

An institutional remedy for ethnic patronage politics

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Abstract

When the difference between winning and losing elections is large, elites have incentives to use ethnicity to control access to spoils, mobilizing some citizens and excluding others. This paper presents a new electoral mechanism, the turn-taking institution, that could move states away from ethnically mediated patron–client politics. With this mechanism, the whole executive term goes to a sufficiently inclusive supermajority coalition; if no coalition qualifies, major coalitions take short, alternating turns several times before the next election. A decision-theoretic model shows how the turn-taking institution would make it easier for mass-level actors to coordinate on socially productive policy and policy-making processes. We argue this institution would raise the price elites would pay to deploy and enforce exclusive ethnic markers.

Keywords

Divided societies; ethnicity; institutional design; patronage; turn-taking

1. Introduction

Ethnic groups are, in short, a form of minimum winning coalition, large enough to secure benefits in the competition for spoils but also small enough to maximize the per capita value of these benefits . . . The appropriate response, then, is one of institutional design. Efforts should be devoted to creating institutional environments which alter incentives so that persons organize coalitions of a different nature when in pursuit of their interests. Attempts should focus on exploiting the very nature of ethnic competition so as to channel and diffuse it.

Robert Bates (1983: 164–165)

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The connection between the mobilization of ethnic identities and patronage politics is well documented (e.g. Bates, 1981; Chandra, 2004; Fearon, 1999, 2006; Meredith, 2005). When the stakes of elections are high – when the difference between winning and losing is great – elites have incentives to use ethnicity to mobilize some citizens and exclude others. On the mass level, when citizens expect their leaders to control policy-making offices for the foreseeable future, they have an incentive to demand or permit broader policy-making authority for office-holders than they would otherwise. When the difference between being an insider and an outsider is large, insiders pay a high price if they publicly reveal their dissatisfaction with the status quo. The sum of these effects is a relatively bloated public sector with policies skewed by patrons to benefit loyal clients. In short, when the stakes are high, it can be ‘good politics’ to pursue ‘bad policy’ (Robinson, 1998).

This paper presents a novel electoral mechanism, the turn-taking institution, which provides incentives for parties to forgo using ethnicity and patronage politics to buy electoral support. With this electoral mechanism, the whole executive term goes to a sufficiently inclusive supermajority coalition; if no coalition qualifies, major coalitions take short, alternating turns several times around before the next election. There are many ways to institutionalize the turn-taking principle, including varying the number of players in office, the supermajority threshold, the lengths of the turns or the term, or the ballot type. This paper focuses on the case where a complete four-year term goes only to a 60% supermajority; otherwise, the top vote-getter and the runner-up take alternating one-year turns in office.

Our larger project is to add a new perspective to the conversation on institutional design for divided societies. Our aim is to propose institutions that induce the formation, enforcement, and adaptation of socially productive policy or policy-making institutions. By this we mean policies or policy-making institutions that serve general interests rather than targeting benefits at ‘insiders’ by imposing costs upon ‘outsiders.’

A robust design must address the incentives of elite-level participants (i.e. professional office-seekers and their associates), as well as mass-level participants (i.e. local opinion-leaders and voters). We have argued elsewhere that the turn-taking institution might succeed at giving elite-level participants the incentives to cooperate, whereas existing electoral solutions, including majoritarian winner-take-all and ethnic power-sharing systems, have failed to do so (Durant, 2011; Durant and Weintraub, 2013). Here we focus on giving mass-level participants the incentives to form and reveal preferences for socially productive policy and policy-making institutions. When voters form and reveal such preferences, it becomes ‘good politics’ to pursue ‘good policy.’

This paper argues that the turn-taking institution would induce two of the largest segments of voters to form and reveal more socially productive preferences. The first segment is ‘hardcore voters,’ which we define as those who are *fundamentally* loyal to their party or group, and *contingently* loyal to any agreed-upon policy-making institutions. The second segment is ‘conflicted voters,’ who are *contingently* loyal to their party or group, and *fundamentally* disloyal to any agreed-upon policy-making institutions.

We use this segmentation because we think it roughly captures the stylized facts in the empirical public opinion literature. Philip Converse (2000: 331) has summarized the last several decades of research in this way: ‘The pithiest truth I have achieved about electorates is that where political information is concerned, the mean level is very low

but the variance is very high.’ Unfortunately, the most highly informed voters tend also to be the most partisan (Durant and Weintraub, 2012; Friedman, 2006; Zaller, 1992). Thus, in our framework, hardcore voters always vote for their group (if they vote at all), and remain loyal to policy-making institutions only insofar as it seems to benefit their group. Conflicted voters are not loyal to policy-making institutions, but only out of ignorance about constitutional details. Conflicted voters *are* loyal to their group, however, so long as the benefit from being so exceeds the benefit from voting retrospectively.

Each of the two segments is affected through a distinct, but complementary pathway. The first pathway is to increase the desirability and feasibility of constitutional cooperation by ‘hardcore voters’ on both sides. Hardcore voters aligned with ‘insiders’ who expect to control the office have an incentive to demand or permit broader policy-making authority for office-holders than they would otherwise. Hardcore voters aligned with outsiders may wish to narrow that authority, anticipating that it would otherwise be used against them. But if and when they become insiders, they prefer the broader authority wielded by their predecessors. By contrast, the turn-taking institution gives both sides the incentives to form and enforce policy-making institutions that constrain the scope of executive discretion in a socially productive way.

The second pathway is to lower the price that ‘conflicted voters’ pay to act publicly as ‘swing voters’ or ‘retrospective voters.’ Swing voters and retrospective voters are both responsive to appeals from both sides. Swing voters respond to alternative policy proposals. Retrospective voters respond to alternative policy *outcomes*; they reelect the incumbent when outcomes seem ‘good’ and elect the opposition when outcomes seem ‘bad’.¹ This replaces the win–lose fight for patronage with win–win coordination on productive policy.

These two pathways focus on changes to citizen behavior at the mass level, but the mass-level changes would have elite-level effects. In particular, it would be less advantageous for insider elites to make ethnicity salient to make their coalition ‘large enough to secure benefits in the competition for spoils but also small enough to maximize the per capita value of these benefits’ (Bates, 1983: 164). When outsiders have less to gain from access to insider privileges, and conflicted insiders are no longer loyal coalition members, elite insiders have less to gain and more to lose from enforcing the ethnic barrier.

In sum, we argue that the turn-taking institution would induce a move on the margin away from ethnically mediated patron–client politics toward constitutionally constrained competition to persuade swing voters of the merits of policy proposals.

The paper proceeds as follows. The second section begins by articulating a theory of electoral competition and ethnic exclusion. We discuss how ethnic mobilization can be traced to the distributional consequences of public policy and why lowering the stakes of electoral conflict induces moderate policy. The third section presents the baseline model for our claims that the turn-taking institution provides a remedy for destructive policy by transforming patterns of patron–client mobilization into constitutionally constrained contests for the votes of conflicted voters. The fourth section tests the baseline model for robustness to time-discounting, incumbency advantages, and short commitment horizons. The fifth section discusses the implications of the paper for the broader literature on divided societies, considers opportunities for further research, and concludes.

2. From patron–client mobilization to coordination on socially productive policy and policy-making institutions

To the victor belong the spoils of the enemy. New York Senator William L. Marcy (1832)

We are intoxicated with politics; the premium on political power is so high that we are prone to take the most extreme measures to win and to maintain political power, our energy tends to be channeled into the struggle for power to the detriment of economically productive effort, and we habitually seek political solutions to virtually every problem . . . As things stand now, the Nigerian state appears to intervene everywhere and to own virtually everything including access to status and wealth. Inevitably a desperate struggle to win control of state power ensues since this control means for all practical purposes being all powerful and owning everything. Politics becomes warfare, a matter of life and death.

Claude Ake (1981: 1162–1163)

We conjecture that the expectation of unequal time in and out of office is the key driver of patron–client politics, and that equalizing the ‘weighted’ time that equal parties expect to spend in and out of office would lead to its alleviation. While participants may sometimes expect to be in and out of office equally in the long run (i.e. on the time-scale of decades), it is the short run – typically the next several years – that matters most for decision-making. In the short run, incumbents and challengers typically have very unequal expectations about their time in office.

The expectation of unequal time in and out of office makes it hard for insiders and outsiders to coordinate on socially productive policy-making institutions. Different expectations of controlling the office can bias preferences regarding the scope of the office. It is a truism of constitutional thought going back to the classical era that those aligned with the office-holders tend to be less concerned about abuses of discretion than those outside the coalition, and that the office-holders themselves tend to be the least concerned of all (Gordon, 2002). Here is Livy: ‘The leaders of the patrician party, though they had not approved of the weakening of the censorship, nevertheless greatly disliked this example of its ruthlessness in action – aware, no doubt, of the obvious fact that individually they would all have to suffer the jurisdiction of the censors much more often and for much longer periods than they would have the chance of exercising it’ (Livy, 1960: 316). In his inquiry into the ‘cognitive biases that place democracies at risk,’ Vincent Ostrom argues that those who identify with policy-makers pay more attention to the ends (that is, the payoffs) than to the means (policy-making institutions):

This preoccupation with results – payoffs – leads to a neglect of forms – the institutional arrangements for the structuring of human communication in due deliberation, the elucidation of information and the shaping of a common understanding appropriate to the resolution of conflict and taking collective actions.

Ostrom (1990: 250)

For our purposes, the key regularity is that a larger scope for executive discretion tends to benefit those who control the office. As a result, citizens tend to prefer a broader scope when ‘in’ than when ‘out.’ We refer to this as the *insider–outsider bias*.

This condition can lead to a kind of hypocrisy, where citizens embrace spoils-seeking behaviors as insiders they once decried as outsiders. For example, the discretion to abuse

the rights of opposition members or to reward key supporters with bureaucratic appointments may seem more desirable when one's *own* side controls the office than it does when the *other* side does so. Robert Bates relates a case from Ghana:

When attacked for using the state industries to provide sinecures for political allies, N. A. Welbeck, a minister and sometime Secretary General of the ruling party in Ghana, simply replied: 'But that is proper; and the honorable Member too would do it if he were there.' . . . That subsequent regimes have behaved in the same way only underscores the sagacity of Welbeck's reply.

Bates (1981: 104)

The cognitive dissonance of switching perspectives (pro-spoils when 'in' and anti-spoils when 'out') can be avoided by making a norm of spoils-seeking opportunism, as Secretary General Welbeck or Senator Marcy did.² If any winner will reliably wield the office in a partisan way, then the important thing is to be on the side of the winner.

The expectation of unequal time in and out of office makes it hard to coordinate on socially productive policy, insofar as it increases the benefit to insiders of (a) remaining loyal and (b) excluding outsiders. The literature on ethnicity and patronage politics provides the theory and evidence that the desire for political survival induces elites to propose distributively biased public policies that mobilize insiders and exclude outsiders (Benton, 2007; Geddes, 1994).

Political entrepreneurs use ethnicity and other identity-based characteristics as a way of regulating access to the benefits of winning control. This means that rivalrous goods can be divided between fewer citizens (Buono de Mesquita et al., 2003), and non-rivalrous goods can be adapted to fit the preferences of a smaller, more homogenous group of citizens (Easterly and Levine 1997; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). In line with Riker's predictions regarding the formation of minimum winning coalitions (Riker, 1962), Bates (1981, 1983) provides compelling evidence that ethnic groups in Africa serve as vehicles for political coalitions to gain access to the rents distributed by colonial and postcolonial states. Ethnicity allows elites to police entry into political coalitions that distribute spoils. The costs of mobilization are lower *within* groups rather than *across* groups, given a common language and norms of behavior that help make interactions more predictable (Cox and McCubbins, 1986; Dickson and Scheve, 2006; Fearon, 2006; Grafstein, 1995). Because ethnic and colonial administrative boundaries were often coterminous, and because the provision of goods benefited communities based on location, lobbying for these goods in the register of ethnicity has been both common and extraordinarily successful.

Bates (1983), Horowitz (1985) and Fearon (1999) argue that distributive politics at a national level favors coalitions based on individual-level characteristics that are costly or impossible to change; more easily changeable characteristics would allow the winning coalition to expand beyond its 'minimum winning' target. Ethnicity, indeed, is an individual-level attribute that is difficult to alter, making it particularly attractive for elites to help exclude losers from their political coalitions. In a similar vein, Chandra (2004) shows that 'patronage democracies,' characterized by bloated and corrupt public sectors (e.g. Nigeria and Kenya), give birth to and are sustained by *ethnic* coalitions, in contrast to other social categories, because the beneficiaries of patronage are easily identifiable. This

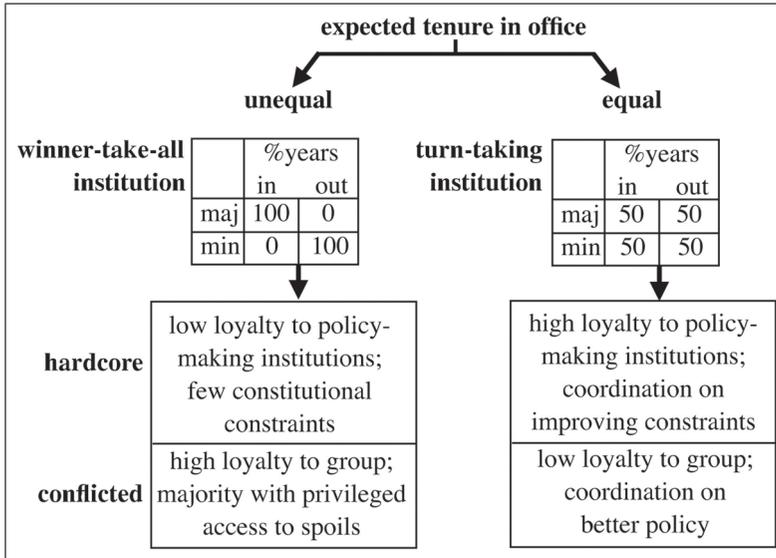


Figure 1. Expected tenure in office and its proposed effects on two mass-level segments.

is not to say that ethnic categories are primordial, fixed, and necessarily politically salient. On the contrary, they are socially constructed, fluid, and salient primarily where political entrepreneurs can benefit from mobilizing ethnic insiders and excluding ethnic outsiders. It is not contradictory to suppose that ethnic identities are malleable and responsive to elite choices, and that they are typically costly or impossible for an individual to change.

We argue that equalizing the tenures that roughly equal parties expect to spend in and out of office is the key to transforming electoral politics from patron–client mobilization to a matter of coordination on socially productive policy and policy-making institutions (see Figure 1).

On the mass level, the effect is driven through two distinct but complementary pathways. The first affects voters who are unequivocally in one camp or the other (the ‘hardcore voters’), the second those who are conflicted enough to be responsive to alternative public policy proposals, whether prospectively promised or retrospectively evaluated (the ‘conflicted voters’).

The first pathway is to de-bias the way hardcore voters evaluate alternative policy-making institutions, making them more responsive to inquiry into the generalized consequences of alternatives, and less to the pursuit of their narrow (and divergent) interests. The consequence would be the formation, enforcement and adaptation of the ‘proper’ scope for executive discretion.

The second pathway is to lower the price that conflicted voters pay to punish bad behavior by office-holders, especially via the retrospective voting mechanism.³ The consequence would be that elite insiders no longer have incentives to use exclusive identity-markers like ethnicity to augment the advantages of loyalty to one’s coalition. Whereas hardcore voters would be concerned with explicit proposals about alternative

policy-making institutions, conflicted voters would be concerned with implicitly evaluating recent policy-making behavior, supporting ‘good’ behavior and punishing ‘bad’ behavior.

As a result of these two pathways, outsiders have less to gain from becoming insiders, which makes it less worthwhile for elite insiders to enforce exclusive status-markers. This is especially true when conflicted insiders are seeking to exit.

The next section sets up a more formal framework for thinking about the two pathways.

3. The baseline model

Reform movements in the nineteenth century sought to throw the rascals out and to elect good men to public office, but the reformers were confronted with the same structural problems and coalitional politics in reelecting reform slates. Reformers faded like morning glories when confronted with the long-term task of maintaining successful reform coalitions.

Vincent Ostrom (1994: 112)

This section proposes a formal framework for how a turn-taking institution can transform the win–lose politics of patron–client mobilization into the win–win politics of coordination on socially productive policy and policy-making institutions.

Our focus in this paper is on a polity divided into a dominant ethnic majority and the dominated ethnic outsiders. The proposed variation of the turn-taking institution is this. A supermajority of 60% of the electorate is required to win the whole term; otherwise, the first-place party takes the first and third years in office, and the second-place party takes the second and fourth years. We assume that the turn-taking institution would be adopted, rather than considering the conditions under which it would be chosen.⁴

The upshot of this section is that – in contrast to winner-take-all majoritarian institutions – the turn-taking institution gives the majority and the minority equal (or near equal) access to the executive office. This has the two effects on mass-level segments discussed above. First, the hardcore voters of both sides have the incentive to form, enforce, and adapt a more balanced view of the proper scope of executive discretion, meaning that they constitutionally cooperate to solve political problems. Second, conflicted insiders do not pay such a price to vote retrospectively. When the price is low enough, conflicted insiders may find that it is worthwhile to leave the coalition when policy is bad, thereby disciplining bad behavior by elite insiders.

The key insight is that these pathways are put into effect when both parties expect to spend equal amounts of time in office within the immediate future on an on-going basis. We refer to this as *expectation-symmetry*, or ‘symmetry’ for short. The next subsection will introduce a formal specification of this notion. For now, it is sufficient to think of symmetry in terms of expecting an equal number of years in office within the next term (or so) on an on-going basis.

The basic intuition is that, with winner-take-all institutions, the insiders expect to always control the executive office for the indefinite future and the outsiders expect never to control it. This difference creates (1) a bias against the kind of constitutional cooperation that would limit the scope of executive discretion, and (2) a benefit to remaining an

insider. As a result of these two effects, outsiders stand to benefit if they can ‘convert’ to become insiders. This makes it worthwhile to erect and maintain boundaries between insiders and outsiders. When access is equal then it is less costly to form, enforce and adapt agreements about the scope of executive discretion, less costly to exit the insider coalition, and less costly to allow entry into the insider coalition.

To make these mechanisms intelligible, we use a simple decision-theoretic model. Different types of citizens have a different decision to make. Hardcore citizens choose to demand constitutional cooperation or not. Conflicted citizens choose whether to change their party affiliation or not. In each case, we assume that each citizen chooses what he or she perceives to be the utility-maximizing path. Moreover, we assume each citizen’s expected utility can be understood as the product of an intensive dimension (the per-year payoff of a choice when one team is ‘in’ and the other ‘out’ of office) and a temporal dimension (the years each team expects to be ‘in’ and ‘out’). Different institutions lead to different ways of adding up the per-year payoffs, which we stipulate as constant across institutions. This section offers a model of a single term without time-discounting; the fourth section extends the model to test its robustness where there are multiple terms, incumbency advantages, and time-discounting.

3.1. Increasing the marginal benefit of constitutional cooperation between hardcore voters in opposing parties

How to make coercive instrumentalities serve the interests of reciprocity is the central problem of politics and political development. This is a much more delicate and complex task than the mere creation and use of coercive capabilities.

Ronald Oakerson (1988: 145)

Constitutional cooperation can limit the stakes of electoral conflict by forming, enforcing, and adapting rules that regulate the interactions of office-seekers, office-holders, and citizens at large (Gordon, 2002; North et al., 2009; Ostrom, 2005). By contrast, the ability to disregard such rules can be politically advantageous in the short run, as it allows the office-holder greater discretion to target benefits at friends and to pile burdens upon enemies.

The challenge is to align short-run incentives, so that both the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ have reason to form, enforce, and adapt agreements about what policy-making institutions would be mutually advantageous.⁵ When incentives are consistently aligned – aligned on an on-going basis, not just for a passing crisis – it is possible to iterate through a series of short-term arrangements (Durant and Weintraub, 2013; Oakerson, 1988). This limits the intensity of the coordination problem, since today’s arrangement need not be tomorrow’s (Heckathorn and Maser, 1987; Fearon, 1998). This also makes it possible for citizens to focus on inquiry into and deliberation about the consequences of the alternatives they face (Elster, 2000; Jillson and Eubanks, 1984).

Let us say that an executive can be permitted to take, or be prohibited from taking, some action x . Permitted actions are ‘within the scope’ of executive discretion; prohibited actions are ‘beyond the scope’ of executive discretion.⁶ Let $u_{i,x}^i$ be the per-year utility to citizen i of permitting executive discretion over action x while his preferred coalition is

‘in’ office, relative to prohibiting discretion. That is, the utility of prohibiting the action x is normalized to zero. Let $u_{i,x}^{out}$ be the per-year utility of discretion when citizen i ’s preferred coalition is ‘out’ of office. When the per-year utility is positive, discretion is preferred to a rule; when it is negative, a rule is preferred to discretion.

To summarize the difference between the ‘ins’ and ‘outs,’ we stipulate that, relative to rules, discretion yields a (weakly) greater per-year utility to those aligned with the office-holder, so that $u_{i,x}^{out} < u_{i,x}^{in}$. This is how we formalize the *insider–outsider bias*.

This fact allows citizens to sort actions into four types. When $0 < u_{i,x}^{out} < u_{i,x}^{in}$ on a per-year basis, permitting the action incrementally benefits citizen i regardless of whether they are ‘in’ or ‘out.’ Where this is true for citizens on both sides, permitting the action would be a Pareto improvement relative to not permitting it. For simplicity’s sake, we say that discretion here is a ‘pure good’ on a per-year basis. On the other hand, when $u_{i,x}^{out} < u_{i,x}^{in} < 0$ on a per-year basis, permitting the action x incrementally hurts citizen i regardless of whether they are ‘in’ or ‘out.’ When this is true for citizens on both sides, discretion is a ‘pure bad’ on a per-year basis, and a rule should govern instead.

Those are the pure cases, but many actions will not have the same directional impact on both sides. In particular, insiders often take actions they consider beneficial that outsiders consider detrimental, such that $u_{i,x}^{out} < 0 < u_{i,x}^{in}$. In common-sense language, a ‘divisive’ action is one perceived as good by some and bad by others, so we refer to such actions as ‘divisive.’ A ‘net good’ action is one that is closer to the ‘good’ end of the spectrum, by helping more than it hurts, such that $|u_{i,x}^{out}| < u_{i,x}^{in}$ for both sides. Similarly, a ‘net bad’ action is one that is closer to the ‘bad’ end of the spectrum, by hurting more than it helps, such that $|u_{i,x}^{out}| > u_{i,x}^{in}$.

The ‘pure bad’ and ‘pure good’ actions are non-problematic, whereas the ‘net good’ and ‘net bad’ actions are problematic, at least potentially. In the non-problematic cases, each citizen has *time-consistent* preferences through time; preferences do not change when ‘in’ rather than ‘out.’ Moreover, insofar as citizens’ beliefs are correlated, there would be *consensus* across citizens at a given time. Finally, when the ‘ins’ prefer to take actions that happen to be socially productive (i.e. the ‘pure good’ actions) or to not take those that are socially destructive (i.e. the ‘pure bad’ actions), then outcomes are *socially productive*.

By contrast, ‘net good’ and ‘net bad’ actions can be problematic. Preferences are time-inconsistent within parties; as the adage goes, ‘where you stand depends upon where you sit’, in or out of power. There is a lack of consensus between parties. Moreover, even when citizens have highly correlated beliefs about the consequences of the alternatives, they would remain in conflict over what the scope should be at a given time. Finally, while the ‘net good’ action happens to yield the socially productive outcome, the ‘net bad’ action does not.

Fortunately, over longer time-scales, insofar as a citizen expects to spend some time ‘in’ and some time ‘out’, then it is easier to come to a time-consistent consensus to create a socially productive scope of office. Temporary benefits can be reckoned as not worth the longer-term costs. The multi-year perspective leads to a reevaluation of the different aspects of the office and, as a result, some of the problematic aspects of the office can be transformed into one of the non-problematic types (see Figure 2).

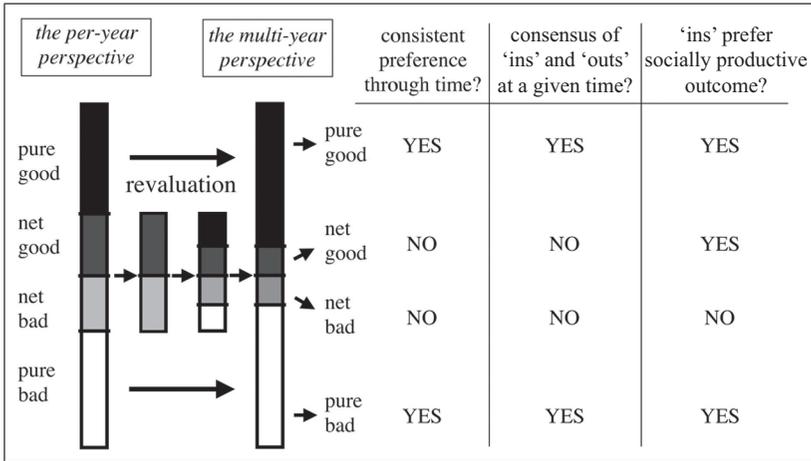


Figure 2. The per-year and multi-year perspectives. With the right mix of time in and out in the multi-year perspective, problematic ‘net good’ actions can become non-problematic ‘pure good’ actions, and problematic ‘net bad’ actions can become non-problematic ‘pure bad’ actions.

Let k be the current position of the two parties, so that $k = 1st$ represents the core voters aligned with the first-place party, and $k = 2nd$ represents those aligned with the second-place party. Let j be the institution, so that $j = MA$ represents the winner-take-all majoritarian system, and $j = TT$ represents the turn-taking institution. Let $U_{i,j,k}^k$ be the net utility for citizen i in position k in institution j of leaving the executive discretion over aspect x . For each aspect x , discretion will be preferred when the net utility is greater than zero, and rules will be preferred otherwise.

From an institutional design perspective, our aim is to transform as many as possible ‘net good’ actions into ‘pure good’ actions, and as many ‘net bad’ actions into ‘pure bad’ actions. This creates conditions where each citizen’s on-going preference is to limit executive discretion to an unbiased optimum. In a single-term model without discounting, this is precisely what a turn-taking institution achieves.

Here we suppose that institutional preferences for discretion or rules over a given aspect of office are set at the beginning of each term. Let W_j^k be the number of years those in position k expect to win control of the office under institution j , and L_j^k be the number of years they expect to lose control of the office. The net utility of discretion over aspect x for citizen i in position k under institution j is:

$$U_{i,j,x}^k = W_j^k u_{i,x}^{in} + L_j^k u_{i,x}^{out} \tag{1}$$

Critically, in the winner-take-all institution, when $W_{j=MA}^{1st} = 4$ and $L_{j=MA}^{1st} = 0$, this reduces to $U_{i,j=MA,x}^{1st} = 4u_{i,x}^{in}$ for the insiders and $U_{i,j=MA,x}^{2nd} = 4u_{i,x}^{out}$ for the outsiders. In this case, there is no effect: the multi-year utilities will have the same sign as the per-year utilities. In the turn-taking institution, by contrast, Equation (1) reduces to $U_{i,j=TT,x}^{1st} = U_{i,j=TT,x}^{2nd} = 2u_{i,x}^{in} + 2u_{i,x}^{out}$. Here the net utility is identical when the citizen is ‘in’ and when ‘out.’ Moreover, when the per-year gain from discretion when ‘in’ is greater than the per-year loss when ‘out,’ discretion will be preferred; otherwise, rules will be preferred.

In this simple model, the turn-taking institution is sufficient to transform any ‘net good’ or ‘net bad’ into a ‘pure good’ or ‘pure bad’, the desired outcome (see Figure 3). For cases where per-year values are correlated, each citizen has the same institutional preference through time (achieving *time-consistency*), opposing sides have the same preference at a time (achieving *consensus*), and the outcomes are socially productive (achieving *social productivity*). The results hold in their *pure* form only for the one-term model with no discounting. Qualitatively, however, we will see that the two results are robust: in a multiple-term model with time-discounting and incumbency advantages, the turn-taking institution transforms *most* ‘net good’ and ‘net bad’ actions into ‘pure good’ or ‘pure bad’ actions.

3.2. Decreasing the marginal benefit of retaining, seeking or defending insider privileges

Conflicted insiders must decide whether to retain the status they receive as loyal insiders or to reveal their private opinion about the social consequences of the office-holders’ behavior. Elite policy choices are disciplined when conflicted voters publicly reveal their private opinions. Voters can act as judges of policy, or arbiters of the conflict between elite office-seekers (Wantchekon and Neeman, 2002). It is socially beneficial for conflicted voters to publicly reveal their private opinions, but it can be individually costly. As noted by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003), when the costs of disloyalty are sufficiently high, citizens tend to remain loyal to their groups.

Here we assume that conflicted voters derive utility from expressing their ‘private opinion’ as well as from ‘access’ to the policy goods that come from being aligned with office-holders. The notion of private opinion here is akin to that in the model of preference falsification of Kuran (1997). Conflicted voters feel pushed away by what is ‘bad’ in their own side, and/or drawn toward what is ‘good’ in other side, but this will be revealed *contingently*, only when the costs of doing so are sufficiently low.

The per-year utility when aligned with those in office is u_i^{in} , and the per-year utility when out is u_i^{out} , so that the additional benefit of being in office is $u_i^{in} - u_i^{out}$. In addition, there is a benefit, O_i , to revealing one’s private opinion. A conflicted insider will opt to remain loyal so long as:

$$(W_j^{1st} - W_j^{2nd})(u_i^{in} - u_i^{out}) > O_i \tag{2}$$

Different citizens would have different values for O_i , u_i^{in} , and u_i^{out} . In a pure winner-take-all world, where $W_{j=MA}^{1st} = 4$ and $W_{j=MA}^{2nd} = 0$, if $(4)(u_i^{in} - u_i^{out}) > O_i$, then citizen i would remain loyal and not reveal his private opinion. If, however, the difference between the years ‘in’ and ‘out’ is sufficiently narrow, then he would reveal his private opinion. The threshold value occurs where $\overline{W_j^{1st}} - \overline{W_j^{2nd}}$ (see Figure 3).

With the winner-take-all institution, so long as $4(u_i^{in} - u_i^{out}) > O_i$, the per-year benefit of access outweighs the benefit of opinion-revelation. When it is clear that only the majority will win access to the office and the spoils it provides, then many citizens would be willing to disregard their private opinion to retain access. With the turn-taking institution,

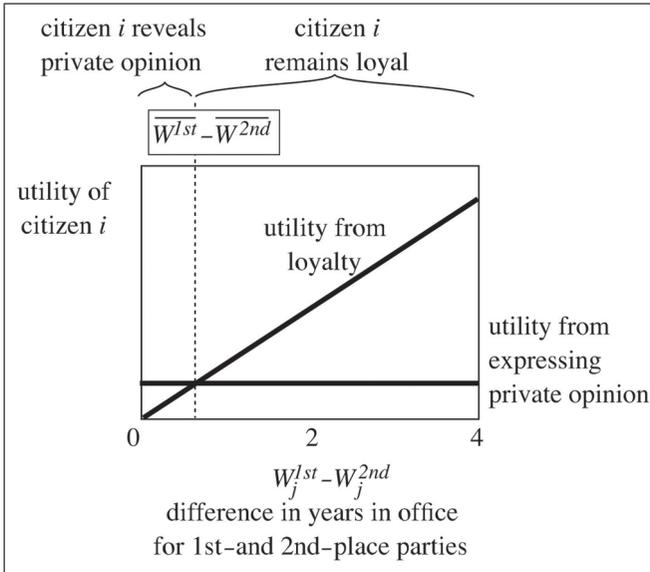


Figure 3. The difference between years in office for 1st-place and for 2nd-place parties determines whether conflicted voters remain loyal rather than reveal their opinion by voting retrospectively.

the benefit of access – the utility of loyalty – is canceled out. The turn-taking institution makes the $W_j^{1st} - W_j^{2nd}$ term equal to zero. Moreover, where there is constitutional cooperation, the $u_i^{in} - u_i^{out}$ term is nearer to zero as well.

In this simple model (one term, no time-discounting), the turn-taking institutions allows the benefit of publicly expressing one's private opinions to dominate the benefit of loyalty. Qualitatively, however, we will see that the result is robust: in a multiple term model with time-discounting and incumbency advantages, the turn-taking institution would dramatically lower the benefits of loyalty. The lack of loyalty to the group would lead to on-going competition that would discipline the public policy provided by office-holders.

4. Robustness to time-discounting, incumbency advantages, and limited choice horizons

This section refines the baseline model of how the turn-taking institution induces the electorate to prefer more socially productive policy and policy-making institutions. Essentially, this section replaces the single-term, no time-discounting set-up of the previous section with a more realistic one that allows multiple terms, incumbency advantages, and time-discounting.

A discounted expected utility model allows us to aggregate the flow of yearly payoffs, akin to a model of discounted cash flows. The simplest and most common model of time-discounting is that of exponential discounting, so that is the one we will use here.⁷ Suppose that citizens apply a discount factor, d , to each year out from the present, so

that the first year is worth 1, the next d , the third d^2 , the fourth d^3 and so on. The sum of all discounted years is $1 + d + d^2 + d^3 + \dots + d^\infty$, which converges to $1/(1 - d)$. Throughout, we use a discount factor per year, $d = .85$, for a point estimate, but we should probably consider this upwardly biased.⁸ From a design perspective, we are interested in institutions that perform well with a broad range of discount factors. This means we do not require a precise estimate of the discount factor for different citizens.

Let us refer to each coalition's sum of expected, discounted years in office as its 'weighted win-sum,' W , and its weighted win-sum as a proportion of the total as its 'weighted win-share,' w . As complements, we also have the 'weighted loss-sum,' L , the sum of discounted years that a coalition expects to lose, and its weighted loss-sum as a proportion of the total as its 'weighted loss-share,' l .

The subscript t marks the number of years before the next election. Throughout, we assume that years per term, $T = 4$. Thus, immediately after an election, $t = T = 4$; immediately before an election, $t = 0$. In all likelihood, not all future years would be relevant. The time horizon is the outer limit of the period that is taken into consideration. We add a subscript, H , to mark the time horizon.

Whether in the winner-take-all status quo or with the turn-taking mechanism, if we know the weighted win-share or the weighted loss-share of one of the parties, then we know the weighted win-share and the weighted loss-share of both:

$$w_{j,t,H}^{1st} = l_{j,t,H}^{2nd} = 1 - w_{j,t,H}^{2nd} = 1 - l_{j,t,H}^{1st} = \frac{W_{j,t,H}^{1st}}{W_{j,t,H}^{1st} + L_{j,t,H}^{1st}} \quad (3)$$

For example, suppose there are two parties, a Red party and a Blue party. As a baseline, consider the case where each year there is 50% chance that Red rather than Blue will have a narrow majority. In this case, the first-place team's win-share will be 74%, and its loss-share will be 26%; the second-place team's win-share will be 26%, and its loss-share will be 74%. These happen to be the numbers when $d = .85$ and there is no incumbency advantage (when $p = 0.5$), so that each side expected to win an equal share of the terms to come (see Figure 4).

This formulation in terms of weighted win-sums and weighted-win shares allows us to revise our estimates of W and L in the previous section. To increase the desirability of constitutional cooperation between hardcore voters (see Equation 1), we want $w_{j,t,H}^{1st}/l_{j,t,H}^{1st}$, the ratio of time 'in' to time 'out' of office, to be as close to one as possible. This happens when $w_{j,t,H}^{1st} = w_{j,t,H}^{2nd} = .5$. Similarly, to lower the price of retrospective voting to conflicted voters (see Equation 2), we want $w_{j,t,H}^{1st} - w_{j,t,H}^{2nd}$, the 'additional years in office' (or, more precisely, the additional expected, discounted years in office), to be as close to zero as possible. This too happens when $w_{j,t,H}^{1st} = w_{j,t,H}^{2nd} = .5$. This, then, is our single normative target. Relative to the winner-take-all institution, the turn-taking institution is robustly an order of magnitude closer to the normative target (see Figure 5).

In sum, where those with high levels of patience and commitment-capabilities face coordination problems (i.e. opportunities for mutual benefit), those with low levels face conflict (i.e. opportunities for and threats of mutual exploitation). In contrast to the majoritarian winner-take-all alternative, the turn-taking institution endogenously produces an electorate with preferences for socially productive policy and policy-making

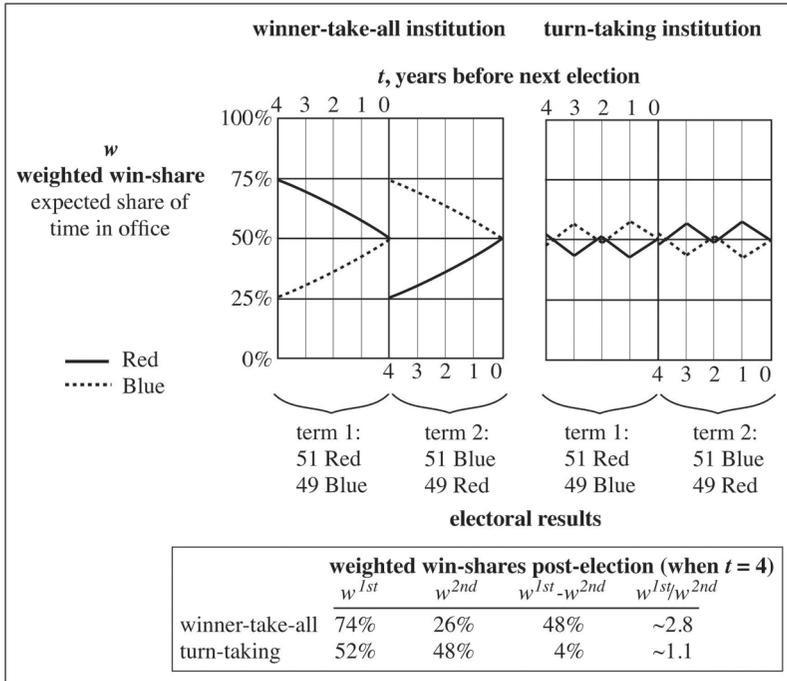


Figure 4. Weighted win-shares of Red and Blue parties across two terms, one as the 1st-place and one as the 2nd-place party, when $d = .85$ and $p = .5$.

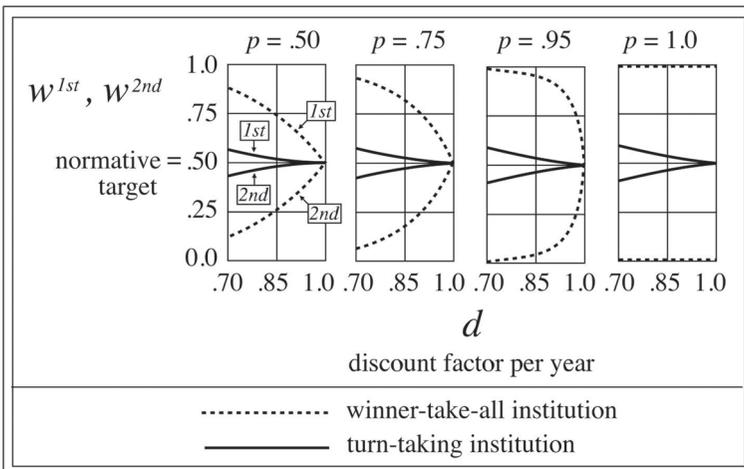


Figure 5. The weighted win-shares for the 1st and 2nd place parties in the winner-take-all and the turn-taking institutions immediately post-election ($t = 4$), when the incumbent's probability of re-election, $p = .5, .75, .95$, and 1.0 , when the discount factor, d , varies from $.7$ to 1 , and when the time horizon, H , is infinite.

institutions. This is true even under conditions that are individually and cumulatively hostile to doing so.

5. Conclusion

In human societies there are both conditions that facilitate mutually productive relationships and those that yield mutually destructive relationships. The problem is how to facilitate the one and constrain the other by constituting order in human societies.

Vincent Ostrom (1987: 48)

The primary contribution of this paper is to show how the turn-taking institution could foster constitutionally constrained electoral competition in divided societies. Hardcore voters have the incentives to form and reveal preferences for socially productive policy-making institutions. Conflicted voters have greater incentives to publicly reveal their private opinions about the substance of policy rather than remaining silent to gain access to spoils. Elites would have less to gain and more to lose from casting their appeals in ethnic terms.

The arguments presented here are relevant to several scholarly literatures and substantive policy debates. The literature on institutional design in deeply divided societies has tended to focus on one particular kind of institution, ethnic power-sharing (Gates and Strom, 2007; Hartzell and Hoddie, 2007; Horowitz, 1991, 2003; Jarstad, 2008; Lijphart, 1999, 2004; Sisk, 1995). Power-sharing institutions, given their multiple veto points, are poorly suited to adapting to changing circumstances, often reinforce existing identity-based divisions, and frequently collapse over the medium and long term (Durant and Weintraub, 2013; Roeder and Rothchild, 2005). Scholarship should focus on developing electoral mechanisms that lower the incentives to scapegoat those of other ethnicities, religions, or races for the purposes of mobilizing the party faithful.⁹

This paper also has important policy implications: we put forth an electoral mechanism that ought to be considered by those engaged in nation-building in deeply divided societies. If sectarian divides raise the stakes of elections and make crafting policy a zero-sum game, as has occurred in Iraq for example, lowering individuals' loyalties to their political coalitions could serve as an important bulwark against those who seek to exploit ethnic differences. As early as the mid-20th century, scholars argued that cross-cutting cleavages 'sew the social system together' by preventing mobilization and conflict along one primary line of allegiance (Coser, 1956). Although the literature has recognized that cross-cutting cleavages are desirable, and that they have an empirically observable causal effect on the decreased political salience of ethnic identity (Dunning and Harrison, 2010), scholars have not specified how such cross-cutting cleavages can be endogenously produced given different electoral rules of the game.¹⁰ If our conjectures are correct, the turn-taking institution could make this happen.

The pernicious effects of ethnicity are likely to be countered only by changing the institutional incentives afforded to elites, and by lowering the costs to mass-level citizens of forming and revealing preferences for socially productive policy and policy-making institutions. Over time, the turn-taking institution would replace ethnic patronage politics with constitutionally constrained competition. We believe this a promising alternative for politics divided by seemingly irreconcilable ethnic differences.

This article is not a comprehensive statement of the qualities characterizing turn-taking institutions. There are elements we are aware we have omitted (either because we have treated or intend to treat them elsewhere), and there are likely additional omissions of which we are not aware.

First, our analysis has focused on states that would typically end up in the turn-taking phase, not the supermajority phase, nor have we discussed how the turn-taking institution would operate in polities that contain multiple ethnic groups, each of significant size (e.g. Kenya). We have begun this analysis elsewhere (Durant, 2011; Durant and Weintraub, 2013) and believe that we can build a more in-depth discussion based upon what we have set out here.

Second, our analysis is focused on mass – not elite – behavioral changes. Elsewhere (Durant, 2011; Durant and Weintraub, 2013) we consider how the turn-taking institution would affect the ability of elites to form, enforce, and adapt agreements about policy and policy-making institutions. Expectation-symmetry in the turn-taking phase is conducive to cooperation, especially when elites are impatient, when incumbency advantages are substantial, and when horizons of commitment are limited. The substitutability between the turn-taking phase and the supermajority phase limits the excesses of each phase by creating an option for beleaguered parties to ‘opt out’ of the existing phase (from the turn-taking phase to the supermajority phase or vice versa) so long as they can convince a sufficient portion of the electorate to come with them. We believe these two attributes would make it easier for elites to form, enforce, and adapt agreements about policy and policy-making institutions that would be complementary to the more socially productive preferences we discuss here.

Third, our analysis has treated a stationary case, where payoffs do not rise, fall, or fluctuate over time. It is most difficult to maintain agreements about policy and policy-making institutions when the pool of available spoils is shrinking and the bargaining power of participants is fluctuating (Powell, 1999). One of the advantages of the turn-taking phase is that it fosters equal expectations *in the immediate future* of being ‘in’ (between parties) or of being ‘in’ and ‘out’ (for a given party); this is a benefit not only when participants are impatient or short-sighted, but also when circumstances shift regularly and rapidly (Durant and Weintraub, 2013). In absolute terms, all institutions – including the turn-taking institution – are challenged by a shrinking pool of spoils and fluctuating bargaining power, but in relative terms the turn-taking is advantaged, as it is meant to sustain cooperation over relatively short cycles.

Fourth, our analysis has assumed voters choose rationally, when there is ample theory and evidence to the contrary.¹¹ We believe including the systematic biases of human psychology (e.g. quasi-hyperbolic discounting, naïve realism, in-group altruism, out-group xenophobia, etc.) would make our argument *stronger* on net. Even so, we think it best to begin the conversation with a simple rational choice benchmark.

Fifth, we do not provide a comparative analysis of competition and cooperation across the menu of well-known electoral institutions, among them various proportional representation rules (e.g. largest remainder methods like the Hare quota or highest average methods like the D’Hondt method) and single-winner rules (e.g. the alternative vote, the Borda count, approval voting, range voting). Ideally, we would show where the turn-taking institution sits in the landscape of alternatives.

Sixth, we have not discussed how we could obtain external validity for our results. We intend to put our ideas to the test in the lab, and, if the lab results are promising, in a field experiment at the local government level.

There is much inquiry that remains to be done. We hope we have persuaded the reader that it is worth pursuing. We believe the turn-taking institution could play a role in facilitating mutually productive relationships and constraining mutually destructive relationships in human societies.

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Notes

1. The canonical accounts of retrospective voting are Key (1966) and Fiorina (1981). Much of the early literature on retrospective voting focused on economic performance: Tufte (1975) and Hibbing and Alford (1981) found that electoral support for the incumbent party is best predicted by change in real per capita income (see Kiewiet and Rivers (1984) for a review). Subsequent work moved beyond economic performance to show how, in the United States, votes for congressional incumbents are driven by the incumbent's policy record more generally (Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Francis et al., 1994).
2. The full quotation from Senator Marcy is as follows: 'It may be sir, that the politicians of the United States are not so fastidious as some gentlemen are, as to disclosing the principles on which they act. They boldly practice what they preach. When they are contending for victory, they avow their intention of enjoying the fruits of it. If they are defeated, they expect to retire from office. They see nothing wrong in the rule, that to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy'.
3. As Fearon (2011) notes, one way in which the price of disloyalty is lowered is through secret ballots. However, the efficacy of the secret ballot is limited where secrecy is not credible, or where public participation is necessary to mobilize others to vote.
4. This is something we consider elsewhere (Durant and Weintraub, 2013).
5. This builds on the literature on distributive politics and reciprocity (Shepsle and Weingast, 1981; Weingast et al., 1981). While the early literature proposed that reciprocity among legislators would lead to a pattern of 'universalism,' subsequent work has proposed that this is difficult to sustain, and universalism within the party is more common (Cox and McCubbins, 1993); McCubbins and Noble, 1995; Weingast, 1994).
6. Here we assume that the relevant 'aspects' are given, and can be treated independently.
7. It would be straightforward to adjust the account to allow for quasi-hyperbolic discounting, but it would not qualitatively affect the results.
8. One of the best surveys of the literature on time discounting is in Frederick et al. (2002). They call the Warner and Pleeter (2001) field study 'particularly compelling in terms of credibility of reward delivery, magnitude of stakes, and number of subjects.' In Warner and Pleeter (2001), over 60,000 participants were given a choice between a fixed-sum payment and an annuity with an implied discount factor of .85. Over half the officers and over 90% of the enlisted men chose the fixed sum, suggesting discount factors per year of less than

.85. These are the discount factors applied to a highly credible flow of cash. The electoral-political context typically involves more strategic advantages to going first, as well as more risk and uncertainty. Even if most office-seeking elites have time-discounting behavior that is closer to that of the officers, we might expect a distribution with its median at or below $d = .85$.

9. This contribution could be also relevant beyond divided societies. See McKay (2005) for an application to American politics.
10. Existing literature has shown how cross-cutting cleavages affect vote choice and the formation of political coalitions (Roemer et al., 2007; Rogowski, 1989). Lipset (1959) thought that cross-cutting cleavages could have an effect on the persistence of democracy itself.
11. See, for example, Caplan (2003), Cowen (2005), and Friedman (2006).

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