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Inclusion and Power-Sharing in Pacific Asia: From Consociationalism to Centripetalism

Abstract

This paper looks at the changing nature of political power-sharing in the Asia-Pacific region, characterised by the ethnically-plural democracies and semi-democracies, and it reviews several cases in terms of their institutional structures and mechanisms adopted for the purpose of political inclusion. The paper states that the classic consensual recommendations of parliamentary rule, proportional elections and ethnic parties have been abandoned in favour of more majoritarian and multiethnic models of governance. In this shift from one model of power-sharing to another, political inclusion in Southeast Asia then increasingly takes place informally, through centripetal rather than consociational means, via some key institutional mechanisms: oversized but not grand coalition governments; aggregative rather than segmental political parties; ethnically-mixed federal or other sub-national jurisdictional units; and majoritarian, vote-pooling political institutions. As a result, this “Asian model” of political inclusion stands in contrast and in many ways in opposition to the classic consensual recommendations.

Keywords: power-sharing, consociationalism, centripetalism, Pacific Asia, political inclusion

Introduction

This paper looks at the changing nature of political power-sharing in the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on the ethnically-plural democracies and semi-democracies of Pacific Asia (that is, Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific). On the face of it, this region does not appear propitious for political inclusion: most democracies are fragile or failing; societies are divided along multiple ethnic, linguistic, religious and other cleavages; and institutional structures are mostly majoritarian, privileging presidentialism, dominant parties and majority rule over the representation of minorities. In the past, various states (Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Fiji) sought to manage

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diversity via formal power-sharing guarantees or guarantees for minorities. Today political inclusion mostly takes place informally, via three key institutional mechanisms: oversized coalition governments; aggregative political parties; and centripetal electoral institutions. With a few partial exceptions (e.g. Malaysia), the classic consensual recommendations of parliamentary rule, proportional elections and ethnic parties have been abandoned in favour of more majoritarian and multiethnic models of governance.

This shift over time from one model of power-sharing to another has taken place against the backdrop of successive attempts at democratisation and great variation in both political and economic development. The region today contains some of the world's richest (Singapore) and poorest (East Timor) states, as well as a full spread of regime types: electoral democracy in Indonesia, the Philippines, East Timor and Papua New Guinea; soft-authoritarian 'quasi-democracy' in Singapore and Malaysia; resilient Communist regimes in Laos and Vietnam; military-electoral juntas in Thailand and Fiji; an absolute monarchy in Brunei; and even an ongoing democratic transition in Myanmar (formerly Burma).

This diversity of regime types is matched by a huge variation in social structure, overlaid by an unusual relationship between democracy, development and diversity. Unlike the common pattern in Africa and indeed other parts of the world, where under-development and ethnic heterogeneity have combined to undermine democracy's prospects, in Pacific Asia democracy has been most successful in the region's poorer and most ethnically-diverse states such as Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and most recently Myanmar – all of which also rank low on aggregate measures of educational attainment, literacy, maternal health and other human development indicators.

Indonesia, the region's standout democracy, is a Muslim-majority country of over 260 million people, spread over thousands of islands and hundreds of different ethno-linguistic groups, as well as all the world's major religions. As with its democratic neighbours, the Philippines and East Timor, electoral democracy overlays deep social and religious divisions, widespread poverty, and acute challenges of national governance. Myanmar too is an ethnic kaleidoscope, with seven ethnic states, over 100 official ethnic minorities, a multitude of identity schisms (including an increasingly deep divide between the Buddhist majority and

the Muslim minority, particularly the Rohingya), and a long and ongoing history of minority ethnic insurgency. Structurally, each of these states combine a majority religious culture – Sunni Islam in Indonesia, Catholicism in the Philippines and East Timor, Buddhism in Myanmar – with a preponderance of distinct regionally-based, ethno-linguistic communities. Indonesia, for instance, as the world’s most populous and culturally-complex emerging democracy, encompasses a large and pluralistic Islamic majority as well as Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other religions, a small but economically powerful Chinese minority, and hundreds of diverse local ethno-regional identities.

The region’s semi-democracies of Singapore and Malaysia, by contrast, have a more polarised ethnic history - which partly explains the emergence and resilience of their quasi-authoritarian political models dominated by party-state ‘partocracies’, the Peoples Action Party (PAP) in Singapore and the Barisan Nasional (BN) multiethnic coalition in Malaysia. One indicator of this dominance is the lack of turnover of power: neither Singapore nor Malaysia have ever experienced a change of government, in large part due to restrictions on the rights of opposition parties combined with electoral gerrymanders, a compliant judiciary and a pro-government press. Both also have deep if relatively latent ethnic divisions, with a clear majority community (Chinese in Singapore, Malays in Malaysia) and large minorities drawn from the opposite community in each case.

This prevalence of democracy in the poorest and most ethnically-diverse states continues into the South Pacific, where ethno-linguistically fractionalised Melanesian states have a superior democratic record to the otherwise more developed Polynesian islands. This is particularly the case in relation to Papua New Guinea (the world’s most ethnically-heterogeneous state on some indicators¹), which despite massive governance challenges and underdevelopment has maintained formal electoral democracy for almost five decades. By contrast, smaller but also more polarised cases such as the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji have all experienced periods of democratic failure, state collapse or military intervention in recent years.²

¹ James Fearon, ‘Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country’, *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2003, pp. 195–222.

² See Benjamin Reilly, ‘Democracy, Ethnic Fragmentation, and Internal Conflict: Confused Theories, Faulty Data, and the “Crucial Case” of Papua New Guinea’, *International*

Cases

Pacific-Asia therefore represents an important testing group for many theories of ethnic conflict and conflict management in the broader scholarly literature. One is the ongoing debate between consociational and centripetal approaches to the design of political institutions in ethnically plural society. As I will discuss in the next section, Indonesia's unlikely success over the past decade in successfully combining this diversity with electoral democracy has many historical and sociological explanations, but also owes something to centripetal strategies of constitutional design in its electoral and party laws, including incentives for cross-national (and thus cross-ethnic) party laws, presidential nominations and presidential elections. Other examples of centripetalism in the region include the use of ethnic cross-voting electoral systems in Singapore, Philippines and PNG, as well as more short-lived experiments in Fiji and recommendations (not yet adopted) for similar systems in the Solomon Islands and Tonga.³

Other states are currently in transition. One example is Myanmar, the region's newest electoral democracy, which warrants attention for its history of ethnic grievance, separatism and repression. Attempts to manage the politics of ethnicity, while changing over time, have been central to the country's emergence and history, starting with the 1947 Constitution which contained explicit recognition of ethnicity in the constitutional structure, including an upper house designed to give minorities political power in the national government. The 125-seat "House of Nationalities" explicitly granting representation to Shan, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Katens and other minorities, including four seats reserved specifically for the Anglo-Burmese. This was abandoned in 1974, when Prime Minister Ne Win abolished the upper house as part of the "Burmese road to socialism", but partly reintroduced in the third and current 2008 constitution, with each of the country's "major ethnic national races" recognised in a quasi-federal structure. Seven ethnic 'states' (mostly in the highland peripheries) are designated for groups such as the Shin, Karen and Shan, while seven 'regions' in the country's

Security, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2000, pp. 162–185; Benjamin Reilly, 'State Functioning and State Failure in the South Pacific', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2004, pp. 479–493.

³ Tonga's Constitutional and Electoral Commission (2008) recommended that the Single Transferable Vote be adopted for future elections. In the Solomon Islands, reform debates have focused on the Alternative Vote. Neither has yet been adopted.

centre represent the majority Burmans (Bamars). Despite the different nomenclature, states and regions are constitutionally equivalent, although in practice the representation of ethnic minorities differs widely. This is most apparent in relation to the officially recognised Rakhine (who, like the vast majority of the country, are Buddhist), but not the Muslim Rohingya people who also live mainly in Rakhine state. These are not recognised by the government as an ethnic nationality of Burma, and have been rendered stateless by successive Myanmar administrations, including the new, democratically-elected National League for Democracy government.

Other states display a similar if less complex ethnic *mélange*. Malaysia is divided not only between the majority *bumiputera* (literally, ‘sons of the soil’) Malays and indigenous groups (comprising 62% of the population in total), and the significant Chinese and Indian minorities, but also between peninsula Malaysia and the more fragmented eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. The Philippines is split at a national religious level between its Roman Catholic majority and a Muslim minority concentrated in the southern region of Mindanao, and is linguistically fragmented too. In Thailand, too, the “deep south” has seen a persistent resistance to the central government based on Muslim identity and deep-rooted history of ethnic discrimination and violence. Ethnic Chinese minorities are also present and influential in all states, as they are across East Asia.

The consequences of this multi-layered cultural, regional and religious diversity for Southeast Asia’s political development have been profound. Political party fragmentation has been a recurrent concern in Indonesia, for instance – both following the collapse of the Suharto regime, but also earlier, during the country’s initial democratic interlude in the 1950s, when shifting coalitions of secular, Islamic, nationalist, communal and regional parties led to six changes of government in seven years, providing a ready pretext for the overthrow of democracy and the declaration of martial law by president Sukarno in 1957. Similarly, the Philippines has long suffered from the consequences of its fragmented social landscape of *cacique* plantation owners, local strongmen, regional warlords and peasants: weak and personalised political parties, clientelistic and patrimonial politics, and an ongoing crisis of underdevelopment. The ‘semi-democratic’ political systems of both Malaysia and Singapore evolved partly as a result of a perceived need to

control the political expression of ethnicity; the management of communal relations has remained a cornerstone of politics in both states. Even Thailand, which often claims to be culturally homogenous, has seen a marked politicisation of ethnicity in the past decade, not just in the Muslim ‘deep south’ but also between the centre and the northeast.

In part because of this close historical connection between democratisation and the politicisation of ethnicity, in recent years numerous Pacific Asian countries have engaged in overt ‘political engineering’ to manage ethnic diversity, via the conscious design or redesign of political institutions. In different ways, and at different points in time, democratic reforms in Indonesia, Thailand, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines enabled the introduction of new political institutions designed to encourage more nationally-focused political competition and reduce the appeal of sectional or localised parties – even as new democratic freedoms encouraged such parties to develop. The semi-democracies of Malaysia and Singapore have also introduced modest reforms in this direction, although with the pre-eminent aim of strengthening incumbent governments and their hold on power.

Drawing on some of my previous work, this paper argues that these reforms have resulted in a shift away from the consociational models prevalent in the immediate post-independence period towards more integrative and centripetal forms of democracy in recent years.⁴ Pacific Asia’s consociational experiments of earlier decades with communal parties, proportional elections and national unity governments have increasingly been rejected in favour of new rules designed to transcend or impede, rather than express and reinforce, social cleavages.⁵ Reforms aimed to achieve multiple objectives: insulate executives from political pressure, limit the political expression of ethnicity, forge more stable political systems – and also restricting potential challengers to the established order, enabling a greater focus on growth-promoting public goods rather than side-payments to segmental elites. As one recent book-length study of Southeast Asia observed,

⁴ See Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁵ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1977.

“political elites deliberately constructed a set of centripetal democratic institutions that facilitated the emergence of democratic developmental states...In each instance, centripetal democratic institutions proved to be particularly fertile ground for pursuit of development as they enabled and enticed political parties to provide the public goods and policies needed to get growth going”.⁶

The story of this turn towards centripetalism has to be seen in the context of earlier, failed attempts to construct democratic polities. In Indonesia, for instance, elites feared a return to the fissiparous and immobilised politics of the 1950s, when “ethnic conflict of two kinds, religious-based and cultural/regional-based, threatened to tear apart the infant republic”.⁷ In Malaysia and Singapore, reforms aimed to manage not just ethnicity but also class-based and communist insurgencies.⁸ In Thailand, centripetal reforms aimed to promote more broad-based national policies rather than the segmental and particularised approaches of the past.⁹ In Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, building more stable and coherent political parties was high on the list, as was dealing with electoral violence.¹⁰ Managing ethnicity was an undercurrent in all of these cases, but not always the headline. But as numerous studies have shown, by sidelining minorities and promoting centrist government, centripetal institutions based around insulated executives and bridging political parties tend to have economic payoffs too. This is a fundamental conclusion of Haggard and Kaufman’s analysis of democratic transitions,

⁶ Michael Rock, *Dictators, Democrats and Development in Southeast Asia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 233–234.

⁷ R. William Liddle, ‘Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia’ in *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in the Asia-Pacific*, Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds), Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1997, p. 311.

⁸ Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 93.

⁹ Joel Selway, ‘Electoral Reform and Public Policy Outcomes in Thailand’, *World Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2011, pp. 165–202.

¹⁰ Benjamin Reilly, ‘Introduction’ in *Political Parties in Conflict-Prone Societies: Regulation, Engineering and Democratic Development*, Benjamin Reilly and Per Nordlund (eds), Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008.

and has been supported by Rock's recent synoptic study of Southeast Asian developmental democracy.¹¹

The Eclipse of Consociationalism¹²

Consociational prescriptions are based on the principle that each ethnic polity should enjoy a significant degree of autonomy and a right of veto over matters directly affecting the welfare of its members. Emphasising the need for elite cooperation if democracy is to survive in ethnically-cleaved societies, consociational agreements entail a balance of power within government between clearly defined social segments, brokered by identifiable ethnic leaders representing distinct social groups. Arend Lijphart, the scholar most associated with the consociational model, developed this prescription from a detailed examination of the features of power-sharing democracy in European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, and there is disagreement over the extent to which these measures can be applied to other regions.¹³ However, there is little doubt that consociationalism represents the dominant model of power-sharing for "plural societies" – that is, in Lijphart's terminology, "societies that are sharply divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines into virtually separate sub-societies with their own political parties, interest groups, and media of communication".¹⁴

In terms of political engineering, consociationalists focus on core democratic institutions such as political parties, electoral systems, and cabinet governments, and on the territorial division of state powers via federalism. In each case, the focus is on defining and strengthening the autonomy of communal components of the society in question. In terms of political parties, for example, consociational approaches favour parties which represent social cleavages explicitly, via what Pippa Norris has

¹¹ Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995; Rock, *Dictators, Democrats and Development...*

¹² This section draws on my chapter 'Political Reform and the Demise of Consociationalism in Southeast Asia' in *The Crisis of Democratic Governance in Southeast Asia*, Aurel Croissant and Marco Bünte (eds), New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

¹³ See Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 185–192.

¹⁴ Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 22.

characterised as “bonding” rather than “bridging” strategies – that is, parties which “focus upon gaining votes from a narrower home-base among particular segmented sectors of the electorate”.¹⁵ The ideal party system for consociationalists is one based around clear social cleavages in which all significant groups, including minorities, can seek representation through their own, ethnically-based parties. Only via parties based upon segmental cleavages, consociationalists contend, can political elites negotiate delicate ethnic issues effectively.¹⁶ To ensure the fair representation of such ethnic parties, consociational prescriptions invariably recommend proportional representation (PR) electoral systems, with a preference for large-district party list systems to ensure parity between the proportion of the vote won by a party and its parliamentary representation.¹⁷

Finally, consociationalism advocates ‘grand coalition’ governments, in which all significant parties (and therefore groups) are given a share of executive power, and in which minorities have the right of veto over important issues directly affecting their own communities. Malaysia’s ethnically-defined political system, in which communal parties representing Malay, Chinese and Indian voters come together to form a national alliance or *Barisan Nasional*, a multi-racial coalition of 14 parties across both East and West Malaysia, has frequently been identified as the clearest example of consociationalism in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ Singapore has also been identified as operating according to consociational principles, although of course it, like Malaysia, is far from a competitive democracy.¹⁹

Consociational arrangements were also once widespread in Asia’s initial post-colonial democratic experiments in the 1950s. In Burma, for

¹⁵ Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁶ See Arend Lijphart, ‘Self-determination Versus Pre-determination of Ethnic Minorities in Power-sharing Systems’ in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Will Kymlicka (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹⁷ Arend Lijphart, ‘Electoral Systems, Party Systems and Conflict Management in Segmented Societies’ in *Critical Choices for South Africa: An Agenda for the 1990s*, R.A. Schreier (ed.), Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 2 and 13.

¹⁸ See, for instance, William Case, *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy* Monash: Monash Asia Institute, 1996.

¹⁹ See Narayanan Ganesan, ‘Democracy in Singapore’, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1996, pp. 63–79.

example, “the principle of institutional separation by ethnicity was ingrained during the colonial period”.²⁰ Burma’s 1948 constitution not only provided for ethnically-based states, but also reserved parliamentary seats for specified groups and ethnic ‘councils’ to look after the interests of intermixed or dispersed minorities.²¹ Lijphart identifies Indonesia’s short-lived democratic incarnation in the 1950s as another example of Southeast Asian consociationalism.²² A list PR electoral system was combined with guaranteed representation for specified numbers of Chinese, European, and Arab minorities,²³ and religious-communal parties were routinely included in (short-lived) grand coalition governments, on the assumption that “ethnic and other demands would be articulated through the party system and conflicts would be settled through negotiation and compromise in the parliament”.²⁴

The one shared feature of all these examples of consociational government is that they proved incompatible with open, competitive democracy. As a result, either democracy or consociationalism, or both, were abandoned in almost every case. In Indonesia, the 1950–1957 parliament represented virtually the full spectrum of the country’s social diversity, but its inability to maintain a stable political centre led directly to the end of democracy in 1957 and four decades of authoritarian rule. The guarantees for minorities were abandoned and not reintroduced. Burma’s post-independence democracy survived for 14 turbulent years until 1962, before being overthrown in a military coup which had strong ethnic motivations. The country’s 1974 Constitution then abandoned the ethnic states model, although they were recreated, in slightly different form, in the current (2008) Constitution.

Similarly, there are four examples of consociational-style grand coalitions in the contemporary period, none of them successes. Cambodia introduced a mandated grand coalition cabinet with PR elections as part

²⁰ Ian Holliday, ‘Voting and violence in Myanmar: nation building for a transition to democracy’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 68, No. 6, 2008, p. 1050.

²¹ J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 169.

²² Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies...*, pp. 198–201.

²³ See Allen Hicken and Yuko Kasuya, ‘A guide to the constitutional structures and electoral systems of east, south and southeast Asia’, *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 22, 2003, p. 135.

²⁴ William Liddle, ‘Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia’ in *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management and Democracy*, Andrew Reynolds (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 286.

of its 1993 UN-tailored constitution, but this arrangement never functioned democratically and was abandoned in 2006. Fiji's 1997 multiracial Constitution, modelled on South Africa's, had a short and troubled history due largely to the mandatory power-sharing provision for grand coalition governments, which were prescribed but never actually embraced, and finally abandoned after a military coup in 2006. A third example comes from Indonesia, where the first democratically-chosen President following the fall of Suharto, Abdurrahman Wahid, forged a series of all-party cabinets over the course of his presidency from 1999 to 2001. All three cases illustrate the difficulties of the grand coalition model, which while attractive in theory has often proved unworkable in practice. Indeed, Malaysia's multi-ethnic coalition is the only example of this model left in Pacific Asia— but there the loser has not been consociationalism as much as democracy itself, as Malaysia has moved ever further along the spectrum of ethnic autocracy as successive prime ministers from Mohamad Mahathir to Najib Razak have used ethnic cues to prolong their hold on power and create a Malay-Islamic state.²⁵

The experience of each of these cases bares examination to show how unsatisfactory formal power-sharing provisions have been in Pacific Asia. Cambodia's grand coalition, which came about primarily because of the unwillingness of the CPP to relinquish power after the 1993 elections, demonstrates the difficulties involved in maintaining power-sharing in the absence of an accommodatory political culture. Since it reflected neither the election outcome nor common policy ground between the two parties, the co-prime ministerial arrangement never functioned well: the CPP remained in effective control of most of the armed forces, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, while FUNCINPEC's attempt to gain a greater share of real power paralysed the executive branch and the National Assembly. After a series of political crises, the coalition fell apart completely in 1997 when the CPP forces of the 'second Prime Minister', Hun Sen, attacked those of FUNCINPEC and the 'first Prime Minister', Prince Ranariddh, and claimed power alone.

The shaky CPP-FUNCINPEC coalition was revived again after the 1998 and (after much wrangling) 2004 elections – not through any rapprochement between the party leaders, but solely due to the two-thirds

²⁵ James Chin, 'Pseudo-democracy and the making of a Malay-Islamic state' in *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization*, William Case (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 2015.

requirement for government formation that had earlier been inscribed, at the CPP's insistence, into the constitution. With observers branding it "a significant obstacle to forming elected government and to political stability",²⁶ the two-thirds rule was finally abandoned in 2006 when the CPP dropped FUNCINPEC and joined with a renewed Sam Rainsey Party in order to vote through the lower threshold of a bare majority vote for government formation. This ended Cambodia's pretence of grand coalition power sharing, further solidifying Hun Sen's grasp on power, which continues to this day.

In Fiji, the constitutional provision that all parties winning at least 10% of seats in parliament be proportionately represented in the cabinet was made unworkable by the unwillingness of some parties to abide by the power-sharing rules of the Constitution. Following the election in 1999 of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, the major Fijian opposition party rejected the option of taking up their share of cabinet seats – an option open to them only because the openly-worded power-sharing provisions of the constitution made participation in the national unity government optional, not mandatory. Chaudhry's government was overthrown in an ethnic coup a year later. The power-sharing issue was revisited at the 2001 elections, when the victorious Fijian prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, refused to invite Labour members to take up the cabinet positions due to them. Qarase defended his decision by claiming that a grand coalition would not contribute to a stable and workable government or the promotion of national unity. Following a Supreme Court decision affirming that the power-sharing requirements were mandatory, Qarase responded by offering the Fijian Labour Party a range of minor ministries in an expanded cabinet – an offer that was rejected, precipitating another constitutional crisis, which became one of several claimed justifications for Fiji's third coup to remove an elected government by the military's Commodore Frank Bainimarama.²⁷

In Indonesia, the grand coalition experiment was similarly troubled. President Wahid came to power in October 1999 via a complex process of political bargaining within the newly-enshrined legislature, following Indonesia's first democratic elections in over 40 years. None of the

²⁶ Robert B. Albritton, 'Cambodia in 2003: On the Road to Democratic Consolidation', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2004, p. 102.

²⁷ Brij Lal, 'Fiji's Constitutional Conundrum', *The Round Table*, Vol. 92, Issue 372, October 2003, pp. 671–685.

leading parties had the numbers to govern alone, and Wahid's National Awakening Party was one of many small parties jostling for power. Amidst frantic cross-party negotiations, Wahid's supporters forged a broad but unstable coalition of Islamic and secular parties, resulting in his surprise ascension to the presidency. He proceeded to form a grand coalition government encompassing a broad spectrum of Indonesian society including party, religious, and regional representatives. However, this 'National Unity Cabinet' proved highly unstable in practice, with a bewildering array of ministers appointed and then removed over the 22 months of Wahid's presidency. Following a protracted power-struggle the Indonesian legislature – the only directly-elected organ of state in existence at the time – began to assert its growing strength vis-à-vis the president, and in August 2001 Wahid was effectively impeached and replaced by his vice-president, Megawati. Since then, all Indonesian governments have adopted more familiar oversized but far from grand coalitions along the *Gotong Royong* (mutual co-operation) model, in which some but not all opposition parties are co-opted to join cabinet. While such *kabinet pelangi* ('rainbow cabinets') carry a range of problems of their own, they have not experienced the crippling dysfunction of Wahid's grand coalition experiment.²⁸

Just as formal power-sharing executives have been abandoned, so too have some of the other key precepts of consociational democracy: parliamentarism, proportional elections, and ethnic parties representing distinct social segments. Of the four genuine democracies in Southeast Asia today (Indonesia, Philippines, East Timor and most recently Myanmar), all have adopted presidential or semi-presidential systems of government, despite the well-known problems of this model.²⁹ Moreover, Indonesia and East Timor combine this model with PR elections for the legislature, along Latin American lines, despite scholars identifying this as a particularly "difficult combination" which can undermine the development of strong parties.³⁰ Both East Timor and Myanmar have

²⁸ See Dan Slater, 'Indonesia's Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power after Democratic Transition', *Indonesia*, Vol. 78, 2004, pp. 61–92.

²⁹ Juan Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1990, pp. 51–69; John Gerring, Strom Thaker and Carola Moreno, 'Centripetal Democratic Governance: A Theory and Global Inquiry', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4, 2005, pp. 567–581.

³⁰ Scott Mainwaring, 'Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy: The difficult combination', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1993, pp. 198–228.

adopted variants of semi-presidentialism, despite what Elgie and Moestrup characterise as the “consensus that young democracies should avoid this type of institutional arrangement as the in-built conflict between president and prime minister may damage the prospects for successful democratisation”.³¹ Such anomalies highlight once again Southeast Asia’s divergence from the expectations of the political science literature.³²

Similarly, pure PR elections are now uncommon in Asia, with most democracies using majoritarian models – either plurality (as in Myanmar, Singapore and Malaysia), mixed-member majoritarian (as in Thailand and the Philippines, along with Taiwan, Korea, Japan and most recently Mongolia) or alternative vote-style (PNG, Nauru, and formerly Fiji) models. Indonesia is the main exception, but even there reforms to create an ‘open list’ system and reduce ‘district magnitude’ – the number of members elected from each electoral district – have served to reduce proportionality. Today, provincial units delineated constituency boundaries, legislative elections are now conducted using much smaller constituencies, capped at a maximum of 10 members per district, and with many 3 and 4 seat districts. Combined with a 3.5% national threshold, this has raised the threshold for electoral victory considerably, making it much more difficult for smaller parties to win seats than at previous elections, when districts were based around entire provinces.³³

The process has been underpinned by restrictions on the formation of ethnic parties. A common aim has been to strengthen ruling political parties and party systems, with institutionalised political parties seen as “a crucial pillar in the functioning and consolidation of emerging democracies”, and the ‘missing link’ in the quest for democratic consolidation across the region.³⁴ Again, Indonesia has taken efforts to restrict separatism and reward nationally-focused parties the farthest.

³¹ Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup, ‘The Choice of Semi-Presidentialism and its consequences’ in *Semi-Presidentialism Outside Europe: A Comparative Study*, Elgie and Moestrup (eds), New York: Routledge 2007, p. 237.

³² A subject I cover in more detail in my chapter ‘Parties, Electoral Systems and Governance’ in *Democracy in East Asia – A New Century*, Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Yun-han Chu (eds), Baltimore Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

³³ See Benjamin Reilly, ‘Electoral Systems’ in *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization*, William Case (ed.), New York: Routledge, 2015.

³⁴ Erik Martinez Kuhonta and Allen Hicken, ‘Shadows from the Past: Party System Institutionalization in Asia’, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 5, 2011, p. 573.

Indonesian parties are required by law to establish an organisational network across the archipelago, no easy task in a nation of 17,000 islands. Parties who fail to do so cannot run in national or even local elections. By effectively banning local parties, this has created putatively national parties with a cross-regional organisational basis by fiat, as parties must satisfy these branch-structure requirements before they can compete in elections. As a result, the number of parties represented in both the legislature and in cabinet has declined over time. This has also resulted in a decline in the vote share for overtly Islamic parties, although three parties from Aceh are now permitted to compete after the split of the main Free Aceh Party. Only 12 parties passed the verification processes for the 2014 elections (down from 48 in 1999), of which ten are today represented in the 560-seat People's Representative Council (DPR); while three Achenese parties are allowed to compete in the autonomous region of Aceh only under the terms of the 2005 peace agreement.³⁵

Southeast Asia's newest democracy, Myanmar, appears to have followed a similar approach following the landslide win of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in late 2015. Despite ethnic parties having been part of the fabric of Myanmar (formerly Burma) since independence, the NLD's landslide election sweep sidelined almost all parties representing ethnic minorities. The NLD also deliberately chose not to field Muslim candidates as part of the ongoing placation of Buddhist hardliners.³⁶ A subtext to the much broader ongoing attempts to render the Rohingya Muslims of western border regions essentially stateless, this deliberate ethnic exclusion has sullied the transition to democracy. Despite much fawning coverage in the Western media, Myanmar's new government is less a shining example of democracy than a form of joint administration between the military (which continues to hold a quarter of all seats in the legislature, and a number of important cabinet posts) and the NLD, which won over 80% of elected seats at the 2015 elections.

³⁵ An exception to this rule applies in Aceh, and was a key part of the 2005 peace agreement there. See Ben Hillman, 'The Policy-Making Dimension of Post-Conflict Governance: The Experience of Aceh, Indonesia', *Conflict, Security, and Development*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2012, pp. 533–553.

³⁶ The assassination in February 2017 of U Ko Ni, a prominent Muslim intellectual and legal adviser for Aung San Suu Kyi's government, was another marker of the sharp downwards turn in the country's ethnic relations.

The shift to centripetalism

Today, political inclusion in Southeast Asia increasingly takes place through centripetal rather than consociational means: oversized but not grand coalition governments; aggregative rather than segmental political parties; ethnically-mixed federal or other sub-national jurisdictional units; and majoritarian, vote-pooling political institutions. This “Asian model” of political inclusion stands in contrast and in many ways in opposition to the classic consensual recommendations of parliamentary rule, proportional elections and parties based around distinctive social segments.

The trend towards oversized but not grand coalitions is particularly striking. Building on Riker, most political science models of coalition formation predict that governments will form around minimum-winning coalitions – that is, coalitions which include no more parties or factions necessary to maximise the spoils of office.³⁷ This emphasis on spoils is also prevalent in the ethnic conflict literature, which conceptualises ethnic groups as coalitions seeking to monopolise state rents for their own group.³⁸ There is thus a common theoretical baseline across both literatures assuming coalition formation is a rational exercise aimed at maximising the returns to those involved, whether we are talking about office-seeking candidates, parties, or ethnic groups. Especially in parliamentary systems “there is a powerful logic behind the formation of minimum winning coalitions”.³⁹

Compelling as it may be, this logic fails a basic empirical test in Pacific Asia. Oversized cabinets are by far the most common model of government formation in the region, and have been for years. Oversized coalition governments have been the rule in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, and

³⁷ William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

³⁸ See Alvin Rabushka and Ken Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1972; Daniel Posner, ‘The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4, 2004, pp. 529–545; idem, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

³⁹ C. Volden and C.J. Carrubba, ‘The Formation of Oversized Coalitions in Parliamentary Democracies’, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2004, p. 521.

have been common in Fiji and Vanuatu as well.⁴⁰ In Malaysia, a multiparty alliance representing the three main ethnic groups has been the foundation of all governments since 1955.⁴¹ Oversized multiparty coalitions have also been common in other Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, for example, all governments from the resumption of democracy in 1992 until the military coup of 2006 were composed of broad, oversized coalitions designed to ensure cross-regional representation and, more importantly, provide a buffer against possible defections. Thus, following his victory in the 2001 elections, then prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra sought out a range of additional coalition partners in order to insulate his government from defectors and limit the ability of factional players to undermine cabinet stability. Following his 2006 overthrow in a military coup, Thaksin's sister Yingluck maintained a similar approach to cabinet formation after Thailand's return to democracy in 2010, making a strong effort to reach out beyond her Pheu Thai party to find additional coalition partners before her government was overthrown in another military coup.

In Indonesia, similarly, all cabinets since the emergence of democracy in 1999 have been either oversized or grand coalitions. The current cabinet is a case in point: following the 2014 elections, President Widodo's PDI-P party had only 19% of seats in parliament, and even with a range of coalition partners such as the new Hanura party still had just less than majority support for his coalition, 48.5%. He could have easily recruited a smaller party to ensure a minimal winning cabinet. Instead, in typical Indonesian fashion, he turned to some of his former opponents in Golkar, the former governing party of Suharto, and the Islamist National Awakening Party (PAN), bringing them into his governing coalition and sacrificing some of his former supporters in the process. This gave him the support from almost 70% of the members of parliament – a highly oversized coalition that makes less sense in rational actor terms than it does when viewed as continuity with Indonesian governance practice.

⁴⁰ See Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity...*, chapter 7.

⁴¹ With no formal power sharing requirements, the *Barisan Nasional* relies on the willingness of its three main constituent ethnic parties – UMNO, the MCA and the MIC – to 'pool votes' across communal lines. The component parties typically divide up the electoral map so as to avoid competing with one another on a constituency level, and campaign under the *Barisan* label rather than as separate parties. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, rev. ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

Myanmar's new government has followed a similar approach. Despite winning an overwhelming electoral victory in November 2015, the new National League for Democracy government formed an oversized executive which included two members of the former ruling party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), several independents, and an ethnic minority party, in cabinet.⁴² Moreover, despite the long history and protected position of ethnic parties in Myanmar, minority representation today takes place predominantly *within* the ruling party than via ethnic parties, which collectively won only 9% of elected seats in the 2015 elections, with only two parties (the Arakan National Party and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy) achieving any serious representation.

All of this suggests that rational actor models of coalition formation need to be reconsidered, particularly in ethnically-divided states. As a recent cross-national study of this phenomenon by Nils-Christian Bormann and Martin Steinwand observed,

“Rational group leaders would prefer to build minimum winning coalitions to increase their own payoffs. However, in the context of civil war ethnic groups are frequently prone to fragmentation and division into competing factions ... the uncertainty surrounding group coherence induces a risk-return trade-off for the formateur in coalition bargaining. Coalitions that are close to a minimum winning coalition maximise the payoff to coalition members, but potentially are unstable. In contrast, larger coalitions reduce the benefits from coalition membership but decrease the risk of a coalition failure due to group fragmentation”.⁴³

Bormann and Steinwand conclude that oversized and grand coalitions constitute a much greater share of all governments than predicted by established theories. In line with their theoretical model, ethnic leaders should attempt to build oversized coalitions and include other groups both

⁴² Under Myanmar's constitution, three ministers – of Border Affairs, Defence and Home Affairs – are appointed by the National Defence and Security Council, while the military retains a quarter of seats in the national legislature.

⁴³ Nils-Christian Bormann and Martin Steinwand, *Power-Sharing Coalitions and Ethnic Civil War*, American Political Science Association annual meeting, 1–4 September 2016, Philadelphia, PA, p. 1.

as a signal of cooperation and as an insurance policy against future break-ups. This is precisely the kind of behaviour that we see in Pacific Asia. Indeed, far from being unusual, Bormann and Steinwand's findings suggest that ethnically divided states in Asia are similar to those elsewhere, prioritising oversized ethnic coalitions over minimal winning coalitions. In other words, it is the theory of minimal-winning coalitions being the rational option that is out of step with reality, in ethnically-diverse states at least.

Electoral and party systems

Centripetal political engineering is perhaps most evident in Asia's electoral institutions. Indonesia's two-stage, double-majority model of presidential elections, for instance, is designed to encourage cross-regional politics by requiring winning presidential candidates to gain not just a majority of the vote, but a spread of votes across different parts of the country. The underlying principle is to ensure that winning candidates receive a sufficiently broad spread of electoral support, rather than drawing their votes from one region only. Nigeria and Kenya both have similar provisions, but the Indonesian model is the only one that has clearly worked to elect moderate and centrist candidates. This may be because of another aspect of Indonesia's election law, which provides a two-stage nomination process in the Indonesian legislature. To ensure broad-based support only parties or coalitions controlling 20% of lower-house parliamentary seats or winning 25% of the popular vote in the preceding parliamentary elections are eligible to nominate a presidential candidate. That candidate must then gain both a nationwide majority and at least 20% of the vote in over half of Indonesia's 33 provinces to avoid a runoff.

Some scholars for the utility of such mechanisms in muting ethnic conflict and ensuring the election of broad, pan-ethnic presidents.⁴⁴ The Indonesian evidence favours this interpretation, with the two most recent presidents (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo) each gaining the broad support required in the electoral law for their election victory, and defeating hard-line opponents – including former generals Wiranto and Probowo, each of whom might easily have won under a different electoral system. As centrist moderates, winning presidents Yudhoyono

⁴⁴ Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 55.

(in 2009) and Widodo (in 2014) both easily amassed the necessary spread of votes across the archipelago in their first-round election victories that Indonesia's centripetal electoral laws require.

As Krzysztof Trzcinski observes, other aspects of the Indonesian system also exert centripetal pressures, including the provincial structure and growing propensity to split potentially separatist provinces such as Papua into new units to undercut potential ethnic identification and mobilisation. However, elements of consociationalism also continue in the special autonomy provisions for Aceh and Papua (although yet to be properly implemented in the latter). Specific concessions to group rights and local segmental parties that have been granted to Aceh included the sanctioning of Sharia Law, allowing proceeds obtained from the exploitation of natural resources to remain in-situ, and in particular permitting segmental ethnic parties such as the *Parti Aceh* to compete, and win, in local elections – a key to the successful 2005 peace agreement there.⁴⁵

Other centripetal innovations include Singapore's Group Representation Constituency (GRC) system, introduced in 1988 with the ostensible aim of promoting greater diversity of representation, although with comparatively weak cross-ethnic incentives. Electors cast a vote for predetermined party lists rather than for candidates, with the party winning a simple plurality of votes in a district winning *every* seat (making it one of the most 'mega-majoritarian' national electoral systems anywhere in the world. Parties and alliances must include one or two candidates from designated ethnic minorities on their ticket – an arrangement which necessitates a degree of cross-ethnic voting. These majority-enhancing rules favoured the opposition Workers Party at the 2011 general elections, enabling them to take all six seats in a GRC and become Singapore's first meaningful parliamentary opposition for many years, a feat they repeated in 2016. In the process, GRC's have ensured the representation of minority Indian and Malay representatives on both the government and opposition benches.

Another example of weak centripetalism is the Philippines' party list system for 20% of the House of Representatives, introduced in the 1987

⁴⁵ Krzysztof Trzcinski, 'The Consociational Addition to Indonesia's Centripetalism as a Tactic of the Central Authorities: The Case of Papua', *Hemispheres: Studies on Cultures and Societies*, Vol. 4, No. 31, 2016, pp. 5–20.

Constitution as a way of increasing minority and sectoral representation in Congress. Voters have a separate vote for the party-list on their ballot paper, and any party, group or coalition receiving at least 2% of the votes wins a seat, up to a maximum of three seats in total. Originally only ‘marginalised groups’ such as youth, labour, the urban poor, farmers, fishermen and women could compete for seats, with each group limited to a maximum of three seats. Because anyone can vote for any party list, the party list seats inevitably facilitate some degree of cross-voting between minorities and majorities, at least in theory. In reality, however, almost any party can stand candidates, and it is common practice for politicians to use the party list to enter Congress when their relatives have already filled up the district seats. Despite being called a “party list”, the system does not allocate seats proportionately, but rather just takes the highest vote-gaining groups and applies a three-seat cap to all of them. As a result, some groups with very low popularity can also end up winning some of the remaining seats once the more popular parties have reached their limit. As a result, the current model of electing party list representatives has encouraged a proliferation of organisations representing underprivileged groups – and arguably undermined the push for more coherent party politics.

By contrast, the use of the limited preferential vote (LPV) in Papua New Guinea provides a stronger model of centripetal incentives in a highly fragmented tribal society. This system enables voters to express up to three preferences between candidates, rather than a single ordinal choice. A similar system encouraged cooperative campaigning behaviour in many electoral contests in the country’s pre-independence period, as the threshold for victory was not a plurality but an absolute majority of the vote.⁴⁶ These more accommodative campaign patterns were repeated in the recent 2007 and 2012 elections, although there are questions about the extent to which they have become institutionalised in what appears to be a failing democracy.⁴⁷ One PNG analyst, John Domyal, wrote recently about how the LPV system has impacted on the 2012 election in several ways compared to earlier elections held under first-past-the-post (FPTP), with benefits for greater inter-tribal cooperation and improved security,

⁴⁶ Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies...*, chapter 4.

⁴⁷ R.J. May, R. Anere, N. Haley and K. Wheen, *Election 2007: the Shift to Limited Preferential Voting in Papua New Guinea*, Port Moresby: National Research Institute, 2011.

but no change to other problems such as money politics and gender equity which continue to afflict PNG elections.⁴⁸

A potential new test case for centripetal elections and ethnic conflict is the autonomous island province of Bougainville, which will hold an independence referendum in 2019. One of the most successful but little known cases of peacemaking in world, the Bougainville Peace Agreement, signed in August 2001, ended a bloody war that killed thousands though the 1990s. The agreement provided for elections to establish the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, which was formed after the first elections in 2005. The agreement includes a number of centripetal reforms such as cross-voting reserved seats for women, youth and ex-combatants as well as majority-preferential parliamentary and presidential elections.

The success of peace making in Bougainville to date provides some support to claims that cross-voting schemes can indeed temper the “interests and passions” of different social groups to “induce a tendency to encourage the common interest” in representative bodies, as was argued in 18th century constitutional debates in France and the United States.⁴⁹ Bougainville’s election results have demonstrated this centripetal spin, with relative moderates like John Momis triumphing in presidential elections over more separatist candidates such as James Tanis. However, other Pacific experiments have been less successful. Fiji’s brief and unhappy experience with a modified ticket vote form of the alternative vote evidenced little in the way of cross-ethnic vote transfers or moderation in what is a bi-polar, not fragmented, society.⁵⁰

Conclusion

As schemes to share power measures are often adopted to deal with deep social and political conflicts, it is perhaps unsurprising that many fail: power-sharing tends to be adopted in precisely those cases where

⁴⁸ See <http://devpolicy.org/did-changing-electoral-systems-change-election-results-png-20170502/> (accessed: 02.05.2017).

⁴⁹ Jon Elster, *Securities Against Misrule: Juries, Assemblies, Elections*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁵⁰ Jon Fraenkel, ‘The Alternative Vote System in Fiji: Electoral Engineering or Ballot-Rigging?’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2001, pp. 1–31; Jon Fraenkel and Bernard Grofman, ‘Does the Alternative Vote Foster Moderation in Ethnically Divided Societies? The Case of Fiji’, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2006, pp. 623–651; cf. Donald L. Horowitz, ‘Strategy takes a holiday: Fraenkel and Grofman on the alternative vote’, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2006, pp. 652–662.

political stability is lacking. Actual examples of the most comprehensive forms of power-sharing in the region, such as the use of grand coalition governments in Indonesia, co-prime ministerial arrangements in Cambodia, or mandatory cabinet positions in Fiji, have often been highly unstable in terms of the duration of executive governments. This is in line with Bormann and Steinwand's conclusion that "oversized and grand coalitions are the most likely type of government in ethnically divided societies but they are very vulnerable early on in their tenure".⁵¹

By contrast, less formal and more liberal versions, based around voluntary oversized coalitions, have a better track record in Asia's divided democracies. This is increasingly underpinned by centripetal majoritarianism, rather than consensual or consociational approaches, in the region's most ethnically-diverse democracies. This regional preference is manifested in a variety of ways, including a broader regional preference for presidential or semi-presidential systems of government; unitary states or non-ethnic forms of devolution and federalism; catch-all or multiethnic political parties; and mixed-member or cross-voting majoritarian electoral systems. This unusual package of institutional design is particularly prevalent in the region's most ethnically-diverse states, highlighting the regional preference for centripetalism over consociationalism, and the broader distinction between Asian and European practice.

⁵¹ Bormann and Steinwand, *Power-Sharing Coalitions and Ethnic Civil War...*, p. 1.

