

Conciliatory Institutions to Reduce Ethnic Conflict

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There are two main ways to think about political accommodation in societies that have serious divisions among ethnic, racial, or religious groups. Both try to protect against the domination of one group by another, but in different ways. One, the consociational approach, is aimed at an inclusive, post-electoral coalition, including extremists. The other, the centripetal approach, tries to bolster the moderate middle against those making extreme claims. Both approaches aim at intergroup compromise, the former through a regime of group guarantees, quotas, and vetoes, the latter through incentives for politicians to take account of interests of groups other than their own. This presentation will survey the two approaches, evaluate their pros and cons, and then explain why adoptions of either approach are so unusual and why so many democratic countries are more likely to adopt institutions that are geared toward majority rule, with guarantees of minority rights that are inadequate to reduce conflict in severely divided societies.