

Political Parties in a Multiethnic Society

Essay Question: States vary in terms of their party system and electoral systems; explain one advantage each of multiparty, two-party, and one-party systems in a multi-ethnic society. Your assignment is to write an essay in accordance with the following rubric:

Format - 10 Points

Two Pages

Double Spaced

12pt. Font

Ariel or Times New Roman

Organization - 10 points

Well defined thesis

Use of specific detail

Well-structured

Effective examples

30 Points

Points are earned for correct explanation of an advantage of multiparty, two-party, and one-party systems in a multiethnic society.

To help you get started you can use the website resources below, or do your own Internet research. When you are finished, please submit your completed assignment.

[Electoral Systems for Divided Societies](#)

[Can Institutions Build Unity in Multiethnic States?](#)

The standard by which most humans organize ourselves into political groups is by party, but even then, how we organize our parties and operate them can vary. Different states which encompass different societies see different governments with different party systems. States have multiparty systems, two-party systems, and one-party systems. Each has its own advantages, but

when it comes to governing a multi-ethnic society, certain systems may appear more advantageous than others.

What comes to mind first when considering the implementation of a democratic or republican government in a multi-ethnic state is a multiparty system, whereby the people have choice and can have specific parties represent specific interests. It appears reasonable to assume that the best way to address the factionalism that naturally exists between the ethnic groups is to offer a means of representing each group's interests. Should ethnic parties form, the reasonable conclusion is that they can work to mitigate their marginalization in politics while simultaneously mitigating overwhelming power from being vested in the hands of any other single ethnic group. This belies the truth of a multiparty system's failings in this scenario, however. As supported by Benjamin Reilly, a multiparty system begets replication of existing ethnic divisions within the government, solving nothing of the divisive issues. This is the most damning failure of any multiparty system that is instituted in a multi-ethnic state, for it serves, most often, only to exacerbate the issues by giving ethnic groups a legitimate platform from which they may decry the actions and beliefs of others. It is possible, however, that a multiparty system be designed and so implemented that it may mitigate this factionalism and instead encourage centripetalism; instituting electoral systems that are not simple plurality can encourage this. For example, accommodation and cooperation can be encouraged by following, in some ways, the example of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, whose electoral rules demand that the Presidential victor receive support from different regions, whereby regionalism is diminished by the demands of broad appeal. Offering ethnically mixed platforms is key to success under such systems, and this is how a multiparty system can serve to be advantageous.

The two party system is the first departure from the multiparty system, bringing the varied options down to two. Unlike multiparty systems, which demand particular rules and regulations be instituted in order to make it effective in encouraging centripetalism, a two party system, by its nature, can encourage a gradual trend towards the center, at least in certain circumstances of a multi-ethnic state. For example, in the case of Fiji, the 1999 Parliamentary Elections marked a shift to a two-party system in which each 'party' (in reality, coalitions) was composed of a multiethnic background that sought broad appeal. Monoethnic platforms cannot survive in a two-party system, while it can manage survival under a multiparty system with the proper maneuvering. Nay, a two-party system's very nature demands that multiethnic platforms be instituted by the respective parties, demanding that, at the very least, some ethnic groups consolidate alliances and agree with one another on key issues. This promotes crossethnic exchanges and greater cooperation. Two-party systems, however, can lead to the development of damaging political machines, and therefore must be carefully managed.

The other extreme from the multiparty system is the one party system. This is the system often present in authoritarian states that would have the international community accept that they are, ostensibly, democratic regimes. In a multi-ethnic society, one party systems can be either hugely beneficial, or hugely detrimental. To begin with, a one party system can mean that a single ethnic group, by dint of having a simple majority in populace or in government, rules tyrannically over all the others; this is a less-than-ideal situation. To juxtapose this, it can be offered that a one-party system can be unifying by giving the divided, multi-ethnic populace a single institution they must work to improve. Selecting the most reasonable, balanced, broadly-appealing candidate would be a necessity for a prosperous one-party system. Under the happiest of circumstances, this would make a one-party system a unifying force in a multi-ethnic state. The Institutional Revolutionary Party of Mexico used to be an example of this, governing for decades

as the sole political party through which the varying classes of the country worked for cooperation; while not the most ideal example, seeing how Mexico lacks the same ethnic divisions as some other parts of the world, it is an example of a functioning one-party system that, at times, served as a centripetal force.

It is arguable that it is irrelevant what political or electoral system is instituted in a multi-ethnic state as to the success it achieves, relying instead on political leaders of character and wisdom, but it cannot be discounted that certain circumstances play to the advantages of differing systems. Multiparty, two-party, and one party systems each have respective advantages and disadvantages that would make governing a multi-ethnic state easier or harder.