RESOLVING CONFLICT IN BIPOLAR SOCIETIES:
THE CASES OF FIJI AND NORTHERN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

Ethnically divided societies that might be described as “balanced bicomunal” ones (where there are two communities, each of which comes close to representing half of the population) pose a particular challenge to conventional principles of collective decision making, and commonly threaten political stability. This paper analyses the experience of two such societies, Northern Ireland and Fiji, with a view to exploring whether there are common processes in the route by which political stability has been pursued. We assess the manner in which a distinctive relationship with Great Britain and its political culture has interacted with local conditions to produce a highly competitive, bipolar party system. This leads us to consideration of the devices that have been adopted in an effort to bridge the gap between the communities: the Fiji constitution as amended in 1997, and Northern Ireland’s Good Friday agreement of 1998. We focus in particular on the use of unusual (preferential) formulas for the election of parliamentarians and of an inclusive principle in the selection of ministers, and consider the contribution of these institutional devices to the attainment of political stability, but conclude that the intervention of forces from outside the political system has a decisive impact.
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1. INTRODUCTION

When states are ethnically divided, the typical position is that one group or coalition enjoys a position of dominance so clear that the incentive for rebellion against it is low, and its own capacity to resist minority demands rests on very considerable political, economic and cultural resources. The recent history of ethnic minority protest movements illustrates just how common this pattern is. But what happens when the two groups in conflict are finely balanced, or where two groups of approximately equal size compete for power? This narrow focus dramatically reduces the range of available evidence. Early writing in this area identified a modest set of cases. Thus, for example, Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 88-91) identified a category of “balanced competition”, in which two to three major groups were juxtaposed but none had a clear advantage, and cited the cases of Guyana, Belgium, Trinidad and Malaysia, noting that Northern Ireland might also eventually fall into this category. Milne (1981: 1-14) identified a category that he labelled “ethnically bipolar”, defined as having two major ethnic blocs of approximately equal size; in this he placed Guyana, Malaysia and Fiji, while excluding other cases that might be considered as borderline (Suriname, Belgium, Belize, Trinidad and Lebanon).

In the present paper, we select two of these cases, Northern Ireland and Fiji, which at first sight bear little similarity to each other, but which further analysis suggests might form an intriguing paired comparison. Ireland was Britain’s closest colony, made part of the United Kingdom by the Act of Union in 1800, with Northern Ireland’s relationship to Britain redefined after partition in 1921. Fiji, in the midst of the Pacific Ocean, was Britain’s most distant and most remote outpost. Yet the colonial experience left both as “bipolar” or “bicommunal” politics, with electoral loyalties that centred strongly on entrenched communal divisions. Both reached landmark political settlements in the late 1990s. Fiji’s 1997 constitution was designed to bring an end to an era of discord between indigenous Fijian and Fiji Indian leaders which had been exacerbated by a Fijian military coup in May 1987. Northern Ireland’s Good Friday Agreement brought together unionist and nationalist politicians in an attempt to put a seal on the relative peace that had had been in place since 1994, following a prolonged triangular civil conflict between rival paramilitary groups and the security forces. Both agreements entailed use of preferential voting systems, which are often thought to ameliorate ethnic divisions and encourage moderates in deeply divided societies. Both also included provisions for mandatory power-sharing, aimed at bringing former rivals together in cabinet.

The differences between these institutional arrangements also offer some important contrasts. Northern Ireland has used a multi-member preferential voting system, the single transferable vote (STV), first in the 1920s and then for province-wide elections in 1973, 1975 and 1982, and at regular intervals since 1998. As part of the 1997 constitution, Fiji adopted the single member district-based counterpart to STV, the alternative vote (AV), and used this in elections in 1999, 2001 and 2006. The two
polities’ power-sharing arrangements also differed in critical respects. Inspired by South Africa, Fiji’s rules required that all parties with over 10% of parliamentary seats be represented in cabinet, an edifice erected over an otherwise Westminster-based and majoritarian system. Northern Ireland’s arrangements originally entailed concurrent majorities for the election of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and proportional allocation of ministerial portfolios between parties using the d’Hondt formula.

In the aftermath of the political settlements in Northern Ireland and Fiji, the more radical parties in each case fared strongly and moderate or centrist parties lost support, and in both the power-sharing arrangements proved fraught with difficulty. But the subsequent path of development in the two cases followed a different trajectory. Whereas Northern Ireland witnessed a diminishing electoral focus on communal cleavages, particularly at the elections of 2007 and 2011, Fiji experienced coups in the wake of both the 1999 and 2006 elections, paving the way for a period of protracted military rule and the abrogation of the constitution in 2009.

This paper aims to examine this divergent experience, with a view to determining whether this can be explained by the institutional devices adopted, or whether other factors intervene. We begin in the next two sections by examining the process by which polarised polities emerged, and the manner in which this division became mobilised politically. We then examine the content of the agreements designed to overcome these divisions, and look in turn at two aspects of these: the provisions for converting voter preferences into parliamentary seats by means of the electoral system, and the impact of the power sharing formula on government formation. We conclude by seeking to explain the different outcomes in the two cases, detecting signs of the explanation in the presence or absence of other fall-back mechanisms outside the political process—the army in Fiji, and direct rule from London in Northern Ireland.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF POLARISED POLITIES

Notwithstanding the geographical distance separating the two cases considered here, and their contrasting historical trajectories, there are two important comparable aspects of the political evolution of Fiji and Northern Ireland. The first is the British imperial legacy, with its important consequences for political institutions and political culture. The second is the long-term impact of policies of plantation and settlement, which resulted in a relatively even balance of two distinct but geographically overlapping and competing populations of similar size.

Northern Ireland may be seen as a periphery of the island of Ireland; but the status of Ireland has been defined over the centuries essentially as a periphery of Great Britain (Coakley, 2008a). Unlike the position in the two other Celtic peripheries, Scotland and Wales, English rule in Ireland never achieved a level of popular acceptance sufficient to permit it to become a contented part of the United Kingdom. In the seventeenth century, British strategy for the pacification of Ireland rested substantially on a policy of “plantation”, encouraging the settlement, especially in the northern province of Ulster, of English and Scottish Protestants on land confiscated
from the native Irish (largely Catholic) population. This policy left a vivid legacy that was given new life in the nineteenth century, when mass mobilization of Catholics behind demands for “home rule” or autonomy within the United Kingdom found its counterpart in mass mobilization of Ulster Protestants in defence of their British heritage. The outcome was an imperfect partition of the island in 1921: the southern part quickly established its de facto and eventually its de jure independence, while Northern Ireland remained a divided periphery of the United Kingdom, albeit one enjoying a measure of self-government.

British colonization of Fiji occurred in an altogether different global context at the end of an era of establishing settler colonies, most importantly in nearby Australia and New Zealand. Colonial rule was embraced by leading indigenous Fijian customary chiefs, who ceded Fiji to the British Crown in 1874. Pacification of the hill tribes occurred, but British policy more generally was to coopt and rule through the traditional leaders, not to displace them in the interests of establishing yet another colony that would serve as a magnet for the overseas exodus of Europeans. The first substantive Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, put in place a “protectionist” policy prohibiting further alienation of native lands, restricting indigenous participation as plantation labourers and codifying in law the obligations of Fijian “commoners” to their traditional chiefs. To provide a labour force for the sugar plantations, over 60,000 indentured labourers were brought from the Indian sub-continent between 1879 and 1916. For Indian indentured labourers, wages were low and conditions poor, and contracts were punitively enforced through the courts, leaving a lasting legacy of bitterness against the colonial order. After indenture was ended in 1916, the sugar industry was reorganized. Indian tenant farmers, normally on land leased either from native owners or from the state, supplied sugar cane to the monopsony milling company, the Australian-owned Colonial Sugar Refining Company. By 1921, when Ireland was partitioned, colonial Fiji had established for itself a political economy based on reliance on Indian labour, Fijian land and white-owned capital.

The subsequent demographic experience of both Fiji and Northern Ireland, summarised in figure 1, compounded the inevitable political difficulties. Designed as a region in which Protestants would have a clear majority, Northern Ireland had a large Catholic minority of 35% in 1921. The minority remained at this level until the 1970s, but from that point onwards it began to increase steadily (a consequence in part of differential migration patterns, but in particular of big differences in rates of natural increase between the two communities). Catholics accounted for about 45% of the population by 2001, and projections based on age structure suggest that, other things being equal, Catholics will outnumber Protestants within a relatively short time.

In Fiji, decline in the indigenous population as a result of exposure to hitherto unfamiliar infectious diseases was halted only in the 1920s, after the global influenza epidemic resulted in the deaths of around 5% of ethnic Fijians. Meanwhile, the Fiji Indians increased in number, and Fiji-born Indians came to exceed in number those who had sailed from Calcutta or Madras. By 1946 indigenous Fijians found
themselves out-numbered by the descendants of the immigrant population. Nevertheless, indigenous birth-rates were accelerating by the 1960s, and by the 1980s Indian out-migration—particularly after the 1987 coup—allowed the indigenous population to reclaim a majority. By 2007, the share of ethnic Fijians had grown to 56.8% and that of Fiji Indians had dropped to 37.5% (Fiji Government, 2007).

3. ETHNIC POLITICAL MOBILISATION

Bipolar politics cast a long shadow on patterns of political mobilisation in the two cases. Northern Ireland had traditionally been characterized by a two-party system that essentially represented a continuation of the political cleavages of the nineteenth century.1 On one side was the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), representing the Protestant population of Northern Ireland and forming part of the British Conservative Party. Its main opponent was the Nationalist Party, originally an all-Ireland organization, but confined to Northern Ireland after 1921. Those pockets of Protestant and Catholic support which were not mopped up by these two parties opted mainly for the small Northern Ireland Labour Party, self-consciously bicommunal but always ranked third in elections.

The shocks of the civil unrest that began after 1968 gave a severe jolt to the traditional party system. On the Catholic side, the success of the civil rights movement and dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of the Nationalist Party led to the creation of a new party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), in 1970. Notwithstanding its name and its affiliation to the international socialist movement, the party’s de facto role quickly became that of representative of the Catholic community, replacing the Nationalist Party in this respect. The cornerstone of the SDLP’s policy has been acceptance of the reality of the partition of Ireland, coupled with a commitment to power sharing government and a demand for recognition of the Irish identity of the minority within Northern Ireland through the creation of all-Ireland institutions. The more radical alternative on the Catholic side, the IRA, largely stood aside from electoral politics during the 1970s. From the early 1980s onwards, however, its political wing, Sinn Féin, became an enthusiastic participant in elections. Initially offering only a modest challenge to the SDLP, by the early twenty-first century it had pulled ahead of that party in its pursuit of Catholic support (see table 1, which reports results of Northern Ireland elections over the period 1969-2011).

On the Protestant side, the Unionist Party splintered in the face of changed political circumstances. Northern Ireland’s original devolved representative institutions were suspended in 1972, depriving the UUP of power, and the party itself split three ways, managing to re-unify only in the late 1970s. In addition, it was challenged from the outside by the more militant Protestant Unionist Party, reorganized in 1971 as the

1 For further analysis of the Northern Ireland case, see McGarry and O’Leary, 2004, 2009; Ruane and Todd, 1996, 1999; Tonge, 2002; Wilford, 2001.
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Elections to an abortive Northern Ireland Assembly in 1973 and to a Constitutional Convention in 1975 showed the profound fragmentation of unionism. By the time elections to a new consultative Assembly took place in 1982, however, the unionist tradition was dominated by two forces: the old UUP, and its radical challenger, the DUP. Following the Good Friday agreement of 1998, the consociational deal that permitted the reintroduction of devolved government in Northern Ireland, the DUP steadily increased its level of support in the new Assembly, finally becoming the largest party there.

This pattern of stable electoral competition since the early 1980s (with a moderate and a militant party on each side of the communal division) is completed by the rather less significant political centre. The middle terrain had originally been occupied by the Northern Ireland Labour Party. In 1970, however, a new party, the Alliance Party, appeared, seeking to draw support from both Protestants and Catholics. Northern Ireland’s five-party system may thus relatively easily be arranged on a unionist-nationalist continuum: the DUP, the UUP, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and Sinn Féin (Coakley, 2008b).

Political mobilisation in Fiji was initially characterized by a confrontation between Indian politicians and the colonial state.\(^2\) The British colonial authorities responded to the growth of Indian numerical strength in the 1920s and 1930s by rejecting calls for a “common roll” both from within Fiji and from Indian diaspora organisations. Elected Indian political representation was allowed on the Legislative Council in 1929, but only on the basis of communal rolls, which were viewed by Indian leaders as tools of colonial exploitation. London insisted on “parity” between Indian, Fijian and “European” representation on the Legislative Council in the 1930s, despite the “Europeans” being a tiny minority.\(^3\) Indigenous Fijian representatives were not elected until 1963, but instead were nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and appointed by the Governor. These arrangements helped to nurture two enduring features of Fiji politics—indigenous ambivalence towards calls for popular democracy and a political alliance between Fijian and “European” representatives against the “Indian threat”. When the thorny question of devising political institutions to accompany decolonization came under consideration in the mid-1960s, the compromise reached in London entailed acceptance of so-called “cross voting” as a half way house between communal and common rolls.

At independence in 1970, the British left behind an elaborate electoral system, designed as a compromise between Indian and ethnic Fijian demands as regards political representation. In addition to the communal seats where each group voted

\(^2\) For further analysis of the Fiji case, see Fraenkel, 2006b; Premdas, 1995.

\(^3\) “Europeans” meant peoples of European descent, though many were from Australia, New Zealand or North America, and, by the 1930s, the “part-Europeans” of mixed descent were already a substantial share of those on the “European” electoral rolls.
separately, so-called “national” (previously “cross-voting”) seats were used. Each voter had four votes; one in his or her own communal seat, and another three in “national” seats for candidates whose ethnicity was specified as “Indian”, “Fijian” and “general”. All contests were based on a first-past-the-post rule. The national seats were intended to require multi-ethnic support for candidates with a national appeal. In practice, the prevalence of voting along ethnic lines meant that such seats tended to be captured by whichever ethnic group had a majority in the corresponding constituency (Fraenkel, 2003). Under the 1970 constitution, arrangements were such that ethnic Fijians could keep perpetual control over the legislature if they could remain united and sustain a strong alliance with the parties of the over-represented “general” voters. Where divisions appeared, and where that alliance weakened, the British legacy of indigenous Fijian paramountcy came under threat, resulting in constitutional crises and/or coups.

Political parties emerged much later in Fiji than in Northern Ireland—only in the twilight of the colonial era in the 1960s—but the pattern was also that of an emerging two party system. Born in the Indian-dominated sugar cane regions, the Federation Party led by A.D. Patel proved able to win all of the Indian communal constituencies in elections held in 1966, 1968, and, re-named as the National Federation Party (NFP), in 1972, April 1977, September 1977 and 1982. At the other end of the spectrum, the Alliance Party led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara appealed primarily to indigenous Fijian voters but sought to sustain links with leading European politicians. It won most of the Fijian and general voter seats at elections in 1966, 1972, April 1977, September 1977 and 1982. Each party was reasonably certain of success in the communal constituencies of its associated ethnic group, with the overall election outcome invariably being decided in those “national” constituencies where ethnic Fijians and Fiji Indians approached parity in numbers. Despite the overarching bipolar political pattern, because of the first-past-the-post electoral system, small breakaway splinter parties or variations in turnout could make a major difference in the close-to-parity marginal seats, and these decided the overall outcomes at critical elections in April 1977 and 1987 (see table 2).

Ratu Mara became Fiji’s Prime Minister at independence in 1970, and his Alliance Party was able to easily win the initial post-independence election in 1972, because in addition to solid Fijian and general voter support, he had the support of 25% of Fiji Indians. That was to prove the largest share of the Indian vote ever secured by Mara’s Alliance, or any other predominantly Fijian-backed party. By the mid-1970s, Mara’s efforts to command the political centre were undermined by the emergence of Sakeasi Butadroka’s Fijian Nationalist Party, which obtained 25% of the ethnic Fijian

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4 “General” voters are those not on the Fijian or Indian voter rolls, including Europeans, part-Europeans, Chinese and others. Other Pacific islanders were included on the Fijian electoral rolls until the 1987 coup, but transferred to the “general” rolls thereafter.
vote in April 1977. Mara’s Alliance Party was defeated, but an internal crisis in the NFP led the Governor General, controversially, to reappoint Mara at the head of a minority government. At fresh elections in September 1977, the ethno-nationalist challenge abated, the NFP split between “dove” and “flower” factions, and Mara’s Alliance was triumphant. Fiji’s political history during the 1970s resembles the classic Rabushka and Shepsle pattern: an ethnic outbidder forces a centrist party towards a more robust defence of communal interests (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 88-89).

Following the shock of losing the election in April 1977, Mara’s Alliance Party calculated (like the 1970s Northern Irish parties as observed by Richard Rose) that “the chances of winning an extra seat by adding a few votes from the other community were much less than the chances of losing votes by appearing ‘soft’ on key sectarian issues” (Rose, 1976: 78).

A decade after the 1977 debacle, Mara’s Alliance was again defeated, this time by a coalition between the NFP and the newly formed Fiji Labour Party (FLP), both parties which were reliant largely on the votes of the Fiji Indians. This time, the opposition did form a government, led by an indigenous Fijian, Dr Timoci Bavadra. Within a month, it had been overthrown by the overwhelmingly indigenous Fiji military forces. Efforts to reach some settlement that would entail a restoration of constitutional rule were derailed by a further military intervention in September 1987, after which the 1970 constitution was abrogated. On the basis of a new 1990 constitution, which reserved the positions of President and Prime Minister for indigenous Fijians, and gave the Fijians 37 of the 70 parliamentary seats as compared to 27 for the Indians, Fiji went back to the polls in 1992 and 1994. Coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka emerged as Prime Minister after both of these elections at the head of a new party, the Soqosoqo ni Valavulewa ni Taukei (SVT). Although the 1987 coup was bloodless, it left a lasting legacy of civil strife and communal antagonism: Indian hostility to Rabuka’s government was to remain strong even after the coup leader embraced reform in the mid-1990s.

4. THE CHARACTER OF POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

The pursuit of efforts to resolve inter-communal conflict in the two cases illustrates a significant contrast between dependencies and sovereign states, as well as drawing attention to other important differences between Northern Ireland and Fiji. In the former, it was ultimately the UK government that played the key decision making role; in the latter, competition between the two communities was not moderated by any outside power, but the army eventually intervened. In Northern Ireland, a prolonged campaign of violence over the years 1970-94 resulted in more than 3,000 deaths and colossal social, economic and psychological damage; in Fiji, ethnic Fijian control of the armed forces meant that military rule rather than civil conflict or external rule was the main alternative to political accommodation. Finally, Northern Ireland’s very existence was at issue, unlike the position in Fiji: nationalists wanted not just an end to British rule, but union with the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, the pursuit of a settlement was hampered by the gap between the ultimate aims of the parties, but was facilitated by the role of outside forces
(notably, of the British government, from the early 1970s operating in concert with the Irish government). After the old, Unionist-dominated majoritarian institutions of Northern Ireland were abolished in 1972, the British government made it clear that Northern Ireland would not be absorbed by the United Kingdom, but that “direct rule” would be imposed pending an internal settlement. It also required any such settlement to have two components: it would be based on power sharing between the two communities, and it would recognise the “Irish dimension” to the problem by establishing formal links with the Republic of Ireland.

The most ambitious effort to meet these conditions occurred in 1973-74, when a power-sharing government linking the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party took office, and an all-island Council of Ireland was planned. This initiative failed, however, in the face of militant unionist opposition and a general strike. Subsequent efforts in 1975-76 (through the election of a constitutional convention) and in 1980-82 (through inter-party talks, and the election of a new consultative assembly) failed to produce agreement. In 1985, the British government introduced a new source of pressure on unionists by offering a formal consultative voice to the Irish government in matters affecting the government of Northern Ireland, pending a domestic settlement.

The ultimate outcome was a set of prolonged inter-party talks in the mid-1990s, facilitated by paramilitary ceasefires, eventually resulting in agreement in 1998. This provided for a set of consociational structures: an assembly elected by STV, a government made up of ministers selected in proportion to party strengths in the Assembly, and provisions for a veto on matters affecting the vital interests of either community. The new posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister were created; these were to be elected in a joint vote, and were required to come from different communities. The agreement also provided for new political structures linking the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland, and with the United Kingdom more generally. Importantly, measures for dealing with the legacy of violence were also put in place. The agreement got off to a faltering start, with the power sharing government collapsing in 2002, as discussed below, and was initially opposed by the militant Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It was placed on a more secure footing in 2007, when the DUP finally signed up to a slightly amended version. Since then, the government headed by a DUP First Minister and a Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister seems to have brought a new level of political stability to Northern Ireland.

The pressures towards accommodation were more domestic in origin in Fiji than in Northern Ireland. After the 1987 coup, the prospects for a settlement acceptable to the Fiji Indians had looked bleak. However, the 1990 constitution was designed as an “interim” arrangement lasting seven years. In 1995, Prime Minister Rabuka agreed to commence deliberations on a new constitution in collaboration with NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy and the FLP. A Constitutional Review Commission, chaired by former New Zealand Governor-General Sir Paul Reeves, was established. Initial submissions from Fijian parties, including Rabuka’s SVT party, indicated support for continuing paramountcy of indigenous Fijians (Lal, 1998). However, the Commission’s final report entailed a compromise between the demands of Fijian and
Indian political leaders, and included an important accommodation over issues of political representation and electoral reform, although government was intended to continue along Westminster lines. The government organized deliberation on the Reeves Commission’s report through a joint parliamentary select committee, comprising politicians from the major parties. In some respects, the select committee proved more conservative than the Commission; in other respects, it was more radical.

The Reeves Commission had proposed a 70-member parliament, with 45 open seats and 25 communal seats (12 for Fijians, 10 for Indians, two for general voters and one for Rotumans), but expressed a desire to “to move decisively but gradually away from the present communal voting arrangements” (CRC, 1996: 295). The select committee disagreed, and proposed instead only 25 open seats in a 71-member parliament, with the 46 communal seats divided between Fijians (23), Indians (19), General voters (3) and Rotumans (1) roughly in accordance with population shares. The Commission’s proposals entailed an end to ethnic reservation of the Prime Ministerial post, but the President was to continue to be an ethnic Fijian, together with a non-Fijian Vice-President. Instead, the select committee settled on a President and Vice-President nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs, an all-indigenous body of traditional leaders. Based on a review of the experience in South Africa, the Reeves Commission had rejected submissions urging mandatory power-sharing, and instead claimed that the AV electoral arrangements alone would generate voluntary power-sharing (Lal, 1998: 93). The select committee rejected this, opting instead to “go further” in the direction of encouraging multi-ethnic government by embracing arrangements under which all parties with over 10% of seats would be entitled to participate in cabinet (Parliament of Fiji, 1997: 17).

The Reeves Commission had initially proposed an unusual multi-member AV system, but this was dropped by the select committee in favour of the more usual single-member AV system. Both registration and voting were to be compulsory, and ranking at least 75% of candidates in order of preference was made a requirement for casting a valid ballot. Ostensibly to simplify the ballot, a form of ticket voting was adopted, modelled on that used for elections to the Australian Senate. Voters could either record preferences “below-the-line”, or they could simply tick next to a political party “above the line”. Doing the latter entailed endorsing party lists of preferences, which were lodged with the Elections Office prior to each election. That proved a highly influential detail, since around 92-95% of ballot papers were completed above-the-line, thereby granting political parties an exceptional degree of control over the allocation of preference votes (for details, see Fraenkel, 2001).

We now look in turn at the operation of two key components in these political settlements. The first is the electoral system, and the extent to which methods of translating votes cast into seats in parliament encouraged or discouraged compromise. The second is the formula for allocating cabinet portfolios proportionally to parliamentary seats, and the extent to which this facilitated a stable form of power sharing.
5. THE OPERATION OF PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEMS

The single transferable vote system of proportional representation had first been introduced to Northern Ireland in 1921, when the departing British government sought to promote minority representation by making this system a key feature in the new, divided state. Perceiving the advantages of the plurality system, however, the local Unionist administration re-introduced it in 1929, and this continued as the electoral system until devolved government collapsed in 1972. Other abuses of electoral law over 1929-72 also encouraged the reintroduction of the single transferable vote in 1973. All subsequent elections to Northern Ireland assemblies (and indeed to local authorities) have taken place under this system, with one exception: in 1996 a list system of proportional representation was used in elections to a constitutional forum.

The outcome of elections under STV was predictable: the results achieved a high degree of proportionality, aided by relatively large constituencies. It also, predictably, helped to allow the representation of separate tendencies that would have been forced to coalesce under the plurality system. Thus, a political landscape once dominated by two parties was now host to a multi-party system. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) had for some time been challenged from its militant and moderate fringes by the DUP and the Alliance Party respectively; but in the mid-1970s the main party itself divided three ways, with frustrated militants and moderates going their separate ways, a luxury facilitated by STV. By the 1980s, however, only the DUP survived to challenge the UUP from the militant side; and the SDLP was now facing a much more powerful challenge on the militant nationalist side, Sinn Féin. By the early 1980s, the five-party system that survives to the present had been securely established.

Fiji’s choice of a single-member AV system, and of a predominantly communal seat allocation system, ensured that electoral outcomes in 1999, 2001 and 2006 were broadly consistent with the experience of 1970-87 under the plurality system. The 19 Indian communal seats were taken by the largest Fiji Indian-backed party, the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), in all three AV elections. These were all two party contests with the National Federation Party. Thus, the new voting system made no difference to these outcomes since the FLP obtained over 50% of votes at the first count in every Indian communal constituency. By contrast, contests for the 23 Fijian communal seats in 1999 involved multiple parties, and thus ballot transfers proved critical, with preferences mostly disadvantaging Rabuka’s SVT, the party of the incumbent government. In part in reaction to that defeat, and in part due to the intensification of polarization in the wake of the coup of 19 May 2000, contests for the 23 Fijian seats in 2001 and 2006 entailed a shift to homogeneous backing of harder-line parties, initially the newly formed Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lemeniavana (SDL) and the Conservative Alliance-Matanitu Vanua in 2001, and then the SDL alone in 2006 (Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006).

Since parties rooted in the Fijian community could make no headway in the Indian communal constituencies, and vice versa, the overall outcome at all three elections
was inevitably dependent on contests in the 25 open constituencies. In 1999, the FLP was able to win 18 of those open seats, largely drawing on party official-controlled transfers of preference votes from the ethnic Fijian-backed parties. In 2001, the tables were turned, and the SDL was able to win 13 of the 25 open seats, largely drawing on preference votes transferred from the small centrist “Moderates Forum” parties. In 2006, the outcome was virtually a dead heat, with the SDL taking 13 and the FLP 12 of the 25 open seats. The high degree of disproportionality witnessed at the first AV elections in 1999 and 2001 diminished, and owing to the squeezing out of centrists between the two increasingly homogeneous ethnic parties, the number of first count leaders who eventually lost their seats fell to zero. The share of invalid ballots remained unusually high: 7.8% in 1999, 12% in 2001, 8.9% in 2006.

One important question arising from the kind of electoral experimentation we have described is the overall proportionality of the system. In table 3 we reproduce Michael Gallagher’s (1991) “least squares” index of disproportionality. The lower this figure, the more proportional the system; zero would represent perfect proportionality, and figures below about five indicate a rather proportional arrangement. Northern Ireland traditionally fared poorly by this measure: prior to 1973 the proportionality index was very high, with the Unionist Party, in particular, normally winning many more seats than its share of the votes should have entitled it to (though the index is hard to interpret, given the high proportion of uncontested constituencies). Fiji demonstrates the difficulties of the plurality system, with its disproportionate outcomes, though it is striking that even under this system some relatively proportional results were achieved, as in 1982. Fiji also appears to offer counter-evidence in respect of two other common generalisations. First, use of the block vote in 1992 and 1994 did not result in a massive increase in levels of disproportionality, partly because the system was used exclusively in communally based electorates. Second, the most disproportional result of all was achieved in 1999 under AV, a system often wrongly thought to deliver reasonably proportional results. Of course, these conclusions are based on mechanical analysis of data; we need to recall also that the plurality and block vote systems encourage tactical voting, making it difficult to infer voters’ sincere preferences.

6. THE OPERATION OF POWER-SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

The constitutional settlements in Northern Ireland and Fiji in the closing years of the twentieth century offered opportunities for political stability. But, as so often in settlements of these kinds, implementation posed formidable difficulties. In Northern Ireland, although the parties signed up to the power-sharing deal in April 1998, and a referendum and Assembly election a few weeks later showed popular endorsement of the new arrangements, the new government took office only in December 1999, and it was only then, too, that the other institutional components of the agreement (such as the North-South Ministerial Council, and the British-Irish Council) came into existence. The stumbling block was the position of the UUP, whose leader, First
Minister David Trimble, refused to enter government with Sinn Féin until the process of IRA disarmament had begun. A creative “fudge” on this matter allowed the new government to take office; its membership, based on application of the d’Hondt formula to the results of the Assembly election, was determined automatically: three UUP and SDLP ministers and two Sinn Féin and DUP ministers took up their posts (the latter, opposed to the agreement, refused to attend government meetings but otherwise managed their departments effectively).

Following the final collapse of the crisis-ridden government in 2002, direct rule from London was reinstated. Fresh Assembly elections in 2003 showed the two militant parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, surpassing their more moderate rivals, but stalemate continued at the level of government formation. This was finally broken in late 2006 when a supplementary agreement between the parties and the British and Irish governments was reached in St Andrews, Scotland. This made minor changes to the provisions for selection of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and to certain other provisions of the 1998 agreement. These were sufficient to win DUP endorsement. Following a further election in 2007 that demonstrated the dominance of the DUP and Sinn Féin within their respective communities, the governmental institutions were restored—with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister posts now held by these two parties. This pattern was confirmed in a further election in 2011, after which the institutions were widely seen as having achieved a high degree of “normalcy”, as their priorities shifted from divisive constitutional and symbolic matters to the safer ground of social and economic policy.

Fiji’s power-sharing arrangements were not part of the original constitutional recommendations of the 1995-96 Reeves Commission. They were subsequently advocated by the parliamentary select committee. As a result, these rules were hastily incorporated into the overall constitutional framework, and imperfectly aligned with other Westminster-type elements, such as “collective responsibility” and the appointment of a Prime Minister “in the President’s opinion” able to “form a government that has the confidence of the House of Representatives” (Fiji Government, 1998: S 98). The key new provision was that “in establishing the Cabinet, the Prime Minister must invite all parties whose membership in the House of Representatives comprises at least 10% of the total membership of the House to be represented in proportion to their numbers in the House” (S99(5)). There was to be no control over which portfolios qualifying parties would receive, nor any provisions for participating parties to have input into the selection of ministers, nor any specified limits on the overall size of cabinet.

These provisions resulted in extensive litigation after the 1999 and 2001 elections. Following his victory in the May 1999 election, the leader of the largely Fiji Indian-backed Fiji Labour Party, Mahendra Chaudhry, gave portfolios to his three coalition allies, only one of which had reached the 10% threshold. As legally required, he also

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5 Further detail on the 2002-4 court cases in Fiji can be found in Fraenkel 2006.
offered participation to Rabuka’s SVT. With 38% of the indigenous vote, the SVT was the largest Fijian party by vote share, but as a result of the new AV system it had just 8 seats in parliament, narrowly reaching the 10% threshold. Bristling from its election defeat, the former governing party put conditions on its participation, which Chaudhry rejected. At the instigation of the President, the matter was brought before the courts, where judges ruled in favour of Chaudhry, finding that “what purported to be a conditional acceptance amounted to a declining of the invitation” (Fiji Supreme Court, 1999: 22).

After the 2001 election, the tables were turned, with victory for the newly formed and mainly Fijian-backed Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL). Hoping to follow the earlier pattern, Qarase wrote to the FLP leader—whose party had 27 of the 71 seats—offering participation in cabinet, but also pointing out that the SDL and FLP had “diametrically opposed” policies, insisting that government would be based on SDL policy and claiming that power-sharing “unrealistic and unworkable” (Qarase, 2001a). Chaudhry responded, urging that “cabinet decision making in Government should be on a consensus seeking basis especially with regard to key issues and policies” and that “membership of the cabinet should be in proportion to the number of seats held in parliament by those parties participating in the cabinet”. Qarase interpreted this as setting a precondition, and rejected this as unacceptable (Qarase, 2001b). Instead, a coalition government was formed that excluded the largest Fiji Indian-backed party.

Again, the matter was brought before the courts, which ruled against Qarase. In 2002, the court ordered the government to advise the President to appoint to cabinet “such number of parliamentary members of the Fiji Labour Party as is in proportion to their numbers in the House of Representatives” (Fiji High Court, 2002). On appeal, the Supreme Court upheld that judgment, though ruling that cabinet entitlements be “measured by the proportion of the number of parliamentary seats it holds to the total number of parliamentary seats held by the Government or Coalition party and all eligible parties” (Fiji Supreme Court, 2003). In accordance with the Court of Appeal ruling, the FLP might claim 39% of portfolios, while the Supreme Court ruling entailed the right to 47% of ministerial posts. To comply with the latter judgment, Qarase announced an inflated 36-member cabinet. The FLP was to be given a set of tokenistic portfolios, with minimal responsibilities.

By agreement between the two parties, the issue of numerical entitlements to cabinet portfolios was referred back to the Supreme Court, resulting in a split verdict. The court upheld its earlier insistence on proportionality measured using “eligible” parties rather than the whole house as the denominator, but the majority verdict now recognised that strict application of this provision “entails the possibility of a Cabinet dominated numerically by parties hostile to the Government, with the consequence that the Cabinet (or government) would not have the confidence of the House”. To avoid this, the Prime Minister was given the right to bring into cabinet additional “Independents or Senate members, provided they do not belong to any of the parties represented in the House of Representatives” (Fiji Supreme Court, 2004). To comply, Qarase now offered the FLP 14 token portfolios in a 30-member cabinet, but
declared an intention to appoint independents and senators as additional ministers. With a new election looming, Chaudhry formally rejected the offer, and became Leader of the Opposition.

In the wake of the 2006 election, the multi-party cabinet issue resurfaced yet again. This time, returned SDL Prime Minister Qarase offered nine substantial portfolios to the FLP. In response, the FLP split, with several senior members accepting ministerial portfolios, but party leader Mahendra Chaudhry preferring to remain on the backbenches. On the eve of the military coup of December 2006, the FLP ministers were confronted with an ultimatum from Chaudhry to reject the government’s 2007 budget or face disciplinary action. Two of the FLP leaders who favoured cooperation with the SDL were expelled (for details, see Green, 2009).

The ultimate success of efforts to install power sharing government in Northern Ireland and Fiji was, then, rather uneven. In Northern Ireland, the “safety net” of direct rule from London permitted the new institutions to collapse in 2002. The British government was able to continue to administer Northern Ireland until 2007; societal chaos and renewal of armed conflict was not the only alternative to a power-sharing government. In Fiji, too, there was an alternative to the parliamentary system, but here it was indigenous rather than external. Military intervention in 2006 took on a more enduring form than had been the case after earlier coups; the alternative to power sharing turned out to be not civil war, but military dictatorship.

7. CONCLUSION

The 1997-98 political settlements in Fiji and Northern Ireland aimed to bring a close to troubled eras of civil strife. The level of violence in Fiji was much less than that in Northern Ireland, but Fiji Indian alienation from the state was nevertheless intense. In Fiji, resistance was limited by the monopoly on weaponry of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, made up overwhelmingly of ethnic Fijians. The process of implementation of the agreements draws attention to several lessons for conflict resolution in balanced bipolar systems. They have to do with provisions for the conduct of elections, for the formation of power sharing governments, and for the long-term underwriting of the settlements.

First, proportional representation is often considered a suitable choice for deeply divided societies, and Fiji’s usage of a proportionality rule for cabinet together with a majoritarian electoral system proved something of a mismatch. The re-introduction of STV in Northern Ireland in 1973 provoked some initial unionist resistance, but it quickly acquired near-universal acceptance as a fair system for translating votes into seats. The temporary use of the list system of proportional representation in 1996 was precisely that: a once-off effort to secure representation for very small groups seen as vital in the negotiation process. Fiji’s use of AV, coupled with ticket voting, helped to deliver unusually disproportionate results, a high level of invalid voting and exacerbated tensions in the wake of the 1999 election. The key architects of the new political settlement, former coup-leader Sitiveni Rabuka and Fiji Indian opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy, would probably have been defeated under other electoral systems, but the scale of their defeat was exaggerated by the majoritarian electoral
arrangements. Under a proportional system, such as the list system or STV (especially without ticket voting), they would have been more strongly represented in the post-1999 parliament, and the incentive to resort to extra-parliamentary action to dislodge the Chaudhry government would have been lessened. Aside from continuing non-proportional effects, AV was associated with more intense communal polarization in subsequent elections.

Second, Northern Ireland’s power-sharing arrangements were better crafted than those in Fiji. In Northern Ireland since 1998, parties have simply designated their ministerial nominees in accordance with a mathematical formula, and the posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, originally to be elected by the Assembly, have since 2007 been chosen in the same automatic way. In Fiji, by contrast, while parties winning a minimum share of seats have guaranteed representation in government, the system has not worked smoothly in practice. The absence of a ceiling on cabinet size, lack of qualifying party input into ministerial selection and substantial misfit with retained Westminster foundations generated continuing difficulties. In a context of intense inter-party haggling and discord, much of the responsibility for enforcing the multi-party cabinet provisions fell to the courts; indeed, perhaps the most extensive litigation anywhere in the world was contained in successive rulings by the Fiji High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court. Ultimately, the courts—after having adopted a maximalist interpretation of the constitutional requirement to allocate portfolios to qualifying parties—chose, controversially, to ease the power-sharing constraint on the Prime Minister by allowing additional ministerial appointments of independents and senators.

Third, and finally, the cost of failure to agree has always been a major—if not always a sufficient—deterrent for ethnic elites. Where political settlements fail, the result is frequently intense social conflict or civil warfare, and usually, at a minimum, a lasting legacy of bitterness. Yet there is another alternative to power-sharing (and, indeed, Westminster-style) government: authoritarian government, often under the control of the military. In both Fiji and Northern Ireland, forces outside the parliamentary arena were critical to the fate of political settlements. In Fiji, the December 2006 military coup was in part a reaction against the failure of the AV system to deliver victory to moderates. It was also an armed intervention into a political arena that bore the scars not only of the 1987 and 2000 coups, but also of a troubled subsequent era of civilian governance. It was initially, ostensibly, a “clean-up campaign” against corruption, but was soon declared to be a military-driven effort to transcend ethnic cleavages arising from an electoral system dominated by communal loyalties. In non-sovereign states, another alternative to democratic government is possible: external rule can hold the line as regards domestic conflict and even, as in Northern Ireland from 2002 to 2007, provide a reasonable level of effective day-to-day government.
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Qarase to Chaudhry, (2001b) September 12.


Table 1: Party support (seats) in elections, Northern Ireland, 1969-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>DUP</th>
<th>UUP</th>
<th>other unionist</th>
<th>Alliance Party</th>
<th>other centre</th>
<th>Nat/SDLP</th>
<th>SF</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: DUP, Democratic Unionist Party; UUP, Ulster Unionist Party, SDLP, Social Democratic and Labour Party; SF, Sinn Féin. “other unionists” includes Vanguard Unionist Party, Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, and other smaller unionist groups and independents; “Nat/SDLP includes the Nationalist Party and independent nationalists in 1969.
### Table 2: Party support (seats) in elections, Fiji, 1966-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major Fijian Party</th>
<th>Other Fijian Party</th>
<th>Centre/Inds &amp; Others</th>
<th>Fiji Labour Party</th>
<th>National Fed. Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1972</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
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<td>1977-1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*28</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: parties are grouped as follows: “Major Fijian Party” also includes Fijian Political Party (SVT); “other Fijian” includes Christian Democratic Alliance, Conservative Alliance, Fiji Association Party, Fijian Nationalist Party, Nationalist VTL, Western United Front, All Nationals Congress Party, Party of National Unity; “centre/others” includes General Voters Party, New Labour Unity Party, United General Party, Independents.


### Table 3: Levels of disproportionality, Fiji and Northern Ireland, 1965-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>Northern Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plurality system</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977 (1)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 (2)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block vote</strong></td>
<td><strong>List system</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative vote</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Disproportionality is calculated using the Gallagher index (Gallagher, 1991). The value of this index varies depending on the manner in which parties are classified and grouped.