethnocratic system of governance, whereby (as we have seen) the president would be a Maronite, the premier a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shia Muslim. The ratio of deputies would be six Christians to five Muslims, mirroring the population proportions indicated by the 1932 census. Many have argued that the rigidity of the system—which took no account of changing demographics, especially a growing Shia population—sowed the seeds of the

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civil war that raged from 1975 to 1990.

The 1989 Taif Agreement, shaped by Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, maintained ethnocratic principles and practices despite the pleas of a sizeable secular Arab constituency. Although the accord stipulated that the confessional proportions were to be temporary, and that confessionalism ought not be the defining characteristic of politics, there is little incentive to change since political leaders owe their positions to the extant system. After almost recovering from the violence of 2006, the government of Lebanon collapsed in January 2011, in the wake of disputes over the investigation of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's murder, and re-formed only five months later. Despite the presence of more than twelve-thousand UN peacekeepers, Lebanon continues to teeter between war and peace, especially as tens of thousands of refugees flow in, escaping the strife in Syria.

In Northern Ireland at the outset of the "Troubles" in the late 1960s, the Nationalists (mainly Catholics, most of whom identify with the Republic of Ireland) sought inclusion as a way of curbing political, social, and economic discrimination and abuse at the hands of Unionists (mainly Protestants, who identify with Great Britain). Nationalists sought individual civil rights, famously calling themselves "the negroes of Europe," and using slogans such as "one man, one vote." The principle of an ethnically based single-transferable-vote system was formally introduced in 1971 by a British civil servant.<sup>22</sup> The principles of power-sharing between Nationalists and Unionists became part of the talks that led to the first peace agreement in 1973. That pact nevertheless did not curtail the violence, which continued until the 1998 Belfast or "Good Friday" Agreement (and continues at lower levels today).

That accord, mediated by the United States, ushered in the current ethno-sectarian power-sharing arrangements. Deeper provisions for separate school systems followed. In order for a vote to count in the Northern Ire-

land Assembly, the representative—even if he or she belongs to one of the small cross-ethnic or nonethnic parties—must “declare” as a Unionist or a Nationalist. While it is remarkably creative and flexible in some ways, the Good Friday Agreement has worked to squeeze out moderate parties and to privilege leaders of extreme parties in a semi-ethnocratic regime. This is so despite frequent polls in which about 40 percent of the populace say that they would rather *not* vote either Unionist or Nationalist. Occasional acts of violence persist, and “peace walls” up to eight meters high and five kilometers long continue to divide urban neighborhoods.

In Bosnia, under Ottoman and later communist rule, ethnonationalism was an organizing principle for some state institutions, but the 1995 Dayton Accords entrenched ethnocracy in a new way. The 1995 Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina was drafted by members of the U.S. negotiating team in Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio, and was initiated by representatives of the three main ethnosectarian groups (no nonsectarian or civic leaders were invited to the negotiations).

The constitution introduced ethnic distinctions into all aspects of political institutions in Bosnia, even though the parties present at Dayton were not necessarily demanding such a rigidly ethnic approach to constitutional design. Bosnia today is the model of an extreme ethnocratic regime, but it does not necessarily have to be so. As Bosnian president Željko Komšić said in 2009: “In the Bosnian Constitution, ethnic and group rights are raised above all else. I don’t want that. I want to be a man, an individual. I am a proud Croat, but I have other interests as an individual, not simply a member of a group. We need equal opportunity for every individual, just as you have in the U.S.” Group-rights concepts enjoyed some popularity in Bosnia before Dayton, but the rigid constitution has made matters worse by institutionalizing and solidifying ethnic divisions. Talk of partition attempts and renewed violence is common.

After toppling Iraq’s Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, U.S. authorities sought to construct a new Iraqi government as quickly as possible. Members of an Iraqi Governing Council were hastily chosen along ethnosectarian lines roughly matching each group’s share of the population. There were 13 Shias, 5 Kurds, 5 Arab Sunnis, 1 Assyrian Christian, and 1 Turkoman. While there existed many nonethnic bases of political cleavages in postinvasion Iraq—socialist-liberal, secular-religious, tribal, regional—the ethnoreligious divisions seemed more familiar, especially after the U.S. experience in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. The U.S. governance advisors went along with the idea of pursuing representative government based on simplistic ethnoreligious formulas, even though many aspects of political identity were in flux after the fall of Saddam, and ethnocratic principles were being rejected by many Iraqis who feared that Iraq might become “another Lebanon.”

According to John Agresto, the lead higher-education advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the CPA’s quota system ulti-

mately encouraged religious and sectarian divisions that had not previously been a focus of Iraqis. The system “magnified rather than muted the very divisions that so many Iraqis rejected,” Agresto told reporter Rajiv Chandrasekaran.<sup>23</sup> The case of the United States in post-Saddam Iraq represents another example of a liberal-democratic power helping to institutionalize ethnocratic principles.

I am not suggesting that support for these principles by representatives of liberal Western powers was the sole reason for the creation of the ethnocratic regimes. But it is necessary to remember that those representatives did have alternatives—that ethnocracy was *not* foreordained by the makeup, prior history, and politics of the societies in question. Political regimes are built on choices that human beings make and sustain. A regime is not a given but rather is something created and re-created by internal and external influences. Yet once a principle such as group rights becomes institutionalized in a constitution, it becomes very difficult to banish.

Imagine if, in the wake of the U.S. Civil War or the civil-rights movement, the United States had somehow become subject to a foreign power’s advice on how to build institutions to deal with the U.S. racial and ethnic situation. If that power had suggested, in the name of inclusivity, that there should be political parties organized along racial and religious lines—a Black party, then later a Latino party, an Asian party, and perhaps even sectarian parties for Catholics, Protestants, or even Jews, respectively—imagine how many U.S. citizens that system would have excluded because of their inability to fall easily into such rigidly fixed and restrictive categories.

If strict ethnic quotas were introduced into all significant state institutions, the system would tend toward disintegration. Such structures would undermine U.S. national identity; politics would become more zero-sum and divisive; the principles of freedom of political expression and individual rights would be weakened. The United States would not have presidents from minority racial or religious groups who could be popularly elected by a diverse majority of citizens. And yet, such a strategy has been precisely the one pursued in many places by otherwise liberal policy makers from Western powers who subscribe to primordial notions of identity in other societies. Ethnocracy, especially in recent years, has been promoted as a normative agenda in the name of pragmatism, but in practice its institutions are neither pragmatic nor democratic. Fortunately, however, there are alternatives.

## The Alternatives

Foreign policies and outside advice do not generally translate into institutional changes in other countries, but in the rare moments when policy makers from liberal democracies get a chance to change the

political landscape in other places—such as may be the case now, in the wake of upheavals in the Arab world—how can a flexible view of identity be incorporated into policy making? Robin Wilson is right to assert that “constitutional engineers should set their sights on entrenching the individualist conception of society . . . if they are to allow such societies to begin to leave a divided past.”<sup>24</sup> The foreign policies of liberal democracies should include a focus on individual, as opposed to group rights. Even in a society that is multiethnic and emerging from conflict, representative government should not necessarily mean ethnocratic representation. Other important principles in addition to the promotion of individual rights include the protection of minorities from majority tyranny, employment in state institutions based on qualifications other than ethnicity (while also encouraging diversity), and uniform educational, security, health, and social-welfare policies and practices.

A central challenge of democracy promotion is to devise mechanisms that foster stability while remaining consistent with uncertainty in electoral outcomes. Losers need the possibility of becoming winners in subsequent rounds of elections. Individuals must be able to represent, and be represented by, people who are different from them in such a way that majorities and minorities may shift.

The key is not only to create institutions that encourage candidates to seek support across ethnic lines, but to design incentives that make it possible to participate in political life without having to subscribe to a single ethnic group. Institutions should work to bind all people to one another, and to the state. As Giovanni Sartori noted decades ago, electoral institutions are “the most specific manipulable instrument of politics.”<sup>25</sup> Other scholars have investigated “centripetal” institutions as both an empirical type and normative ideal that may be engineered.<sup>26</sup> Preferential voting systems such as vote pooling, the alternative vote, and the supplementary vote may hold promise. Other policies that foster an overarching sense of national identity while allowing for subnationalism to find local expression may also be effective. Cross-cutting institutions based more on geographic than ethnic demarcations have helped to moderate postconflict disputes in multiethnic states ranging from Afghanistan and post-2006 Iraq to Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United States.

In Iraq, for example, both Iraqis and the second Bush administration came to see the destructive tendencies of ethnocratic rules. The United States changed its principles and recommendations for institutional solutions in conjunction with the 2007 troop surge. Prior to the 2009 elections, electoral rules shifted from one single district for all of Iraq to 18 regional districts, and from a closed-list to a partially open-list voting system. These changes, in addition to popular exhaustion with ethnosectarian violence, worked toward moderation in electoral outcomes. In the 2009

provincial and 2010 national elections, the majority of winning parties made explicit cross-ethnic appeals and emphasized the rule of law over religion or ethnicity.<sup>27</sup>

Iraq demonstrates that just as ethnic identity can be mobilized, it can also be demobilized given the right organizational incentives. As Rogers Brubaker explains, “organizations, not ethnic groups as such, are the chief protagonists of ethnic conflict and ethnic violence.”<sup>28</sup> In Bosnia, one observer insists, “It is entirely possible to re-create a civic identity if the electoral system is changed to encourage cross-ethnic appeal[s]. The current system, including the institutional set-up, rewards those with ethnic platforms, who then depend on ethnic divisions to stay in power.”<sup>29</sup> In Iraq and Bosnia, as well as many other places, there is ample evidence that it was organized groups committing violence that caused hardened ethnic identities to form, rather than vice-versa. Since the violence has ended, cross-ethnic civic sentiment has reappeared in Bosnia, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland, but often the postconflict institutions are not designed to accommodate shifts away from extreme ethnic sentiment in politics.

Although rigid ethnocratic arrangements may sometimes appear necessary to end a violent conflict, other options must be explored. Provisions should be built into future agreements that allow for re-evaluation, and for more flexible, countrywide, cross-cutting ties to emerge. The motivations are both normative and instrumental. Normatively, the advocacy of ethnocracy runs in fundamental contradiction to liberal-democratic ideals of individual political rights, freedom of religion, and civic national identity. The instrumental motivations are that ethnocracy promotion and institutionalization make it difficult for third parties to go home; prevent societies from moving past wartime divisions; inhibit a transition to liberal democracy; and create political and economic structures that at best are paralyzed by ethnoreligious factions, or, at worst, are sowing the seeds of further bloodshed.

## NOTES

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1. Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Focuses on Efforts to Topple Assad Government,” *International Herald Tribune*, 23 July 2012.

2. Ethnicity here is defined broadly, as is customary in the sociological and comparative-politics literature, as deriving from such categories as language, religion, race, and common culture.

3. Liberal democracies have not been free of unjust discrimination, but their larger story has been one of widening inclusion, with a basis in the logic of liberal principles

built into political institutions. In the United States, some policies such as affirmative action appear to favor group rights over those of the individual, but the policies' flexibility and institutionalized commitments to individual rights generally preclude the encroachment of ethnocracy.

4. Belgium's 2010 Polity IV score is 8 (decreased in 2007 from the highest score of 10). Freedom House rates it as "Free," with scores for 2011 of 1 (the freest possible) for both civil liberties and political rights.

5. See Liesbet Hooghe, "Belgium: Hollowing the Center," in Ugo Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Britt Cartrite, "Contemporary Ethnopolitical Identity and the Future of the Belgian State," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 8 (Autumn 2002): 43–71; John Fitzmaurice, *The Politics of Belgium: A Unique Federalism* (London: Hurst, 1996); Dirk Jacobs, "Becoming Part of a Disintegrating Nation-State," working paper, December 2011.

6. Ulrich Schneckener, "Making Power-Sharing Work," *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (March 2002): 206.

7. Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Sammy Smooha, "Types of Democracy and Modes of Conflict Management in Ethnically Divided Societies," *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (October 2002): 423–31.

8. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), ch. 12; Ali Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1975).

9. David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 430–51. Note that consociational democracy is already a diminished subtype of democracy.

10. Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics* 21 (January 1969): 216.

11. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 1.

12. Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); and Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.

13. Matthijs Bogaards, "The Uneasy Relationship between Empirical and Normative Types in Consociational Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 12 (October 2000): 395–423; and Ian Lustick, "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism vs. Control," *World Politics* 31 (April 1979): 325–44.

14. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 24.

15. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

16. Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," 212. See also Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1996); Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild, eds. *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy After Civil Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Rupert Taylor, ed., *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Caroline A. Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, *Crafting Peace: Power-Sharing Institutions and the Negotiated Settlement of Civil Wars* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

17. Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); and Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

18. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

19. Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (April 2004): 96–109.

20. Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "One Nation, Loosely United," *New York Times*, 18 December 2001; Robert D. Blackwill, "A De Facto Partition for Afghanistan," *Politico*, 7 July 2010.

21. Anne-Lucie Chaigne-Oudin, *La France et les rivalités occidentales au levant: Syrie-Liban, 1918–1939* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

22. Robin Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience of Conflict and Agreement: A Model for Export?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

23. Quoted in Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage, 2006): 322–23.

24. Wilson, *Northern Ireland Experience*, 135.

25. Giovanni Sartori, "Political Development and Political Engineering," *Public Policy* 17 (1968): 273.

26. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Sisk, *Power-Sharing*, and Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

27. See, for example, Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Rebirth of a Nation," *Newsweek*, 25 February 2010, available at [www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/02/25/rebirth-of-a-nation.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/02/25/rebirth-of-a-nation.html). This is not to argue, of course, that Iraq is out of the ethnocratic woods, but that shifts toward flexibility are possible.

28. Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 16.

29. Author's interview with Damir Arnaut, ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Australia and New Zealand, Washington, D.C., 2 October 2009.