

ETHNIC CONFLICT, TERRITORY AND FEDERALISM

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ABSTRACT

The fact that the federal approach to ethnic conflict management will work only if coexisting ethnic groups are spatially concentrated is both obvious and well known. But the imperfect fit between the internal boundaries of existing federal states and the contours of ethnic division has attracted rather less attention. This paper examines the relationship between the spatial distribution of ethnic groups and territorial arrangements from two perspectives. First, it explores the nature of ethnic fractionalisation in contemporary states, and seeks to assess the extent to which this receives territorial expression. Second, it considers the range of federal systems and seeks to establish how far these are responses to ethnic divisions. It concludes that while there are very many territorially defined ethnic minorities, the federal approach to dealing with their demands is more the exception than the rule.

INTRODUCTION

The argument that in multi-ethnic societies “justice seems to demand federal restructuring” (Weinstock, 2001: 79) is generally accepted, though with some qualifications, by researchers in the area of ethnic conflict resolution. Yet, the political system that is acknowledged as the original federal model offers little evidence that this was a significant consideration in its creation. Indeed, the emphasis in the founding literature on American federalism stresses national unity rather than diversity as the basis for the new political architecture: the US constitution was designed for “one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs”, who furthermore had undertaken united political action to usher in a new political regime (*Federalist 2*).

The tension between these two positions is more apparent than real. They reflect different but not necessarily conflicting perspectives on the relationship between ethnonational divisions and federal arrangements: those of the specialist in ethnic conflict management, and of the analyst of constitutional design. But the issue is not simply one of perspective: there is a case for exploring much more systematically the role of federalism within the broader armory of strategies for ethnic conflict management. This paper proposes to do so in the following sections by building on the two perspectives already identified. In the first, we explore the nature of ethnicity in the contemporary state and examine a particular feature of ethnonational

division—the tendency for groups in conflict to be spatially segregated, and thus amenable to territorial approaches to conflict management, such as the federal principle. In the second, we shift perspective, examining the universe of federal states and undertaking a preliminary exploration of their disposition to respond to the issue of ethnic division. The general strategy in this paper is, then, to look at the intersection of two sets in a Venn diagram. The first set comprises countries with territorially defined ethnic conflicts. The second comprises federal states. Our ultimate goal is to account for the shape occupied by the intersection between the two.

ETHNIC CONFLICT AND TERRITORY

In looking at the political significance of ethnicity and its potential implications for federalism, we need to move through three arenas. The first is the character of ethnicity and its relationship to the state—the extent to which states are subject to ethnic divisions. The fact that a state is ethnically divided need not of itself have political implications, but even passive or potential ethnic mobilisation may cause states to consider structures of government appropriate to forestall possible political fallout. The second arena is the phenomenon of ethnic mobilisation: the set of circumstances that arises when one or more ethnic groups organise politically behind demands—often of a far-reaching nature—on the state, making adoption of some kind of state policy on the matter essential rather than merely desirable. But ethnic mobilisation need not have a clear geographical dimension. In the third arena, therefore, we explore those cases where ethnic mobilisation takes a territorial form; we need to examine the spatial distribution of the groups in conflict, and the extent to which ethnic geography permits or facilitates political cartography, and is thus compatible with some kind of federalist approach.

Ethnic division

The volume of material that deals with ethnonational division within the countries of the world is huge, and of well-established vintage. In its initial phase, it focused on the “old world”, or, more specifically, on Europe.¹ More recently, it has been global in reach, and has been based on accumulated research deriving from a range of approaches. Broadly speaking,

¹ For early examples, see Auerhan, 1926; Junghahn, 1932. A later wave is represented by Straka, 1970; Stephens, 1976; and Blaschke, 1980.

our basic data in this area now derive from three types of source. First, a considerable number of handbooks of various kinds seek to cover the globe comprehensively, spanning a wide range of political and non-political data, including data on ethnonational divisions, in a systematic way.² Second, a great deal of scholarly activity has been directed specifically at the issue of ethnonational minorities, and has generated several important cross-national surveys.³ Third, certain activist groups have a vested interest in describing the ethnonational breakdown of the countries of the world and have also been wide-reaching in coverage.⁴

This wealth of data, qualitative and quantitative, lends itself to efforts to reduce the complex global picture to a more concise summary of the position. Although this is of obvious interest to political scientists, efforts to measure ethnic fractionalisation have been a particular focus of attention within economics, since this has been assumed to be an important variable in explaining economic development. Analysis of a range of approaches suggests that there has been a high degree of convergence in this area, and that remaining differences between specialists may be put down to variations in data sources and in the definition of ethnonational division. The generally accepted index, which we may identify with the long-established Simpson index in ecology (or the Herfindahl index in economics), defines ethnonational fractionalisation as the sum of the squared proportions of each ethnonational group as a share of the total population.

Several attempts have been made recently to apply this index to data relating to ethnicity on the basis of a range of sources (for example, Alesina et al, 2003; Fearon, 2003). In this paper, we use another index, an index of ethnolinguistic fractionalisation elaborated by Roeder (2001), which is based on data referring to the mid-1980s. This is marginally preferable to other sources for two reasons. First, it covers a very wide range of cases, and does so on the basis of data from specialists in the area (Soviet ethnographers) rather than from general handbooks. Second, it is not too recent: it refers to a period when perception of ethnonational

² The *Europa world yearbook*, the *Statesman's yearbook* and the CIA's *World factbook* are among the more widely used examples.

³ In addition to a large volume of work conducted by Soviet scholars, other works in this category are discussed later in this text.

⁴ Examples are the Minority Rights Group (see www.minorityrights.org) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a Christian organisation which maintains a vast database on languages and language use (see www.ethnologue.com).

divisions might be seen to have had a chance to have an impact on policy makers, and thus to permit constitutional experimentation designed to minimise ethnonational conflict.

[table 1 about here]

While this approach to measurement allows us to rank countries in respect of their degree of ethnonational fractionalisation, we also need to recognise cut-off points that are of potential political significance. One way of doing so would be to convert the fractionalisation index into a measure of the “effective number of ethnic groups”, analogous to the well-known index in the literature on party systems, the “effective number of parties” (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979).⁵ The outcome is reported in table 1. The resulting grouping of categories matches the result that would be obtained if we used either of two other recently developed indices: the Fearon index or the Alesina et al one matches it precisely in most cases (53%); in a further 30% of cases the Roeder index matches one of these indices, but not both.⁶

It should be noted that the label “effective number” is as misleading in respect of ethnic groups as it is in relation to parties: it does not in any way approximate the number of groups (or parties), or even the number of relevant ones: it is simply an index, and the unfortunate labelling has been retained here only to preserve the useful analogy with party systems, where this terminology is so widely accepted. As table 1 shows, in any event, the number of countries with a very high level ethnic fractionalisation as measured in this way (where the index is at least 0.50) amounts to almost half of all countries (78 out of 169).

Ethnic mobilisation

Ethnic division need not, however, of itself be politically significant. Indeed, notwithstanding the value of overall indices of ethnic fractionalisation, we need to go much further than determining *whether* a country is ethnically divided: we need to know *how* it is so divided. Here, too, we are obstructed by ambiguous or clashing criteria, so that even identifying the universe of cases may be quite a challenge. This will become clear if we consider a number of

⁵ The index of concentration already discussed may be defined as follows: $C = \sum_{i=1,z} p_i^2$, where z = the number of groups and p = the proportional size of each. This may easily be converted into an index of diversity ($D = 1 - C$), and it may equally easily be converted into an “index of the effective number of ethnic groups” ($E = 1 / C$).

⁶ This is based on 153 countries which are measured by all three indices. There are seven cases where the Roeder index diverges significantly from the other two, but this is for obvious reasons linked to the nature of the division being measured.

cross-national surveys. The classification systems emerging from three such surveys—selected here primarily for illustrative purposes—are presented in table 2, which is intended not to provide an exhaustive list but to highlight the implications of different defining criteria. Not all of these are explicitly “ethnic”, but ethnicity is an important component in each.

[table 2 about here]

The first classification presented in table 2 (Levinson, 1994) identifies five type of ethnic conflict and allocates 41 cases between them. Of these, 24 are placed within a single category; a further 17 are placed in two or more categories, illustrating the challenge facing any attempt of this kind to reduce ethnic conflict to a small number of discrete types. This difficulty is reflected also in the second classification, that of Scherrer (1999), who identifies seven types of “violent conflict”. He applies this to 80 cases, of which only four happen to fall exclusively into one type; but in the case of the remaining 76, he is able to identify a predominant type in all cases. In the third classification, the criterion of mobilisation which reaches a certain level of violence is relaxed, and a large number of “minorities at risk” is identified (MAR, 2005). The 315 cases considered are placed in six mutually exclusive categories.

The three systems overlap substantially in the cases they include, but there are significant differences. These may derive in part from variation in information sources, difficulties of measurement, varying criteria of definition, and different cut-off thresholds; but they arise in particular from the fact that the three do not purport to describe precisely the same phenomena. Furthermore, if we include more qualitative types of overview we get a pattern that is different yet again. A French encyclopaedia of internal conflict, for instance, dealing with civil wars and political violence of varying degrees of intensity, covers more than 90 countries as well as a number of transnational groups or conflicts, and it reports on an indefinite number of actual or potential cases of contemporary political violence (Balancie and de la Grange, 1999).⁷ The Minority Rights Group (1990), similarly, identifies 170 minorities globally, dispersed across all continents.⁸

⁷ The other more quantitative overviews discussed here are accompanied by detailed qualitative information, and this is exceptionally extensive in the case of the Minorities at Risk and Ethnologue projects; see www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/data.asp#qualitative and www.ethnologue.com/web.asp.

⁸ It identifies 11 minorities in North America, 10 in South America (including such unusual groups as the Welsh of Patagonia), 36 in western Europe (including southern Irish Protestants), 13 in eastern Europe, 17 in what was

Given its proximity to the effort being made in this paper to assess the political consequences of ethnic diversity and the availability of an important dataset that facilitates this, the typology developed by Gurr and his colleagues constitutes an obvious starting point. It is therefore worth reviewing further the elements in this typology. The *Minorities at risk* project focuses on minorities that have achieved a minimum degree of political mobilisation (described as *politicised communal groups*), even if this mobilisation falls well short of violent conflict. This typology begins with a distinction between “national peoples” (regionally concentrated groups which have lost their former autonomy but retain elements of cultural distinctiveness) and “minority peoples” (groups, frequently but not necessarily made up of immigrants, which do not have this background, but which have a definite status in society that they wish to improve or defend). Each of the two resulting categories is further broken down, to produce the five broad types listed below (Gurr et al, 1993: 15-23); a sixth category, the last below, was added later (MAR, 2005):

- Ethnonationalists: “national peoples” of relatively large size pursuing a struggle to regain autonomy
- Indigenous peoples: “national peoples” descended from the conquered original population but now economically and politically marginalised
- Ethnoclasses: “minority peoples”, frequently based on immigration, that are ethnically or culturally distinct and that occupy a characteristic economic niche, typically a low status one
- Militant sects: “minority peoples” whose primary political goal is defence of their religious beliefs
- Communal contenders: “minority peoples” in heterogeneous societies who hold or seek to share state power, and who in turn are divided into three sub-types: disadvantaged (subject to political or economic discrimination), advantaged (enjoying relative political advantage) and dominant (enjoying both economic and political advantage)

then the USSR (this included whole groups of minorities), 14 in the Middle East, 24 in sub-Saharan Africa, 18 in South Asia, 6 in East Asia, 8 in Southeast Asia, and 13 in Oceania.

- National minorities: minorities linked to an external population which controls an adjacent state.

As we have seen, this classification is based on analysis of a large number of cases; the 315 classifiable cases included in the 2005 version of the database are spread across 120 countries (many of the groups occur in more than one country). Analysis of the cases included within each category suggests that they indeed offer instances where the potential for ethnic rebellion is sufficiently plausible for the state to need to formulate a response. This extends to the “militant sects”, incorporated for reasons that do not immediately point in the direction of ethnicity. The fact, however, that this category includes such groups as Shia Muslims in Iraq and Sanjak Muslims in Yugoslavia gives grounds for retaining this category, though the level of mobilisation of other “militant sects” (such as Copts in Egypt and Muslims in Greece) remains restricted at present. On the other hand, notwithstanding the large number of cases and the inclusive defining criteria, there are some surprising omissions from the list—ones that loom large in other sources, such as the Ethnologue list of complex multilingual societies. Although India and Switzerland are included, for instance, it is not because of their remarkable linguistic diversity, but because of certain minorities that have been very visible in recent times (such as Sikhs and Kashmiris in the former, and foreign workers and Jurassians in the latter). For purposes of further analysis in this paper, we bring these cases back, in order to take account of the potentially disruptive consequences of language divisions.

Ethnic geography

The minorities included in the MAR dataset vary enormously in size, as in other characteristics. For instance, the population of 21 of these exceeds 10 million, and that of 11 is less than 100,000. However, it is not simply size, but degree of mobilisation and of territorial concentration that is important as regards implications for federalism. For instance, one of the largest minorities, African Americans (population 34 million), is so widely dispersed that it lacks the kind of territorial base needed for any kind of federal arrangements to endow it with a measure of self-rule. On the other hand, notwithstanding its small size, the Turkish population of Cyprus (population 142,000) is now so highly concentrated that any conventional two-entity solution for the island could almost perfectly reflect the ethnic boundary.

How may we assess the global position in this respect? We may use the MAR dataset to examine the distribution of ethnic groups along two relevant dimensions. The first is the ethnic cohesiveness of the territory identified as the group's homeland—not in the sense in which this might be defined in imaginary images of nationalist historiography, but as it might be delineated by real patterns of ethnic demography. Here we may make a crude dichotomy, distinguishing cases where the ethnic group dominates its “own” territory, in the sense of accounting for a majority of its population, and those where it does not—where it is a minority in this territory. The second dimension is the territorial concentration of the ethnic group. Here, once again, we may reduce a complex continuum to a dichotomy, distinguishing between groups where a majority live in their “own” territory, and those where most live outside this area, elsewhere within the frontiers of the political system.⁹

Both of these dimensions clearly depend on the definition of an ethnic territory. It may be the case that this is understood in terms of a long-recognised geographical entity with clearly defined, generally accepted boundaries: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Sardinia or Corsica, for example. But there are two patterns of deviation from an understanding that rests on the long-term stability of conventional administrative boundaries. The first is the notion of the “national homeland”, justified by reference to historical or quasi-historical arguments of varying degrees of validity. The second is an autonomous territory carved out by the controlling state in the name of the principle of nationality, with a view to endowing the ethnic group in question with a territory of its own. The two types have in common the fact that, while the ethnic group may constitute a majority in this territory, it need not do so, and it sometimes constitutes only a small minority of the total population. In the case of the allegedly historically justified “national homelands” mentioned above, the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, of the former Kingdom of Hungary and of the Land of Israel (Eretz Israel) are examples: the ethnic groups laying claim to these constituted only a minority of the population actually resident within their borders at the beginning of the twentieth century. Certain of the “autonomous republics” of the former Soviet Union, and of its Russian successor state, are examples of the other approach, where the initiative is taken by the state authorities.

⁹ This excludes from consideration diaspora groups, where large numbers of people have left not just their ancestral territory but also the state which hosts it.

A global overview of the relationship between these two dimensions is provided in table 3, which cross-classifies them to produce four cells.¹⁰ This marries two different perspectives. First, each cell is labelled by reference to examples that may be more precisely documented. These have all been selected from the Russian census of 2002, which provides detailed breakdowns of ethnic nationality by territory, in circumstances where the state designates specific territories as being associated with particular ethnic groups. Second, an effort is made to indicate the extent to which these categories may be represented globally: the figures in each cell indicate the number of cases, as measured from the MAR dataset, where the defining criteria of the category appear to apply. The four cells may be described as follows.

[table 3 about here]

1. The locally weak, territorially dispersed group (the *Birobidzhan* model): most of the population of the group's designated territory consists of non-members of the group, and most members of the group live outside this territory. The Jewish Autonomous Area in Russia, formerly known as Birobidzhan, affords an excellent example: designated an ethnic territory initially of Soviet Jews and then of Russian Jews, only 1.2 per cent of the local population was Jewish in 2002, and the territory accounted for only 1.0 per cent of the Russian Jewish population.
2. The locally weak, territorially concentrated group (the *Karelia* model): most of the population of the group's designated territory consists of non-members of the group, but most members of the group live within this territory. Here Karelia is a good example: in 2002, only 9.2 per cent of its population was Karelian, but it accounted for 70.3 per cent of all Karelians in Russia. Bosnia, the former Yugoslav republic associated with ethnic Muslims, is another example: ethnic Muslims accounted for only 39.5 per cent of the population in 1981, but the republic included 81.5 per cent of Yugoslavia's ethnic Muslims. The former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, similarly, though populated predominantly by non-Kazakhs (only 39.7 per cent of the population were Kazakhs in 1989), was the territory in which the vast majority (80.3 per cent) of Kazakhs lived.
3. The locally strong, territorially dispersed group (the *Tatarstan* model): most of the population of the group's designated territory consists of members of the group, but most

¹⁰ This develops an approach outlined earlier in Coakley, 2003.

members of the group live outside this territory. The Republic of Tatarstan is now a good example: in 2002 it was predominantly Tatar in ethnic composition (52.9 per cent of the population), but it accounted for only 36.0 of all Tatars in Russia. The autonomous Åland Islands offer another example: they were 93.8 per cent Swedish speaking in 2000, but they accounted for only 8.3 per cent of Finland's Swedish-speaking population. Of course, this interpretation is based on the debatable assumption that the Åland Islanders are part of the Swede-Finn community rather than constituting a separate group of their own (similar questions arise regarding the relationship between Québécois and French Canadian identity). The new Greek state of the early nineteenth century in its original form is another example: overwhelmingly Greek in composition, it accounted for only a portion of the total Greek population of the Ottoman Empire.

4. The locally strong, territorially concentrated group (the *Tuva* model): most of the population of the group's designated territory consists of members of the group, and most members of the group live within this territory. The Republic of Tuva in Asian Russia, for instance, was predominantly Tuvan in 2002 (77.0 per cent), and the Republic accounted for almost all (96.7 per cent) Tuvans in Russia. Slovenia within the former Yugoslavia offered another example—it was not only overwhelmingly Slovene (90.5 per cent), but also accounted for the great bulk of the Slovene population of Yugoslavia (97.7 per cent)—but there are numerous others from the histories of independence movements in Europe and elsewhere.

Although an effort is made in table 3 to look at the relative importance of these categories, the figures indicating the number of cases in the various cells must be treated with caution. The threshold for inclusion in the table is minimum degree of mobilisation and measurability on each of the two dimensions reported. When the cases excluded because of measurement difficulties are examined, it appears that while the largest number would fall into the Tuva category, a very large number would also fall into the Birobidzhan one.¹¹

¹¹ The data on which this analysis is based were selected by recoding cases on the basis of whether a group was locally dominant (accounting for at least 50% of the population in its own region) and concentrated (with at least 50% of the total population of the group concentrated in that region). The MAR dataset also uses a "group concentration index" to place cases in four categories. Of the 162 missing cases, 38 are classed in MAR as "widely dispersed", 37 as "primarily urban or minority in one region", 19 as "majority in one region, others dispersed" and 68 as "concentrated in one region". However, crosstabulating this index against the classification used in table 2 (based on the same data) shows several anomalies: four of the cases in the Tuva category fall into the "widely dispersed" category in the index, for instance, while one of the Birobidzhan category is classed as

For purposes of this paper, though, we are interested in cases where a country's population is divided by an ethnic-type cleavage which sets at least one significant minority apart from the rest of the population, and where this minority is concentrated in one region where it is also locally dominant—in other words, the “Tuva” category. When the unit of analysis shifts from the minority to the country which hosts it, the number of cases is rather smaller. With a view to ending up with a more realistic listing of cases, though, we need to exclude marginal cases where a minority is very small in absolute or relative terms. For this reason, it has been possible to identify a shorter list of cases (countries), 61 in all, where there was at least one territorially concentrated minority that either accounted for at least 5 per cent of the population or amounted to at least half a million people. This cut-off point is a rather blunt instrument, and measurement difficulties result in the exclusion of important cases to which attention is drawn in other sources. For this reason, a further three cases which would otherwise be excluded have been added: Belgium and Estonia (where important language differences do not register in the *Minorities at risk* project) and Spain (where minorities are not classified as territorially concentrated in the MAR dataset, but other data make it clear that they are).¹²

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND ITS ALTERNATIVE

We move now to the second perspective on ethnic federalism: the role of federal government, and its variants. The federal approach needs to be placed in context. If we accept that the distribution of power between a central government and regional institutions is a matter of degree, it is obvious that such categories as may be identified along this continuum are at least in part arbitrary. This point is developed in the first part of this section, which looks at the

“concentrated in one region”. Inspection of individual cases suggests that neither approach produces a fully plausible classification. The numbers here thus probably indicate no more than the broad pattern.

¹² This set of 64 cases includes six where “old world” divisions between ethnic or linguistic groups are present: Belgium, the UK, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and, notwithstanding its “new world” location, Canada. The second is a set of successor states of the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia and the former Czechoslovakia, and one other ex-communist state, 13 in all: Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, together with Slovakia and Romania. A third category, commonly described in geographical terms in relation to the Middle East, might alternatively be described as a set of seven Ottoman successor states, if we acknowledge the long hand of history—Turkey, Cyprus, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq—and an adjacent state, Iran. The last large category comprises other countries with indigenous and other minorities—14 in Asia (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, Burma-Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines), 14 in Africa (South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Djibouti and Togo), and nine in Latin America (Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Guyana, Colombia, Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil).

relationship between political centres and their territories. Since this will be examined from a perspective of implicit symmetry, we need to consider also (in the latter part of this subsection) the special case of *asymmetrical* relationships between a centre and adjacent territories. The second subsection turns to the crucial question of the manner in which the political system responds to ethnic geography.

Cases of federal government

Given the complexity of the notion of federal government, it is rather surprising that, by contrast to the challenge of distinguishing between societies which are ethnically divided and those which are not, efforts to list the universe of federal countries attract a large measure of agreement. By the end of 2006, there was substantial consensus among observers on the existence of 24 states with federal-type constitutions. In some cases, such as South Africa and Spain, it could be argued that regionalism would be a truer description of the form of government than federalism. In others, such as Ethiopia and Pakistan, the effectiveness of the constitutional blueprint might be questioned (hence reliance here on constitutional provisions rather than institutional practices in defining the borders of this category).

The 24 cases fall into relatively clearcut categories as measured by their provenance. Seven were rooted in settler societies where large scale and local complexities called for an imaginative approach to territorial management, and federalism was an obvious mechanism: the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and Australia. Five more were also relicts of empire, though the impact of the imperial heritage was very different in each, and the interests of the indigenous population rather than those of the settlers were dominant: India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Nigeria and South Africa. Four had evolved organically in the direction of greater integration from a starting point where connections between them had been loose, or non-existent: Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, and, though interrupted by an episode of strong centralisation in the interwar period, Austria and Germany. In five other cases, the pattern of development was the opposite of this, with unitary entities gradually—or sometimes suddenly—moving in the direction of federalism: Belgium, Spain, Russia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ethiopia. Finally, the remaining three cases were micro-states which had recently become independent, based on archipelagos in the Caribbean (St

Kitts and Nevis, independent from the UK, 1983), the Indian Ocean (Comoros, independent of France, 1975) and the western Pacific (Micronesia, independent of the USA, 1982).¹³

Several cases of exceptional interest for this paper have been excluded because they have disappeared, though in each case this disappearance has been recent, and it may contain a salutary lesson for specialists in ethnic conflict management. These include the gradual but violent disintegration of Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2006; the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1991); and Czechoslovakia (1993). But other states abandoned federalism in a quite different way, reverting instead to a model closer to the unitary one: Burma, Cameroon, Sudan and Tanzania.

It will be clear from this list that there is great variation in the character of the power relationship between the federal centre and the regional entity in constitutional theory, and that the variation may be much greater in actual practice. The position is made more complex by the fact that it is commonly not uniform: regions may vary in the extent of their autonomy in relation to the same federal centre, and some may have none at all. The last pattern is indeed common: the capital territory may be governed directly by the federation (as in the case of Washington, DC), or there may be outlying regions which are federally administered (as in the case of Canada's northern territories). In such cases, though, only a small minority of the population is exempted from participation in full federal arrangements. At the opposite extreme, there are cases where a small minority of the population enjoys a level of autonomy comparable with that in federal units (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, for instance, or the Åland Islands in Finland). But we are fortunately spared the difficulty of trying to classify regimes lying between these extremes as unitary or federal. Although the difference between the two types is in principle a continuum, in practice there tend to be few difficulties, with clusters at either end of the continuum and an empty middle sector.

¹³ The Federation of St Kitts and Nevis consists of two islands, with a population of 43,000; the Union of the Comoros of three islands, with a population of 798,000; and the Federated States of Micronesia of four clusters of small islands, with a population of 110,000; all population figures refer to 2005 (source: United Nations, 2007).

Matching federalism to ethnic politics

In the next stage of this analysis, we seek to explore the points of intersection between the two perspectives already discussed: efforts to implement policies of ethnic federalism. More specifically, we need to look at the match between the 64 countries where there are significant, territorially concentrated minorities, and the 24 countries governed by federal constitutions. It will, of course, be obvious immediately that most countries with territorially concentrated ethnic minorities—at least 40, or 64 minus 24—do *not* have federal constitutions.

When we match these variables more closely, it becomes clear that the degree of overlap between them is even less. Of the 24 federal states, only 15 are also on the list of ethnically diverse states with territorially concentrated minorities as defined above. Of the nine which are not, some (such as Argentina, Austria and Germany) clearly do not have territorially concentrated minorities. Although three others (Australia, the United Arab Emirates and the USA) have significant indigenous or other minorities, and these may be concentrated in certain localities, they do not have an identifiable territory of their own, and the federal system was not in any way designed to empower such minorities politically. The three remaining cases are island microstates which do not feature on the MAR list, but in which, nevertheless, the federal system reflects genuine ethnoregional differences.

The 15 federal states with territorially concentrated ethnic minorities appear to fall into three broad groups as measured by the nature of their institutional response to ethnic division. First, in a few cases the territorial organisation of the federal structure altogether ignores ethnic issues, and subnational boundaries cut across the contours dividing ethnic groups from each other. In a second set of cases, the federal structure takes account of ethnic issues, but the configuration of subnational boundaries divides at least the largest group, and sometimes other groups as well. In the remaining cases, the federal structure effectively matches the territorial distribution of the ethnic groups—the case of true ethnic federalism.

[tables 4 and 5 about here]

Malaysia offers a good example of the first type. The ethnic distribution of the population in peninsular Malaysia according to the 1970 census, the first since the formation of Malaysia, is shown in table 4: the Malays had a bare majority, with the Chinese as a large minority and the Indians as a smaller group. The populations were, however, intermingled; of 70 districts, 47

had Malay majorities, six had Chinese majorities, while 17 were mixed (six with Malay and 11 with Chinese pluralities). The federal structure did little to reflect underlying divisions: the 11 states into which the districts were grouped followed traditional boundaries, ignoring ethnic ones. The result, as table 5 shows, was that seven states had Malay majorities (and in only one of these cases did that majority exceed 80%), one had a Chinese majority, and three were mixed (two with Malay pluralities and one with a Chinese plurality). The dispersed nature of the ethnic communities would have made it difficult to fit state borders to ethnic ones; but doing so was not, in any case, an objective in the Malaysian state-building process.¹⁴ If we are to regard Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela as other countries with ethnic minorities which show a certain level of territorial concentration (respectively, Afro-Brazilian, indigenous and Black minorities, according to the MAR dataset), then the federal structure of these states would have to be seen as responding to concerns that have little to do with giving self-expression to such groups: the state boundaries in these cases pay little attention to those of ethnic groups.

We may see Switzerland as a good example of the second type. If we are to regard language as the potentially most divisive issue there (though historically religious differences were more politically salient), then a high level of territorial concentration of the various linguistic groups is clear. Table 4 illustrates this in relation to the Swiss citizen population (taking the entire resident population would paint a rather different picture). In each of the country's 176 administrative districts, one linguistic group has a clear majority; indeed, in all but nine of these, the majority exceeds 80%. Even the tiny Romansch group constitutes a majority in four districts. This greatly facilitates a federal structure in which cantons are unilingual. The only exceptions are Graubünden, a predominantly German-speaking canton with a large Romansch minority, and Valais and Fribourg, predominantly French-speaking but with German-speaking minorities of 32% in each case. The fact that factors other than linguistic ones are at work in this case is clear: although the federal structure takes substantial account of linguistic considerations, other regional issues are of great importance, and the German- and French-speaking populations are divided among several cantons. This pattern is to be found also in Canada and Spain, where certain regionally concentrated groups enjoy autonomy under the

¹⁴ Had Singapore not departed from Malaysia in 1965, it would have constituted another predominantly Chinese state. The populations of Sabah and Sarawak, the two remaining states in the federation, include a substantial indigenous population, as well as Malays and Chinese.

federal system, but the predominant English- and Castilian Spanish-speaking populations are divided among several federal units. Russia has been moving in this direction since the 1990s; the successive waves of structural reform in Nigeria have had a similar effect; and it could be argued that South Africa bears some resemblance to this model.

Finally, Belgium illustrates the third category—the case of ethnic federalism. The tight regional concentration of Belgium’s linguistic groups is well known: the northern Dutch-speaking areas are separated from southern French-speaking areas by a sharply defined linguistic border which runs like a straight line from West to East, apart from the predominantly French-speaking Brussels conurbation and certain small communes on the “wrong” side of the line. As table 4 shows, only two of the country’s 41 districts had a mixed linguistic composition in 1947, the year of the last Belgian census whose results on linguistic structure were reported: Brussels (predominantly French-speaking, but with a sizeable Dutch-speaking minority) and Verviers (with a 23% German-speaking minority). The regional reforms that began in the 1970s culminated in complex federal-type arrangements, expressed in a triadic structure: an overwhelming Dutch-speaking Flanders, an overwhelmingly French-speaking Wallonia, and the bilingual city of Brussels. The complex settlement in post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina resembles this outcome; and India has also moved in the direction of ethnic federalism. The pattern in two other cases may well end up eventually resembling this: Pakistan and Ethiopia, where a blueprint of ethnic federalism currently exists in muted form.

It should be noted that while we may find examples in several “disappeared” cases of federation which resemble each of the types mentioned above, a characteristic pattern emerges. In countries with a federal structure of the first or second types, the tendency has been to move towards a more unified structure, as in Burma, Cameroon, Sudan and Tanzania. But in circumstances where ethnic federations existed, as in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and, with some qualification, Yugoslavia, the tendency has been towards disintegration. Both Pakistan (with the secession of East Bengal in 1971) and Ethiopia (with the secession of Eritrea in 1993, though admittedly this had little to do with federal structure) have experienced similar territorial rifts; and the long-term territorial integrity of Belgium and Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot be taken for granted.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this paper leads to a rather stark conclusion about the use of the federal model as a mechanism for ethnic conflict management. In most countries with a significant presence of territorially concentrated ethnic minorities, the system of government could not be described as federal (though this is not to say that other types of territorial strategy are absent—a consideration outside the boundaries of this paper). Even in the case of the very small number of countries that could be classed as federations, the reason for the adoption of this system of government does not necessarily have anything to do with territorial minorities, possibly because in effect they do not exist (as in Germany) or their territorial basis is insufficiently clearly defined (as in Malaysia).

There are, then, relatively few cases where the territorial expression of federalism seeks to shadow the geographical contours of ethnic communities. Where they do so closely, as we have seen, the entire structure of the state risks collapse. A more common formula is for the creation of ethnically uniform subfederal units, *but not of territorially unified ethnic entities*. In other words, Canada, Spain and Russia may well permit autonomy to ethnically distinct outlying regions under the framework of the federal system; but they are careful to dilute this by adding a range of other subfederal units which rupture the unity of the dominant ethnic bloc. It is thus not surprising that the British devolution experiment conferred autonomy on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, *but not on England*, and that the preferred way to deal with the “English question” is to confer autonomy on the English regions.

In principle, then, federation, like consociation, offers a potentially valuable resource for the resolution of ethnic conflict. Both approaches have been criticised on the grounds that by recognising ethnic divisions (sometimes very formally and explicitly) they may actually aggravate them. The federal approach, however, facilitates a less institutionalised recognition of ethnic divisions than the consociational one, and when states depend on it to manage the demands of ethnic minorities they rarely apply it in its starkest form. Federations in ethnically divided societies, in other words, typically have an internal geographical structure which both facilitates ethnic self-expression and clouds the clarity with which this may be articulated, drawing a delicate balance between state unity and ethnic minority autonomy.

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Table 1. Approximate distribution of states by level of ethnic fractionalisation, c. 1985

Level of fractionalisation	Range of ELF index	“Effective number of ethnic groups”	No. of countries
None (homogeneous society)	less than 0.10	1	22
Low	0.10 – 0.50	1-2	69
Medium	0.50-0.67	2-3	30
High	0.67-0.75	3-4	16
Very high	more than 0.75	4+	32
All countries			169

Note: microstates (with populations less than 100,000 in 2005) and dependencies are excluded. “ELF” refers to the ethnolinguistic fractionalisation index, defined as follows: $C = \sum_{i=1,z} p_i^2$, where z = the number of groups and p = the proportional size of each. The “index of the effective number of ethnic groups” is the inverse of this ($E = 1 / C$).

Source: Based on Roeder, 2001.

Table 2. Classifications of societal divisions relevant to territorial government

Source	Levinson, 1994	Scherrer, 1999	MAR, 2005
<i>Criterion</i>	<i>ethnic conflict:</i>	<i>violent conflict:</i>	<i>minorities at risk:</i>
Categories	separatist (8, 17)	ethnonationalist (31, 50)	ethnonationalist groups (55)
	internal autonomist (2, 9)	inter-ethnic (17, 38)	indigenous peoples (73)
	conquest-oriented (0, 2)	decolonisation (4, 9)	ethnoclasses (46)
	survivalist (13, 26)	genocide (2,3)	militant sects (81)
	irredentist (1, 8)	anti-regime (18, 56)	communal contenders (16)
		gang wars (5, 15)	national minorities (44)
		inter-state (3, 7)	
Total cases	41	80	315

Note: in the case of the Levinson classification, the first of the two figures within brackets refers to “pure” cases, the second to cases where the category in question is one component, and particular cases may be classified under more than one heading. In the case of the Scherrer classification, similarly, the first figure refers to exclusive or predominant type, the second to secondary type.

Table 3. A typology of relationships between ethnic groups and ethnic territories: four models

		Territorial concentration of ethnic group	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Ethnic Cohesiveness of Territory	<i>Low</i>	Birobidzhan (6)	Karelia (34)
	<i>High</i>	Tatarstan (9)	Tuva (107)

Note: numbers in brackets indicate numbers of “minorities at risk” in each category. It was not possible to classify a further 162 cases as data on one or both variables was missing.

Source: Quantitative data derived from MAR, 2005.

Table 4. Examples of ethnic dispersion and concentration

Country / group	Proportion of population by district				Median proportion in “own” districts
	80% or more	50-80%	plurality	total	
<i>Peninsular Malaysia (districts, 1970)</i>					
Malays (53.1%)	20	27	7	54	71.4
Chinese (35.5%)	0	6	10	16	49.3
Indians (10.6%)	0	0	0	0	-
Total (100.0%)	20	33	17	70	64.7
<i>Switzerland: citizens only (districts, 2000)</i>					
German (72.5%)	114	4	0	118	97.8
French (21.0%)	43	1	0	44	94.4
Italian (4.3%)	9	1	0	10	91.5
Romansch (0.6%)	1	3	0	4	69.1
Total (100.0%)	167	9	0	176	96.8
<i>Belgium (arrondissements, 1947)</i>					
Dutch-speaking (55.1%)	21	0	0	21	95.9
French-speaking (43.9%)	18	2		20	98.1
German-speaking (1.0%)	0	0	0	0	-
Total (100.0%)	39	2	0	41	97.7

Note: In the Belgian case, data have been adjusted by allocating the non-speaking population (made up of infants, but strangely included in the Belgian census as an additional language category) proportionally among the three other language groups.

Source: Computed from Malaysia, 1977; Switzerland, 2005; Belgium, 1954.

Table 5. Examples of operation of federal structure

Country / group	Proportion of population by district				Median proportion in "own" units
	80% or more	50-80%	plurality	total	
<i>Peninsular Malaysia</i>					
<i>(states, 1970)</i>					
Malays (53.1%)	2	5	2	9	61.2
Chinese (35.5%)	0	1	1	2	51.4
Indians (10.6%)	0	0	0	0	-
Total (100%)	2	6	3	11	56.3
<i>Switzerland: citizens only</i>					
<i>(cantons, 2000)</i>					
German (72.5)	18	1	0	19	97.7
French (21.0)	4	2	0	6	91.1
Italian (4.3)	1	0	0	1	86.6
Romansch (0.6)	0	0	0	0	-
Total (100.0)	23	3	0	26	96.7
<i>Belgium</i>					
<i>(post-1970 regions, 1947)</i>					
Flanders: Dutch-speaking	1	0	0	1	94.7
<i>(French-speaking)</i>					5.1
Wallonia: French-speaking	1	0	0	1	95.5
<i>(Dutch-speaking)</i>					2.1
Brussels: Bilingual: French	0	1	0	1	74.2
<i>(Dutch-speaking)</i>					25.5

Note: In the Belgian case, data have been adjusted by allocating the non-speaking population proportionally among the three other language groups.

Source: Computed from Malaysia, 1977; Switzerland, 2005; Hooghe, 2003.