Making Extremism Pay?

Centripetalism and Nationalism in Post-War Sri Lanka

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This thesis titled

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ABSTRACT

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Making Extremism Pay? Centripetalism and Nationalism in Post-War Sri Lanka

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The majority of countries turn to centripetalism or consociationalism after a settlement for a major conflict. Sri Lanka is an outlier because it adopted centripetalism before the twenty-six year (1982–2009) civil war. However, centripetalism was unable to foster moderation during and after the war. Why? Drawing upon a plethora of secondary sources, interviews, as well as translations of Sinhala-language political speeches and political manifestos, this thesis asks do post-conflict centripetalist institutions reinforce moderation across the ethnic divide? I argue that centripetalist institutions not tailored to a post-conflict environment tend to be unable to ameliorate ethnic conflict. As a result, various forms of exclusionary nationalism become a common feature of political competition.
DEDICATION

For Amma, Thaththa, and Garrett
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question and Argument</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Basic Terms: Sri Lanka, Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a Deeply Divided Place?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Review of Literature</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Conflict in Deeply Divided Places</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalism and Competitive Politics</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Engineering and Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Onset of Centripetalism in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Past-the-Post, Linguistic Nationalism, and Civil War's Commencement</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Centripetalism Before a War?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Centripetalist Outcomes During the Civil War</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the War Ended</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Post-War Sri Lanka: Making Extremism Pay?</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of Centripetalism in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Post-War Election</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lack of Centripetalist Outcomes: Nationalism in the Post-War Context</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Results of Sri Lankan Presidential Elections, 1982–2015</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Results in the 2015 Sri Lankan Presidential Election</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>2015 Presidential Election Results in the Northern Province</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>2015 Presidential Election Results in the Eastern Province</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>2015 Presidential Election Results in the Western Province</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1. Demographic Map of Sri Lanka ................................................................. 56
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, democratic processes have thrived along with mounting waves of political violence. Sri Lanka (then, Ceylon) was the first Asian democracy to enjoy universal suffrage (Snyder, 2000, p. 274). Yet since the late 1950s, Sri Lanka has been the site of sustained ethnic nationalism, conflict, and violence.

In 1978, Sri Lanka adopted a new presidential electoral system, alternative vote. Alternative vote was adopted to prevent the eruption of conflict among the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. Scholars like Donald Horowitz consider alternative vote to be a crucial tool of centripetalism. Centripetalism refers to a particular school of thought regarding conflict amelioration. The centripetalist school argues that an electoral system like alternative vote encourages majority political leaders to adopt moderate platforms that satisfy minority communities.

Despite the establishment of a “centripetalist” institution, Sri Lanka became the site of a nearly thirty-year (1983–2009) civil war due to ethnic conflict between the Sri Lankan government, who represented the Sinhalese majority, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist movement led by members of the Tamil population in northern Sri Lanka. Unlike most civil wars in the twenty-first century, the Sri Lankan civil war did not end due to a settlement: in May 2009, after nearly thirty years of warfare, the Sri Lankan government defeated the LTTE and ended the civil war with a military victory.

The end of the war was announced by two videos shown repeatedly on Sri Lankan television channels. The first video was of the dead body of the LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran. It lay on the Nadikadal lagoon with other corpses of LTTE guerilla leaders.
The second video was of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. After learning of Prabhakaran’s death, he cut short his trip abroad and returned home. In the video, Rajapaksa gets off his helicopter and worships the soil of mother Sri Lanka. Someone hands him a Sri Lankan flag and a Buddhist flag. The large Sinhalese crowd that gathered at the airport chants “Apē Rajā, Apē Rajā!” (Our King! Our King!).

The symbolic politics of Rajapaksa’s gesture to worship the earth of Sri Lanka strengthened the convictions of Sinhalese nationalists who compared President Rajapaksa to the second-century Sinhalese King Dutugamunu. First, Rajapaksa and Dutugamunu hailed from southern Sri Lanka, the region known as Ruhuna. Second, and more importantly, Rajapaksa had defeated the Tamil Tigers just like Dutugamunu was said to have vanquished the Tamil king Elara.

After the victory, Rajapaksa adopted a new persona: “father of the peacetime nation” (Wickramasinghe, 2014, p. 379). In his victory speech, President Rajapaksa stated in Sinhala and Tamil, “The writ of the state now runs across every inch of our territory...We have now completely defeated terrorism” (The Times of India, May 19, 2009). According to Rajapaksa and hardline Sinhalese nationalist parties, Sri Lanka did not have an “ethnic problem as such,” rather, what existed was a “terrorist problem” (Uyangoda, 2009, pp. 8–9).

In the immediate aftermath of the bloody denouement of Sri Lanka’s civil war the main political alliance in the government, the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), bolstered the process of political centralization and regime consolidation (Goodhand, 2012, p. 130). The United People’s Freedom Alliance’s popularity had grown because of its civil war victory over the LTTE. Having neutralized the threat of militant Tamil
nationalism and secessionism, President Mahinda Rajapaksa seized upon an opportune moment to strengthen his political dynasty. The war was now over but the same regime that waged the “war for peace” was now, it seemed, securely entrenched with little incentives to encourage minority office holding. How did Sri Lanka transform from a country with a new electoral system implemented in 1978 to avoid ethnic conflict, into a country marred by a twenty-six year civil war, and later, a post-war regime that embraced extremism as a strategy to maintain power?

Research Question and Argument

This thesis is concerned with the role played by centripetalist institutions before, during, and following the civil war. The research question of this thesis is: do post-conflict centripetalist institutions reinforce moderation across the ethnic divide? I argue that centripetalist institutions not tailored to a post-conflict environment tend to be unable to ameliorate ethnic conflict. As a result, various forms of exclusionary nationalism become a common feature of political competition.

Methodology

Methodologically, this thesis is based on an extensive literature review of three areas that provide a broad theoretical backdrop necessary for approaching the case of Sri Lanka. These three areas are (1) ethnic conflict in deeply divided places, (2) nationalism and competitive politics, and (3) institutional engineering and power sharing in deeply divided places. The case studies (chapters 3 and 4) are based on primary materials that include eight interviews with a variety of Sri Lankans (3 Sinhalese, 4 Tamil, and 1 Muslim); analysis of the Sinhala-language manifestos of the former and current
presidents; and translation of excerpts from Sinhala-language videos that can be accessed on the Internet. Most of these videos are political speeches given by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa as well as the leader of the Bodu Bala Sena, Gnanasara Thero, and the current president, Maithripala Sirisena. The chapters also draw upon secondary materials pertaining to Sri Lanka, such as newspaper articles, peer-reviewed articles, and monographs.

Significance of the Study

The majority of countries in the twenty-first century embrace centripetalism or consociationalism for a settlement to put an end to a major conflict. The case of Sri Lanka differs from most deeply divided places because Sri Lanka embraced a centripetalist institution before any outbreak of war. Sri Lanka is thus an important outlier in comparative politics because it was not a settlement that prompted Sri Lankan politicians to try out a power-sharing model. The case of Sri Lanka, then, diverges from the “settlement-centric” approach of centripetalists as well as consociationalists.

Defining Basic Terms: Sri Lanka, Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims

Sri Lanka is the island country located twenty-five miles off of the tip of southeastern India. At 25,332 square miles, the country is about the size of West Virgina. The term “Sinhalese” is used to identify the majority ethnic community of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese ethnic group today consists of almost seventy-five percent of the population. It is generally believed that around 500 BC the Sinhalese immigrated to the island of Sri Lanka from Northeast or Northwest India and mixed with the indigenous
communities. The Sinhalese speak the Sinhala language, which is an Indo-Aryan language. The Sinhalese practice a form of Buddhism known as Theravada Buddhism.

Sri Lanka’s largest minority (twelve percent) is the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic group. Since ancient times, Sri Lankan Tamils have lived in the northern and eastern parts of the island. To make matters more complicated, there is another group of Tamils in Sri Lanka: the Up-Country Tamils. The Up-Country Tamils immigrated to Sri Lanka in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to work on the tea, rubber, and coconut plantations. The Sri Lankan Tamils and Up-Country Tamils are predominantly Hindu. Finally, another Tamil-speaking ethnic group exists in Sri Lanka: the Sri Lankan Muslims. They comprise six percent of the population and speak a different dialect than the Sri Lankan Tamils and Up-Country Tamils.

What is a “Deeply Divided Place”?

The term “deeply divided place” appears often in this thesis. The term is used to describe a place where (1) a characteristic feature of politics are cleavages based on ethnic categories (common ancestry, common region of origin, common cultural markers, common language, etc.); (2) a small amount of groups compete for power at the center; and (3) there is a history of interethnic conflict (Horowitz, 2014, p. 5). In this thesis, I use the word “place” rather than “society” because a divided place does not only contain one society; some deeply divided places comprise parallel or segregated societies (O’Leary, 2013, p. 5). As Brenda O’Leary (2013) writes, “Deeply divided places are…sites of actual or potential “civil” or intergovernmental wars. They are where genocide, ethnic
expulsion, or coercive assimilation are threatened, or have taken place; they are the
places for which power sharing is often recommended” (Ibid.).

Outline

Chapter 2, “Review of Literature” attempts to provide a theoretical backdrop to
the question of whether post-conflict centripetalist institutions fail to promote
moderation. The literature review thus examines scholarship focused on three areas: (1)
etnic conflict in deeply divided places; (2) nationalism and competitive politics; (3)
institutional engineering and power sharing in deeply divided places. The literature
review aims to set the foundation for the following two chapters.

Chapter 3, “The Onset of Centripetalism in Sri Lanka,” focuses on the period
between 1948 and 2005 and examines a transition in the electoral system from First-Past-
The-Post (1948–1977) to the centripetal system of alternative vote (1978–2005). The
chapter highlights how Sri Lanka diverges from most studies of power sharing because
Sri Lankan politicians did not embrace a centripetalist institution for a war settlement.
They embraced centripetalism a year prior to the eruption of civil war. The reasons for
the embrace of centripetalism will be explained. The overall aim of this chapter is to
reveal that the model of centripetalism has had little impact in Sri Lanka between 1978
and 2005.

Chapter 4, “Post-War Sri Lanka: Making Extremism Pay?” turns to the post-war
context. Now that the war was over, could Sri Lanka’s centripetalist voting system make
moderation pay? I argue that centripetalism powerlessness was a major factor in the rise
of various forms of political particularistic nationalism. To bear out this argument, three
forms of nationalism will be discussed: the extremist Sinhalese nationalism of former
president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Buddhist nationalism of the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist
Power Force), and the cultural nationalism and integrationist rhetoric of current president
Maithripala Sirisena. Lastly, Chapter 5, “Conclusion,” summarizes the main findings of
this thesis, discusses a limitation of the thesis, and makes recommendations regarding the
next steps that can be taken to develop this study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goal of this thesis is to analyze why and under what conditions post-conflict centripetalist institutions fail to promote moderation. This literature review analyzes literature centered on three areas that will help provide plausible answers to this question: (1) ethnic conflict in deeply divided places; (2) nationalism and competitive politics; (3) institutional engineering and power sharing in deeply divided places. A thorough discussion of these three areas will set the foundation for the next two chapters. Effort is taken to think how the literature relates to the case studies of chapters 3 and 4, which are drawn from Sri Lanka.

Ethnic Conflict in Deeply Divided Places

Many political scientists have assumed that democracy is incompatible with deeply divided places. This idea has a long history and perhaps can be traced back to 1861, when John Stuart Mill (1958 [1861]) contended that democracy is incompatible in multi-ethnic societies because “free institutions are next to impossible in a country made of different nationalities” (p. 230). Nearly one hundred years later, political scientists in the 1950s and early 1960s still harbored ideas related to Mill’s assertion. They believed that the perils of “tribalism” and ethnic division caused the failure of democracy in the newly independent states of Africa and Asia during the post-war period (Low, 1991, pp. 272–273; see Snyder, 2000, pp. 33–36 and Chandra, 2012, p. 136). Scholars at this time tended to agree that ethnic conflicts were primordial and irrational manifestations of ancient hatred (Reilly, 2001, p. 1). Scholars, consequently, did not consider important
explanations based on the objectives and interests of those directly involved in such conflicts.

Political scientists in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries have strove to offer more plausible explanations for the failure of democracy in deeply divided places. Scholars like Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) contend that political leaders in democratic countries generally have more incentives to champion ethnic outbidding than moderation (pp. 82–86). Ethnic outbidding is the process that begins when political parties become aligned with particular ethnic groups in a democratic country. Outbidding is when they compete for the support of a given ethnic group and try to “outbid” their opponents. At this stage, if the party has no incentives to accommodate other ethnicities they may resort to strong nationalistic politics to attract votes of the hardliners (Mitchell, Evans, & O’Leary, 2009, p. 397). If this process begins it creates conditions ripe for the eruption of ethnic conflict in the form of riots or even civil wars. The phenomenon of ethnic outbidding is thus “playing the ethnic card.” Ethnic outbidding is a grave problem for intergroup relations in deeply divided places because ethnic outbidding makes it harder for a moderate multiethnic center to sustain itself against the centrifugal forces released by the “heated rhetoric of ethnic chauvinism” (Sisk, 1996, p. 17).

In the 1990s, many political scientists became interested in the “third wave” of democratization and its many instances of intra-communal violence. Samuel P. Huntington introduced the concept of the “third wave of democratization” to describe the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Spain and Portugal in 1974 and the new democracies that arose in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Huntington, 1991, pp. 21–26). One issue that still puzzles scholars of third-wave democratization is the increase in
intra-state violence and ethnic conflict (Reilly, 2001, p. 2). Most wars fought in the late twentieth century were within existing states rather than between states. Wallensteen and Sollenberg (2001) report that out of 111 ethnic conflicts during period of 1989–2000 104 were intra-state conflicts (p. 629). Sri Lanka’s civil war (1983–2009) is one example.

What is the relationship between democracy and intra-state conflict? Charles Taylor (1998), for example, maintains that exclusion (which can factor into ethnic conflict) is embedded in democracy. Taylor (1998) argues that exclusion arises in democracies because of the need for cohesion among a decision-making unit (p. 1). That is, a common identity generates exclusion because the dominant community feels uneasy about including into their group citizens who have a different language, culture, and history. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the Sinhalese Buddhist government since 1956 has excluded members of minority communities (Tamil, Muslim) who have a different language and religion. If Taylor maintains that democracy produces exclusion, Snyder (2000) contends that democracy encourages nationalist rhetoric (which can factor into ethnic conflict) because powerful national groups need to mobilize a particular ethnic group to stay in power (p. 32). The issue of nationalist rhetoric and its power to derail peace, tolerance, and democracy will be explored in detail in chapter four.

Since the term “ethnic conflict” has appeared in this chapter nine times already it is necessary to make this caveat: political scientists have often focused on a biased selection of cases and thus characterized global interethnic relations as riddled with ethnic conflict despite the fact that “peaceful and cooperative relations are by far the more typical outcome than is large-scale violence” (Laitin & Fearon, 1996, p. 715). In an influential article, Laitin and Fearon persuasively argue that in the post-Soviet world and
Africa “cases of actual ethnic violence were vastly fewer than cases of potential ethnic violence” (Ibid, p. 716). Laitin and Fearon use rational choice logic to explain the dissipation of violence when they argue that violence is often avoided because decentralized institutions attempt, often successfully, to mediate conflicts because the people who work in these institutions understand that it is in their interest to foster peaceful interethnic relations (Ibid, p. 730).

The term “ethnic conflict” can be misleading because “ethnic conflict” can imply that every member of one ethnic group attempts to murder all the members of another. Yet ethnic groups do not declare war on each other. Rather, “it is generally small factions of committed militants that execute war” or sometimes governments create the very ethnic boundaries they claim to be defending (King, 2007, p. 69). King (2007) suggests that ethnic groups can hypothetically influence politics but the reverse tends to be true: “politics can help create mobilized ethnicity in the first place” (p. 69).

But what is ethnic about ethnic conflict? I agree with Daniel Posner (2004), Charles King (2007), and Donald Horowitz (1985 [2000]) who argue that ethnic conflict is not about ethnicity per se. There is nothing inherently unique about ethnicity compared to other group identities. I contend that ethnicity can become politically salient, however, due to a variety of factors. These factors include (but are not limited to) demography (Posner 2004), policies of colonization (Horowitz 1985 [2000]), and politicians who use recent traumatic experiences to mobilize a particular group for the politicians’ benefit (King 2007).

Ethnicity may become politically important due to demography. Ethnic cleavages may become salient according to the “size of the group” relative to the “size of the arena”
More precisely, Posner (2004) contends that when the cultural cleavages that define groups are large enough to form viable coalitions that can compete for political power, politicians will attempt to mobilize these groups. The cleavage that divides groups then becomes politically salient (Posner, 2004, pp. 529–530). In chapter four, I explore how demography is crucial to the outcomes of centripetalism and electoral engineering in Sri Lanka.

Posner (2004) arrives at this conclusion when he asks why two communities were enemies in one place but not in another: the Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia but enemies in Malawi (p. 535). The Chewa and the Tumbuka communities in Malawi are adversaries, Posner (2004) suggests, because they are each large enough to construct a viable political coalition in order to gain national power (p. 538). However, because of the different group size/territory-size ratio in Zambia, the Chewa and Tumbuka communities are not large enough to create ethnic-based political alliances (p. 538). Similarly, the demographic breakdown in Sri Lanka creates a situation in which Sinhalese politicians have tended to have incentives to create exclusive ethnic-based political alliances.

Ethnicity may become politically important due to colonialism. Horowitz maintains that colonialism is at the root of ethnic conflicts in many Asian and African countries. In Asian and African countries, the colonial legacy was the environment in which were born comparisons between “backward” and “advanced” (Horowitz, 1985 [2000], p. 148). That is, Horowitz (1985 [2000]) argues that colonial rule “made ethnic identity a more important matter than it might otherwise have been (pp. 149–150). New standards of group evaluation emerged in colonized countries, Horowitz maintains, and
these standards carried over after independence and caused problems (Horowitz, 1985 [2000], p. 149).

For example, Tamils in Sri Lanka became “advanced” in colonial times because they received education in the colonizer’s language, English. After independence, Sinhalese politicians tried to mobilize the Sinhalese majority who had not received the preferential treatment accorded to the Tamils. At this time, Sinhalese politicians stoked the fears and anxieties of the Sinhalese people by claiming that the Tamils in the North would one day take over the island. Horowitz (1985 [2000]) thus argues that fears of extinction also play a role in ethnic conflict (pp. 175–178).

Another example is the influence of colonial-era policies on the Rwandan genocide. The colonial state in Rwanda created indirect rule, which put certain ethnic groups in positions of power. It also created a law-based middle ground between colonizers and colonized: the “subject races,” who became partial citizens like the Tutsis in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2001, p. 4). In Sri Lanka, the Tamils were the “subject race.” The colonizers discriminated against the subject races but also gave them administrative posts in the colony. Mamdani (2001) points out that the worst post-independence violence was aimed at subject races like the 1959 violence targeted against the Tutsis in Rwanda. (p. 5). In this way, he finds colonialism to have played a role in the violence that escalated into the 1994 genocide. Similarly, in post-independence Sri Lanka the violence has tended to be aimed at the Tamils.

Ethnicity may become politically important due to politicians efforts to capitalize on recent traumatic experiences. As chapter four will demonstrate, some politicians use past conflicts as a way to mobilize people: “Drawing lines from the past to the present is
a purely political act, not an analytical one” (King, 2007, p. 70). Contrary to common assumptions, rare are conflicts that are based on culture, language, religion, or history. “History,” King (2007) maintains, “is important mainly to the extent that leaders manipulate it to their own benefit” (p. 71).

The fundamental claim of this section is that the adjective “ethnic” in the term “ethnic conflict” tends to obfuscate the underlying factors that give rise to such conflict. I also have asserted here that there are a variety of conditions under which ethnicity becomes politically salient. These include demography, colonialist policies, and politicians who use traumatic experiences for their benefit. No one country is the same, however. Various combinations of these factors and others can create conditions that are favorable to ethnic conflict.

Nationalism and Competitive Politics

Theories that attempt to explain the rise of nationalism and ethnic conflict can be categorized into three main approaches: (1) primordialism, (2) instrumentalism, and (3) constructivism. Primordialists tend to begin with the assumption that ethnic identity is genetic and biological. Primordialists believe that ethnic identity is based on a group’s fixed language, religion, or culture (Smith, 2001, pp. 52–53; Smith, 2008, pp. 9–10). For example, in 1963, Clifford Geertz asserted that nationalism is based on relatively fixed primordial ties (assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion, and customs (pp. 107–113).

One reason the primordialist theory is problematic is because the existence of such a “primordial” cultural entity is doubtful. Second, the theory fails to account for the
inconsistent or changing nature of ethnicities. Third, the theory implausibly suggests that a sole independent variable (primordialism) decides the outcome of various dependent variables (DeVotta, 2004, p. 14). Although many assume that political scientists have largely put to rest the primordialist viewpoint, Kanchan Chandra argues that primordialism is a way of thinking about ethnic identity that still impacts theorizing in the social sciences regarding the relationship between ethnicity and political/economic outcomes (Chandra, 2012, p. 1). Further, primordialism still informs the master narratives that politicians champion and people accept as true (see Brass, 2003, p. 10; O’Leary, 2013, p. 5). Thus, primordialism lives on among the preconceptions of scholars and beliefs of people involved in ethnic conflict despite the fact that it does not work as a true explanation for the eruption of ethnic conflict.

The scholars who advocate an instrumental approach tend to agree with the premise of rational choice. Rational choice scholars argue that all individuals behave to achieve what they desire. Steven I. Wilkinson (2004), for example, discusses ways that ethnic nationalism and violence are useful political tools for individuals to achieve their objectives. According to Wilkinson (2004), politicians stir up ethnic nationalism, use violence, or even encourage tolerance to achieve their political ends (pp. 6–7). For example, if the minorities in a given country are part of an important political coalition, individuals in power will behave in such a way to protect them. Similarly, V.P. Gagnon (2004) argues that the violence in the former Yugoslavia was a strategic strategy that politicians chose. They chose to murder minority sectors of the population in order to create homogenous constituencies that would support their interests (Gagnon, 2004, p. 7).
Jack Snyder (2000) contends that nationalism has an instrumental role for elites within democracy. Snyder (2000) maintains that popular nationalism tends to arise during the earliest stage of democratization, when elites employ ethno-nationalistic agendas to compete for votes (pp. 32, 269–270). Instrumentalism in its manifestations as rational choice, however, has drawbacks because it can exaggerate two issues: (1) the power of elite individuals to create ethnic antagonism, and (2) the desire to do so to achieve electoral objectives (Varshney and Gubler, 2012, p. 198).

Constructivists challenge the primordialist assumption that ethnicity is fixed and agree, to a certain extent, with the instrumentalist argument that politicians make use of ethnic identity and nationalism for their own benefit. Yet, constructivists are not satisfied with the instrumentalist emphasis on rational choice. Constructivists argue rational choice fails to understand how nationalism came into being in the first place. Constructivists also argue ethnic identity does not become politicized only due to power-hungry politicians. Constructivists believe that phenomenon like nationalism and ethnic identity have a social origin. At the core of the constructivist argument are the assertions that (1) ethnic identities change, (2) individuals have multiple ethnic identities, (3) ethnic identities can impact processes like political competition, institutional design, state collapse, and modernization (Chandra, 2012, pp. 139–140).

Constructivists thus understand “ethnic nationalism” as a process in continuous flux. Stated differently, constructivists view nationalism as a complicated construct owing to forces related to modernization such as industrialization, mass communication, and print capitalism. Chandra (2012), in perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of constructivism to date, examines six “strains” of constructivist arguments that locate the
source of ethnic identity in (1) modernization; (2) “institutions of cognition” (institutions that create discourses that normalize ethnic identity); (3) institutions that structure incentives (institutions that attach cost and benefits to particular aspects of ethnic identities); (4) patronage-driven economies; (5) violence; and (6) an unending process of self-definition (see pp. 142–149).

Chandra (2012) describes the scholarship of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Karl Deutsch as belonging to the “modernization strain” (p. 142). Gellner (1997), for example, claims that industrialization triggered the rise of ethnic nationalism because it eradicated older forms of feudal or agricultural society and created a need for a more homogenous society with a common language and culture (Kellas, 1998, p. 52). Karl Deutsch (1966) argues that nationalism is a product of mass communication. More specifically, Deutsch (1966) singles out the development of the growth of markets and towns that strengthened systems of mass communication. Only with the creation of mass communication could people produce a collective history to be experienced as common (pp. 96–100). In other words, Deutsch claims that standardized communication makes it possible to invent communities and promote nationalism.

Benedict Anderson (1991) suggests that capitalism in Europe created the possibility for the production of mechanically produced print languages in vernaculars (p. 47). When people in Europe who spoke different dialects began to read one standardized print language in the print of books and newspapers they started to feel connected to the men and women who were simultaneously reading the same standardized language. Constructivists’ ideas are compelling but have some limitations. Political theorist Partha Chatterjee (1993) criticizes Anderson’s theory as Eurocentric. Chatterjee (1993) argues
that Anderson incorrectly assumes nationalism in colonized countries is only a “derivative” form that originated in Europe and was transplanted to colonized countries (p. 5).

Chandra (2012) labels Paul Brass’s seminal *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India* (1974) as part of the “institutions of cognition” strain of constructivist arguments (p. 143). Brass focuses on the role symbols play in the production of nationalism. Brass argues that elite consciousness (which precedes mass consciousness) and political organizations select certain symbols of ethnic identity like language and religion to create ethnic nationalism. This involves a process that Brass (1974) terms “multi-symbol congruence” (p. 10). For example, Brass argues that Sikh elites selected three sets of symbols to transform the Sikhs from a community to a nationality: (1) historical symbols derived from the history of the Sikh kingdoms prior to British invasion; (2) religious symbols that defined Sikhs in relation to Hindus, and (3) linguistic symbols associating the Sikhs with the Punjabi language written in the Gurumukhi script (Brass, 1974, p. 278). However, Sikh elites had to be careful to select facts from history that the target group would feel proud about. They thus had to exclude from their historical narratives the factional divisions in the Sikh state, traitorous actions of Sikh commanders, and the fact that Sikh kingdoms were divided against each other under the national Sikh hero, Ranjit Singh (Brass, 1974, p. 280).

Institutional Engineering and Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places

While some political scientists have analyzed how ethnicity may become politicized due to demography, colonialist policies, and the politicians’ exploitation of
recent traumatic experiences, a sub-group of political scientists have taken interest in the way institutional engineering may also be a factor in the politicization of ethnicity. At the root of studies about electoral engineering is the issue of power sharing. O’Leary (2013) defines power sharing as, “any set of arrangements that prevent one agent or organized collective agency from being the ‘winner who holds the all critical power’ whether temporarily or permanently” (p. 3). In recent years, power sharing has been implemented in peace accords and institutional settlements across the globe to remedy conflicts in deeply divided societies. For instance, international policy prescriptions have attempted to make a majority government cooperate with the minorities in places like Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Iraq. Countries like Belgium, Burundi, and Northern Ireland have implemented locally created power sharing arrangements to negotiate conflict. Power sharing has also been attempted for institutional settlements in many deeply divided places such as Cyprus, Fiji, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka (McCulloch, 2014, p. 1).

Institutions foster the creation of networks of people to forge relations with the state. Institutions create rules, norms, and standards for such relations. Reilly argues that the constant and practical behavior prompted by functioning institutions will avert uncertainty and political instability (2001, p. 5). Further, Reilly contends, “in a well institutionalized democracy, for example, the competitive nature of the political process is ideally characterized by a recurring uncertainty of outcomes, thus encouraging a ‘rule bounded’ commitment amongst political actors to the democratic process itself” (p. 5).
Lijphart (1991) argues that different forms of institutions and rules can promote major results in democracy (p. ix).

There are two major “proposed methods of amelioration” (Horowitz, 2014, p. 5) that structure the institutional rules of the game: centripetalism and consociationalism. Consociationalism is today the “dominant model of managing ethnically divided societies” (Aitken, 2007, p. 260). Consociationalism is a concept introduced by Arend M, who asserts that the most advantageous type of politics involves proportional representation, community recognition, cross-community executive power sharing, and veto powers (O’Leary, 2013, p. 25). More specifically, the main institutional characters of the consociation are (1) a “grand coalition” of political leaders, (2) mutual veto or concurrent majority rule, (3) proportionality, and (4) high degree of autonomy for the minority (Lijphart, 1977, p. 25). The grand coalition is a group that includes political leaders from all significant populations of a given country (see Lijphart, 1977, pp. 25–31). A minority veto gives a minority the right to veto any decisions, and thus they enjoy political protection. Proportionality is the strategy to allocate sought-after civil service positions and financial resources equitably among the different populations (Lijphart, 1977, pp. 38–41). Lastly, “high degree of autonomy for the minority” means that the minority rules over itself in the area most heavily populated by it (Lijphart, 1977, pp. 41–44).

Brandon Kendhammer (2015) argues that three problems have plagued consociationalism in Africa (pp. 146–148). Such problems have implications for countries outside of Africa like Sri Lanka. First, consociational systems demand the consent of political elites who are reluctant to share their power. Second, drawing on the
work of Kanchan Chandra, Kendhammer argues that supporters of consociationalism
tend to bring to the bargaining table primordialist assumptions that ethnic communities
have fixed identities. For example, in Cyprus and Lebanon citizens can only vote for
candidates assigned to their ethnic group (Kendhammer, 2015, p. 147). Ethnic identities
are in reality fluctuating identities and such primordialist assumptions tend to favor
ethnonationalist conceptions of ethnicity. Contrary to such assumptions, scholars of Sub-
Saharan Africa maintain that ethnic identities are only vehicles through which
competition for resources is expressed (Kendhammer, 2015, p. 148). Third,
consociationalists tend to argue that federal arrangement can help countries provide
communities with cultural or administrative autonomy. Yet African politicians are
dedicated to the nation-states because they fear they may lose their access to the state’s
power to make and enforce rules if a federal structure is adopted. Scholars like Donald
Horowitz argue that consociationalism is unrealistic because grand coalitions are “as rare
as the Artic rose” (Horowitz, 2002, p. 197). Horowitz contends that consociationalism is
not a solution for a deeply divided place but works only in places with resolved struggles
or of relatively moderate cleavages (O’Leary, 2013, p. 33).

The other school of power sharing is known as “centripetalism.” Centripetalism is
a concept introduced and defended by Donald Horowitz (1985 [2000]). Scholars like
Horowitz believe that politicians in deeply divided places will naturally reject
moderation. Politicians thus require incentives to favor inter-ethnic appeals (McCulloch,
2013, p. 111). Certain institutional designs, such scholars contend, are better than others
at providing incentives to politicians to champion centrist agendas that hold inter-ethnic
appeal. Centripetalism is a method of power sharing in which an electoral system
encourages majority political leaders to adopt moderate platforms that satisfy minority communities.

Although the best electoral systems to encourage moderation will vary according to circumstance, many scholars assume that centripetalism can be maintained through majoritarian preferential voting systems like Alternative Vote (AV) and a variant of Alternative Vote called Supplementary Vote (SV). Horowitz (2008), for instance, asserts that majoritarian preferential voting systems like AV and SV can lead to the formation of moderate inter-ethnic coalitions (p. 1217). Likewise, Sisk (1996) contends that the AV system has the ability to provide a “centripetal spin” to deeply divided places to create “electoral incentives for broad-based moderation by political leaders and disincentives for extremist outbidding” (p. 41).

What specifically are the AV and SV systems? They are electoral systems for which voters rank candidates according to their preferences (1, 2, 3, etc.). In these systems, if one candidate secures more than 50% of votes cast, s/he wins. If no candidate obtains 50% of the total votes during the first count the candidates with the lowest number of votes are eliminated. In the second count, the second preference of the individual voters are tallied. This process will continue until one person receives over 50% of the votes (Reilly & Reynolds, 1999, p. 49).

SV, the system in place in Sri Lanka since 1978, is a type of AV. The differences of SV lies in the amount of preferences each voter can specify. In AV, the voter can identify as many preferences as there are candidates. In SV, if there are three candidates, the voter can only list his or her first and second preference. Also, in the SV system, if there are more than three candidates, the voter can identify his or her second and third
preference, but no more. Like AV, the candidate who obtains more than 50% is declared President (Reilly, 2001, p. 118, note 11). Also like AV, if in the first count no candidate obtains 50% of the total votes, in SV, the candidates with the lowest number of votes are eliminated. Then, the second preference of the individual voters are counted. This process will continue until one candidate receives over 50% of the votes.

Why do political scientists who advocate for centripetalism favor AV and SV? Political scientists who support centripetalism believe that because AV and SV accord weight to second and third preferences politicians in deeply divided countries will have incentives to make cross-ethnic appeals. Donald Horowitz, for instance, asserts that the politicians who represent the majority ethnic group will become concerned about an election where neither candidate has 50% of the vote. In this scenario, the politician can win the election if s/he has secured the minorities’ second-preference votes in round two. As Horowitz argues,

Parties that succeed in negotiating for second and third preferences will be rewarded. The price of a successful negotiation is intergroup accommodation and compromise. The exchange of second and third preferences, based on reciprocal concessions on ethnic issues, is likely to lead to an accommodative interethnic coalition if no party can form a government alone. Under conditions of party proliferation, therefore, AV is likely to produce governments committed to accommodative policies. (Horowitz, 1991, pp. 189-190)

This thesis registers a disagreement with Donald Horowitz (1991) because he goes too far when he suggests, “the electoral system is by far the most powerful lever of constitutional engineering for accommodation and harmony in severely divided societies” (p. 163). The aim of this thesis is to use Sri Lanka as a test case. It reveals that centripetal electoral engineering in Sri Lanka was powerless between 1982 and 2015 to provide any restoration of moderation to the severely divided society.
The literature on power sharing is clearly deeply divided over whether centripetalism or consociationalism works. This thesis uses Sri Lanka as a case study of a centripetalist approach to ameliorate ethnic conflict. The following chapter turns to the presidential system of Sri Lanka. The chapter is based on the premise that presidential systems may heighten divisiveness (Cordell & Wolff, 2010, p. 148). The purpose of the chapter is to test what extent are centripetalists like Donald Horowitz correct when they argue that the electoral system is decisive in deciding whether the president’s election and office unites or divides. The chapter aims to reveal that when centripetalist institutions remain unchanged from ineffective pre-war institutions these institutions fail to foster moderation across the ethnic divide.
CHAPTER 3: THE ONSET OF CENTRIPETALISM IN SRI LANKA

Introduction

Centripetalists maintain that the optimal solution to deeply divided places is to foster interethnic relationships and offer incentives to politicians to favor moderation on issues that may divide ethnic groups. Centripetalists further maintain that governments can implement certain institutional strategies that foster moderation. For example, centripetalists tend to advocate that governments should adopt majoritarian-preferential systems as well as centrist coalitions, administrative federalism, and distribution requirements for presidential elections (McCulloch, 2014, p. 92).

Since the majority of countries turn to centripetalism or consociationalism after a settlement for a major conflict, Sri Lanka is an outlier because it adopted centripetalism at the beginning of what spiraled into a twenty-six-year civil war. Sri Lanka is thus an interesting case for comparative political scientists because it was not a settlement that caused Sri Lankan politicians to turn to power-sharing models. The case of Sri Lanka thus challenges the “settlement-centric” approach of centripetalists as well as consociationalists.

Do post-conflict centripetalist institutions reinforce moderation or produce conflict? I argue that centripetalist institutions not tailored to a post-conflict environment do not work. This chapter concurs with the claim of political scientists that divisive politics in divided societies cannot be fully understood without an attempt to grasp the significance of institutional “rules of the game” found in electoral systems through which democratic competition occurs (Lijphart, 1977; Goodin, 1996; Horowitz, 1985 [2000];
The rules of electoral systems clearly have the potential to shape particular incentives for political behavior because they influence the nature of political interaction within a given nation-state. Some political scientists, for example, contend that electoral systems encourage ethnic outbidding when they are structured so that politicians depend only on votes from their own ethnic group. Many political scientists also assume that electoral systems nurture moderation when they provide incentives to the politicians who appeal to members outside of their own ethnic group (Esman, 1994, p. 258). If these two assumptions are correct, changes in electoral systems can have an impact—negative or positive—on deeply divided places where institutional exclusion from the government tends to be accompanied by exclusion also from the national community (Horowitz, 1993, p. 18).

As discussed in the literature review, this thesis takes issue with Horowitz’s (1991) idea that the electoral system is by far the most powerful vehicle of constitutional engineering for accommodation and harmony in severely divided societies (p. 163). Yet in privileging the importance of the electoral system comparative political scientists have failed to realize the importance of designing particular settlements. In what follows, I attempt to reveal that centripetalist electoral engineering in Sri Lanka was unable to bring moderation to the severely divided society. Thus, one can argue that Horowitz overemphasizes the power of centripetal electoral systems to create harmony in divided societies.

Although the word “centripetalist” will be used to describe Sri Lanka’s presidential electoral system, to be fair to “centripetalism” it must be noted that the
electoral system of *parliament* is proportional. Thus, Sri Lanka’s electoral systems are in reality a mix of preferential and proportional systems. This thesis does not attempt to analyze the proportional system. What follows in this chapter is a history of the introduction of centripetalism in Sri Lanka’s presidential system.

First-Past-the-Post, Linguistic Nationalism, and the Commencement of the Civil War

Sri Lanka was a British colony from 1796 to 1948 and it inherited the British “Westminster” majoritarian political system. The Westminster system encouraged a conception of political power based on majoritarian principles (Bose, 2007, p. 12). The head of the government was the prime minister. Unsurprisingly, Sri Lanka’s prime minister elections resulted in governments with a majority (Sinhalese) orientation. In the Westminster system, parliamentary representatives became elected on the basis of the single member plurality system (SMP) or first-past-the-post (FPTP). Until 1982, all prime minister elections were held under FPTP (McCulloch, 2009, p. 112). In first-past-the-post, the winning candidate is one who receives the plurality of votes (not necessary the absolute majority).

Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. The dominant party for the first decade after independence was the United National Party (UNP), which D.S. Senanayake had formed in 1945. Howard Wriggins (1960) described the UNP at this time in this way: “It was...more of a coalition of distinguishable political groups [rather than ethnic-based parties]. In this respect, the parallel is closer to American political parties or to British parties in the early nineteenth or late eighteenth centuries” (p. 106). Wriggins could characterize the UNP in this way because the party at first consisted of Sinhalese and
Tamils. The members of the UNP were Western-educated and from the upper middle-class.

However, soon after independence the *political divisions* in Sri Lankan politics developed precisely according to the *ethnic divisions* in Sri Lankan society. Due to disagreements regarding communal representation the Tamil members withdrew and the UNP became a Sinhalese party. Since this development, there has never been a dominant multi-ethnic party in Sri Lanka. Ethnic outbidding became a feature of Sri Lanka’s politics from the very instant Sri Lanka’s party system started to proliferate inter-ethnically after independence in 1948. The first split occurred in 1949, when a faction from the Tamil Congress split off to create the Federal Party. Each side began to accuse one another of selling out Tamil interests. The Federal Party campaigned to establish a federal state to maximize Tamil interests, while the Tamil Congress advocated that Tamil interests could be maximized from the center (Horowitz, 2000, p. 354).

Similar intra-ethnic party proliferation occurred on the Sinhalese side when S.W.R.D Bandaranaike established the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1951. How did Bandaranaike create the SLFP? The SLFP grew out of Bandaranaike’s Sinhala Maha Sabha, a group Bandaranaike had created in 1937 to represent Sinhalese and Buddhist interests. During the late 1940s, Bandaranaike’s Sinhala Maha Sabha joined the UNP and became a major component of the UNP. Bandaranaike rose in the ranks of the UNP and became vice president. Sri Lankans thought he would succeed D.S. Senanayake as leader of the UNP. However, Senanayake had doubts about Bandaranaike and decided to prepare his nephew for the position. This decision was also influenced by the long-lasting family competition between the aristocratic Senanayake and Bandaranaike families.
Bandaranaike resigned from cabinet in 1951 and formed the SLFP in opposition to the UNP (see Wriggins, 1960, pp. 106–111).

In 1956, Bandaranaike formed an electoral coalition that managed to defeat, for the first time after independence, the UNP in the General Election. He was successful because he had mobilized the unanimous support of the Sinhalese Buddhists (Vittachi, 1958, p. 19). Bandaranaike was the first Sinhalese politician to exploit the “Westminster” majoritarian political system inherited from the British. Bandaranaike focused exclusively on mobilizing the Sinhalese Buddhist majority because he understood well he could rise to power if he tailored campaigns exclusively to the Buddhist Sinhala-speaking majority. Bandaranaike thus centered his campaign on satisfying the demands of the Buddhist constituency known in Sinhala as the *pancha maha balavēgaya* (Five Great Forces), comprising *sanga* (Buddhist monks or *bhikkus*), *veda* (Sinhala Ayurveda physicians), *govi* (farmers), *guru* (teachers), and *kamkaru* (laborers).

Meanwhile, language had become the most politically salient issue and eventually the issue of language played an important role in the eruption of ethnic conflict. Neil DeVotta (2004) argues that it was primarily Sinhala linguistic nationalism—fueled by the 1956 Official Language Act, which made Sinhala the island’s only official language—that precipitated an extreme form of ethnic outbidding to ensure the maximum benefit for the Sinhalese Buddhist community (p. 3). Few would disagree that the modern origins of linguistic nationalism in Sri Lanka can be traced to the peaceful *swabhāṣa* movement (self-language movement). The Sinhalese and Tamils were united in this movement. Both Sinhalese and Tamils participated to replace English as the official language with both Sinhala and Tamil, respectively.
The British had hoisted English on the island after taking full control in 1815. Making English the official language created cleavages among those who had resources to study the language and those who did not. Most of the white-collar jobs went to the English-speaking natives who attended British missionary schools and embraced the Christian religion. Sinhalese Buddhists often ridiculed such people with the Sinhala-language term kalu sudda (Brown Englishman).

In 1943, a leading minister in the UNP, J.R. Jayewardene, introduced a new resolution to make Sinhala the only official language. This resolution excluded Tamil. However, Parliament rejected the resolution. DeVotta (2004) writes that this rejection “evidenced that the extant institutional structure was one geared to promoting polyethnic compromise and coexistence” (p. 49).

How, then, did tolerant policies turn into the Sinhala Only Act? I attempt below to reveal how elite politicians exploited the language issue to win support. They sought to utilize institutions to implement new policies, policies that led to institutional decay. Institutional decay refers to the process that occurs when institutions resort to particularistic interactions rather than dispassionate interactions with various ethnic groups of a nation-state. The greater particularism, Neil DeVotta (2004) maintains, the more likely those who are marginalized will mobilize in opposition (p. 16).

Discussions of elite exploitation of the language issue invariably turn again to Bandaranaike. He recognized that pro-Sinhala-language sentiment and the marginalization of Tamils could be manipulated for political benefit. Bandaranaike campaigned to make Sinhala the only official language, whereas the UNP leaders initially advocated making Sinhala and Tamil the twin official languages of the country.
Bandaranaike’s campaigns set off a vicious cycle of ethnic outbidding: the UNP, fearing it would lose its Buddhist electorate, changed its position radically, declared its support for “Sinhala Only,” and became anti-Tamil (Horowitz, 2000, p. 357).

Shortly after Bandaranaike’s victory he enacted the “Official Language Act” amid extremist campaigns for “Sinhala Only.” Parliament passed it with a majority vote five days later. The Official Language Act prescribed how to switch the language of the government from English to Sinhala within four years and six months (Warnapala, 1974, p. 296). The Sinhala Only Act empowered the Sinhalese but it disenfranchised the Tamil population. The original legislation had contained provisions about the role that the Tamil language would have in public life. But Bandaranaike dropped all these clauses after a Sinhalese extremist went on a hunger strike in the Parliament and proclaimed that such a clause was a conspiracy to make Sri Lanka part of Tamil-speaking India (Manor, 1989, p. 261). The day parliament passed the bill, the Tamil Federal Party spearheaded a hartal (suspension of normal business) in Tamil-majority areas (Manor, 1989, p. 261).

The situation worsened when Bandaranaike dissolved pacts that promised to give concessions to the Tamil community. In 1957, Bandaranaike negotiated with the Tamil Federal Party to give the Tamil language more recognition in the country’s affairs. He signed a pact called the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact. However, he abruptly dissolved the pact after the Tamil Federalists in Jaffna tarred over the Sinhala-language letters on a new fleet of buses. Because Bandaranaike abandoned the pact, in June of 1958, Tamils in the Federal Party began a satyagraha (non violent resistance) campaign. To prevent Tamil resistance, Sinhalese mobs murdered innocent Tamil civilians in Colombo, along the western coast, and in the Central Province (Wickramasinghe, 2014,
p. 273). These were the first modern large-scale murderous rampages against the Tamils.

In 1959, a Buddhist monk assassinated Bandaranaike when he advocated to pass the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act (De Silva, 1981, p. 524). In the March and July elections of 1960, the UNP and SLFP targeted Sinhalese votes that would enable them to secure power based on Sinhalese dominance. Bandaranaike’s wife, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, campaigned in these elections as a “weeping widow” (DeVotta, 2004, pp. 122–123) and became the world’s first woman prime minister. In 1960, Mrs. Bandaranaike’s government officially implemented the Sinhala-Only policy throughout the entire nation. She ordered all the government institutions such as the Parliament, courts, civil service, and military to conduct all business in the Sinhala language. Tamil speakers now had to learn Sinhala to get a government job. Forced to learn a foreign language, the Tamils began to increase their efforts to mobilize against the government.

During the 1960s and 1970s the SLFP regime deeply marginalized the Tamil population and caused a more violent Tamil backfire. The same structure of political competition that brought Bandaranaike into power in 1956 continued to make “it incumbent on each of the major Sinhalese parties to champion the cause of Sinhalese ethnic assertion against Tamil interests” (Horowitz, 1990, p. 462). A variety of factors contributed to the marginalization of Tamils, such as (1) government-sponsored programs that resettled Sinhalese in Tamil areas; (2) ratification of two new constitutions (in 1972 and 1978) by Sinhalese parliamentary majorities whose large majority enabled them to ignore Tamil concerns; and (3) the constitution of 1972 that gave the foremost place to
Buddhism as the religion of the country, which further marginalized the Hindu Tamils (McCulloch, 2014, p. 111).

In response to the tyranny of the majority, in 1976, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a coalition of all the dominant Tamil political parties—The Federal Party, Tamil Congress, and Ceylon Worker’s congress of Indian Estate Tamils—issued on May 1976 the Vaddukoddai Resolution. It was the first document that demanded Eelam, a sovereign, secular, and separate state for Tamils. The resolution identified the Northern and Eastern provinces as the land of Eelam and promised to award citizenship to all Tamil-speaking people on the island of Sri Lanka.

Amid calls for a separate Tamil state, the UNP successfully defeated the SLFP in the parliamentary election of 1977. The UNP responded to the TULF demand for Eelam by promising to address the problems of the Sri Lankan Tamils. With a five-sixth majority in parliament the UNP introduced a new constitution in which ethnic integration was a central feature (Bandarage, 2009, p. 91). The constitution abandoned the Westminster parliamentary system and established a presidential system in which an executive president would be elected directly by alternative vote (discussed in more detail below). Further, the government replaced FPTP voting in parliament elections to a complicated system of proportional representation in which “the number of representatives to the parliament was determined by the proportion of votes gained by the contesting political parties” (Bandarage, 2009, p. 92). This was seen as an attempt to reverse the FPTP’s promotion of majoritarianism.

However, the terrifying acts of violence against the Tamils between 1977 and 1983 left little doubt that the UNP never truly intended to accommodate the Tamils. In
1977 an anti-Tamil riot broke out after the parliament elections. Sinhalese mobs, angered about the TULF’s demand for secession, looted and set fire to Tamil shops in the south. Tamil gangs in the north responded by killing Sinhalese people in the Jaffna peninsula. According to one estimate, 97 Tamils and 24 Sinhalese were killed in the riots of 1977. Asoka Bandarage (2009) argues, “the 1977 violence deepened the ethnic polarization and strengthened the separatists’ cry for Eelam” (p. 76).

The riot of 1977 was bad but the anti-Tamil pogroms of 1983 were the cataclysmic events of the ethnic conflict (Thiranagama, 2011, p. 81). It was not only the moment when the Tamils lost faith in the Sri Lanka state but also the moment at which most scholars trace the commencement of the civil war. These anti-Tamil pogroms are known collectively referred to as “Black July.” Black July was a well planned and probably a government-aided massacre against Tamils (see Tambiah 1986). As Nira Wickramasinghe (2014) writes: “The late intervention of President J.R. Jayewardene to appeal for cessation of the violence, and other telling evidence, suggest pre-planning and organization [by the government] in the July events” (pp. 299–300).

Black July came into being after Tamil militants who called themselves the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed thirteen Sinhala soldiers and brought their corpses to Colombo. In response, organized Sinhalese gangs armed with voters’ lists and detailed addresses of Tamil-owned shops, houses, and factories murdered thousands of Tamil civilians and left tens of thousands homeless (Tambiah, 1986, pp. 19–33). Due to the riots, many Tamils fled to the north, which created further geographic polarization in the country. The 1983 riots were the grounds for the LTTE’s insistence that Tamil people should have their own country (Thiranagama, 2011, p. 81). Many Tamil youth
became militants against the Sinhalese government because of their terrifying experiences.

Why Centripetalism *Before* a War?

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the case of Sri Lanka challenges the “settlement-centric” approach of centripetals because Sri Lanka adopted centripetalism before a war broke out. Sri Lanka implemented a centripetalist institution in 1978: the preferential voting system of Alternative Vote. As the ethnic conflict was worsening in 1978, the UNP established a new constitution that replaced First-Past-The-Post with a preferential voting system for a separately elected presidency. Centripetalists advocate that preferential voting systems are powerful methods to ameliorate conflict in divided places. The adoption of alternative vote means that moderates are willing (1) to appeal for the votes of members of groups other than their own and (2) to form an “interethnic vote-pooling coalition” (Horowitz, 2014, p. 9). Donald Horowitz argues that governments adopt centripetalist methods like alternative vote, “when minority votes are valuable, generally because the majority is divided between parties competing for its vote” (Horowitz, 2014, p. 9).

When one asks “why did the UNP change the electoral system from FPTP to a preferential system?” the answer appears to support Horowitz’s contention: in this case the UNP was competing with the SLFP and then UNP came to see the Tamil vote as valuable. C.R. de Silva, for instance, argues that the UNP adopted the preferential system because they believed they would obtain the second preference-votes from the large
Tamil minority, who preferred to vote for the more moderate majority party (the UNP at the time) rather than the more Sinhalese nationalist SLFP:

The UNP hopes and the SLFP fears that the second preference of the minorities, especially the Tamil minority, would go largely to the UNP candidate and thus secure his election. The current political alliance between the UNP and the CWC (Ceylon Workers’ Congress) representing the estate (Indian) Tamils has reinforced this feeling. (De Silva, 1979, p. 199)

Benjamin Reilly also suggests that the UNP assumed the Tamils and other minorities would vote for the UNP for the same reason:

The real reason for the SLFP’s objection to the new system appeared to be their well-founded concern that the preferences of Tamil and other minorities would flow to the more moderate UNP candidate under a preferential ballot. (Reilly, 2001, p. 119)

In *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985 [2000]) Horowitz’s explanation for the shift in Sri Lanka is more vague than those offered by De Silva and Reilly because Horowitz portrays the shift as something attractive to “Sri Lankans” (which Sri Lankans?) and uses passive tense in his sentences (“plurality elections was less attractive to Sri Lankans”) rather than describing how the UNP adopted the system as a political strategy:

With at least several parties, however, plurality election of the president was less attractive to Sri Lankans, for the plurality achieved by a candidate might be a small fraction of the total vote. Only once in seven Sri Lankan general elections since independence had any party secured more than 30–40 percent. Accordingly, it was provided that the president must have a majority. But how to arrive at a majority if there are several candidates? For this purpose, a preferential or alternative vote system was adopted. (Horowitz, 1985 [2000], pp. 639–640)

Although Horowitz does not specify the desires of the UNP in this passage, later in *Ethnic Groups and Conflict* he argued that the UNP government adopted preferential vote “to prevent capture of the presidency by a candidate with a low plurality” (Horowitz, 2000, p. 646). Thus, one may deduce from this assertion that Horowitz also believed that
the UNP were confident that they could secure the vote of the minorities under a preferential system.

Although Horowitz did not go into detail regarding why the UNP switched the system from FPTP to preferential, he asserted “prudent presidential candidates could hardly ignore Tamil interests under such conditions” (Horowitz, 1990, p. 463). Supporters of the new preferential system argued that if a successful candidate needed an absolute majority to get elected, presidential candidates would look beyond their own party or ethnic group for support so that “the votes of minority groups would be decisive in determining the winning candidate” (Reilly, 2001, p. 117).

Horowitz (1990) asserted these changes could transform the nature of the party system into a more cross-ethnic system in which moderation, rather than ethnic outbidding, would be encouraged (p. 463). For example, in 1985, Horowitz (1985 [2000]) contended, “if a presidential system is designed so that the electoral formula encourages moderation and penalizes ethnic exclusivism, as it was in Nigeria and Sri Lanka, the potential for presidential systems to foster accommodation seems considerable” (p. 647).

No Centripetalist Outcomes During the Civil War

During the civil war, four presidential elections were held: in 1988, 1994, 1999, and 2005, respectively, under the preferential voting system. These elections were conducted amid attempts to reach a negotiated settlement between the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese Buddhist) government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. This section aims to reveal that centripetalism was not tested during this period largely due to settlement-related violence.
An analysis of centripetalism during the wartime elections needs to be understood against the backdrop of negotiated settlements like the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (1987–1994) and the Norwegian Ceasefire Agreement (2002–2008). Allow me to first consider how the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord serves as examples of the ways in which the centripetalist institution of alternative vote was never implemented due to the civil war context. In July 1987, the Indian government attempted to end the Sri Lankan conflict through a political settlement. The settlement, known as the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, was signed by the Sri Lankan president at the time, J.R. Jayawardena, longtime member of the United National Party (UNP). Jayawardena signed the accord without consulting Sri Lankan citizens or the parliament. The settlement was also signed by the leaders of four Tamil militant groups in the north: the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).

From an outsider’s perspective the accord seemed successful because it was the first settlement to declare that Sri Lanka is a “multi-ethnic” society (Wickramasinghe, 2014, p. 199). As part of this declaration, the accord recognized that Sri Lankan Tamils had historically habituated the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It also resolved to unite the Northern and Eastern Provinces into one administrative unit with an elected provincial council, chief minister, and board of ministers. And it asked for a referendum to see if the people in the Eastern Province wanted to be united or separate from the North (they wanted to be separate). The President of Sri Lanka was given the power to
postpone such a referendum, however. The accord further ensured Tamil would become an official language.

Once signed, the Indo-Lanka accord stated that all hostilities were to come to an end within 72 hours: the Tamil militant groups agreed to surrender arms and the Sri Lankan security forces agreed to be confined to their barracks. The Sri Lankan government agreed to lift the state of emergency by August of 1987. India also resolved not to take actions that harmful to the security of Sri Lanka. They make this promise because they had air dropped relief supplies on the Jaffna Peninsula in June 1987 without the Sri Lankan government’s permission.

The accord made resolutions that exacerbated Sri Lankan fears of Indian expansionism (Wickramasinghe 2014, p. 192) and subsequently triggered a vicious cycle of killings and counter killings among the Sinhalese between 1988 and 1989. These killings amounted to the highest average death toll of any conflict in the world at the time (Bandarage, 2009, p. 142).

Why did many Sinhalese parties argue the Indo-Lanka accord was India’s strategy to control Sri Lanka? First, the accord made certain that India could decide who uses the Trincomalee harbor in north-east Sri Lanka. Second, the Indo-Lanka Accord ensured that the Trincomalee oil tank farm would be a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka. Third, it declared that no foreign broadcasting facilities based in Sri Lanka could be used for military or intelligence operations (see Bandarage, 2009, p. 133–134). In July 1987, 7000 soldiers from India arrived in Sri Lanka to assist in the termination of war hostilities. These soldiers were known as the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).
Although the international community hailed the Indo-Sri Lanka accord as a diplomatic breakthrough, the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord not only aggravated unease about Indian expansionism, it also ignored the complex nature of Sri Lanka’s diversity. More specifically, the accord failed to recognize differences between the Northern and Eastern Provinces: thirty-two percent of the Eastern Province is populated by Tamil-speaking Muslims, who identity as a separate ethnic group. The Indo-Lanka accord, however, lumped the Muslims and Sri Lankan Tamils into one “Tamil” ethnic group. Further, the accord overlooked the fact that the Muslims and the Eastern Tamils had no desire to form a united state with the Northern Province.

The violence that the accord triggered was not violence between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. The violence broke out in 1987 because of the insurgency of the Marxist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP). The JVP predominantly comprised unemployed Sinhalese Buddhist men from poor and low caste families from the Southern, North Central, and Uva provinces. (They had conducted an insurgency in 1971 against the United National Party.) The JVP virulently opposed the Indo-Lanka Accord because they believed the Accord (and the presence of the IPKF) would eventually subject Sri Lanka to Indian expansionism and Tamil Eelam. Since the JVP insurgency of 1971 the JVP often campaigned against Indian expansionism. The JVP thus took the Accord as an opportunity to condemn the Sri Lankan Government as “henchmen” of India. The JVP accused President Jayawardena as a betrayer of the Sri Lankan motherland.

Subsequently, the JVP began to assassinate Sinhalese politicians who they believed supported the accord. With the IPKF in the north, the Sri Lankan government
moved their soldiers to the south to control the growing anti-accord insurgency. The JVP blacklisted and killed hundreds, maybe thousands, of Sinhalese people they suspected of being in support of the accord. They murdered armed service personnel, police officers and their relatives, politicians, media personalities, government officials, and Buddhist monks. By November of 1988 the JVP had created near anarchy in the country and had created a mini government in the south.

Having explained the background I can turn to the election of 1988. Given widespread sympathy for the anti-Indian and anti-Eelam cause among the majority Sinhalese, it is not a surprise that the victorious candidate in the presidential election of December 1988 was Ranasinghe Premadasa, who vehemently opposed the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. At this time, the “centripetalist” preferential voting system had no influence. The “election” was hardly even a democratic election. The JVP ordered everyone to boycott the elections and intimidated anyone who voted. In the north, the Tamil militants similarly ordered all to boycott the elections. Thus, the 1988 elections were the lowest poll recorded in Sri Lanka: only 50-55 percent of registered voters voted (Bandarage, 2009, p. 142). In the elections of 1994 and 1999 centripetalism was not put to the test due to the violent context of the civil war.

How the War Ended

Three major events led up to the final attack that ended Sri Lanka’s civil war. First, in February 2002, the LTTE and Government of Sri Lanka signed the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with Norway’s mediation. Both parties agreed to abstain offensive military operations. However, there were frequent violations between the parties between
2002 and 2007. In October 2004, for example, the UNICEF reported 35,116 cases of child recruitment to the LTTE army during the peace process (Höglund, 2005, p. 166). Further, 3,830 violations were reported to have been carried out by the LTTE and 351 violations by the Sri Lankan government between February 2002 and April 2007 (McCulloch, 2009, pp. 110–111).

The second major development that led to the end of the civil war occurred in March 2004, when the LTTE split into two factions, one in the north and one in the east. LTTE military commander of the east, Colonel Karuna Amman broke from the LTTE. He created the new party TamilEelam Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) (and later joined the government of Sri Lanka) (Höglund, 2005, p. 163). This was a major blow to the LTTE’s collective military power and the LTTE had to recruit more child soldiers to have a necessary amount of soldiers (McCulloch, 2009, p. 111).

The third major development occurred on January 2, 2008, when the Sri Lankan government pulled out of the six-year ceasefire agreement and returned to war (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 59). This was due to the strategy of Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, the Defense Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. Mahinda Rajapaksa claimed, “I will not stop until terrorism is defeated,” (Bureau Report, 2008, para 4), promised he would destroy the LTTE by the end of 2008, and doubled the defense budget to $1.5 billion, which was about 5.8 percent of the GDP (Kahn, 2008, para 5).

The Rajapaksa regime subsequently rejected all peace initiatives, redefined the war as a “terrorist” issue, and became committed to ending the war at all costs (Wickramasinghe, 2014, pp. 354–355). At this time, the government not only aimed to military defeat the LTTE but it also destroyed conquered areas, distorted the boundary
between Tamil civilian and Tamil Tiger, and hid the conflict from the media. On May 19, 2009 President Rajapaksa announced that the Sri Lankan army had defeated the LTTE and ended the civil war. NGOs like the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International criticized the Sri Lankan government for sacrificing innocent Tamil lives to decisively finish off the LTTE.

Regarding the 2005 election Alison McCulloch (2009) argues that it “highlights the problem of electing a powerful president in a deeply divided polity” (p. 116). The electoral system in use for the presidential election remained the Supplementary Vote (SV) and as usual the competition in the 2005 presidential election was between two candidates from the two dominant Sinhalese parties: Mahinda Rajapaksa for the SLFP and Ranil Wickramasinghe for the UNP. Also, the election of 2005, like every Sri Lankan election held under Supplementary Vote, did not progress to a second round.

For voters, the election meant a choice between two opposites: Wickramasinghe was a product of the urban elite, endorsed international mediation, and was willing to enter into talks with the LTTE. Rajapaksa was a product of rural culture, articulated suspicion regarding the international community, and advocated for an undivided country. Although Wickramasinghe and Rajapaksa’s election campaigns made promises to voters about finding a solution to the conflict Rajapaksa championed a more hardline attitude (McCulloch, 2009, p. 116). For example, in Rajapaksa’s 2005 election platform he called for a suppression of separatism. Further, Rajapaksa argued that the international interventions of the past years only made the conflict more complex (SLFP 2005).

Because the election was held during the civil war, the voter turnout in the north was reduced to almost nothing. In the north, the LTTE boycotted the election and issued
a joint statement with the TNA (Tamil National Alliance) that it would be “a futile 
exercise to show any interest in the election” (European Union Election Observation 
Mission, 2005, p. 44). The Tamil turnout was extremely low because the LTTE 
imintimidated potential voters in the Northern and Eastern provinces and because the Sri 
Lankan government did not place polling stations in LTTE-controlled areas, which forced 
Muslims and Tamils to travel long distances to caste votes. Consequently, the voter 
turnout in Tamil districts was less than 2% out of 70,000 registered voters (Mishler et al. 
2007, p. 208). Mishler et al (2007) reported that one ballot was casted from the 90,000 
registered voters in the large Tamil town of Kilinochchi (p. 208). Wickramasinghe was 
the preferred candidate in the Tamil populated areas: “78% voted for Wickramasinghe 
compared to 20% for Rajapaksa” (Ibid.).

Rajapaksa won the election, however, because he gained the vote from the 
Sinhalese majority. He had secured deals with two key nationalist Sinhalese parties—the 
Marxist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya, a party 
comprised of Buddhist monks. Forming this alliance helped Rajapaksa secured 50.3% of 
the vote against 49.4% votes for Wickramasinghe (Department of Elections, 2005).

The 2005 election is thus a reminder that the centripetal device of a majoritarian 
preferential system like Supplementary Vote is powerless in the context of a protracted 
ethnic war. Sinhalese candidates did not make any attempt to obtain transfer votes. In 
deeply divided places like Sri Lanka, “minorities do not always adhere to centripetal 
logic and vote for the other side, nor do candidates from the majority always feel 
compelled to reach out to minorities” (McCulloch, 2013, p. 100).
Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter focused on the transition in electoral system from FPTP (1948–1977) to the centripetal system of alternative vote. The chapter emphasized that Sri Lanka is an outlier because it was not a settlement that influenced Sri Lankan politicians to embrace a centripetalist institution. Rather, a year before the eruption of civil war, Sinhalese politicians established alternative vote because they thought that they, as the moderate Sinhalese party, could obtain the votes of the minorities. The chapter has further attempted to reveal that when post-war power-sharing institutions remain unchanged from ineffective pre-war institutions these institutions fail to foster moderation across the ethnic divide. Since centripetalism has not made moderation pay, this chapter concurs with Bernard Grofman’s (2013) argument that “Donald Horowitz’s view of its [centripetalism’s] expected moderating effects can be shown to confuse potential with actuality, and he is not sufficiently mindful of the contextual factors that must hold if the alternative vote is to work as he thinks it will to foster moderation” (p. 69). Thus, Allison McCulloch (2013) rightly maintains that the model of centripetalism must be reconfigured as a framework for manage or prevent mild conflict but not a model to solve deep divisions (p. 109). The fate of Sri Lanka is a lesson to leaders of civil society movements and electoral engineers: it is imperative to take the failure of electoral systems seriously in order to foster long-term political transformation and democratization.
CHAPTER 4: POST-WAR SRI LANKA: MAKING EXTREMISM PAY?

Introduction

Scholars who advocate for centripetalism generally assume that centripetalist institutions are best for post-war contexts. For example, Donald Horowitz contends that preferential electoral systems offer benefits in conflict settlements, benefits that non-preferential systems cannot provide (Cordell & Wolf, 2009, p. 148). Yet Sri Lanka, unlike most countries, did not adopt the centripetalist electoral system after the military victory. Rather, it already had inherited the centripetalist system in 1978 when the UNP adopted the new constitution. The centripetal institution of alternative vote has remained unchanged to the current day.

In *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Donald Horowitz (2000 [1985]) argues that the violence of Black July in 1983 “was no reflection on the new constitutional arrangements, which had not really been tested” (p. 641). Yet Horowitz (2000 [1985]) believed that the Tamil second preferences, “should ultimately cement coalitions of commitment between the Tamil parties and the more conciliatory of the main Sinhalese parties” (p. 642). In this chapter, the post-war context will be examined. With the war over, could Sri Lanka’s centripetalist voting system finally make moderation pay? I argue that centripetalism powerlessness was a major factor in the rise of various forms of political nationalism.
Limitations of Centripetalism in Sri Lanka

Why does centripetalism fail to make moderation pay in Sri Lanka? What are the limitations that hinder the successful operation of centripetalism? The civil war’s impact on elections is an obvious answer, however other more general factors are involved. Allison McCulloch (2014) concludes that, “context matters” (p. 143).

More specifically, McCulloch maintains it is difficult for centripetalism to function when divisions between ethnic groups are deep because voters in societies with high levels of violence will not act as “vehicles of moderation” (McCulloch, 2013, p. 107). As McCulloch (2014) argues, “…in situations of deep division, centripetal institutions are often unlikely to cultivate the sort of moderation required in order to promote political stability” (p. 145). For example, in deeply divided societies majority politicians can be labeled as “traitors” if they are extra accommodative to minorities. Thus, centripetal institutions are unlikely to foster moderation.

McCulloch also contends that centripetalism cannot lead to moderation in contexts where a majority has a strong demographic superiority. In places like Sri Lanka, the majority is considerably larger than the minority populations. For example, let us take a look at Sri Lanka’s demography: the three main ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims (fig. 1):
Figure 1. Demographic Map of Sri Lanka (Kondrashov, 2013).

The term “Sinhalese” is used to identify the majority ethnic community, which today comprises roughly 75% of the population. The Sinhalese, here represented in shades of purple, are mostly Buddhists and predominantly located in the southern and western parts of the country. The term “Tamil” is used to identify the largest minority group, mostly Hindus, who make up roughly 18%. The colors yellow and orange indicate the Tamil populations. The Tamils in the North consider this territory as their ancestral homeland. Finally, the Muslim community makes up approximately 6% of the
population. They are concentrated along the eastern coast and represented here with the color green (Mishler, Finkel, & Peiris, 2007, p. 206). In this demographic situation, with the Sinhalese majority making up 75% of the population, Sinhalese politicians have had incentives to cater only to the Sinhalese majority in order to win elections since they do not necessarily need the Tamil/Muslim vote to get elected. McCulloch (2014) thus contends, “The demographic superiority of the Sinhalese facilitated the adoption of the Supplementary Vote, which, while it gives the illusion of minority consideration, offers only the mildest of incentives for moderation on the part of the majority group” (p. 145).

Bose contends that the territorial concentration of Tamils is also a factor:

[Due to the territorial concentration of Tamils in north], in the rest of Sri Lanka, which contained the vast majority of electoral districts and where national electoral battles were won or lost, Tamil voters were not a factor that needed to be taken into consideration by vote-seeking Sinhalese politicians. (Bose, 2007, p. 23)

Regarding limitations on centripetalism in Sri Lanka, Horowitz seems to agree with McCulloch that “context matters.” However Horowitz’s argument is that the conditions in Sri Lanka were “abnormal” because (1) the main Tamil party at that point, The Tamil United Liberation Front was excluded from parliament; (2) Tamil separatist violence had commenced in earnest; and (3) the Sinhalese and Tamils were so deeply polarized that no electoral system could transform voters into vehicles of moderation (see Horowitz, 1990, p. 463). DeVotta (2000) adds that the dictatorial presidential powers instituted by the new constitution also contributed to the disenfranchisement of the Tamils (p. 68). McCulloch (2014) further points out that although the preferential system was adopted in 1978 it was only first used in the 1982 election, just one year before the civil war erupted (p. 111).

It will be instructive to now provide a summary of the results of all seven elections held under the centripetalist system of supplementary vote. Table 1 below reveals that two Sinhalese parties (UNP and SLFP) dominated competition in every election held under supplementary vote between 1982 and 2015. More importantly, every election was decided in the first round. Political scientists tend to assume that in alternative vote the parties rewarded will be the ones that work to obtain the second- or third-preference vote of the minority populations. However, in the Sri Lankan scenario, where the election never moves to the second round, Sinhalese politicians have no fear of losing in an election because of second/third round votes. They thus have no incentives to make cross-ethnic appeals. One may conclude that centripetalism in the form of a presidential preferential voting system has made no impact on political competition in Sri Lanka between 1982 and 2015.
Table 1. Results of Sri Lankan Presidential Elections, 1982-2015

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**Notes:**
- UNP: United National Party
- SLFP: Sri Lanka Freedom Party
- JVP: Joint People’s Front
- Other: Other Parties
- NDF: National Democratic Front
- SLMC: Sri Lanka Maha Sanyasaya Congress

**Results:**
- **1982 (first round):** UNP 52.9%
- **1988 (first round):** UNP 50.4%
- **1994 (first round):** UNP 35.9%
- **1999 (first round):** UNP 42.7%
- **2005 (first round):** UNP 48.4%
- **2010 (first round):** NDF (UNP) 40.15%
- **2015 (first round):** UNP 51.20%

**Other:**
- **JVP:** 4.2%
- **SLFP:** 4.6%
- **Other:** 1.8%

**NDF (UNP):**
- 40.15%
The First Post-War Election

As stated in chapter 3, Horowitz believes alternative vote in Sri Lanka will create a situation in which two closely matched Sinhalese parties will need Tamil votes in a second round to secure victory. As Horowitz argues,

The second preference system for the election of the president in Sri Lanka ought to have the same moderating effect as the Nigerian scheme had. In Sri Lanka, every voter has to indicate second and third preferences for president. If no candidate secures a majority, then the second preferences are reallocated to form the majority. That means that in a competition between two closely matched Sinhalese parties, which is usually the case, Tamil voters may decide the election. (Horowitz, 1990, p. 127, italics mine)

However, the election of 2010 reveals that there were not “two closely matched” Sinhalese parties because the SLFP took 57.8% of the vote compared to the UNP’s 40.15%. The electoral rules of alternative vote clearly did not facilitate minority influence: Rajapaksa obtained only a quarter of votes from the Tamil-majority areas of Jaffna and Vanni. Further, turnout was limited to 25% in Jaffna (McCulloch, 2014, p. 2).

Still, after taking into account McCulloch’s argument that context matters, one may ask why did the centripetalist system of alternative vote have no moderating effect on the post-war elections? If there were “free and fair” elections after the war why did the post-war elections not move into a second round in which Tamil votes proved crucial? There are a few plausible reasons. The first answer lies in the popularity of Rajapaksa. He had the overwhelming support of the Sinhalese who credited Rajapaksa not only for ending the twenty-six year civil war but for refusing to compromise with the LTTE.

The second plausible reason why centripetalism fails in the post-war context is that alternative vote is the only centripetalist institution. Perhaps if Sri Lanka establishes more centripetalist institutions, alternative vote can have more “horsepower” to
encourage moderation. It is important to remember that centripetalism refers to a *variety of strategies* to ameliorate ethnic conflict, such as regional distribution requirements in presidential elections, centrist coalitions, and federal arrangements intended to bridge the ethnic divide (McCulloch, 2014, p. 5). One could persuasively argue that because Sri Lanka does not have regional distribution requirements—which would require presidential candidates to obtain not only the majority but also a particular percentage of votes from the Tamils in the North—the alternative vote has little power to lead to moderation.

The third possible reason why centripetalism fails in the post-war context is because in the 2010 election, moderation would have been political suicide for Rajapaksa. It would have been unthinkable for Rajapaksa’s supporters to see Rajapaksa form a coalition with Tamil parties right after his government worked to defeat the LTTE with a military victory. Rajapaksa knew that the majority of the Sinhalese, who supported Rajapaksa for violently ending the civil war, would have felt betrayed if Rajapaksa attempted to form a coalition with Tamil parties. The extremists would have labeled him a *koṭiyā* ([Tamil] Tiger). As Snyder (2000) argues, “granting equal civil rights to ethnic minorities would thus threaten the nationalist ideology of the state elite, which becomes locked into a rigid definition of state interest centering on the special position of the dominant ethnic group” (p. 79).
The Lack of Centripetalist Outcomes: Nationalism in the Post-War Context

As stated in the thesis introduction, the main research question is under what conditions do centripetalist institutions fail to provide a solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka? I have argued that when post-war centripetalist institutions remain unchanged from ineffective pre-war institutions these institutions fail to foster moderation across the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka. As a result, various forms of nationalism become a common feature of political competition. Now, allow me to discuss such forms of nationalism, forms that coincided with 2010’s first post-war election.

By 2010, the civil war was over but twenty-six years of war (1983–2009) cannot be forgotten easily. The Sinhalese still feared that the LTTE was going to rise up again and attempt to establish Eelam. To garner Sinhalese support and votes, Rajapaksa’s election focused to a great extent on “his” civil war victory. The strategy was evident in the motto of Rajapaksa’s post-war election campaign: “Be grateful and do your duty” (kalaguna salakamu yutukama iṭukaramu). The motto instructed Sri Lankan citizens to be grateful that Rajapaksa’s party defeated the Tamil Tigers. It also instructed the citizens to carry out their “duty” to vote for Rajapaksa. The civil war victory strategy was also evident when Rajapaksa held the Presidential election early. It is likely that he did so to capitalize on his civil-war victory, still fresh in the minds of the Sinhalese.

Rajapaksa harnessed Sinhalese nationalism to mobilize Sinhalese votes in his second manifesto, which he published before the 2010 election. The manifesto was entitled *Mahinda Chintana Idiri Dākma: Alut Šrī Lankāvak* (*Mahinda’s Vision for the Future: A New Sri Lanka*, 2010). Consider, for example, this passage,
During the era of King Parakramabahu [r. 1153–1186] it was our land that possessed the [greatest] navy power in the [Asian] region. I strongly believe that the blood and heritage of these fearless navy leaders and creators remain within our children. I will use this heritage and power as our foundation, and I will take steps in the upcoming decade to transform Sri Lanka into a naval [economic] center in the Southern Silk Route. (Rajapaksa, 2010, p. 9)

Here, Rajapaksa attempted to connect to the Sinhalese constituency with nationalist rhetoric. He argued that the same blood of great medieval navy men who lived during the twelfth century (when Sinhalese King Parakramabahu unified the country under his royal suzerainty) also pulsed through the veins of the children of Sri Lanka. Later in the manifesto Rajapaksa again sought to appeal to the Sinhalese population with this anachronistic juxtaposition:

Our social foundation is the [irrigation] tank and the field. The tank sits next to the stupa [Buddhist mound-shaped relic house]. These three features are our very special heritage…I revere Mother Earth [of Sri Lanka]. My forefathers cultivated this fertile land of ours…I sincerely believe that the progress we have thus made in agriculture is as valuable as our victory in the war against terror. (Rajapaksa, 2010, 77–8, italics mine)

Here, Rajapaksa again placed the distant past into the present. He equated the state’s violent military victory against the LTTE in the twenty-first century with technological advances made by Sinhalese people in irrigation before the turn of the first millennium. Further, he alluded to a common Sinhalese nationalist trope that the special heritage of Sri Lanka’s rural society was the ancient reservoirs, the Buddhist temple, and paddy field, and he contended that the progress made in constructing ancient reservoirs (that irrigated the paddy fields) was as valuable as the victory against the LTTE.

After Rajapaksa won the 2010 election with 57.18% of the votes he continued to espouse the same nationalism that helped him to secure his second term as president. For
example, in September 2011, he stated the following at the SLFP’s 60th Anniversary celebration:

[Whether you are] Tamil or Muslim [does not matter]…I am saying everyday that there are no minorities in our party [or] within our country. We must change their [the Tamil and Muslims’] attitude. They have to feel it [that there is one nation and no minorities] (www.srichannel.com, September 4, 2011).

Here, Rajapaksa attempted to appeal to the Sinhalese majority by claiming that the concept of minority does not even exist in Sri Lanka. Such a flagrant statement effaces the existence of minorities and reveals the degree to which centripetalism had failed in Sri Lanka to provide incentives to politicians to champion moderate policies.

In addition to the Sinhalese nationalism evident in the above-mentioned texts and speeches, another form of nationalism must be discussed here. It arose in conjunction with Rajapaksa’s victory in the 2010 election: Buddhist nationalism. Buddhist nationalism emphasizes a primordial link between religion and nation, and it calls for the preservation and revival of both (Berkwitz, 2008, p. 76). Buddhist nationalism in the post-war Rajapaksa regime has received a sizeable amount of attention by journalists, but scholarly accounts are sparse. In the American media, journalists sometimes describe it with the prefix “ultra-” to suggest that it is a more intense and extremist form of Buddhist nationalism than was known to exist before in Sri Lanka (see Hume 2014).

Some scholars of Sri Lanka such as Nirmal Dewasiri contend that the post-war period marks the “continuation of the second wave of [Buddhist] nationalism,” which commenced in 1983 (Nirmal Dewasiri interview, June 8, 2015). Yet, there are two significant differences: ethnic conflict in post-war Sri Lanka, this section aims to reveal, became predominantly an attack of Buddhists against Muslims rather than a Sinhalese/
Tamil conflict. Second, unlike the Buddhist nationalism of the 1980s, globally circulating discourses that champion Islamophobia seem to have factored into the justification of Sri Lanka’s post-war Buddhist nationalism.

In Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa’s regime strategically utilized a smaller progenitor of a larger political party to inculcate Buddhist nationalism. The smaller progenitor is known as the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force, BBS). The Bodu Bala Sena grew out of the Buddhist nationalist political party, Jathika Hela Urumaya (The National Heritage Party, JHU). The members of the JHU drew influence from the ideas of two Buddhist monks: Walpola Rahula (1907–1999) and Gangoddawila Soma Thero (1948–2003). Scholars tend to credit Walpola Rahula for the mid-twentieth century transformation of the Buddhist monk’s role from social guide to political activist (Seneviratne, 1999; Abeysekara, 2002; DeVotta & Stone, 2008).

In Rahula’s influential Bhikṣuvagē Urumaya (The Heritage of the Bhikku, 1946) he argued that the role of the Buddhist monk (bhikku) was in essence political, and it had been since ancient times. Rahula argued that Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka had been involved in politics and even armed struggle since the fifth century (Seneviratne, 1999, p. 175). Rahula claimed that Buddhist monks had throughout Sri Lanka’s history advised rulers on legal matters, confirmed legitimacy on new rulers, supported military counter attacks against those who threatened Buddhism, and sacrificed their lives for their religion and nation (DeVotta & Stone, 2008, p. 35).

After the 2010 election, two members of the JHU—Kirama Wimalajothi Thero and Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara—broke away from the party. In 2012, they created the
Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force). Consisting of mainly young Buddhist monks and patriotic laymen, the Bodu Bala Sena has been described by one scholar as a “vigilante group” (Jones, 2015, p. 11) because Bodu Bala Sena members have focused a great deal of their energy upon serving as an “unofficial civilian police force against [what they perceive to be] Muslim extremism” (Bastians, February 18, 2013, *Daily FT*).

BBS, like JHU, believe that monks must become involved in politics to avert the destruction of Buddhism. Yet, their methods are very different: whereas JHU participate in Parliamentary elections, the BBS focuses on rallies and protests that have led to violence. Moreover, “JHU lacks the BBS’s specific focus on Islam as an enemy” (Jones, 2015, p. 27).

Largely due to the influence of the Bodu Bala Sena and Gnanasara, the Muslim minority (the second largest minority group in Sri Lanka) became the new target of ethno-religious hatred and violence from those claiming to preserve the Sinhalese Buddhist nation, race, and culture from the incursion of Islamic fundamentalism (Jones, 2015, p. 10). Why did Buddhist nationalists begin to stigmatize Muslims? First, one could argue that Rajapaksa needed a new “other” to mobilize the right-wing Sinhalese demographic group to maintain his power. V.P. Gagnon Jr. has written about a similar, albeit more extreme, situation in Yugoslavia when Serb nationalists began to murder all non-Serbs and then even targeted the more moderate Serbs. The ethnic violence, Gagnon argues, was an attempt by elites to force a reconceptualization of a fixed ethnicity to achieve political ends (2004, p. 8).
The secretary of the BBS and the most vocal leader is Gnanasara. Many of his hate speeches directed at other Sri Lankan minorities have been posted on YouTube. For example, in one speech Gnanasara uses racial slurs when speaking of Muslims, using terms like “marakkala,” a Sinhala-language epithet for the Muslim community. In one speech, Gnanasara stated this about a Muslim member of parliament named Rauff Hakeem, who at the time was serving as Minister of Justice:

Who is Hakeem to discuss the problems of the Buddhist teachings? This is the Sinhala Buddhist country. The decisions should thus should be made by the Sinhalese Buddhists…So we are telling Muslim marakkala ministers: mind your own business and don’t provoke us because you people have more than enough freedom in this country. (Anti Bodu Bala Sena, June 22, 2014).

There are allegations that the BBS was backed, or at least protected, by the Rajapaksa regime. First, the headquarters of Bodu Bala Sena—Sri Sambuddha Jayanthi Mandir in Colombo—is attached to the Buddhist Cultural Center that was opened by Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 15, 2011.

In this section, I have argued that a conspicuous outcome of centripetalism’s failure was Sinhalese and Buddhist nationalism. To date, Sri Lanka has had one additional presidential election: the general election of 2015. It is to this election that I now turn.

Making Moderation Pay 2015–2021?

The 2015 election was, strictly speaking, the second “post-war” election yet it was in some ways the first post-war election: now it was six years after the end of the civil war and thus Rajapaksa could no longer sell the military victory to cover up his nepotism and attempts to weaken the democracy. Rajapaksa had called for the presidential election
two years before the end of his second term. Guruparan argues that Rajapaksa announced an early election, “fearing that two more years in office might have further eroded an already diminishing support base among the Sinhala Buddhist community” (2015, para 2). Rajapaksa’s strategy proved fruitless for the seventh presidential election, which took place on January 8, 2015. The election marked the end of the ten-year Rajapaksa regime.

The election diverged from most Sri Lankan elections because the new president, Maithripala Sirisena, was not a candidate from the opposition. He had been the secretary of the SLFP (Rajapaksa’s party) but Sirisena left his position and ran in the election as a common candidate. Sirisena succeeded in forming what Horowitz (1985 [2000]) might have termed a “coalition of convenience,” a coalition interested mainly in amassing votes and rising to power (pp. 366–367). This is evident when one considers how his coalition, the “New Democratic Front” (NDF), was not an alliance with minority parties but an alliance between the four powerful Sinhalese Buddhist parties: the UNP; defected members of the SLFP; the JVP; and the JHU. The NDF, did, however obtain the support from the minority Tamil and Muslim parties. The main objective of all the above-mentioned parties was to dislodge Rajapaksa’s family from power (Uyangoda, 2015 March 26, para 1).

As depicted below in table 2 Sirisena received 51.28% votes against Rajapaksa’s 47.58% (with the margin of 449,072 votes) (Department of Election Sri Lanka, Presidential Election January 8, 2015 official results). As usual, there was no second round count in the 2015 election.
Tables 3 and 4 below reveal that Sirisena won in a landslide victory in the Northern Province (where 93.8% of the population is Tamil) and Eastern Province (where 39.2% is Tamil and 36.2% Muslim):

Table 3. 2015 Presidential Election Results in the Northern Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Name</th>
<th>North Province: Received Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jaffna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maithripala Sirisena</td>
<td>253,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahinda Rajapaksa</td>
<td>74,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Candidates</td>
<td>12,273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: North Province Population (Sinhalese 3.0%, Tamil 93.8%, Moore 3.1%, Other 0.1%) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2011)

Table 4. 2015 Presidential Election Results in the Eastern Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Name</th>
<th>Eastern Province: Received Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maithripala Sirisena</td>
<td>209,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahinda Rajapaksa</td>
<td>41,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Candidates</td>
<td>5,533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Eastern Province (Sinhalese 23.2%, Tamil 39.2, Moore 36.9, Other 0.7) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2011)

Sirisena also obtained the majority of votes from the Sinhalese community. For example, in the largely populated Western Province (where 84.2% are Sinhalese), Sirisena secured the majority of Sinhalese votes in the predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist
districts of Colombo, Gampaha, and Kaluthara (see table 5). Rajapaksa’s Sinhalese vote base had drastically dropped from 65% in 2010 to 55% in 2015 (Guruparan, 2015, para 10). Clearly, the Sinhalese electorate had become disenchanted with Rajapaksa’s cronyism and corruption.

Table 5. 2015 Presidential Election Results in the Western Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Name</th>
<th>Number of Votes: Western Province</th>
<th>Colombo %</th>
<th>Gampaha %</th>
<th>Kaluthara %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maithripala Sirisena</td>
<td>725,073</td>
<td>55.93</td>
<td>669,007</td>
<td>349,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahinda Rajapaksa</td>
<td>562,614</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>664,347</td>
<td>395,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Candidates</td>
<td>8,673</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>9,142</td>
<td>6,690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Western Province (Sinhalese 84.2%, Tamil 16.8%, Moore 7.9%, Other 1.2%) (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2011).

Was the 2015 election the first election in which the centripetal institution of alternative vote influenced a moderate outcome? Donald Horowitz argues that the answer ultimately lies in “(1) whether candidates acted as if they [second preferences] might count and so moderated their appeals and behavior and (2) whether, in particular, they made deals to exchange second preferences, if there were more than two candidates” (Horowitz, Personal Communication, February 6, 2015). Based on Horowitz’s criteria, it is hard to make a persuasive argument that 2015 witnessed the success of the centripetal institution of alternative vote. First, Sirisena did not make any deals to acquire second-preference votes: it was easy for Sirisena to obtain the minority vote because the minorities despised Rajapaksa. Although Sirisena received the majority of votes from the Tamil and Muslim populations, it was not because he moderated his appeals and behavior to accommodate the minorities. Sirisena received these votes because the minorities
needed to vote Rajapaksa out of office: “Tamils… voted for Sirisena not because they liked his candidacy but because they wanted to out Rajapaksa” (Guruparan, 2015, para 6). Further, the Sinhalese were fed up with Rajapaksa because Rajapaksa had put his family members in the major positions of power in the government and was notorious for sending “white vans” to kidnap journalists that resisted his regime.

Sirisena’s motto of “good governance” was a pledge that the minorities and the majority Sinhalese found reasonable. These promises included freedom for the media and the abolition of the 18th amendment (which allowed a president to be re-elected for an unlimited amount of terms) and executive presidency. If one word characterized the campaign it was *yahapālayana* (good governance). Sirisena’s chief election campaign for good governance pointed right at the major problems of the Rajapaksa regime.

Although Sirisena’s government does not champion an overtly extremist platform compared with Rajapaksa’s post-war campaign Sirisena’s government has not attempted to provide Sri Lanka with any long-term solutions to inter-ethnic problems. One reason is that Sirisena has not taken any action to make moderation pay even though he admittedly does not engage in ethnic outbidding. Three examples in recent Sri Lankan politics can illustrate this situation.

First, power sharing is usually constitutionalized yet in Sri Lanka the constitution has features that exclude rather than include the communities within the state’s territory. This is another case in which the rule of the law is the rule of the dominant majority (O’Leary, 2013, p. 10). For example, the constitution in Sri Lanka assigns authority to use power in a monopolistic fashion because it allows the president alone to declare war
and peace (see Chapter VII Article 33). If constitutional rules permit the domination of one religion or ethnic group then the abuse of political power is possible (O’Leary, 2013, p. 9). For instance, Chapter II Article 9 in the constitution states, “Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the States to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).” Chapter II Article 9 is a clear example of constitutionalism that excludes minorities rather that protects core rights of its citizens of different religions (see O’Leary, 2013, p. 9). If a powerful president is backed by a regularly electorally endorsed party that president may lawfully execute his or her powers that reflect the preferences of the dominant nationality, race, religion, or linguistic group.

Second, efforts to implement hybrid-courts in Sri Lanka have reached a stalemate. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) proposes to implement a court to address civil war crimes in Sri Lanka. The hybrid court would contain mostly international and some local judges as well as an international chief prosecutor to avoid political interference. The UNHRC also recommends that the Sri Lankan government create legislation that makes into a criminal offense (1) war crimes, (2) crimes against humanity, (3) genocide, and (4) enforced disappearances. The UNHRC is also asking the Sri Lankan government to ratify the Convention on Enforced Disappearance as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Human Rights Watch, 2015, September 16, para 8–9). President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe have not yet given their consent regarding the hybrid court.
Third, although Sirisena wants to change the current parliamentary election system he did not take any effort to change the presidential electoral systems. According to an interview conducted with a Tamil scholar from Jaffna Sirisena’s government has not attempted to make any accommodations to minorities (ex. office holding) or settle grievances (Interview, Thiruvarangan, July 2015).

On the one hand, Sirisena’s election campaign was not an effort to make extremism pay. On the other hand, Sirisena’s campaign was also not an effort to make moderation pay because he never addressed minority grievances. The slogan of “good governance” was the most prominent slogan in Sirisena’s platform because “good governance” pointed right to the corruption that plagued Rajapaksa’s government. Admittedly, perhaps for the first time in Sri Lanka’s modern history the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim cast their votes for one candidate because Sirisena “became the electoral vehicle for the public resentment against the Rajapaksas” (Philips, August 29, 2015, para 3). Yet, the common candidacy “was handled cautiously [and] differently among the Sinhalese, the Tamils, and the Muslims” (Ibid.). The reason is that the Buddhist voted for Sirisena to stop Rajapaksa’s nepotism. The Tamil community tended to vote for Sirisena because they did not have a better option. From their perspective, the election was ultimately a choice between the lesser of two evils. Rajapaksa was the greater of the two evils because of the way he treated the Tamils after the war, which included the militarization of the northeastern provinces; Tamil land grabbing; the removal Hindu artifacts and temples; and the jailing of Tamil activists. Muslims were frightened under
Rajapaksa’s post-war regime because of the Bodu Bala Sena, who targeted them as the new threatening Other. Thus, the Muslims also sought to remove Rajapaksa.

Although Sirisena is not open to federalism he has embraced some forms of multiculturalism. O’Leary (2013) consider “multiculturalism” to count as one distinct form of democratic power sharing (p. 19). O’Leary (2013) argues that the major theme of multiculturalism is recognition of a given country’s multiple communities. In March 2015, Sirisena took a reconciliatory step towards multiculturalism when he removed the ban on singing the national anthem in the Tamil language. In 2009, the JHU had demanded a ban on singing the national anthem in Tamil and Rajapaksa had unofficially prohibited it. Although some interpret Sirisena’s actions as a step towards multiculturalism, others argued that this is only an instance of what Stanley Fish (1999) has termed “boutique multiculturalism,” which may be integrationism in disguise.

As I conclude this chapter Sirisena has now been in office for one year. What has become apparent in the last few weeks is that Sirisena has rejected extremism yet he relies on integrationist rhetoric and cultural nationalism, which does little to appease minority grievances or bring about power-sharing alternatives. An analysis of two speeches will suffice to demonstrate these features of Sirisena’s approach. Consider the following excerpt from a speech Sirisena gave in parliament in December 2015:

According to my memory, [former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal] Nehru stated that the den of political mischief-makers is found in love for the nation [dēśāprēmiyayi]…We can also talk about nationalism [jātikavādaya]. What I must say is that [nationalism] is disastrous for the future of the nation. I respectfully
request: to prevent another outbreak of war we must put a stop to these [extremist forms of nationalism], strengthen the peace…and come together to build a united country”. (UPFA – A Brighter Future, 2015, December 2015).

Few would disagree that Sirisena here rejects extremist nationalism, the kind that Rajapaksa favored. Sirisena argues that “nationalism is disastrous for the future of the nation.” Yet notice how he ultimately resorts to integrationist rhetoric. As O’Leary (2013) points out, “integrationist rhetoric frequently hides dominant interests under veneers of neutrality or impartiality” (p. 35). Sirisena also states, “We must put a stop to these [extremist forms of nationalism], strengthen the peace…and come together to build a united country.” Yet, as a member of the dominant majority group it is convenient for him to request all groups come together. Note that he does not ask what the minority communities want. O’Leary’s (2013) argument applies to the context of Sri Lanka: “Dominant communities generally champion integration, while minorities generally prefer power sharing” (p. 35).

Further, Sirisena’s integrationist rhetoric shows little consideration for the concerns of the minority communities. For example, earlier in the speech he states:

It is clear that we still give the number one priority to national security. It must be stated that our government will fulfill the duty to protect the security of the nation…[However,] we did bail [LTTE activists] from jail and removed the prohibition that had been placed on eight [Tamil] diaspora organizations. And the extremist groups in the country are still spreading the message that national security has collapsed. (UPFA – A Brighter Future, 2015, December 2015).

On the one hand, he emphasizes that the country has adopted a tolerant stance towards the former-LTTE activists. On the other hand, Sirisena’s government’s unwillingness to consider the potential of federalism tacitly suggests that the government is still plagued
by fears that a federal solution will threaten the power of the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

In addition to Sirisena’s integrationist outlook he also champions Buddhist cultural nationalism. Although cultural nationalism may seem relatively harmless such ideologies leave little room for the kind of thought needed to institute power-sharing models. This became clear on after a famous Latin American singer named Enrique Iglesias brought his “Sex and Love Tour” concert to Sri Lanka for one performance. During the concert, one exuberant female fan threw her bra at the singer. The next day, Sirisena described her behavior as “most uncivilized” (BBC Sinhala-sandeshaya, December 27, 2015). Sirisena also criticized the concert organizers for serving alcohol at the concert, which he believed encouraged one woman at the concert to jump onto the stage and kiss Iglesias. Sirisena argued that such behavior runs against traditions of the predominantly Buddhist nation (Ibid.).

People are now attacking me via the Internet because of the statement I made about the Colombo music concert. They are trying to squash me. However, it is not me they attempt to squash but our culture. It is not me they demolish but our localness. What they try to weaken and destroy is our heritage. We destroy our culture when we embrace foreign cultures and accord value to these cultures…I created a new government to protect our country’s own things, to protect our localness, to accord value to our country…(Maithripala Sirisena, December 30, 2015).

Here, Sirisena argues that the embrace of foreign culture threatens to destroy Sri Lanka’s native culture. He does not use the words “Sinhalese Buddhist” but later in the speech it becomes clear that the native culture her refers to is the Sinhalese Buddhist culture.

Consider the next passage in the speech,

We have a history that is thousands of years old and we speak always of the glorious past. Today and in the future we, you, and the people of the nation must make into a
reality our dream to build an outstanding nation. Those who embrace foreign cultures and foreign forces can become obstacles. But our enlightened people understand our culture’s significance, [they understand] that we must protect and strengthen our heritage to move forward. Friends, when we behold the kalā šilpa (the native artistic skills) you know how happy we are. We must accord value to these things. We must develop these fields. We must improve the economic conditions of the artists [of our nation]. We must listen to their complaints. We must then strengthen those occupations. This is precisely the “our-ness”…with which we can move forward (Maithripala Sirisena, December 30, 2015).

Sirisena goes on to describe his idyllic childhood in the ancient Sinhala Buddhist kingdom of Polonnaruwa:

….When I was small I grew up in historical Polonnaruwa village. On my way to school I would see the [fourth-century] King Parakrama Tank. Close by my house I would see the [twelfth-century rock temple known as the] historical Gal Vihārāya [Buddhist temple] and historical artifacts such as rankothvehera, kirivehera...[Buddhist historical temples]...This glorious of history is carved in our blood because grew up in this environment: tanks, paddy fields, watch-huts [of the paddy fields], threshing floors, the small walking paths of the paddy fields. We are people raised in this fragrant village who embraced this local culture. Therefore, we do not have the ability to embrace foreign cultures and let them destroy our country. We cannot thus grant freedom to those who go naked. While protecting the democracy and fundamental rights we have to protect our national identity, the things we call our own, our traditions, our customs, and our cultures. According to our heritage, culture is more important than the law. Customs are more important than the law. Traditions are more important than the law. That is indeed the marvelous feature of culture in civil society (Maithripala Sirisena, December 30, 2015).

Sirisena juxtaposes the protection of democracy against the protection of national identity and concludes that customs and traditions are more important than the law. Yet whose customs and traditions? Clearly, he is making this statement to the majority Sinhalese Buddhists. Sirisena may not be as extreme as Rajapaksa. Yet he also depends on Sinhalese support. After all, Sirisena must be careful because his government comprises the three main Buddhist political parties: the JHU, JVP, and SLFP. When Sirisena speaks of his Sinhalese Buddhist childhood he appeases his coalition members.
Conclusion

This chapter attempted to reveal that in post-war Sri Lanka the failure of centripetalism goes hand in hand with nationalism. The chapter first discussed how the demographic characteristics of Sri Lanka and the depth of divisions among the Sinhalese and Tamils also contribute to the failure of centripetalism. It was then revealed that two Sinhalese parties (UNP and SLFP) dominated competition in every election held under supplementary vote between 1982 and 2015. No vote pooling occurred at this time. Centripetalist institutions in post-war elections, such as the election of 2010, were just as powerless as the centripetalist institution during the wartime. The failure of centripetalism, it was argued, led to the rise of nationalism.

The chapter offered plausible reasons why post-war elections did not move into a second round in which Tamil votes proved crucial. First, Rajapaksa had the overwhelming support of the Sinhalese who credited Rajapaksa for ending the twenty-six year civil war. Second, alternative vote is the only centripetalist institution. Third, centripetalism fails in the post-war context because in the 2010 election, moderation would have been political suicide for Rajapaksa.

Finally, the chapter argued that centripetalism continued to be powerless in the second post-war election (2015) because Sirisena came to power through a coalition of convenience that cared little about accommodating the minorities. Although Sirisena has rejected extremist forms nationalism his rejection does not necessary serve as a usher in developments in power sharing because he tends to also favor integrationist rhetoric and exclusivist cultural nationalism.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, I review the major findings of the thesis, explore how to best make a recommendation for a new electoral system, and lastly discuss three weaknesses of the MA thesis. The research question for this thesis is do post-conflict centripetalist institutions reinforce moderation across the ethnic divide? I have argued that centripetalist institutions not tailored to a post-conflict environment tend to be unable to amend ethnic conflict. As a result, various forms of exclusionary nationalism become a common feature of political competition.

Sri Lanka, the thesis has demonstrated, is an important case for comparative political scientists because Sri Lankan politicians turned to a power-sharing model not on account of a war settlement. On the contrary, the majority of deeply divided places in the twenty-first century have embraced power-sharing models to put an end to an intrastate war. Yet Sri Lanka adopted centripetalism prior to the outbreak of an intrastate conflict. The Sri Lankan case is thus an outlier to the “settlement-centric” approach of centripetalists.

The thesis first attempts to provide a history of the transition to centripetalism. Chapter 3 discusses why the United National Party (UNP) established a new constitution that replaced First-Past-The-Post with a preferential voting system for a separately elected presidency. I reveal that the UNP adopted the preferential system as the ethnic conflict was worsening in 1978 because the UNP expected they would obtain the second preference-votes from the Tamil minority. The UNP were convinced that the Tamils
would vote for the more moderate majority party (the UNP) rather than the more Sinhalese/Buddhist nationalist SLFP.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that centripetalism failed to ameliorate ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Despite the establishment of a so-called “centripetalist” institution, Sri Lanka became the site of a twenty-six year (1983–2009) civil war due to ethnic conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, a separatist movement led by members of the Tamil population in northern Sri Lanka. During the civil war, presidential elections were held in 1988, 1994, 1999, and 2005. At this time, alternative vote did not become a vehicle for centripetalism. Centripetalism was not tested due to poor voter turnout in Tamil areas and settlement-related violence.

Chapter 4 argues that centripetalism remained powerless in the post-war context partly due to Sri Lanka’s divisions and demography. The Sinhalese consist of roughly 75% of the population and reside in the central/southern parts of the polarized island. The Tamil minority resides mainly in the northern and eastern areas. Due to these demographic imbalances and deep divisions, the Sinhalese politicians have had great incentives to cater only to the Sinhalese majority in order to win elections, for they do not need the Tamil/Muslim vote to get elected.

Chapter 4 explores further reasons why alternative vote was powerless in the two elections held post-war in 2010 and 2015. For example, one reason is that the memory of the civil war is still fresh in people's minds. Thus, Sinhalese presidential candidates are cautious to make alliances with Tamil parties. The Sinhalese presidential candidates fear to be labeled as a “betrayer of the Sinhalese people.”
Moreover, chapter 4 examines the way in which two Sinhalese parties (UNP and SLFP) dominated competition in each election held under alternative vote (1982 and 2015). Political scientists tend to suggest that in alternative vote the successful parties will be those that strive to obtain the second- or third-preference votes from the minority populations. However, in the Sri Lankan context, where the election has not transitioned to the second round, Sinhalese politicians do not worry about losing in an election on account of second/third round votes. They thus lack incentives to make cross-ethnic appeals. One may thus contend confidently that centripetalism in the form of a presidential preferential voting system has not made an impact on politics in Sri Lanka between 1982 and 2015.

Lastly, another objective of chapter 4 is to show how an ineffective electoral system created an atmosphere in which various forms of particularistic nationalism become a common feature of political competition. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, for example, harnessed Sinhalese nationalism to mobilize Sinhalese votes in his second manifesto, which he published before the 2010 election. In the manifesto, he equated the Sinhalese government’s violent military victory against the LTTE in the twenty-first century with technological victories made by the Sinhalese nation in irrigation before the turn of the first millennium. The current president, Maithripala Sirisena, has rejected extremism yet he relies on integrationist rhetoric and cultural nationalism, which does little to appease minority grievances or bring about power-sharing alternatives.
Making Sound Recommendations

If electoral systems can be designed to produce particular outcomes, what is the optimal electoral system for the divided society of post-war Sri Lanka? It is beyond the scope of this study to make a specific recommendation. However, it will be instructive to at least mention here Ben Reilly and Andrew Reynolds’ (2000) attempt to review the cumulative evidence on the relationship between electoral systems and intrasocietal conflict. They do so to determine under what conditions electoral systems have great influence on outcomes. The authors ask, when ethnicity represents a fundamental political cleavage, what electoral systems can reward candidates who act in a cooperative manner to rival groups? And what electoral systems punish those who appeal only to their own ethnic group? (Reilly & Reynolds, 1999, pp. 425–426). Reilly and Reynolds (1999) argue persuasively that three factors are crucial for policy makers when they make recommendations regarding electoral design: (1) knowledge of the nature of societal division; (2) nature of the political system; and (3) the process which led to the adoption of the electoral system (see pp. 429–476).

To make a sound recommendation regarding electoral design, policy makers must first pay attention to the specific nature of a given country’s societal divisions, which includes the nature of group identity; the intensity of conflict; the nature of the dispute; and spatial distribution of groups in conflict (see Reilly & Reynolds, 1999, pp. 429–435) Regarding the nature of the dispute, policy makers would thus need to study closely the twenty-six-year civil war, in which the Sri Lankan government (predominantly Sinhala-speaking Buddhists who reside in the central and southern areas) ultimately prevented the
LTTE Tigers (Tamil-speaking Hindus in the north and east) from seceding and creating a sovereign state in the north for Sri Lankan Tamil speakers.

At the same time, policy makers might further benefit from comparing the “intensity of conflict” in Sri Lanka with other divided countries. For instance, Reilly and Reynolds compare Sri Lanka’s intensity of conflict with Malaysia and Bosnia, and situate Sri Lanka in between Malaysia and Bosnia: if Malaysia’s ethnic conflict never escalated into civil war, and if Bosnia broke down into ethnic cleansing, the intensity of Sri Lanka’s conflict was, in Reilly and Reynold’s judgment, somewhere in between:

There are other cases (e.g., Sri Lanka) where what appeared to be a relatively benign interethnic environment and less pronounced racial cleavages nonetheless broke down into violent armed conflict, but where democratic government has nonetheless been the rule more than the exception. (Reilly & Reynolds, 1999, p. 432)

Policy makers can also benefit from becoming cognizant of the way geographic distribution of conflicting groups tends to be related to the intensity of inter-group conflict. For instance, there is evidence that suggests less-separated groups are less prone to conflict. When faced with a country that has minorities concentrated in single geographical areas, some scholars argue that electoral engineers ought to favor a multimember district system and proportional representation. The reason is because a single-member electoral district “will likely produce ‘ethnic fiefdoms’ at the local level” (Reilly & Reynolds, 1999, p. 434).

Three Limitations

One major limitation of this thesis is that I have characterized the Sri Lankan political system as “centripetalist.” To be fair to the theory of centripetalism, it must be
stated that Sri Lanka is far from a textbook example of centripetalism. The presidential electoral system operates under alternative vote (i.e. centripetalism), yet the parliamentary system is proportional. Thus, one must acknowledge that Sri Lankan electoral systems are more of a mix than a one-hundred-percent centripetalist system. At the same time, I believe this thesis needed to focus only on the presidential system because Sri Lankan’s system of government is, after all, a presidential system in which an executive branch is led by the president, the head of state and government. Thus, one can argue that it is fair to characterize Sri Lanka as a case study in centripetalism despite the proportional parliamentary system.

Another limitation of the thesis is that although it criticizes Horowitz for overemphasizing the importance of centripetalism, the thesis tends to also suggest that ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be ameliorated if Sri Lanka implements a new electoral system. A recent article published by Cyprus Samii (2013) argues that quota-based integration can become a powerful strategy to address ethnic conflict in deeply divided places (p. 570). If so, perhaps policy change like quota-based integration holds out a greater promise than does the reform of electoral systems. For example, if the Sri Lankan military (now nearly 100% Sinhalese Buddhist) had a quota-system that required the military to consist of at least 15% of people from minorities, such a system might improve ethnic relations.

A third limitation of this thesis is that it draws upon only eight interviews (3 Buddhists, 4 Tamils, 1 Muslim). One reason for the lack of interviews is because many people in Sri Lanka do not have Skype and thus interviewing from the United States is
rather challenging. More interviews would have helped develop a stronger awareness of the diverse range of experience in civil society. Currently, the thesis focuses more on the state than on the experiences of citizens within the alternative vote system.

Ultimately, I believe this thesis will be successful if comparative political scientists can use it to broaden their understanding of centripetalism and the potential links with nationalism. I hope the thesis can also become useful for students of Sri Lanka who wish to understand why alternative vote was embraced. Lastly, I will consider this thesis successful if it can help students come to terms with the track record of alternative vote as a form of centripetalism in Sri Lanka.
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