The Emergence of Racial Politics in South Africa: Lessons for Peacebuilding

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Entry to the Case Studies in Peacebuilding Competition 2012
United States Institute of Peace

Introduction

At first glance, South Africa appears to be a remarkable success story. Inclusive institutions and democratic elections have replaced over four decades of race-based social, economic, and political structures. Racial tensions and violence have been dramatically reduced. After apartheid, South Africa chose a functionally single-district proportional representation electoral system[1] and a federal executive structure to distribute power both racially and regionally. This was done to maximize inclusiveness at the national and provincial levels of government and prevent 'spoiler' politics. Indeed, overtly racial political parties have struggled in South Africa, while the main parties are broadly multiracial. However, a closer examination of South African elections shows the gradual emergence of racial politics. As multiracial opposition parties (specifically the Democratic Alliance) gain strength, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) has responded by escalating its racial appeals through divisive election rhetoric, filling its party lists with more black candidates, and disproportionately targeting black voters with campaign advertising. This represents a dangerous trend for South African politics, one driven by historical conditions and demographic realities that combine with an institutional arrangement to incentivize racial politics over time. The South African case demonstrates the importance of considering the long-term interaction effects of historical, social, and demographic factors on institutional outcomes. This case study will first outline the background and key actors of South Africa's conflict. Next, it will discuss South Africa's post-conflict institutional arrangement and its consequences on racial politics. Finally, it will conclude with critical questions for peacebuilders derived from the South African case.

Background of South Africa's Racial Conflict

Racial conflict in South Africa stretches back over a century. White colonialists of Dutch and British descent fought two wars between 1880 and 1902 in modern-day South Africa. Called the First and Second Boer Wars, the conflict was over land rights and resource control. Its conclusion in 1902 gave the British full control over formerly Dutch areas and solidified a tenuous alliance between the two groups. But these divisions within the white community imperiled its survival. An increasingly hostile black majority could not be subdued without unity, which came with the Union of South Africa in 1910. British conciliation toward the Boers shocked the African population, who believed the English would implement reforms. However, after the Second Boer War ended, the strategic necessity of an English-Boer alliance was clear. Oppressing the local population required white reconciliation, which meant appeasing Boer opposition to social change.[2] In 1913, the new union passed its first piece of racist legislation: The *Natives Land Act* restricted "native" (black) land ownership to 7 percent of the union's landmass. South Africa's new white government continued to pass laws throughout the 1920s and 1930s designed to separate the races and suppress black rights, including the designation of white-only urban areas, the prevention of blacks from practicing

[1] Half of South Africa's 400 MPs are selected from a single national district using national party lists and the other half are selected from 9 regional party lists. Members are drawn from regional lists based on the party's national vote total in each province. Therefore, 200 members are selected through a single national district while the 200 remaining members are divided between 9 provinces. This arrangement makes a party's national vote total more electorally important than its vote total in any one province. This is why I call South Africa "functionally single district" as opposed to just "single district." Regardless, a fully single-district election in South Africa would only minimally change the composition of parliament given the ruling ANC's performance across provinces.

[2] Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

skilled trades, the elimination of the power of tribal chiefs, the removal of blacks from the voter rolls, and the prohibition of miscegenation.

Two years after the founding of the Union of South Africa, the African National Congress was formed. In 1912, this organization drew its members mostly from the black elite: oftentimes western educated, middle class, Christian converts.[3] The nascent ANC was accommodating of white rule, seeking reform rather than transformation. But the organization faced racism embedded in both institutions and attitude. Jan Smuts, a white political figure and two-time Prime Minister (1919-1924; 1939-1948), stated the intentions of the newly formed union: "It has been our ideal to make South Africa a white man's country, but it is not a white man's country yet. It is still a black man's country."[4]

Despite the government's efforts to separate the races, whites and blacks were inextricably linked within the country's economy. Though blacks could not live in white cities, their cheap labor was vital to mining and other sectors of industrial production. The interaction of white and black workers was oftentimes tense, but had important consequences. The South African Communist Party (SACP), formed in 1921, emphasized class struggle over black empowerment and many white workers resented black labor driving down wages. However, worker strikes and demonstrations blurred racial lines and fostered an always controversial, though long-lasting, alliance between the SACP and the ANC, which constituted the only significant cooperation between races at the time.

As the ANC entreated the government for more rights, the black masses became restive. Labor strikes and squatter camps grew in size and effectiveness. Simultaneously, the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) agitated internally for more aggressive policies. The ANCYL, a political incubator for many future liberation leaders, including Nelson Mandela, was far more radical than its umbrella organization. Its 1944 policy document promoted African nationalism and the struggle against white domination. While the ANCYL also acknowledged the need for interracial cooperation, its orientation was toward confrontational emancipation. In 1948, apartheid became the official policy of South Africa. A year later, the Youth League Program of Action marked a militant departure from previous ANC documents, committing the organization to the pursuit of national freedom as well as a campaign of boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience.[5]

The government pursued a policy of violent repression toward these acts of resistance and enacted further discriminatory legislation. The 1950 *Population Registration Act* required that each South African be legally classified according to race. That same year, the *Group Areas Act* assigned different racial groups to specific urban areas. Additionally, the government implemented the *Suppression of Communism Act*, which categorized a wide range of resistance activity as illegal. These draconian acts precipitated a national stay-away-from-work day on May 1, 1950, which led to violent clashes with the police. Two years later, the *Pass Laws Act* mandated that all black South Africans carry identity cards that indicated where that person was permitted to travel within the country. This law provoked persistent and widespread unrest, most famously a protest that brought thousands to a police station in Sharpsville in 1960. The panicked police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 and wounding more than 180. Disorder and instability spread throughout the country, prompting the government to outlaw the ANC and other resistance organizations and declare a state of emergency.

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[3] Saul Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000)
[4] Heidi Holland, *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress* (New York: George Braziller, 1990)
[5] Francis Meli, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us* (Bloomington: India University Press, 1999)

The ANC ban and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela in 1964 ended almost all of the organization's open activities, though underground resistance continued. Its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, carried out acts of sabotage against government facilities. A new state policy mandating Afrikaans training in black schools sparked the Soweto uprisings in 1976 and 1977, which brought tens of thousands of students and activists into the streets. By the 1980s, racial tension was reaching critical mass. The ANC-backed United Democratic Front coordinated large-scale multiracial protests while the government engaged in last-ditch efforts to save the apartheid system. In an attempt to divide the non-white population, a new "multiracial" constitution created a three-part legislature that included whites, coloureds, and Indians, but excluded blacks. The move failed amid low Indian and coloured participation.

The ANC and the SACP had become enormously popular in the restless and violent townships and South Africa's erstwhile supporters in America and England began to revoke their long-standing support for the apartheid regime. In 1986, the hated *Pass Laws* were repealed. Movie theaters, sporting events, restaurants, and hospitals were opened to all races. Finally amid mounting pressure, F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and released hundreds of prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, on February 2, 1990. With apartheid's most odious polices repealed, the focus now turned to the democratic transition. After 4-years of negotiations between the ANC and the ruling National Party, South Africa's first fully democratic election was held on April 27, 1994.

Key Actors

African National Congress - The ANC has preserved a dominant position in South African politics since transforming itself from a liberation movement to a political party. With almost total control of the black majority, the ANC has won each of South Africa's first four democratic elections with over 60 percent of the vote. Its primary objective in 1990 was to design a non-racial and democratic institutional arrangement that ensured the ANC's political advantage. Since the first democratic election in 1994, the ANC has worked to maintain its unrivaled control over the black vote, and with it, control over state power and resources.

The National Party - F.W. de Klerk's rebranded New National Party (NNP) received 20 percent of the vote in the 1994 election. This performance allowed it to participate in the Government of National Unity (GNU), which, according to the interim constitution, included any party that won twenty or more seats in parliament. But after leaving the GNU in 1996, the party's popularity declined precipitously. It received less than 7 percent of the vote in 1999 and less than 2 percent in 2004. After short-lived alliances with the Democratic Party and then (ironically) the ANC, the NNP dissolved itself in 2005.

The Democratic Party/Democratic Alliance - The Democratic Party was the official opposition party during the National Party's apartheid rule. While opposing apartheid policies, it chose to participate in the government rather than abstain. In 1994, the party carried only 1.7 percent of the vote with its largely white, liberal base. However, its 9.5 percent of the vote five years later earned it the status of official opposition in parliament. Changing its name to the Democratic Alliance (DA), which it retained after its abortive alliance with the NNP, the party expanded its share of the vote in 2004 and 2009 to 12 percent and 16 percent respectively. The DA remains the official opposition in parliament and the only opposition party that has expanded its voter base since apartheid.

Inkatha Freedom Party - The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) grew out of a Zulu cultural association formed by Mangosuthu Buthelezi in 1975. The organization was initially aligned with the ANC, but

the two groups became violent competitors for power in the 1980s and 1990s. Ultimately, Buthelezi agreed to participate in the 1994 elections, in which the party won only its provincial stronghold of Kwa-Zulu Natal.[6] Since winning 10 percent of the national vote in 1994, the IFP has become an increasingly irrelevant force in South African politics. It lost badly to the ANC in Kwa-Zulu Natal in 2009 and won less than 7 percent of the national vote.

Congress of the People - After a leadership battle within the ANC, disgruntled party members formed the Congress of the People (COPE) in 2008, which contested the 2009 election. COPE is the first viable opposition party to have a predominantly black constituency. Many regarded the party's development as a profound shift in South African political and racial dynamics; however, the party performed below expectations in 2009 and has declined in relevance because of leadership conflict and lack of resources.

Results of the Peacebuilding Efforts

The release of Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid activists in 1990, along with the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, and Pan-Africanist Congress, did not resolve the conflict in South Africa. Large-scale violence persisted between IFP and ANC activists, which killed thousands. The government, eager to foment intra-black violence, armed the IFP in its anti-ANC actions. Simultaneously, blacks and whites stood on the verge of civil war. The assassination of SACP leader and ANC official Chris Hani by a white South African in 1993 exacerbated fears of racial violence, prompting Nelson Mandela to implore South Africans for interracial peace in a national address. Amid this pervasive unrest, the ANC and the NP negotiated the terms of a democratic South Africa. The NP initially sought guaranteed minority rights and federalism. However, early polling indicated to the NP that it could gain a substantial number of black votes, which prompted a shift from support for group rights to proportional representation (PR). The NP also believed that prolonged negotiations would cool support for the ANC and allow it to build a black voter base.[7]

The ANC slowly shifted its negotiating position as well. Initially supporting first-past-the-post (FPTP) elections that it could dominate, the party came to accept a PR system. The ANC realized that any additional representation won by minority parties under PR would be irrelevant as long as the ANC could retain 51 percent of the vote—a result virtually assured given its enormous popularity among the black majority (79 percent of the population). As the negotiations wore on, the NP strategy of delay backfired. Its popularity began to decline, precipitating a series of concessions designed to schedule elections as quickly as possible before the party imploded.[8] The two sides ultimately agreed to a functionally single-district PR electoral system and a federal structure with concurrent national and provincial elections. Although this arrangement had many features advocated by peacebuilding scholars advising the South African government,[9] over time South Africa's institutional structure has allowed the ANC to dominate elections and undermine consensual democracy.

Election Rules and Governing Structure

[6] It is widely believed that the ANC allowed IFP vote tampering in Kwa-Zulu Natal in order to placate IFP officials and prevent further violence.
[7] Robert Mattes, "The Road to Democracy: From 2 February 1990 to 27 April 1994," in Andrew Reynolds, ed. *Election '94: The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995)
[8] Robert Mattes 1995
[9] Arend Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1985)

At the national level, members of parliament are elected through closed party lists in direct proportion to the number of votes the party receives, with half of the 400-member National Assembly chosen from national lists and the remaining 200 members chosen from nine regional lists.[10] South African political parties do not have to meet a minimum threshold of support to receive seats. A natural threshold of approximately .25 percent of the vote will likely win one seat, with some parties winning representation with less than .25 percent because of the Droop quota.[11] Provincial legislatures are also filled using closed-list PR, with the size of each legislature determined by the provincial population. Separate provincial lists are produced by each party. National and provincial elections use separate ballots, but are held concurrently every five years.

List PR electoral systems are often encouraged in deeply divided societies as a way to ensure the broadest possible representation in parliament. Particularly in the absence of a minimum threshold, even very small parties can win some seats. This is superior to FPTP systems, it is argued, which advantage large, institutionalized parties over small or new parties. Indeed, in 1994, only 5 of South Africa's over 700 districts had white majorities, which meant a winner-take-all system would likely have ensured the ANC control of 70-80 percent of the parliamentary seats with only 50-60 percent of the vote.[12]

However, increasing the representativeness of parliament in deeply divided societies creates two dangers depending on the country's demographic configuration. Ideally, list PR systems cultivate moderate governing coalitions between competing groups that receive at most a plurality of the vote. Yet in highly fragmented societies in which no group has a majority, PR can foster combative ethnic parties by granting parliamentary representation to any constituency that can surpass a minimum vote threshold. In this situation, paralysis occurs rather than moderate coalitions. Alternatively, in societies with dominant majorities, PR can actually decrease the real representative power of small parties. South Africa's dominant-majority ethnic configuration guarantees power to any party that can win the black vote. Indeed, the ANC, harnessing its ties to the liberation movement, has shown almost total control of the black vote over four election cycles. This makes South Africa's parliament trivially inclusive—many small parties compete for power during elections and ultimately do win some seats. Yet the real inclusivity of the parliament is actually weak. Election outcomes are pre-determined, as opposition parties compete for the minority vote on the periphery of party politics. The current "racial census" that characterizes South African elections is thus a partial product of the list PR electoral system, which fosters a dynamic in which the ANC only needs black votes to win—a group it already dominates—and opposition parties are permanently excluded from real power as they largely compete over white, coloured, and Indian voters, which together constitute only approximately 20 percent of the population.

South Africa's governmental structure also helps the ANC dominate the country's democracy. The prevalence of ethnic politics is shaped by the way in which power is distributed

[10] Elections at the municipal level use a mixed system, employing a FPTP ward system and PR. These elections are also held every five years, but not concurrent with the national/provincial elections.
[11] David Pottie, "The Electoral System and Opposition Parties in South Africa," Compilation of contributions to *Opposition in South Africa's New Democracy* (Pretoria, June 2000)
[12] Andrew Reynolds, Benjamin Reilly, Kader Asmal, eds. *The IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design* (International IDEA 1997)

within the state.[13] A federal system that truly devolves power to lower levels of government enhances the political power of local ethnic groups that cannot compete at the national level. Nigeria exemplifies this process. Small federal units designed to strengthen local autonomy have served to increase the political salience of regional groups.[14] Alternatively, unitary systems require large, nationally based coalitions, which are difficult for particularistic parties to form.

The ANC conceded to demands for a federal system during South Africa's transition to democracy, but it worked to weaken local units as much as possible. Consequently, the most important polices are generated at the national level, while provinces serve as administrative units. Decisions regarding major social and economic policy, resource distribution, and taxation are made by the national government.[15] Provincial budgets and spending decisions are also decided at the national level. South Africa's nominally federal structure thus does not decentralize power away from the ruling party, which can distribute patronage resources as it sees fit.

Furthermore, concurrent national and provincial elections disproportionately benefit the ANC. The ruling party is vulnerable on provincial issues regarding local service delivery, but these issues are often drowned out during election fights. The ANC's strongest appeal to the electorally essential black vote is its role in liberating South Africa from apartheid. Holding simultaneous national and provincial elections allows the ANC to push this narrative. Thus, this election scheduling format effectively nationalizes the race, elevating issues of foreign policy, macro-economic policy, and national unity over issues of local concern. The ANC has indicated its goal to fully synchronize all elections (national, provincial, and municipal), which would effectively eliminate local issues from all election campaigns. The ANC generally performs worse in municipal elections than in national elections, which was showcased dramatically in the recent 2011 municipal election results.[16]

In sum, South Africa's institutional arrangement allows a single racial group to dominate electoral politics. Proportional representation benefits the ANC given its natural dominance of the black vote. Simultaneous elections and a weak federal structure centralize power in the state and weaken local issues during campaigns. More detrimental, these institutional rules have incentivized a devolution to racial politics in South Africa. Open-list, single-district PR provides no formal mechanisms to shape party behavior, which in turn entrusts the country's multiracialism to the goodwill of the ruling party.[17] Two trends have combined with the electoral system to alter mobilization strategies. First, Nelson Mandela, whose dedication to multiracialism held the nation together in the early post-apartheid years, is no longer an active party official. Though ANC leaders often invoke his name, Mandela's old age prevents real participation in political activity. New leaders, such as President Jacob Zuma and former ANC Youth League head Julius Malema, have been divisive figures both inside and outside the party. Second, opposition parties represent a slow but steady challenge to ANC power. The Democratic Alliance won 16.6 percent of the vote in 2009, up from 1.7 percent in 1994. When combined with COPE, the two primary opposition parties took in almost 25 percent of the vote in 2009. Although this still falls well short of the ANC, trend lines

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[13] Jessica Piombo, *Institutions, Ethnicity and Political Mobilization in South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009)
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] The ANC's vote declined in all provinces compared with the 2009 general election.
[17] This argument builds upon and expands other analyses of the influence of PR in South Africa, including "Proportional Representation and Racial Campaigning in South Africa" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10 (2005) 297-324.

suggest the opposition could present a real challenge to ANC power in the coming years. The internal weakness of the ANC coupled with the growing strength of the opposition has pushed the ANC to increasingly target the black vote, with whom it remains electorally invincible within the electoral system. This has manifested itself in the party's election rhetoric, party list composition, and voter outreach, all of which disproportionately target South Africa's black community.

The Ascendance of Racial Politics in South Africa

The ANC's election manifesto is broadly inclusive and explicitly multiracial. Its 2009 manifesto proclaimed the party's aim to "build a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic" South Africa. But a party manifesto presents the party to the public as it wants to be perceived. In South Africa, the legacy of Mandela and the "rainbow nation" is sacrosanct. All parties pledge loyalty to the mantra of multiracial unity. However, on the campaign trail, the ANC's rhetoric has become progressively less multiracial over election cycles. A comparative content analysis of the 1994, 1999, and 2009 campaigns shows that the ANC is making progressively fewer explicit appeals to minority voters.[18] Although ANC rhetoric overtly targeting black voters decreased in 2009, the campaign featured racially charged language between the ANC and its two main challengers, the Congress of the People and the Democratic Alliance. Challenging COPE's credentials as a black party, the ANC laid continuous claim while campaigning to the legacy of Mandela. The ANC also routinely charged that the Democratic Alliance was run by "racists" and "fascists" who wanted to bring back apartheid. By casting COPE as usurpers and the DA as racist, the ANC sought to delegitimize them as viable political alternatives available to black voters.

Candidate lists allow a party to signal to voters in divided societies which groups it actually represents. Inclusive campaign rhetoric can be belied by the identity of the elites who actually wield power after elections. In 2009, the ANC's national, regional, and provincial candidates closely mirrored South African society. Eighty-four percent of its candidates were black (compared with 79 percent of the total population) and 7 percent were white (compared with 10 percent of population).[19] However, these results hide the overall trend across election cycles. Between 1994 and 2009, the percentage of the ANC's black candidates has increased from 70 percent to 84 percent, while its percentage of white and coloured candidates has decreased from 21 percent to 12.5 percent. Simultaneously, the historically white Democratic Alliance has vastly expanded its number of black candidates.[20] The ANC faces the strategic imperative to strengthen its core of black support while not disregarding the social imperative to maintain at least nominal multiracialism. Thus, its party lists remain generally representative of South African society, but increasingly feature black candidates to bolster its support among black voters.

The ANC's voter-targeting operation also indicates a strong effort to mobilize black support. After the 2009 elections, South Africans were asked which parties, if any, contacted them during the campaign and by what means.[21] The results show that of those contacted by the ANC, 83 percent were black and 0.9 percent white. These results conform to results from the same survey that show that significantly more blacks saw ANC newspaper advertising as compared to whites. Coupled with campaign rhetoric and party list composition, the ANC's voter-targeting operation provides more evidence of its electoral strategy. South Africa's electoral system, executive structure, and election

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[18] Based on this author's research combined with data from: Gavin Davis (2005)
[19] Based on this author's content analysis of party lists
[20] Based on this author's research combined with data from: Karen Ferree, *Framing the Race in South Africa: The Political Origins of Racial-Census Elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[21] Comparative National Elections Project, South Africa, 2009

schedule—when combined with ruling party decline—have incentivized racial politicking. The ANC realizes that mobilization of the black vote is the easiest route to victory. Though South Africa does not conduct election-day exit polling, post-election surveys indicate the ANC's strategy is working. In 2009, the ANC won 73.8 percent of the black vote. COPE and the Democratic Alliance won 4.6 percent and 2.1 percent of the black vote respectively.

Lessons Learned and Critical Questions

The "new" South Africa represents an extraordinary resolution to a seemingly intractable identity-based conflict. The sudden end of decades of apartheid portended widespread racial conflict as a newly empowered black majority came to power. Instead, violence diminished and democratic institutions flourished. Four elections later, South Africa's democracy appears strong. Its elections are widely considered free, fair, and legitimate. However, trend lines in South African politics are cause for concern. The ANC's dominant position has created an entrenched political elite who benefit from control over state resources. As the party's triumphant role in South Africa's liberation movement recedes further into the past, its elites rely more and more on racial appeals. As shown above, the ANC is slowly abandoning its multiracial character in pursuit of the institutionally constructed path of least resistance; a path that could shatter South Africa's tenuous racial peace.

The current reality of South African politics could have been avoided. Three key choices were made in the immediate post-conflict period that set in motion the country's slow decline into identity politics. The first choice was the selection of functionally single-district proportional representation. While this system does provide the opportunity for national representation to virtually all significant groups, it also incentivizes identity appeals. South Africa's dominant black majority represents an enticing prize in PR politics. Given the ANC's natural advantage with black voters, proportional representation provides no rationale for the ANC to moderate its message or appeal to minority voters. The second choice was to create a weak federal structure. Control over provincial legislatures is a minor award for South African parties. With most of the real power over resources vested in the central government, the ANC has loses little from diminished support in racially mixed provinces such as the Western Cape. The loss of any one province has little impact on ANC power as long as it wins 51 percent of the national vote.

The third important choice was to mandate concurrent national and provincial elections. This election schedule effectively nationalizes campaign issues, which are grounds on which the ANC is most comfortable campaigning. Issues of service delivery, employment, and poverty are addressed with empty promises as the election rhetoric revolves mostly around platitudinous populism, past deeds, and racial invective. The ANC is most vulnerable on local issues, but it can evade responsibility for widespread suffering because provincial issues are given only cursory attention during elections.

The ANC designed South Africa's institutional arrangement to its own advantage, but the interaction of these institutions with demography and history has created a toxic political environment. An examination of this case yields three important questions that peacebuilders must address:

1) How will electoral system incentives interact with demographic configuration to influence election outcomes?

Single-district proportional representation will oftentimes be the wrong choice for countries with large, cohesive majorities. If one party can control this group, elections become preordained and thus irrelevant. Efforts should be taken to fracture the majority by creating multiple districts and/or altering district size and composition. Proposing alternative institutional arrangements for South Africa is beyond the scope of this paper, but its electoral system was ill-chosen given its demographic composition.

2) Is a strong or weak central government necessary?

This issue again underlines the importance of demography. If a dominant majority cannot be prevented from winning an election, the power that they control once elected should be limited. Forcing the central government to share power with the provinces has two clear benefits: 1) provinces in which minority groups constitute the local majority will be able to challenge the central government for power as well as tailor governance to local needs; and 2) even in provinces where the national majority is also the local majority, strong federalism fosters institutional competition. This could fracture the majority's political cohesion, creating a new cleavage the pits provincial versus state power rather than majority versus minority power.

3) When should elections be held?

A common question for peacebuilders is when to schedule the first election. Elections in a country unready for them could bring chaos and delegitimize the democratic process. While this is undoubtedly an important issue, the question of routinized election scheduling is just as important. The simultaneity of South Africa's national and provincial elections harms its democracy. Local issues—those important to both whites and blacks—are obscured by national concerns. Under any conditions, simultaneous elections are likely to produce negative results. By separating national and local elections, parties are forced to address issues that most affect people's daily lives.

The negative influence of South Africa's institutional arrangement is illuminated by other postconflict societies that have cultivated much stronger multiethnic politics. For example, Indonesia transitioned through the end of decades-old authoritarianism in 1998 and relatively large-scale ethnic violence in the early 2000s to a strongly multiethnic party system in which particularistic parties struggle. Similarly, in India, the multiethnic Congress Party remains one of two national-level parties along with the BJP, whose chauvinistic rhetoric has declined since its rise to power in the 1990s. Both Indonesia and India use multiple-district electoral systems and have strongly federal arrangements. Though the central government remains powerful, provincial/state and local governments are important foci of power. Unlike under South Africa's highly centralized system, this electoral and power-sharing arrangement forces national-level parties to compete across the country and creates local power centers, both of which encourage moderate and inclusive politics. From a comparative perspective, single-district PR and weak federalism—exacerbated by simultaneous elections—appear to allow the re-emergence of conflict-based identities.

Conclusion

Although the conflicting parties in South Africa negotiated their own reconciliation, this case still provides important lessons for international actors involved in post-conflict peacebuilding. The settlement achieved in South Africa through negotiated concessions on proportional representation and centralized executive power ended a deplorable regime. However, the resulting absence of

democratic dynamism within South Africa's *de facto* one-party state has cultivated a slow decay in democratic norms. Deeply entrenched ANC elites have grown enormously wealthy on state resources and have shown little hesitance to racialize elections in order to stay in power, thus endangering the country's fragile multiracial consensus.

South Africa elucidates the difficult choices facing both local and international peacebuilders whose narrow objective is often reaching compromise by any means necessary. While this strategy is justifiably pursued to end conflict, an ill-chosen institutional arrangement creates a dysfunctional foundation for lasting democratic strength and stability. South Africa's experience shows the danger of implementing a self-regulating institutional order in which political actors have a high degree of autonomy. Conflict-prone societies often yield identity-based parties, which prove deleterious to democratic functions and social stability. These parties will often stoke ethnic tension to maintain support, which can lead to outbidding strategies marked by increasingly chauvinistic and divisive appeals both within and between parties. South Africa initially avoided this problem because of the unique leadership of Nelson Mandela. But as challenges have arisen, the ANC has acted in the rational pursuit institutional power: it has increasingly used racial appeals to gain a majority vote share.

This demonstrates the lingering importance of identity-based violence in postconflict states. Those who have fought along identity cleavages are also likely to vote along them. It is therefore vital to create institutional impediments to identity politics in the postconflict democratic order. Depending on the unique characteristics of the society, these could include minimum vote thresholds, preferential voting, tailored district boundaries, federal power sharing, regional autonomy, or other arrangements. Instead, South Africa employs permissive election rules, which have left the country vulnerable to the possibility of identity politics rekindling long simmering conflict.