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## **Democracy in Divided Societies**

Donald L. Horowitz

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## **Democracy in Divided Societies**

*Donald L. Horowitz (bio)*

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Democratization is a worldwide movement, but it is neither universal nor uniformly successful where it has begun. Some authoritarian or semidemocratic states may be untouched by the democratic

movement; others may find ways to thwart the movement at the outset; still others may move along a democratic path, only to have the changes aborted. There are many reasons, of course, why democratization and democracies may fail, among them the resistance of entrenched civilian or military elites, the absence of conducive social or cultural conditions, and inaptly designed institutions. In many countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, a major reason for the failure of democratization is ethnic conflict.

Democracy is about inclusion and exclusion, about access to power, about the privileges that go with inclusion and the penalties that accompany exclusion. In severely divided societies, ethnic identity provides clear lines to determine who will be included and who will be excluded. Since the lines appear unalterable, being in and being out may quickly come to look permanent. In ethnic politics, inclusion may affect the distribution of important material and nonmaterial goods, including the prestige of the various ethnic groups and the identity of the state as belonging more to one group than another. Again and again in divided societies, there is a tendency to conflate inclusion in the government with inclusion in the community and exclusion from government with exclusion from the community. **[End Page 18]**

Ethnically divided societies thus have a special version of the usual democratic problem of assuring decent treatment of the opposition. Opposition to government is always susceptible of portrayal as resistance to the popular will. An ethnically differentiated opposition can easily be depicted as consisting of particularly dangerous enemies: historical enemies, enemies who do not accept the current identity of the state, enemies who are plotting to break up the state or to steal it for their own group—as indeed they may be, given the crucial importance of state power and the costs of exclusion from it.

Where ethnic relations undergo significant improvements during an authoritarian period, that is very likely to improve the prospects for democracy. Relations between Thais and Chinese in Thailand and between Mainlanders and Taiwanese on Taiwan were hostile and even

violent after World War II. Several decades later, those relations were far less prone to conflict, and rates of intermarriage were higher than is typical of deeply divided societies. These changes facilitated democratization in both countries, because they reduced the fear that each group had of the other. At the other extreme, most African countries remain severely divided, and ethnic divisions have proved a major impediment to the attainment of stable democracy all over the continent.

Democracy has progressed furthest in those East European countries that have the fewest serious ethnic cleavages (Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland) and progressed more slowly or not at all in those that are deeply divided (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and of course the former Yugoslavia). It is true that the first group of states was more prosperous, had at least some democratic traditions, and had closer ties to the West. But there is also a direct relationship between ethnic conflict and nondemocratic development in the second group. The use of ethnic hostility by former communists in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia to support ethnically exclusive regimes and authoritarian tendencies is well known. The heavy-handed Slovak regime of former communist Vladimír Mečiar is hardly comparable to the regimes in Croatia and Serbia, but it does have a record of attempting to control the press, pack the Constitutional Court, and limit the language rights of Hungarians in the south of the country. The democratic movement in Romania, which received its strongest impetus in multiethnic Transylvania, was quickly transformed into a narrower Romanian nationalism, occasionally inclined to xenophobia, especially fearful of the Hungarian minority, and conducive to the continued governmental role of former communists. In Bulgaria, an anticommunist parliamentary plurality, attentive to popular fears of the Turkish minority (and of other Muslims), was unable to form a stable government by coalescing with the Turkish party. When the government lost a vote of...



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