**THE MIDDLE EAST**

*“In Tahrir Square, Christians and Muslims link hands in common cause…”*

The *Guardian,* 7.2.2011

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**Abbreviations**

av (irv/stv) alternative vote cp - Communist Party

fis *- Front Islamique du Salut* irv (av/stv) instant run-off voting

gnu - government of national unity mbc - modified Borda count

mmp - multi-member proportional mp - member of parliament

pr - proportional representation qbs - quota Borda system

stv (av/irv) single transferable vote trs - two-round system

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

In post *perestroika* Eastern Europe, various forces for reform were united in their opposition to Honecker, Milošević, etc.. Once that ruler was removed from office, however, these campaigns all too quickly split into two. In Russia, for example, the debate soon descended into a verbal battle between a pair of Nobel laureates, Gorbachev and Sakharov.

This was partly because the countries concerned adopted a western and therefore adversarial form of governance. To take Russia again, they used i) an electoral system similar to the French two-round system, trs; ii) a parliament based on majority rule; and this involved iii) a simple majority vote decision-making process. The consequences were immediate.

* 1. **Elections**

In the first round, the atmosphere among the general public and even between the candidates was cordial and civilized; in those constituencies where the vote went to a second round, however, it quickly became bitter and polarized.

**1.2 Governance**

As noted, the 1989 Supreme Soviet split into two, government versus opposition, the cp versus the Inter-Regional Group.

**1.3 Decision-making**

Despite being beset by some extremely difficult problems, parliament used a form of decision-making in which one ‘half’ had a vested interest in the failures of the other ‘half’.

**2 EGYPT, TUNISIA et al**

“Christians and Muslims link hands in common cause .” It is absolutely essential that the democratic structure should not break that bond. If anything, democracy should help its further development.

**2.1 Elections**

The electoral system should be both proportional and preferential, so to allow the voter to cast preferences for persons of both ‘this’ and of ‘that’ party, of both (or all or no) faiths, and hopefully too for candidates both male and female.

**2.2 Governance**

Parliament should form a government of national unity.

**2.3 Decision-making**

On contentious matters, decisions taken in parliament or in national referendums should be based on a preferential vote.

**3 INCLUSIVITY**

The fear of many is that, come the next election, one particular faction will win a majority of the (votes and) seats and then take over the reins of government. The implications, not least for Israel, need no emphasis. From a pragmatic point of view, therefore, but also from the ideals of democracy, it would be wiser to adopt a democratic structure which is inclusive. The latter is more likely to be realised if i) the parliament does indeed represent *all* the people; ii) if likewise the government represents the *entire* parliament; and iii) if the mps’ *modus operandi* is based on an inclusive form of decision-making.

**3.1 Elections**

A voter cannot express his/her opinion with any degree of accuracy if the electoral system allows a) only a single-preference: fpp, or most forms of closed or open pr-list; or b), at best, a 1st and 2nd preference: trs and mmp.[[1]](#footnote-1) And if the electoral system cannot cater for the accurate expression of the individual will, it most certainly cannot facilitate the accurate identification of the collective will.

Furthermore, the unity of the people in Cairo and elsewhere cannot be maintained if the voters are then divided into various exclusive factions. The ballot should not, in effect, ‘force’ the voter to say, “this candidate good, those candidates not good”. Many people will have opinions as to the relative merits of the various candidates, so a true representation of the voters’ opinions can best be manifested by a preferential electoral system.

Depending on the nature of the count, such a preferential voting procedure could allow various candidates to stand linked *with* each other, and voters to vote *with* each other. Indeed, if some voters wanted a coalition government, they could cast their preferences for those parties which they wished to see in that coalition.

**3.2 Governance**

In conflict zones like Kenya and Iraq, the formation of a gnu has invariably relied on a process of negotiation which, to put it at its mildest, has often been protracted. The more effective instrument would be a governmental election: (the people first elect the parliament, by a preferential system of pr; and) the parliament then elects the government, again by a preferential system of pr. The appropriate methodology for electing a cabinet in which a) each individual minister is the one most suited to that department; and yet b) the cabinet overall is a proportional, power-sharing, all-party collective, is a matrix vote.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In majoritarian forms of governance, power is usually given to parliament’s bigger ‘half’, either to a single party if the latter has gained a majority (or at least the largest minority) of seats, or to a majority coalition of one or more parties. The somewhat secretive process by which such coalitions are formed often allows a small party to have more power than is its proportional due; what’s more, as was the case in Austria, that party can be extremist. In an elected gnu, in contrast, no party, big or small, will exercise more than its fair share.

**3.3 Decision-making**

Given the complexity of most topics – constitutional reform, peace treaties, economic development plans and so on – questions of policy should not be reduced to a dichotomy or a series of dichotomies. Rather, on all non-urgent questions of any controversy, the debate should be so structured as to ensure that all opinions – those, that is, which conform to the un Charter of Human Rights or some similar norm – are allowed ‘on the table’; and, if a verbal consensus proves to be elusive, resort may be made to a preferential vote, the mbc.

**4 POSSIBLE VOTING PROCEDURES**

**4.1 Elections**

Approval voting is multi-optional; av (irv) is preferential; the Swiss form of pr-list is proportional; and those systems which are both preferential and proportional include pr-stv and qbs. All of these procedures *allow* the voter to support both a Moslem and a Christian candidate etc. Uniquely, qbs actually *encourages* the voter so to do.

The count of an av or pr-stv election may be such that the individual’s vote will go to, let us say, the Moslem candidate; that or it will be transferred, literally, to the Christian candidate. Hence the name, of course: single transferable vote. In effect, therefore, in av (irv) and pr-stv, voters who do vote for more than one candidate often vote, in fact, *either* for their 1st preference *or* their 2nd preference; in qbs, they votes for both their 1st *and* 2nd preferences.[[3]](#footnote-3)

If qbs were to be adopted, it is suggested that the count be done in two phases: on the termination of voting, all 1st preference votes shall be counted *in situ*, in the polling station; the subsequent results and corresponding bundles of ballot papers shall then be transported to the constituency counting centre where, (the next morning), the count shall resume.

**4.2 Governance**

Parliament could elect its government of, let us say, 20 ministers, by using one matrix vote; or it could use a two-step procedure to elect the 20 most popular mps by qbs; and then use a matrix vote to allocate these 20 to the various ministerial posts. With such a methodology, parliament could elect its proportional, all-party, power-sharing coalition government in just one day.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**4.3 Decision-making**

The mbc is a win-win voting procedure for use in decision-making. It is non-majoritarian. The outcome is not the majority’s more preferred option from a choice of just two options, but all the mps’ most preferred option from a (short) list of (usually) between 4 and 6.

To succeed, the protagonist needs not only lots of high preferences, but also a good few middle ones, and very few if any low ones. The outcome depends upon everyone. It is therefore worth the protagonist’s while to talk to any erstwhile opponents, so to persuade them to give a 3rd preference, say, instead of a 6th. In a word, the mbc encourages the maintenance of those Moslem-Christian-etc. “links”.

The mbc is versatile, for it enables those concerned to identify either a social choice or a social ranking; and it is very difficult to manipulate.

All votes in parliament should be in the public domain; every mp’s preferences should be on record; and the principle of collective responsibility should apply to the entire parliament, not just to the government. Come the next election, if there is, say, a two percent swing in the country, there should be an approximately two percent swing in parliament, and indeed in government.

**5 PARALELS**

For many years now, majoritarianism has been a cause of tension throughout the Middle East (and beyond).

**5.1 Algeria**

In 1991, Algeria completed the first round of a trs election, on the basis of which it looked obvious that the fis was going to gain a majority. The second round was therefore cancelled. The consequences were dreadful.

**5.2 Israel and Palestine**

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both sides fear they could be out-numbered by the other. Not least for this reason, the one-state solution is not even on the agenda.

**6 CONCLUSIONS**

A win-or-lose democratic structure can lead to the dominance of one or other faction; and under such a polity, there is always the danger that such a faction may be of an extremist hue.

A more inclusive structure would allow for extreme political parties to be represented not only in parliament but also in government – every party of any size would be *inside* the tent – but only at a level which is their proportional due.

Such a structure is much more likely to cater for a peaceful transition into the future. Indeed, it could even be permanent.

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1. mmp, a two-tier electoral system, is based on two ballots; it is sometimes confusingly called ams, additional member system, which is based on two counts of a single preference. mmp is used in Germany and New Zealand. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Designing an All-Inclusive Democracy*, Springer, 2007, p. 61 *et seq.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Proportionality without Transference: the Merits of the Quota Borda System, (qbs), *Representation*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Iraq’s negotiations lasted for 259 days. Belgium’s are still on-going. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)