

When electoral engineering could be its own goal: Evidence on centripetalism from municipal elections in Serbia

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Abstract

There are two main ways by which electoral engineers want to conciliate conflicts based on ethnicity in divided societies: The *power-sharing* approach (Lijphart 1994) is based on proportional representation and integration of all ethnic groups into the government. The *centripetalist* school however, criticises them as leading to "ethnic censuses". Instead, they propose electoral laws that require a majority of votes for a candidate to win so that this might incite inter-ethnic voting and moderate candidates.

In recent contributions, it has been shown that the *centripetalist* institutions rely on strong assumptions about voter behaviour. In many cases, they might not be fulfilled, and this leads to unintended outcomes. In this paper, I use a new model in order to define those situations where majority-voting systems are likely to support nationalist extremists instead of moderate forces.

I test my model using data from the 2004 municipal elections in Serbia, and compare these to the outcomes of the 2003 proportional elections to the national parliament. My results show that although the centripetal effect worked only in few cases. In multiethnic municipalities however, nationalist extremists could obtain a much larger amount of seats than votes, while the moderate centre lost the elections. I show that this effect is related to the – allegedly centripetal – electoral law.

Introduction¹

"Electoral engineers" discuss electoral systems as a means for conflict prevention and peace making in divided societies. Studies indeed have shown that electoral systems may make a difference for the inclusion of minority groups (for instance Lijphart 1994; Horowitz 1985; Reilly 2001; Norris 2005).

Electoral institutions are certainly not the only part of the puzzle in respect to ensuring the participation of ethnic minorities in public life (OSCE/ODIHR 2001: 29). But their role may be central, since they might decide if minorities even gain representation or not – which in most cases might be necessary for an effective and full participation.

However, recommendations are controversial: While some opt either for proportional representation as an important pillar of power-sharing regimes (Lijphart, Norris, etc.), the school of "centripetalists" (as called by Reilly 2001) prefers majoritarian systems, which are said to be more inclusive (Horowitz, Reilly, etc.). They argue that the logic of proportionality might promote a segregation of the ethnic groups.²

The apparent contradiction may be partially explained with different dependent variables, which the authors use: While the power-sharing school stresses representation of all the groups of the society, the centripetalists rather emphasise on the integration of different groups through multi-ethnic parties and inter-ethnic vote. Only recently and rarely, scholars pointed out that the outcome

¹ Many thanks to Sergiu Gherghina for his helpful comments and Luke Franson for corrections.

² I define ethnicity as a fluid perception of collective identity of a people through a social group itself or through society.

of those systems heavily depends on the structure of the social cleavages and on the voter's behaviour (Fraenkel/Grofman 2004, 2006a, 2006b). However, their studies have been criticised, among other reasons, because of their consideration only of isolated situations, and being largely based on hypothetical voter distributions instead of empirical data (Horowitz 2004, 2006). Thus, the question if the centripetal effect works in reality or fails due to unrealistic assumptions merits the attention of empirical research.

In this paper, I add both theoretical innovations and new empirical findings to previous research: *On theoretic grounds*, I develop a new model based on voter distribution and the median voter that shall help to discuss systematically the conditions under which centripetal electoral systems may have a moderating effect – and under which they are likely to fail. My main argument is that even in fractionalised countries, at the local (electoral district) level there are often clear-cut local majorities of one dominating ethnic group. In consequence, all kind of majority-based electoral systems lead to an exclusion of minorities from political life, while the ethnic majority elects nationalist extremist parties. Thus, in deeply divided countries a significant moderation effect appears unlikely, and centripetal systems might even lead to more intensive polarisation.

Empirically, I focus on the municipal electoral results of 2004 (elections of local majors by two-round majority vote) from Serbia in order to study the centripetal effect of electoral systems. The Serbian case appears suited for my study because it is undoubtedly a deeply divided society, with different degrees of multi-ethnicity in different regions (variation on the context variable). Further, while in other countries centripetal electoral systems are used at the national level and there is no instance to compare them to, the Serbian case allows controlled comparison with "non-centripetal" electoral results: The 2003 parliamentary elections were held by proportional representation and they appear ideal to compare the outcome under different systems.

This paper is structured as follows: In the first part, I develop a comprehensive model of how different types of electoral systems in divided societies may work. Afterwards, I explain my case selection and the methodology applied, followed by empirical results and conclusions.

Which electoral system provides peace and conciliation in ethnically divided societies?

There are two conflicting views about what kind of electoral systems is the best for divided societies. Power-sharing scholars, most prominently Arend Lijphart (1994), promote proportional representation in large districts as the adequate electoral systems for divided societies, stressing the importance of the integration of all relevant ethnic groups into political bodies. According to this school, the principles of proportionality are reflected by proportional elections for the parliament, as by the integration of different social groups into government and administration (*consociational model*; cf. Lijphart 1968).

The opposite school, most prominently promoted by Donald Horowitz (1985, 1991) puts the accent on different criteria that electoral systems in divided societies must fulfil. While the power-sharing school stresses the aspect of integration of all groups and representation, Horowitz points out conciliation and moderation of political forces. The idea behind: moderate representatives may follow the interests of all ethnic groups and oppose ethnic segregation and sectarianism.

As this paper is focussed on this latest aspect, we shall discuss, how centripetal electoral systems influence the political landscape, and in a second step, what factors may limit such an impact.

Centripetalism

The electoral system that is most frequently discussed as centripetal institution is the Alternative Vote (AV). It is best known from its use in Australia, but has been applied too for parliamentary elections in Papua New Guinea and the Fiji Islands (cf. Reynolds et al. 2005).

At the level of the *electoral ballot*, AV is classified amongst the preferential electoral systems (together with the Single Transferable Vote): Voters do not chose one party out of the ballot, but instead list the candidates on the ballot in the order of their preference. If considering the way how *votes are transferred into seats* (the electoral formula), AV is instead a majority-based electoral system, working mostly in single-member districts: The candidate that wins an absolute majority of the votes is getting elected. As long as no candidate gets an absolute majority of the first preference votes, step by step the least successful candidates are eliminated, and their voters' votes are accorded to second (or subsequent) preferences. The process is repeated until one candidate wins an absolute majority of the votes (Reynolds et al. 2005: 47ff.). This is not very different from how a majority voting system with many rounds works like. The only difference is that the different preferences are not expressed on a single ballot (as in the AV case), but on several ballots that are cast in consecutive rounds.

Centripetalists see the AV as a particularly fruitful moderating institution for divided societies. It requires from candidates to win a majority of votes, what demands from candidates to get a broader support, and make concessions to other voting groups. In ethnic divided societies, it incites them to adopt moderate policies on ethnic terms. Voters, even if in ethnically divided societies they vote according ethnic lines, might give their second or third preference to the moderate party from the other ethnic group, most likely to moderate parties of the opposed group. This puts parties with a moderate program in favour, as they may easier attract such votes. Further, inter-ethnic alliances of moderate parties are favoured: they may reach agreements to exchange their second voting preferences (Horowitz 1991: 179).

Alternative Vote is the most frequently cited example of electoral systems with centripetal incentives. However, other electoral systems have similar impacts: Majority elections in two rounds require (as in AV) an absolute majority of votes to get elected. This might incite parties to campaign for voters of ethnic groups, in order to reach the majority of votes. Single-Transferable Vote is a proportional system that includes the principle of vote transfers and incites inter-ethnic vote exchanges between moderate parties (cf. OSCE/ODIHR 2001; Horowitz 1985; Farrell 2001).

Explaining the centripetal effect using a median voter model

The idea of the centripetalism may be best symbolised using the Downsian concept of the *median voter* (Downs 1957; Fraenkel/Grofman 2004). If we graph all the voters on an axis along one dimension, then we find the same number of voters at the left of the median voter as we find on her right. In majority decisions (or in majority electoral systems), she has the decisive vote (cf. figure 1).

Example 1: Suppose we have an electoral district, as symbolised in figure 1, with 60% of voters belonging to the ethnic group 1, and 40% of the voters belonging to the ethnic group 2. As in all the following examples, the effects are happening on the district level, thus voter distributions at the district level are discussed. A majority of those voters are supporting radical parties (the radical party of ethnic group 1, "R1", scores 40% of the total vote; the radical party of the ethnic

group 2, "R2", scores 28% of the total vote). The moderate parties consist of only a small share of the votes (M1 20%; M2 12%).³ Under proportional representation (PR), this would give the radical parties a majority of more than two thirds of the seats. In (one-round) plurality elections, the radical party of the larger group would win the contest and win the only mandate. Both PR and plurality electoral systems are counter-examples working without centripetal incentives.

This changes drastically if we apply AV (and further suppose that moderate voters prefer the moderate party of the opposed ethnic group over the radical party of the own ethnic group, what we call "moderate preferences"). Voters of the ethnic group 2 (M2 and R2 voters) prefer the moderate party of the ethnic group 1 to the radicals. Consequently, if the M2 and R2 parties drop out of the race, the votes of the ethnic group 2 are transferred to party M1.⁴ In the third counting, M1 gets all the votes of the second ethnic group and wins over the radical party. Alternative Vote leads to the electoral success of this moderate party, despite its limited size, as it holds the median position in the party system, with 40% of the voters at its left and 40% of its voters at its right.⁵

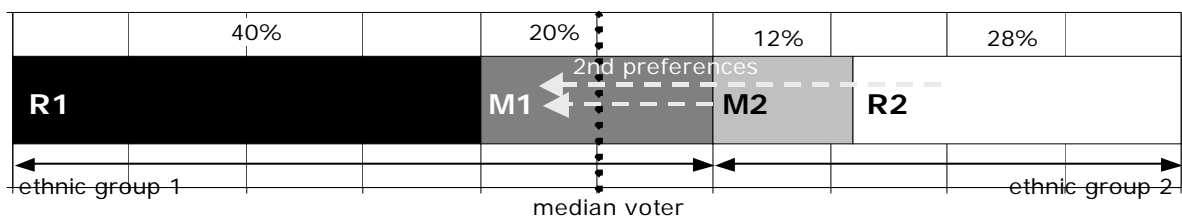


Figure 1: The centripetal effect.

	Radical voter [example: 1 st choice R1]	Moderate voter, moderate preferences M1	Moderate voter, ethnic preferences M1	Other voters
1 st choice	Radical party of the own ethnic group R1	Moderate party of the own ethnic group M1	Moderate party of the own ethnic group M1	<i>No single-peaked differences.</i>
2 nd choice	Moderate party of the own ethnic group M1	Moderate party of the opposed group M2	Radical party of the own ethnic group R1	<i>[Vote not rationally, or there are other issue dimensions that violate basic assumptions of the model.]</i>
3 rd choice	Moderate party of the opposed group M2	Radical party of the own ethnic group R1	Moderate party of the opposed group M2	
Last choice	Radical party of the opposed group R2	Radical party of the opposed group R2	Radical party of the opposed group R2	

Table 1: Voter types and their preference order.

This idea appears to be very innovative and to create a conciliation effect: Parties competing for second preferences from opposed ethnic groups and moderate parties at the median have an advantage over radical competitors.

³ The same model, including the following examples, may be used for situations with more than four parties, supposing that it is possible to class the parties in those four categories, and that voters will rank parties according those categories.

Instead of introducing two moderated parties for each of the ethnic groups, we could include one single "ethnically mixed moderate party" that campaigns for conciliation voters from both ethnic groups (such a party configuration has been the basis of the median voter model in Bochsler 2006: 17ff.); a party type we know it from many divided societies (for instance the Estonian Centre Party has important support at both sides of the ethnic cleavage, the Bosnian Social Democratic Party is trying not to be identified with one ethnicity, or the new Liberal-Democratic Party in Serbia leads its campaigns in several languages in order to attract ethnic minority voters). I decided however – in line with Fraenkel and Grofman (2004, 2006a) – to apply a model with two moderate parties (one from each ethnic group). The ethnically mixed moderate party would just be a special case of it: if the vote shares remain constant, the outcomes are the same as in the model with two moderate parties and "moderate" and single-peaked voter preferences (see below for a definition).

⁴ They rank their votes as the follows: $M2 > M1 > R2 > R1$ – or $R2 > M2 > M1 > R1$.

⁵ The model relies on what are called single-peaked preferences (cf. Fraenkel/Grofman 2004: 490f.). This means, that the parties and voters are grouped on one dimension, and voters rank the parties according the relative distance on this dimension. This is a likely configuration for a society with two ethnic groups, marked by ethnic divisions. We would have a completely different situation, if for instance the voters at the extremities of the political dimension would prefer the party at the other extreme to moderate parties. Those points will be addressed later on, however at this point they have not been discussed extensively.

Some might criticise AV (and in a similar way majority two-round systems) being one of the rather expensive electoral systems regarding costs and disadvantages in the electoral administration: Preferential voting procedures require very good education of the voters; further, because of small single-member districts, district boundaries have to be drawn (with the resulting risk of biases through differences in size and gerrymandering) and voters must undergo costly registration by districts; the counting procedure is complicated; and finally, if a seat becomes vacant between elections, by-elections have to be held (Reynolds et al. 2005: 153ff.).

However, a much more serious problem might be that there are some pre-conditions that have to be fulfilled – otherwise centripetal institutions will not do their job. The centripetalists themselves stress those limits: Horowitz (2006: 653, 2004) writes that Alternative Vote "generally fosters moderate results" – while exceptions may be possible. According Horowitz (2006: 659), it is necessary to have "heterogeneous constituencies" (different ethnic groups living in the same constituency) and "sub-ethnic divisions reflected in party politics". However, in some situations the AV still will not fulfil its goals. In the following paragraphs I try to show those situations and derive general "conditions" or "limits" of the centripetal effect.

Limits of centripetalism (I): the problem of early dropouts

Fraenkel and Grofman simulated situations, where despite being at the median, moderate parties fail to get elected. Their main argument was, that the Alternative Vote "does not necessarily imply victories for moderate parties" (2006a: 647), and that such an effect is only likely under very special circumstances (if there is "already a first-preference promoderation electoral majority"). Those are situations where many other electoral systems would lead to the same outcome.

For Horowitz (2004: 507) "Fraenkel and Grofman's model is based on extreme assumptions that bear no relation to party and voter behavior in such societies" (ibd.: 507), taking "flawed assumptions" about preference transfers (ibd.: 514).

Before the validity of those arguments will be investigated on an empirical base (next section of this paper), I shall first develop systematically the conditions that are necessary for a centripetal effect. For that goal, I take the model I used above (first example) and adopt some minor changes to it in order to show how the outcome changes – and the centripetal effect fails. (Examples 2-4 are generalised models of simulations by Fraenkel and Grofman 2004, 2006a.)

First, we show the problem of *early dropouts* (examples 2 and 3): In the previous example, the voters' preferences were moderate. This meant that voters of one of the moderate parties gave their second choice votes to the moderate party of the opposed ethnic group (instead of giving it to the radical party of its own ethnic group, cf. table 1). Now instead, we suppose that voters of M2 are split into such with "moderate" and such with "ethnic" preferences (Fraenkel/Grofman 2004). This means, when M2 after the counting of the first preference vote drops out, one part of its votes go to M1, and another part to R2. Actually, as soon as the R2 party reaches more than 2% of such second-choice votes, the electoral outcome changes: Now, in the second counting of the votes, R2 is stronger than M1, which means that M1 drops out (instead of R2). Consequently, as both moderate parties are out of the game, a radical party wins: R1 gets the mandate, with the second or third choice votes of M1 voters.

In this example, the moderate parties, despite holding the position of the median voter, failed to get the seat. As a lack of very strong "moderate preferences", some votes were transferred to the radical parties, and both moderate parties dropped out too early of the counting process. This happens even if 60% of the voters prefer M1 to R1 to win the seat.

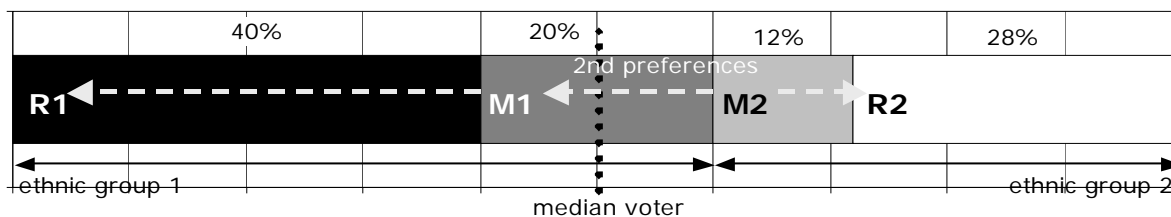


Figure 2: Early dropout due to "ethnic preferences".

Example 3: In the next case, we suppose perfect "moderate preferences" (as in example 1), but change the vote shares slightly. The second ethnic group gets radicalised, with now only 9% of the votes for the moderate party (M2) and 31% of the votes for the radical party (R2). Still, M1 holds the median voter, with 40% of the voters at its left and at its right.

After the counting of the first preferences, party M2 (still the smallest party) drops out, and all its votes are transferred to M1 (perfect "moderate preferences"). However, even if the M1 party now holds all the moderate votes (20% + 9%), it is weaker than R2 (31% of first preference votes) and drops out after the second counting of the votes. The rest is identical to example 2, with R1 winning the electoral district because representing the larger ethnic group.

This is the second case where *early dropouts* of the median party may lead to a success of the radicals: If the moderate parties have too little first preferences, they cannot win. More precisely (even if preferences are moderate) the moderate parties (both together) need at least as many first preferences as the smaller of the radical parties has; otherwise they drop out early.

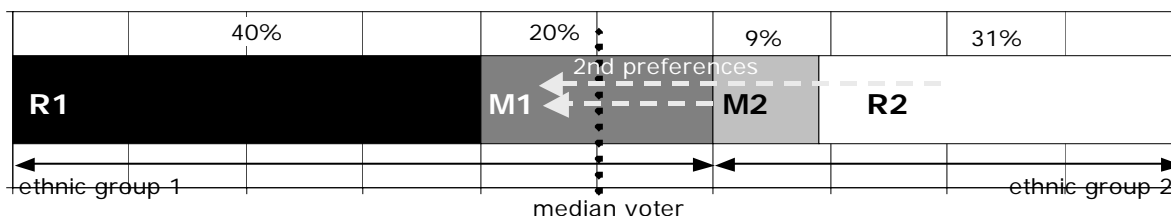


Figure 3: Early dropout due to weak moderate parties.

It is possible that one of the moderate parties would indeed include the median voter, thus be in a position where it might win the electoral race. But nevertheless, if this party is either small (according to first preference votes), or some moderate voters rank their ethnic parties over the moderate party of the opposing ethnic group, then the moderate party will drop out early of the election, which leads to the victory of one of the radical contestants.

Limits of centripetalism (II): strategic coalitions of the extremists

Example 4 puts into question the single-peak premise of the centripetal model.^{6 7} Centripetalists stress the importance of electoral agreements between two players of opposed ethnicity to ex-

⁶ This would be the case as soon as the dimension on which voters and parties are situated is changing its shape. For instance, if it is not a line, but a circle, or, when radicals of the ethnic group 1 feel suddenly closer to radicals of the opposed ethnic group than to moderates. Under such conditions, the concept of the "median voter" loses its sense, and predictability gets impossible (cf. example 4 below).

change second preference votes. They argue it would be easier for moderate parties than for radical parties to conclude such agreements. However, they do not discuss the possibility of purely strategic coalitions. Hence, it is possible that the leaders of both radical parties agree to exchange second preferences, despite being political enemies, and despite being much closer to each of the moderate groups. However, such agreements bring advantages for each of those groups: if the agreement works, then each of the extremist parties gets additional votes if the other extremist party drops out of the race. For each of those parties it is attractive to reach such an agreement in order to get those votes – and there is little reason not to do so.⁸

In our example (cf. figure 4), little changed compared to the first example; only the second choices of the R2 voters are given to R1 instead of M2 or M1.⁹ In this situation, after M2 having dropped out in the first count, and R2 in the second count, R1 gets all the radical votes and gets elected with 68% of the votes. In other districts, similar coalitions may help R2 to get elected analogously. Actually, even if only a minority of the radical voters follows the agreement, it might still work. R1 needs only slightly more than 10% of votes through second choices; even if the other almost 18% go to M1 the outcome is still in sense of R1.

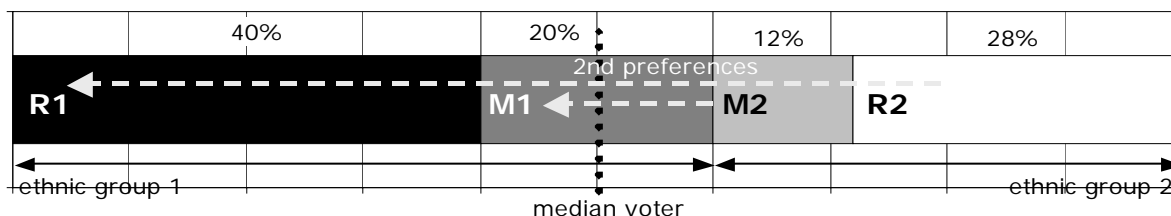


Figure 4: Purely strategic coalition.

Limits of centripetalism (III): median voter votes for radicals

It seems to be a premise of the centripetalist ideas that the median voter has to be a moderate voter, although we may doubt if this is really the case in divided societies.

First, in my previous examples I operated with an arbitrarily chosen 60% - 40% distribution of ethnic groups. This is still a rather balanced proportion; it is plausible that in many multiethnic societies we have rather less balanced distributions (what would make the conditions for the centripetal effect to work even harder). Particularly, even if we might find two balanced ethnic groups at the national level, they are seldom distributed exactly homogeneously across countries. Rather, there is important variance between territorial units. This means that some districts with an equal or similar share of both ethnic groups may exist in all multi-ethnic countries, but they are rather exceptional – and districts with a dominating ethnic group are the rule.

⁷ At the empirical level, those findings by Fraenkel and Grofman (2006a, 2006b) have been disputed by Horowitz (2006). He does not agree about the classification of the party concerned as being chauvinist, as Fraenkel and Grofman do. There is a hidden methodological issue behind this discussion: Actually, in many developing political systems, it may be difficult to judge the real programmatic direction of parties, especially if they are in an intern transformation and heterogeneous party membership. In such cases, the perception of those parties' policies may be influenced by the alliances they make. This would mean that we have a circular influence: As soon as a party joins an inter-ethnic coalition, even of purely strategic character, maybe related to purely strategic moderate rhetoric, we tend to classify it as moderate. Thus, there is a measuring bias that makes the identification of purely strategic alliances difficult. This is why I tried to base my classification of Serbia's political parties (empirical section of the paper) as far as possible on their policies and not the alliances they are involved.

⁸ The success of purely strategic agreements depends on the willingness of the voters to follow their parties' indications and give a second preference vote to the political enemy. This is facilitated through pre-ranking of candidate ranking on the electoral ballot, as it is the case for some AV ballots, for instance in Fiji. Voters there may either rank the candidates themselves, or follow the pre-ranked order proposed by party officials. In Fiji, 92% of the voters used the pre-ranked choices. This gives party offices considerable power in reaching agreements that otherwise maybe would not be followed by the voters.

⁹ In our example it would even be possible that they change their ranking only slightly: $R2 > M2 > R1 > M1$.

For our model this implies that we should test the effect of shifting the proportions of both ethnic groups. I chose a proportion of 78% for group 1, and 22% for group 2, holding the relative vote share the moderate and radical parties inside each ethnic group constant. This means that the radical party of the first ethnic group (R1) gets a 52% majority of the first preferences. We do not need long calculations or considerations of second and third preferences of the voters to see that R1 has the median voter, wins the district mandate, and leaves the second ethnic group and the moderate voters without any chance of winning a mandate. In consequence, there is no necessity for the radical party to behave moderate with regards to ethnic issues. At the contrary, a radical program may in some instances even mobilise ethnic majority voters.

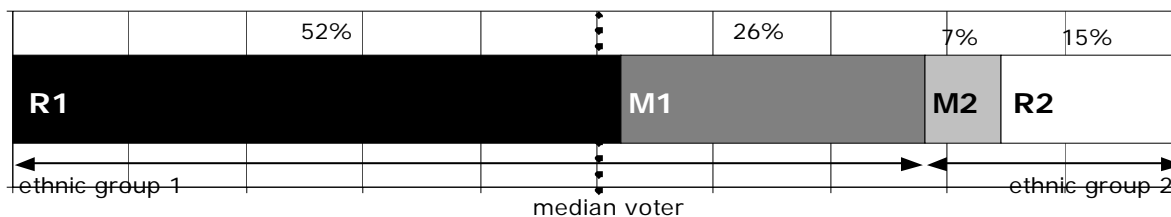


Figure 5: Dominating ethnic majority.

Besides, there is a second aspect in deeply divided societies that leads the median voter to vote for radicals: Inter-ethnic conflict impacts voters' preferences. By definition, "deeply divided" means that voters of each ethnic group are heavily polarised, and many vote for radical parties. Example 6 shows that such a polarisation might imply that even the median voter is included as a supporter of one of the radical parties. And where the radical party of the larger ethnic group gets a majority of the first preferences and wins the district (as in examples 5 and 6), there is no moderation effect (cf. Bochsler 2006: 17ff.). Only where this is not the case, the centripetal effect may lead to a moderate outcome, provided that none of the problems that have been discussed before applies.

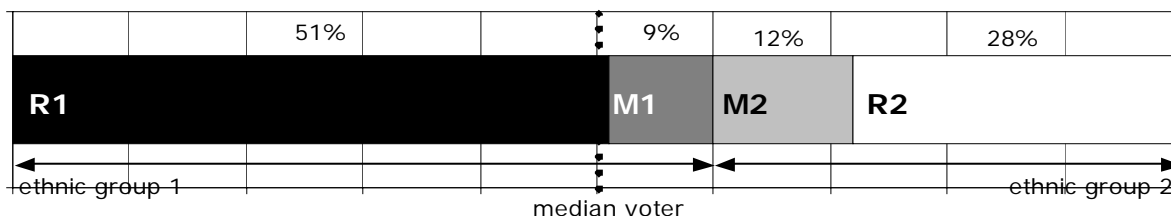


Figure 6: Polarisation.

Summarising, the centripetal model builds on the idea that majority-voting systems, in connection with preferential ballots, lead to a moderating effect. They incite political parties to adopt moderate policies on the ethnic issue and thus engineering the success of moderate political forces. However, as the studies by Fraenkel and Grofman (2004, 2006a) and my examples show, the efficacy of this centripetal effect is based on many premises, conditions and assumptions:

- *"Moderate preferences" of moderate party voters:* Moderate party voters have to accord their second choices to the moderate party of the opposed ethnic group. If instead they opt for the radical party of their own ethnic group as second choice ("ethnic preference"), the centripetal effect doesn't work – sometimes even if only a small part of the moderate voters have such "ethnic preferences" (example 2).
- *Strong moderate parties:* All the moderate parties together have to be at least as strong as the weaker radical party of one of the ethnic groups. Otherwise, moderate parties will drop out of the electoral race too early, leaving the field for the radical competitors (example 3).

- *Sincere voting on a single-peak dimension*: If the radical parties of both ethnic groups form a purely strategic electoral coalition to exchange second choice votes, the centripetal effect is ruled out, even if only some of the radical voters follow this party strategy (example 4).
- *Equal or similar size of both ethnic groups*: While the centripetalist school supposed that the effect may even work in districts with an ethnic majority of up to 90%,¹⁰ our example shows that even at lower instances the radical party of the larger ethnic group may win a majority of first-preference votes, and thus winning the district without giving the second preferences any chance (example 5).
- *Non-polarised politics*: Although centripetal institutions are proposed for nothing else than deeply divided societies, they may not work if the ethnic cleavage leads to a very strong polarisation and thus to a majority of votes for one of the radical parties (example 6).

Hypotheses

We have thus a set of hypotheses from different schools:

- The *centripetal* hypothesis predicts that majority-based electoral systems lead to the over-representation of political parties in the political centre (median parties), and thus favouring moderate parties (Horowitz 1991; Reilly 2001).
- The *median voter* hypothesis says that centripetal electoral systems indeed will lead to the election of the party of the median voter, but in divided societies this is often a radical voter – we have to be reminded that the *median voter at the district level* is relevant. Thus, because the median voter does not prefer moderates, I expect a shift towards radicals.
- The *early dropout* hypothesis predicts that majority voting systems lead to a move towards large parties or coalitions, because small parties drop out of the electoral race and (even if they have a median position) are not eligible any more (Fraenkel/Grofman 2006a). It thus depends rather on the size of the parties than on their position who will be favoured by centripetal institutions.

Case selection and methodology

At this stage of the discussion, it appears important to test what outcomes centripetal electoral systems produce in reality. This might help us to study to which degree the assumptions taken by the centripetalist school are realistic.

As countries that apply the Alternative Vote are very rare, and some of them due to their cleavage structure do not constitute well-suited cases to test the centripetal effect,¹¹ studies are based to large parts on fictive models (Fraenkel/Grofman 2004, 2006a). Empirical research on the centripetal effect of the Alternative Vote concentrates on Fiji. However, this example appears problematic as the classification of Fiji parties is subject to dispute (Fraenkel/Grofman 2006a, 2006b; Horowitz 2006). Furthermore, at the Fiji example (as in the other cases where the Alternative Vote was used), we can only compare the first preference votes to the number of seats

¹⁰ Although, such an explicit value was not stated directly by Horowitz, he expected centripetal institutions to mitigate tensions in a hypothetical Sri Lankan election – where the Tamil minority counts 10-12% of the population (Fraenkel/Grofman 2006a: 627). The Fiji's Constitutional Review Commission spoke of a threshold of 10-15% an ethnic minority has to count (Reeves et al 1996: 315; cited in Fraenkel/Grofman 2006a).

¹¹ Australia has no dominant ethnic cleavage, while the other case, Papua New Guinea, is ethnically hyper-fractionalised and thus does not fit with the expectations for AV that are based on bipolar ethnic cleavages (cf. Fraenkel/Grofman 2006a: 625). Except those cases and Fiji, there are no other countries where AV was applied for the elections of the national parliament.

the competitors get in parliament. This helps us to establish the "mechanical effect" of the electoral system (the way it converts the votes into seats). In some cases however, the "strategic-psychological effect" (cf. Duverger 1951: 256) turns out to be much more important: According to the centripetal hypotheses, it is well possible that in AV the most radical parties do even not try to compete in elections, because they know that they remain without chances. Or, it is possible that voters vote "strategically", casting their first preference not for their most favourite party, because in anticipation of the counting process they want to avoid an early dropout of an otherwise viable party. Thus, the comparison of first preference votes with seat shares hides such strategic impacts: maybe the most radical parties were "defeated" even before the election – in anticipation of the centripetal effect of the electoral law. In order to control for such psychological effects, we have to apply a controlled comparison with other, non-centripetal electoral systems.

For my study, I focus on cases where two different electoral systems are used in parallel; majority two-round systems and PR elections. This research design allows controlling for external variables; or we have almost "laboratory" conditions, where we can test two different systems while holding all the other factors at constant.

Similar research designs (although with other dependent variables than the success of moderate parties) were based on mixed electoral systems for the national parliaments where both majority or plurality and PR formulas are used in the same country. However, those studies face the problem of the "contamination effect": Elections for both parts of the parliament are held on the same day, and in consequence party campaigns and voters' decisions are influenced in between both tiers of the electoral system. Another possible comparison – the one between PR elections to parliament and two-round presidential elections – would not be meaningful for our purposes, because for presidential elections there is one single countrywide district – which is not comparable to many single-member districts for parliamentary elections.

This is why I compare elections of local mayors that are held in a majority two-round system to PR elections to the national parliament. Majority two-round systems are discussed too as centripetal institutions (Horowitz 1985), and indeed they have similar characteristics like AV,

- requiring an absolute majority of the votes to win a mandate,
- and vote transferred from first- to second-choice parties, after parties with less first preferences drop out of the electoral race after the first round of elections.
- In difference to AV, there are only two iterations (vote counts), which implies that after the first round all the minor parties immediately fall out of the electoral race – and this further reinforces the demand for coalition building. (This might give even additional advantages for parties that are able to form coalitions – one of the bases of the centripetal effect).
- A further difference regards the electoral coalition partner's loyalty: In two-round systems, purely strategic coalitions might be very difficult to implement because voters decide once again in the second round which party to vote for, and it is likely that they do not follow the coalition agreement of their most preferred party, if this is of purely strategic character (as voters have no interest to vote according such an agreement). In AV, the decision for all the rounds of vote counting are taken at the same time and on the same ballot, and parties have a remarkable influence on the second and third choices of their voters if the ballot allows a pre-ranking of candidates. Consequently there is a second electoral cam-

paigned before the second round is held, where it becomes even more important to campaign for the moderate median voter. Majority voting system may thus have a very similar centripetal effect as the Alternative Vote has.

As majority two-round systems differ only in minor points from AV, and in the absence of cases that allow studying the impact of the AV in a comparative setting, we should try to learn our lessons from majority elections.

My case selection is based on the availability of comparable electoral results and data on the ethnic composition. While we find detailed results from parliamentary elections for a growing number of countries, there are few known systematic sources for electoral results on the local level. For Serbia, a local NGO runs a database with detailed electoral results and demographic data at the municipal level.¹² Further, the Serbian case appears as well suited for our research, because the country experiences recent tensions with several ethnic minorities.¹³ Still, there is an important variation with regards to the ethnic heterogeneity of municipalities, thus providing different types of municipalities. This is why my study is based on the 2003 elections of the national parliament and the 2004 local elections in Serbia.

To a certain extent, the variation of the ethnic composition in Serbia follows regional lines. While Central Serbia is dominated by Serbs, in the Southern Sandžak region some of the municipalities have a majority of ethnic Bosniaks, others a minority. In the North-Serbian Vojvodina region we find many significant minorities that make up a majority of citizens in some municipalities. However, the Preševo Valley had to be excluded from my analysis, because the dominant Albanian minority mostly boycotted the elections to the national parliament, which would bias my results.

In order to test my hypotheses, I compare the outcomes of the elections according both electoral systems in the Serbian municipalities: I compare the amount of votes attributed to parties in the PR elections with the winners of the majoritarian two-round major elections.

Empirical results

Central Serbia: Moderates win, profiting from weak centre parties

First, I analysed the results from all the municipalities, except those where politically non-attributable local civic groups won the major offices.

In those municipalities (there are no important deviations from the countrywide average), the radical extremists (Serbian Radical party SRS and the Party of Serbian's Unity SSJ) became the largest political bloc in the parliamentary elections. Both are parties of former paramilitary leaders, and mainly based on the support of a cruel policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The Socialists (SPS, a nationalist extremist party, until his death under the formal leadership of the former dictator Slobodan Milošević) and ethnic minorities each got less than 10% of the vote.

Three blocks of democratically-oriented nationalists or moderated forces composed 10-20% of the vote each: One block, the democratic oriented nationalists, consists mainly of the Democratic Party of Serbia DSS of Vojislav Koštunica. Two other blocks may be characterised as moderate: The Democratic Party DS of Boris Tadić that in some instances made alliances with minority parties;

¹² Centar za Slobodne Izbore i Demokratiju, accessible on <http://www.cesid.org>.

¹³ At the time of the local elections in 2004, the multiethnic Vojvodina struggled with a series of incidents mostly against the ethnic Hungarian minority (Helsinki Committee 2004). At the same time, the Sandžak region remained a very destabilised region, with important conflicts, raised by the Serbian church, Serbian nationalist parties, the Serbian state security and radical representatives of the local Bosniak population (cf. International Crisis Group 2005), "all of them have a vested interest to keep ethnic tensions at a high level."

further the G17+ party (formed by an economist think-tank, very much oriented towards European integration) together with the Serbian Renewal movement (SPO-NS).

Parties of the Hungarian, Bosniak and Albanian minorities count less than 5% of the votes (figure 7).

From this distribution, the DSS nationalists subsequently clearly held the median voter. And, an analysis at the municipal level shows that the same party holds the median voter in an overwhelming majority of cases, altogether the DSS-median-voter municipalities count 80% of the population. Moderate parties hold the median voter only in as few as 2,5% (DS) respectively 11% (G17, SPO-NS) of the municipalities.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the moderate parties ended up the big winners of the municipal elections in 2004, particularly the Democratic Party (DS). Even if holding a vote share of only 13% in the parliamentary elections of 2003 (under PR), it won a 38% share of the major offices in Serbian municipalities.^{15 16}

Almost all the other political blocks were losers in the local major elections: the extreme nationalist Radical party made just half the number of mandates (15%) of its vote share (29%); the moderate parties G17+ and SPO-NS suffered less important losses in the majority elections. Ethnic minorities hold a approximately the same amount of seats as they got votes in parliamentary elections, and the Milošević Socialists (and one of their splitting-off, the SNS) could slightly improve their results in the local elections. Particularly interesting, the DSS nationalists scored less than 8% - instead of the 18% of proportional votes.

¹⁴ My analyses from the municipal level are only reported occasionally, I rather focus on the aggregated outcome, in order not to blow up the discussion.

¹⁵ The major mandates are weighted. In order to avoid biases through uneven turnout across municipalities, I weighted the number of mandates with the number of valid votes in the parliamentary elections.

¹⁶ Although the data are from two electoral races that are hold less than nine months from each other (the parliamentary elections at 28 December 2003, the local elections at 19 September 2004), there might be some political changes in this period, due to the formation of a new government lead by the DSS, and with the DS and the SRS in opposition, what might have lead to a rise in popularity for the opposition parties.

Is thus the drastic increase of the DS success in the municipal elections just a consequence of the political development in 2004, and not an effect of the electoral system? This counter-hypothesis may be rejected considering the results of the presidential elections on 13 June 2004 (first round): There, the DS candidate Boris Tadić (although being the only candidate of the political spectrum of moderates and ethnic minorities) scored only 27% of the national vote – much less than the 38% of mandates won in the municipal elections. This evidence is even stronger if considering that an additional 14% of the major mandates went to the other moderate parties and 4% to ethnic minorities. The comparison with the first round of the previous presidential elections on 16 November 2003 show that there was no major political shift: The candidate supported by the same political bloc scored 35% of the votes then. (Data: Cesid.)

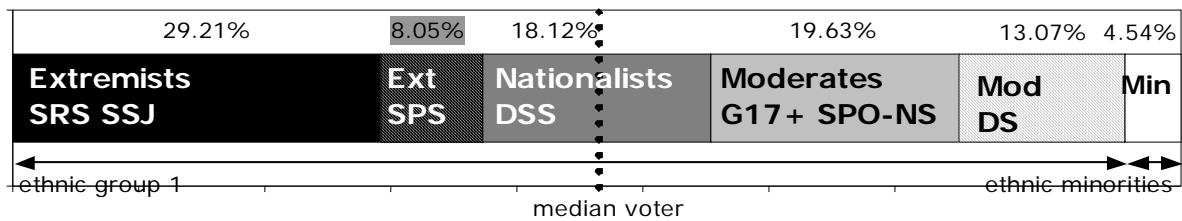


Figure 7: Vote distribution in the 2003 parliamentary elections, whole Serbia. The parties' vote share sum up to 92% as "other" small parties were excluded.

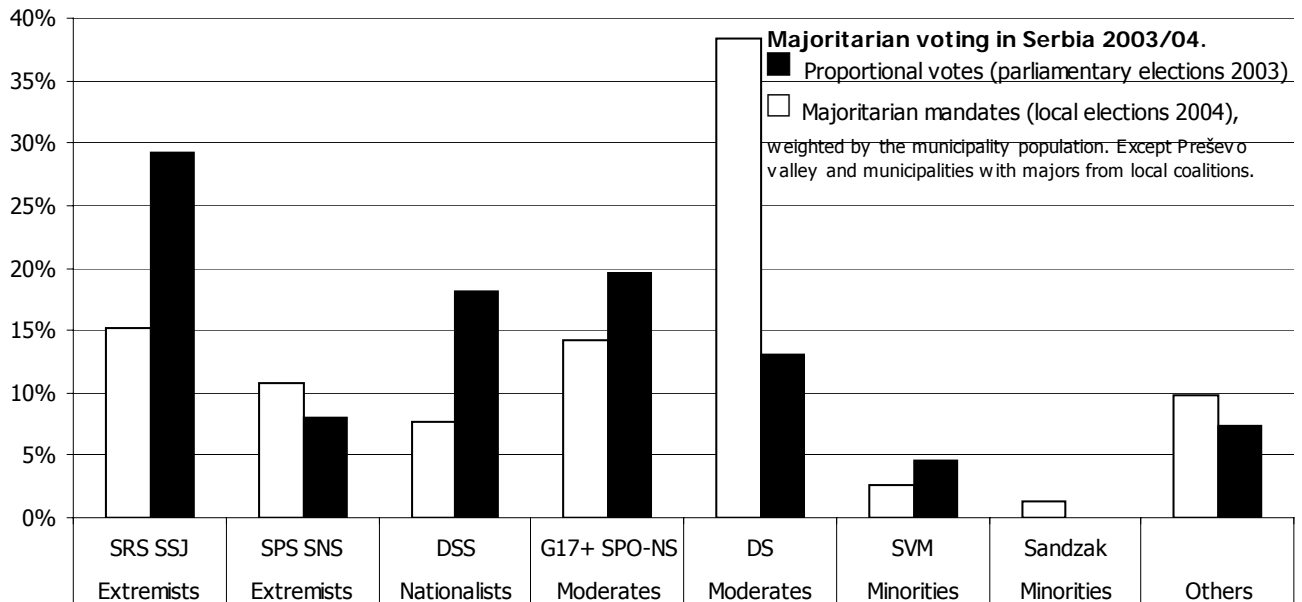


Figure 8: Electoral results from 132 municipalities (counting 87,5% of the Serbian voters). Data: Cesid, own calculation.

Which hypothesis do those results support?

- Certainly, the majority electoral system had a moderating impact. Although, this is not a centripetal effect: In the political landscape of Serbia, the moderate DS party holds a position at one extreme of the ethnic dimension, and thus it could not win second and third choice votes because standing at the political centre. The potential for such votes would have been much larger amongst nationalists and the G17-SPO-NS moderate bloc, which are much closer to the median voter.
- Indeed, the DS is all but the party of the median voter. The *median voter hypothesis* does not become a factor either.
- We see much more evidence for the Fraenkel/Grofman hypothesis of the early dropouts: Adding the votes of all the moderate parties, both moderate political blocs are with 33% of the votes the largest force, further supported by ethnic minority voters. And, the DS is the largest of the moderate parties. This means that in many cases, smaller parties do not win sufficient votes to get a candidate into the second round. Instead, the DS, being the largest party of one of the most important political blocs, has good chances to get its candidates into the second round of the elections. Then, it is a question of political proximity, that the moderate DS and not the radical SRS wins the second rounds in the local elections (similar to the presidential elections at the national level).

Ethnically mixed municipalities: centripetalism produces a nightmare for conciliation

The figure changes drastically if taking into account only those municipalities where ethnic minorities make up an important part of the population. Those are the cases where the Horowitz hypothesis should be most likely to work – there, where different ethnic communities live, and the minority might help a moderate candidate of the ethnic majority to be elected. We chose those municipalities where Serbians and Montenegrins count less than 80% of the population,¹⁷ a criterion that is fulfilled by 51 municipalities, of which we may include 40 into our analysis (after excluding the Preševo valley and municipalities with citizens alliances' majors, as described above). The analysed municipalities counted 23,1% of the voters in Serbia in the parliamentary elections in 2003.

Indeed, there are some instances where candidates nominated by a multi-ethnic coalition won the local major elections: Zrenjanin, a town with 69% Serbian residents, would be the perfect example to show how the centripetal effect works: The joint (ethnically Serbian) candidate of the moderate Democratic Party DS and the Hungarian minority party SVM won in the second round of the elections over the extreme nationalist candidate of the Radical party, with a lead of only 6% of the votes. Hungarian minority votes are likely to have crucially contributed to this victory. Similarly, joint candidates of the DS and the Hungarian parties were elected in Bačka Topola and in Mali Idoš, two municipalities with an ethnic Hungarian majority (65% resp. 59% of the population). But if abstracting from those single examples, the picture changes: The largest party by its *vote share* is the ultranationalist SRS, which holds the same weight as the three moderate parties G17+, SPO-NS and DS.

The overall *median voter* is included as part of the DSS nationalists, but is quite close to the G17+/SPO-NS moderates. But in 11 (out of 40) municipalities, the median voter is voting for the nationalist extremist parties or very close to them, which helped those parties to gain the major offices.¹⁸ In three more municipalities, the SRS extremists won the major office despite an extremist vote share of only 40%, probably gaining support from voters that after less radical options dropped out of the electoral race switched to the extremist option, as this was closer to them than moderate parties. Prominent example of this phenomenon is Novi Sad, the capital of the multi-ethnic Vojvodina region.

When looking at the whole region, the result of the two-round majority elections turned out to be a nightmare for inter-ethnic integration: The extreme nationalist Radical party could profit from the electoral system to increase its share from 31% of the votes to 46% of the major mandates in the ethnically mixed municipalities (figure 10). To sum up: if the ethnic cleavage is polarised, it may happen that the local majority imposes their extremist candidates over the minority, and that the inter-ethnic vote does not lead to any changes. On the contrary, it just excludes the local minority from political representation.

On the other hand, the moderate DS and ethnic minority parties could increase their mandates too through the majority electoral system, while the main losers are the second moderate party

¹⁷ At 2003/04, there is no political conflict in between Serbians and Montenegrins inside Serbia – in difference to the situation in Montenegro (and there are no ethnic Montenegrin political parties in Serbia). Serbians and Montenegrins in Serbia perceive their ethnical distance as small; this is why both groups may be treated as common majority population.

¹⁸ In the municipalities Bačka Palanka, Surdulica, Vrbas the median voter votes for extremists – what means that the extremists hold an absolute majority of the votes, and the SRS got the major office. In Beočin (49%), Dečani (46%), Kikinda (45%), Kula (48%), Ruma (48%), Šid (47%), Stara Pazova (46%) and Temerin (45%), the extremists hold almost an absolute majority, and have only win a couple of nationalist vote to get the major office.

(G17+) and the nationalists (DSS), who both have a similar vote share to the DS in the parliamentary elections. This may astonish, as at the local level, those parties would hold the median voter in a majority of the cases (DSS: 55%; G17-SPO-NS 27%).

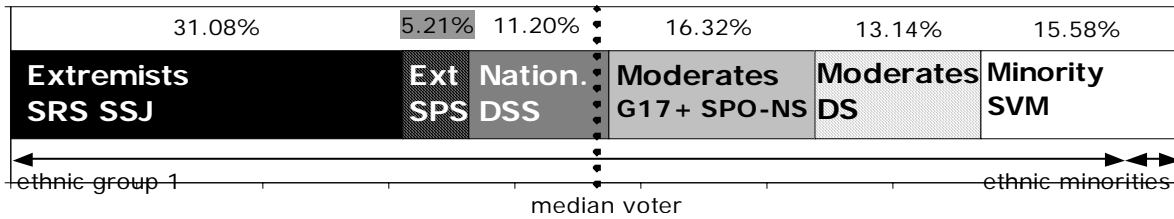


Figure 9: Vote distribution in the 2003 parliamentary elections, mixed municipalities. The parties' vote share sum up to 92% as "other" small parties were excluded.

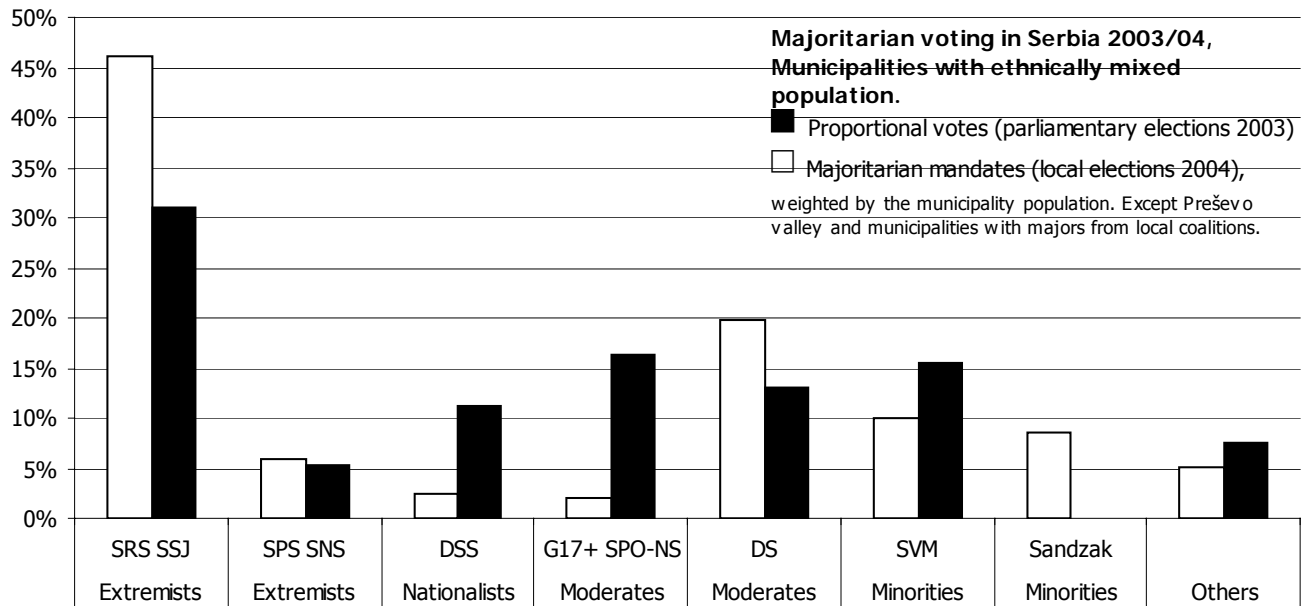


Figure 10: Electoral results from 40 ethnically mixed municipalities (counting 23,1% of the Serbian voters). Data: Cesid, own calculation.

With respect to my hypotheses,

- the centripetal effect worked only in few municipalities, leading to a victory of minority-moderate coalitions which hold the median voter and won the major office, according the model of Horowitz and Reilly;
- many municipalities turned out to be very polarised, with a very large part of the local Serbs voting for radical parties, what in many cases implied that they hold an absolute majority or almost an absolute majority of the vote, needing the further support of only a couple of less extreme nationalist voters. According my *median voter* model, it is no wonder that radical parties win the major offices in those municipalities;
- and, finally, again the early dropout model has an important explanation force: Weak parties in the moderate and nationalist spectrum (DSS, G17+), despite holding the median voter in a majority of the cases scored very bad in the majority elections.

Conclusion

Majority-based electoral systems have been discussed in recent years to have a moderating impact on politics in ethnically divided society. The key concept of the majority requirement is that parties

have to attract a large voter basis and might be incited to campaign as well for voters of the ethnic minority. This is why such electoral systems with centripetal effects have been proposed as conciliating instruments of electoral engineering (Horowitz 1991; Reilly 2001).

Only few studies discussed the assumptions and limits of centripetal mechanisms. In this paper, I have presented a systematic overview about such limits as they have been shown by Fraenkel and Grofman (2004, 2006a), and added my own aspects: Mainly, there are two types of limits we should be aware of when discussing centripetalism through majority-based electoral systems:

- First, divided society might have a polarisation of voters along the ethnic dimension, leading to a radicalisation of views. This, combined with a regionally heterogeneous population structure, leads to many districts where radical political parties have the support of an absolute majority of voters. In those cases, there is no chance for a moderating impact. On the contrary, the radical party gets over-represented.
- Second, even if holding the median voter, moderate parties might lose the electoral race. In two-round majority electoral system or AV, after the counting of the votes in the first round (or the first preferences), the smallest parties fall out of the race.

The mainly disputed question is: How important are those limits in the empirical reality? Do real divided societies fulfil with the conditions that are necessary for the centripetal effect?

The example of Serbia shows that particularly in ethnically divided municipalities centripetal electoral institutions do not fulfil their promises: Often, ethnic conflicts go hand in hand with a radicalisation of politics: Extremist nationalists – here the Serbian Radical party (SRS) – may count (almost) on an absolute majority of loyal party supporters in many municipalities with Serbian majority population. Under such conditions, the centripetal effect can not work. On the contrary, against what could be the conciliating effect of centripetal institutions, they lead to a worst-case scenario – as in the case of Serbian municipalities, where we see that weak electoral parties drop out early from the election. If those are the parties at the centre, this leads to the inevitable victory of more polarised parties, against the intention of electoral engineers.

The case of Serbian's major elections shows that except from a couple of municipalities, the centripetal effect does not work. The conceptual limits of the centripetal effect seem very narrow, too narrow to be fulfilled in empirical cases. The costs of a failure are however high: majority-based electoral systems do not only exclude the minority from political power, but at the same time they give all the political power to radical and chauvinist parties. Even if this is the opposite intention of the institutional engineers, results from Serbia underline that it might be very real risk. Studies from further countries might give us more evidence about the applicability of the centripetal impact.

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