Ethnofederalism

The Worst Form of Institutional Arrangement. . . ?

Liam Anderson

Whether it is termed ethno-, ethnic, plurinational, or multinational federalism, the design of federal subunit boundaries to conform to the territorial distribution of ethnic groups continues to generate controversy among scholars of institutional design.[1] For some, it is an effective means of alleviating deep ethnic divisions that can help to hold together the common state; for others, it is an insidious institutional recipe for the inevitable disintegration of the common state.[2] The vitality of the debate between advocates and critics of this form of federal arrangement should not obscure the fact that hostility toward ethnic federalism is generally more widespread than is sympathy for it. Philip Roeder, for example, finds the enthusiasm on the part of nongovernmental organizations and practitioners

Liam Anderson is Professor of Political Science at Wright State University.

The author thanks the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and insights.

1. Critics of this institutional form tend to use the terms "ethnic federalism" or "ethnofederalism," whereas those more sympathetic refer to "multinational" or "plurinational federalism." The term "ethnofederalism" is used here because it is descriptively accurate. It is not intended to imply criticism.

2. Those generally skeptical of the merits of ethnofederalism include Philip G. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," *Regional and Federal Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May 2009), pp. 203–219; Philip G. Roeder, *Where Nation-States Come From: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Valerie Bunce and Stephen Watts, "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy: Ethnofederal versus Unitary States in the Postcommmunist World," in Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), pp. 133–158; Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (January 2002), pp. 245–276; Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), pp. 327–328; and Carol Skalnik Leff, "Democratization and Disintegration in Multinational States: The Breakup of the Communist Federations," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (January 1999), pp. 205–235. More sympathetic perspectives on ethnofederalism are provided by John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, "Must Pluri-National Federations Fail?" *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2009), pp. 5–25; Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977); Stefan Wolff, "Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies: The Many Uses of Territorial Self-Governance," Ethnopolitics Papers No. 5 (Exeter, U.K.: Centre for Ethno-Political Studies, University of Exeter, November 2010); and Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For useful overviews of the debate between critics and sympathizers, see Jan Erk and Lawrence M. Anderson, *The Paradox of Federalism: Does Self-Rule Accommodate or Exacerbate Ethnic Divisions*? (New York: Routledge, 2010); and John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, "Federalism as a Method of Ethnic Conflict Regulation," in Sid Noel, ed., *From Power Sharing to Democracy: Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), pp. 263–296.

International Security, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Summer 2014), pp. 165–204, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00164
© 2014 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

for "ethnofederalism" as a solution to conflicts "remarkable," given that it runs "headlong into a substantial body of prior expert opinion warning against this." For Roeder, at least, the "imprudence" of ethnofederal arrangements is beyond dispute.[3] Precisely why the collective wisdom of scholars conflicts with practitioners on this point is an important question, because it implies a worrying disconnect between academics and practitioners that has serious real-world implications. It is, of course, possible that practitioners are systematically ignorant of the contents of political science journals, but it is also possible that the "substantial body of prior expert opinion" referred to by Roeder is less substantial than it first appears.

This article examines two main problems with the arguments against ethnofederalism. First, the case against ethnofederalism relies disproportionately on a small number of high-profile cases—particularly the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the former Yugoslavia—to drive its logic. This specific testing ground—nondemocratic, socialist ethnofederations—should, but often does not, inspire caution with respect to the generalizability of the conclusions drawn. To expand the reach of the argument beyond these three systems, in which all of the subunits were associated with territorially concentrated ethnic groups, critics of ethnofederalism have broadened the definition of the term to include systems in which some or all of the federal subunits are defined ethnically. This change makes the argument relevant to a far larger universe of cases, but it comes at a cost. As the universe of relevant cases expands, the success rate of ethnofederalism increases significantly.

Second, as the argument against ethnofederalism has evolved, it has taken a more explicitly prescriptive turn. If the argument is to have genuine prescriptive utility, however, the question, "if not ethnofederalism, then what?" cannot be avoided. Yet while critics of ethnofederalism are clear about what they do not like, and why, they are less inclined to identify and defend their favored alternatives. If no plausible alternatives to ethnofederalism exist in a given case, or if the alternatives are demonstrably inferior, then the argument that ethnofederalism is a poor institutional choice may be true, but it is also irrelevant. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, ethnofederalism may be the worst form of institutional arrangement, except for all the others that have been tried. Realistically, only two institutional alternatives to ethnofederalism are available as a remedy to the problem of managing territorially concentrated ethnic minorities (at least if the problem is to be managed democratically). The first is unitarism, whereby power is centralized, and, presumably, controlled by a ma-

3. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 205.

jority group. The second is some form of federal arrangement in which the geographical distribution of ethnic groups is irrelevant to the delineation of subunit boundary lines. To argue for alternatives, however, requires making two cases: first, that an alternative stood some realistic chance of being adopted; and, second, that the institutional alternative chosen would conceivably have performed better than ethnofederalism. Neither case is easy to make. The most compelling reason to doubt the feasibility of alternatives is that, overwhelmingly, those states that adopt ethnofederalism do so because alternatives have been tried already, and have failed. In turn, if ethnofederalism is adopted in response to a failure of unitarism or nonethnic federalism, then these cannot logically offer viable alternatives.

The broader purpose of this article is to reevaluate the debate on ethnofederalism. The analysis proceeds as follows. The first section provides a brief review of the case against ethnofederalism. The second section presents data on the success or failure of all post-1945 ethnofederations and demonstrates that the success rate of ethnofederations is significantly higher than acknowledged by critics. The third section evaluates the main institutional alternatives to ethnofederalism—unitarism and nonethnic federalism—and provides evidence that neither can offer a viable or plausible alternative to ethnofederalism in the overwhelming majority of relevant cases. The fourth section addresses limitations and potential problems. The conclusion highlights the prescriptive implications that follow logically from the analysis.

The Case against Ethnofederalism

The argument against ethnnofederalism has evolved significantly. In the process, it has become more expansive, ambitious, and sophisticated. In its original form, the argument was focused primarily on a single case—that of the Soviet Union—and was less an argument about the defects of ethnofederalism than an institutional explanation for the collapse of the Soviet Union.[4] Despite its inherent plausibility, any argument that focuses solely on explaining a specific event at a specific point in time is likely to have limited relevance. The application of a similar logic to the disintegration of three former social-

4. Studies in this vein include Philip G. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), pp. 196–232; Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Redwood City, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 414–452; and Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23 (1994), pp. 47–78.

ist ethnofederations—the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia—subsequently extended the reach of the argument.[5] For example, Valerie Bunce's elegantly crafted comparison of the differing fates of socialist countries in Eastern European during a period of dual transition reveals a simple, but striking pattern; all states that were ethnofederal at the time of transition disintegrated; all unitary states survived.[6]

Although ethnofederalism may well have accounted for the collapse of authoritarian, socialist states suffering the trauma of multiple (political and economic) transitions, generalizing this argument much beyond this very specific context is potentially problematic. The evolution of the argument owes much to the work of Roeder. Whereas most previous scholarly efforts had focused on ethnofederalism as an important explanatory variable to help understand a broader phenomenon (why the Soviet Union collapsed or why some socialist states collapsed and others survived), Roeder targets ethnofederalism as a foundationally flawed institutional arrangement. "These institutions," according to Roeder, "privilege some identities and interests and distribute coercive and defensive capabilities in a way that increases the likelihood of escalation of conflict into acute nation-state crises." These consequences flow naturally from the nature of the institutions themselves. They are not context dependent, and in this sense, they "inhere in the institutional arrangements of ethnofederalism and autonomy."[7] In support of his argument, Roeder assembles the post-1901 universe of ethnofederations and "non-federal states with autonomous ethnic regions" and compares their success (or lack thereof) against nonethnic, or "simple," federations. Roeder's findings are striking: the only states in this universe to have suffered secessions are ethnofederations. This observation is reinforced by its logical corollary that "no constituents of simple federations have seceded in the past 108 years."[8] In addition, the failure rate of ethnofederal arrangements is, in Roeder's view, "most impressive"; of the eighteen post-1901 ethnofederations, fourteen (78 percent) experienced failure; of nineteen post-1901 autonomous regions, meanwhile, only seven survive, equating to a failure rate of about 63 percent. Although not quite on the level of an "if P then Q" relationship, Roeder concludes that to adopt ethnofederalism is to all but guarantee failure.

Causal logics that are both intuitive and plausible fortify the apparent strength of this correlation between ethnofederalism and negative outcomes. Although the details vary, most critics focus on two consequences of ethno-

5. Leff, "Democratization and Disintegration in Multinational States."
6. Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*.
7. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalism," p. 206.
8. Ibid., p. 213.

federalism. First, the creation of ethnically defined federal subunits or autonomous regions furnishes ethnic leaders with the institutional resources necessary to mount a secessionist challenge to the common state. Subunits in a federation are endowed with constitutionally guaranteed competences in a range of areas, the full apparatus of governing institutions capable of articulating demands, and (usually) a clearly defined border. Hence, an ethnic minority with autonomous status "has institutions for challenging state authorities in general and its specific policies and actions in particular,"[9] along with institutionalized leadership to unify the population. Beyond this, subunits often have power over their internal security, in the form of police or militia forces; control over mass media through which to promote the separatist cause; and many of the superficial trappings of statehood, such as a flags, anthems, coats of arms, and mottos. Collectively, these institutional endowments enhance the capacity of ethnofederal units to sustain a successful secessionist bid. Rogers Brubaker's account of the Soviet Union's collapse neatly summarizes this point. In his view, the Soviet breakup was "crucially framed and structured by the territorial-political crystallization of nationhood in the form of national republics," and was possible "chiefly because the successor units already existed as internal quasi-nation-states, with fixed territories, names, legislatures, administrative staffs, cultural and political elites."[10]

In isolation, however, the institutional resources argument cannot logically suffice to explain why ethnofederations are more susceptible to secession than nonethnic federations. Subunits in a simple federation are, after all, endowed with the same institutional resources as their counterparts in ethnofederations. Yet, as noted by Roeder, they have been exempt from successful secessions. Hence, a second strand of the argument is required—one that speaks to how and why ethnofederalism enhances the willingness, or desire, of ethnically defined units to separate from the common state. Here the argument is less clear cut. Many critics highlight the tendency of ethnofederalism to sharpen and deepen ethnic identity through, among other things, autonomous control over the mass media and education system. Thus, in the context of the Soviet Union, Dmitry Gorenburg observes that, "[b]y establishing separate systems of native language education for most of the minority ethnic groups that had their own ethno-territorial administrative units, the Soviet government in effect created an institution dedicated to instilling a common and separate identity among the students."[11] Likewise, Svante Cornell highlights how control

---

9. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict," p. 254.
10. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p. 41.
11. Dmitry Gorenburg, "Nationalism for the Masses: Popular Support for Nationalism in Russia's Ethnic Republics," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 2001), pp. 73–104, at p. 74.

over the media "can influence the population directly through news coverage and depiction of events in media—plainly speaking, propaganda—and speed up the process of ethnic mobilization."[12] Several critics hone in on the role played by entrepreneurial ethnic leaders, who strategically manipulate the political space afforded by autonomy to mobilize populations along ethnic lines and challenge the common-state government. Thus, according to Roeder, "Political institutions like Soviet federalism play a critical role . . . in shaping ethnic communities, politicizing ethnicity, and mobilizing protest. . . . The politicization of ethnicity has been the work of political entrepreneurs created by Soviet federalism."[13] Periodic elections may also lead to "ethnic outbidding," whereby rival candidates amplify nationalist rhetoric to win the votes of an electorate increasingly mobilized along ethnic lines. Valerie Bunce and Stephen Watts, for example, speak of ethnofederalism's "plausible impact" on "group isolation, intergroup distrust, and heightened competition among local elites . . . in search of local issues they can use to mobilize and outflank their competitors."[14] This line of attack presumes that ethnic identities are fluid and susceptible to strategic manipulation by unscrupulous ethnic leaders for personal gain.

The peculiar susceptibility of ethnofederations to secessions, then, would appear to result from an interactive combination of enhanced capacity and desire that is uniquely present in ethnofederations and absent in other system types. Hence, although unitary systems have suffered their fair share of violent secessionist movements by ethnic groups that have demonstrated a clear willingness to secede, none has succeeded because these groups lack the institutional capacity that ethnofederalism provides. Meanwhile, subunits in simple federations possess all of the requisite institutional resources to mount a secession bid but (presumably) choose not to, because simple federations do not promote or enhance the willingness to secede. Cornell's succinct summary is on point: "The institution of autonomous regions is conducive to secessionism because institutionalizing and promoting the separate identity of a titular group increases that group's cohesion and *willingness* to act, and establishing political institutions increases the *capacity* of that group to act."[15]

The case against ethnofederalism, however, is more fragile and less coherent than it first appears. The two most serious problems are dealt with in the following two sections.

12. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict," p. 255.
13. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," pp. 230–231.
14. Bunce and Watts, "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy," p. 254.
15. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict," p. 252 (emphasis in original).

THE PRICE OF GENERALIZABILITY

Three cases—the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia—have driven the evolution of the theoretical arguments advanced by critics of ethnofederalism. These cases shared three characteristics. First, they were all socialist "pseudo" or "sham" federations in which real power (for the most part) remained centralized in the hands of a single political party.[16] Second, they all experienced severe traumas as a result of simultaneous transitions (political and economic) during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Third, all three were federal systems in which all of the subunits were ethnically defined in the sense of providing a "homeland" for a specific ethnic group. They were, in other words, fully ethnofederal. These three shared characteristics make these cases, at least, distinctive, if not "unique."[17] If so, what reasonably can be generalized in explanatory or prescriptive terms beyond these three specific cases? Taken literally, the policy prescription that follows logically is that a fully ethnofederal system is a poor choice of institution for authoritarian, socialist regimes if they are, at some point, to attempt simultaneous political and economic transitions. This is not an argument against ethnofederalism per se, but against a specific form of ethnofederalism in a specific context, and the number of contemporary states for which this has any relevance is probably limited. Ethiopia, a fully ethnofederal system, dominated by a single party and currently transitioning (slowly) from a vague form of socialism to a market economy, might conceivably have benefited from heeding these warnings, but it is not easy to think of other potential beneficiaries. Strictly speaking, then, the collapse of ethnofederations in Eastern Europe says nothing about the survival prospects of democratic ethnofederations; ethnofederations that are not undergoing dual transitions; ethnofederations that are not in place at the moment of transition but implemented as part of the transition process; or ethnofederations that are not organized around ethnic homelands.

To increase the generalizability of the argument, critics have broadened the definition of the term "ethnofederalism" (and its various terminological permutations). In its original formulation, the term was used to characterize the particular form of federalism adopted by the Soviet Union to manage its "nationalities problem" in which every one of society's important ethnic groups enjoyed its own autonomous "homeland" subunit. It was, in Roeder's words, "federalism of nominally autonomous ethnic homelands."[18] Carol Leff's characterization is similar; "ethnofederalism," states Leff, is "where territorial

16. McGarry and O'Leary, "Must Pluri-National Federations Fail?" p. 9.
17. Józef Juhász, "Ethno-Federalism: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Problems,* Vol. 57, No. 3 (2005), p. 252.
18. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," p. 197.

boundaries of the constituent units conform roughly to the distribution of the most important national groups within the multinational state."[19] Likewise Henry Hale defines ethnofederalism as "a federal political system in which territorial governance units are explicitly designated as ethnic homelands,"[20] and elsewhere as "a federal political system in which component regions are intentionally associated with specific ethnic categories."[21] For Bunce, meanwhile, the distinctive feature of state socialist federations "is that they were national in form; that is, the subunits were constituted . . . on the basis of the territorial concentration of a particular minority community."[22] Others characterize the term similarly.[23] Defined in this way, ethnofederalism is a category that excludes more than it includes. Among contemporary federations, only Ethiopia, Belgium, and, arguably, Bosnia are organized around ethnic homelands. Historically, Serbia-Montenegro and Ethiopia-Eritrea might qualify, along with (perhaps) the Nigerian First Republic, Pakistan, and the short-lived Malaysian Federation (1963–65).[24] There are probably some marginal cases that might also merit inclusion, but the reality is that federalism organized on the basis of ethnic homelands has not been a popular choice of institution. If the three socialist federations are removed from the mix, on the grounds that a theory derived from case studies should not then be tested against these same cases, the universe of cases against which the "ethnofederalism is flawed" theory can be tested is very small. Moreover, the pattern of success versus failure is more mixed than suggested by critics.

The definition of the term "ethnofederalism," however, has evolved to become more inclusive. Writing in 2005, for example, Bunce and Watts define

19. Leff, "Democratization and Disintegration in Multinational States," pp. 208–209.
20. Henry E. Hale, "Ethnofederalism: Lessons for Rebuilding Afghanistan, Preserving Pakistan, and Keeping Russia Stable," Policy Memo, No. 208 (Washington, D.C.: Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia, 2001), p. 1.
21. Henry E. Hale, "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 2005), p. 55.
22. Valerie Bunce, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Secession: The Communist and Postcommunist Experience," in Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, eds., *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 425.
23. See Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, p. 327; Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, pp. 32–33; and Christa Deiwiks, "The Curse of Ethnofederalism? Ethnic Group Regions, Subnational Boundaries, and Secessionist Conflict," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Swiss Political Science Association, Geneva, Switzerland, January 7–8, 2010, p. 2.
24. All three of these, however, depart from an ideal type of fully ethnofederal system. In the case of Ethiopia, the system's eight ethnic subunits coexist with a "catch-all" and highly heterogeneous "Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples" region. In Belgium, the small German-speaking population enjoys recognition as a linguistic community, but it does not form part of the politics of Belgium's systemwide federation. Lastly, one of Bosnia's two federal subunits provides a homeland for Serbs (the Republika Srpska), but the other entity (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) is home to both the country's Bosniak and Croat populations.

ethnofederalism as a system in which "many, if not all of the subunits are composed of (and understood to represent) geographically concentrated minority communities"; for Roeder a federation in which "at least some, if not all, the constituent units of the federation are homelands controlled by their respective ethnic groups" is sufficient for it to qualify as ethnofederal.[25] For Hale, meanwhile, "An ethnofederal state is a federal state in which at least one constituent territorial governance unit is intentionally associated with a specific ethnic category."[26]

Scholars have also increasingly applied the term "ethnofederal" to systems in which one or more ethnically defined autonomous units are attached to an otherwise unitary state (e.g., Moldova/Gagauzia or Finland/Aland Islands). Roeder, for example, makes a nominal distinction between ethnofederations and what he terms "non-federal states with autonomous ethnic regions," but this is a distinction without a difference in that the latter are assumed to be as defective as the former, and for the same reasons. As Roeder states, "[E]thnofederalism is more akin to the autonomy arrangements found in non-federal states than simple (that is, non-ethnic) federalism."[27] Bunce and Watts's analysis of the relative merits of ethnofederal versus unitary postcommunist states appears to depart from a definition of ethnofederalism that excludes nonfederal autonomy arrangements, but their categorization of Georgia and Azerbaijan as "ethnofederal" indicates otherwise.[28] Both contain historically autonomous ethnic regions—Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajara in the case of Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan—but are otherwise internally organized as unitary states. Hence, in practice, both Roeder and Bunce and Watts include nonfederal autonomy arrangements in the ethnofederal category.

In the broadest sense, therefore, the category of ethnofederalism embraces three distinct subcategories of institutional arrangement. These can be termed "full ethnofederations," in which all of the federal subunits are ethnic homelands; "partial ethnofederations," whereby one or more (but not all) of the subunits are ethnically defined; and "ethnic federacies,"[29] in which an otherwise unitary state endows one or more ethnic groups with territorial autonomy.

---

25. Bunce and Watts, "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy," p. 135; and Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 204.
26. Henry E. Hale, "Divided We Stand: Institutional Sources of Ethnofederal State Survival and Collapse," *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (January 2004), p. 167.
27. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 204.
28. See Bunce and Watts, "Managing Diversity and Sustaining Democracy," p. 140, table 6.1.
29. The term "federacy" has been defined in a variety of ways. The meaning of the term as used here is most similar to Alfred C. Stepan's definition, which conceptualizes a federacy as somewhere between a federal state and a unitary system. See Stepan, "Federalism and Democracy: Beyond the U.S. Model," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (October 1999), p. 20. For current purposes, the term "ethnic federacy" refers to an arrangement whereby an otherwise unitary state

Table 1. Rates of Success and Failure for Post-1945 Ethnofederations

	Full Ethnofederations	Partial Ethnofederations	Ethnic Federacies
Failures	Czechoslovakia (1968–93) Ethiopia/Eritrea (1952–62) Nigeria (1960–67) Malaysia (1963–65) Pakistan (1947–71) Serbia/Montenegro (1992–2006) Soviet Union (1922–91) Yugoslavia (1946–92)		South Sudan/Sudan (1972–83, 2005–11) Crimea/Ukraine (1994–2014?; current status uncertain)
Successes	Belgium Bosnia and Herzegovina Ethiopia Pakistan (1971–)	Canada India Iraq (2005–) Nigeria (1967–) Russia South Africa (1993–) Spain Switzerland	Aceh/Indonesia; Ajara/Georgia; Atlantic Region North and Atlantic Region South/Nicaragua; Bougainville/Papua New Guinea; Comarca Kuna Yala/Panama; Corsica/France; Faroe Islands/ Denmark; Friuli-Venezia Giulia/ Italy; Gagauzia/Moldova; Greenland/Denmark; Mindanao/ the Philippines; Papua/Indonesia; Sardinia/Italy; Sicily/Italy; Scotland/United Kingdom; Trentino-South Tyrol/Italy; Val d'Osta/Italy; Vojvodina/Serbia; Wales/United Kingdom
Success Rate	33 percent	100 percent	96 percent

The most obvious effect of broadening the definition of the term "ethnofederalism" is to increase the universe of relevant cases against which theory can be tested; as this occurs, however, the evidence against ethnofederalism becomes less convincing. Table 1 presents all post-1945 ethnofederal arrangements organized according to subcategory, and according to success or failure. The criteria used to determine failure (and success)—the dissolution

grants autonomy to a territorial entity on the basis of ethnicity. Qualifying for inclusion requires that the autonomy of the entity is reasonably protected from unilateral revocation by the common state on the basis of simple majority vote. This protection may be provided in the common-state constitution, as in the case of Mindanao (the Philippines); in a special law, compact, or treaty between the national government and the autonomous entity, as in the case of Aceh (Indonesia); or even by an international agreement or treaty, such as that which protects the autonomy of Northern Ireland.

of the state via secession, or the dissolution of ethnofederal institutions—are Roeder's.[30]

The data in table 1 reveal two clear patterns.[31] First, full ethnofederations do have a low success rate (33 percent) relative to either partial ethnofederations (100 percent) or ethnic federacies (96 percent). Once the universe of cases expands beyond the original three cases, however, the success rate of ethnofederalism (permissively defined) increases to 79 percent.[32] These data indicate that some ethnofederal systems have failed, but many more have not. In addition, those that have failed are almost exclusively full ethnofederations (from which the argument of critics originates), rather than partial ethnofederations or ethnic federacies (to which the argument was subsequently applied).

ALTERNATIVES TO ETHNOFEDERALISM

If all ethnofederations were doomed to failure, as Roeder's argument implies, there would be little purpose in discussing alternative institutional forms. Guaranteed failure sets a low bar against which to judge the viability of alternatives, whereby even controversial ideas, such as "giving war a chance"[33] or partition become potentially viable, even appealing. As the data indicate, however, ethnofederations succeed more often than they fail. Given these data, ethofederalism is only "subversive," or an "imprudent choice of institution,"[34] to the extent that an alternative institutional form could conceivably improve on this performance.

While Roeder's analysis demonstrates the superiority of "simple" federalism, at least in terms of secession propensity, the same author also seems amenable to a form of nonethnic federalism that uses subunit boundary lines to cut across existing societal divisions (as in India) or to break up territorially concentrated ethnic groups intentionally (as occurred in post-1967 Nigeria).[35]

---

30. See Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 207.
31. The most important way in which the list of cases in table 1 differs from Roeder's concerns how ethnic federacies (which Roeder terms "non-federal states with autonomous ethnic regions") are counted. Roeder's list counts common states that have multiple autonomous relationships with ethnic units, such as Italy, as single cases; I count these as multiple cases. Roeder also includes in his list autonomy arrangements that were never implemented; these are excluded from mine.
32. This relatively high success rate survives even if federacies in which multiple ethnic units enjoy autonomous relationships with the same common state are counted as one, instead of multiple cases. (With this method, the overall rate decreases to 77 percent.) When this method of counting cases is combined with the inclusion as "failures" of all five excluded cases, the overall success rate decreases further, but only to 67 percent.
33. The best-known exponent of this position is Edward N. Luttwak, "Give War a Chance," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (July/August, 1999), pp. 36–44.
34. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 206.
35. See, for example, ibid. p. 217; and Philip G. Roeder, "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing," in Roeder and Rothchild, *Sustainable Peace*, p. 67.

This approach to federal design (termed "anti-ethnic" federalism for current purposes) differs from simple federalism in that the distribution of ethnic groups is essentially irrelevant to the design of the latter given the state's intrinsic ethnic homogeneity (Argentina, Austria, and Germany), or because ethnicities are territorially dispersed throughout the population (Malaysia, and, to an extent, the United States). With regard to institutional design, therefore, simple federalism is conceptually irrelevant to the problem of managing relations among territorially concentrated ethnic groups. Not so anti-ethnic federalism. The system as a whole is designed to help foster crosscutting societal cleavages either by activating latent intra-ethnic divisions or by cutting one potential source of identity (language, say) across another (religion). This approach to federal design is deeply rooted in the broader pluralist tradition of political analysis and has a venerable lineage that dates back to at least the 1950s.[36] More recently, it informed the recommendations of several scholars regarding the appropriate design of Iraq's federal system.[37]

Unlike simple federalism, anti-ethnic federalism is of direct theoretical relevance to the problem of managing relations among territorially concentrated ethnic groups. Yet it enjoys little, if any, empirical relevance given the paucity of real-world examples of the successful application of this approach. The exception, arguably, is Nigeria's evolving system of federal design, though Roeder also identifies the success of India's federal system as another example. Most scholars, however (including Roeder) classify Nigeria and India as ethnofederations, which means that, taken literally, the system of federal design that critics posit as a superior alternative to ethnofederalism—is ethnofederalism. The problem with alternate systems of federal design, then, is that simple federalism lacks theoretical relevance—it is the answer to a different question. Anti-ethnic federalism, meanwhile, is devoid of empirical points of reference, which renders systematic comparison difficult. Realistically, this leaves unitarism as the most relevantly plausible institutional alternative to ethnofederalism.

Having said this, any attempt to compare systematically the performance of ethnofederalism against another institutional form such as unitarism confronts some serious problems, the most obvious of which is evident from Roeder's comparison of the performance of simple federations and ethnofederations on

---

36. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, expanded ed. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
37. See, for example, Andreas Wimmer, "Democracy and Ethno-religious Conflict in Iraq," *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (2003), pp. 111–134; and Kanan Makiya, "A Model for Post-Saddam Iraq," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 2003), pp. 5–12.

the criterion of secession. If, systematically, ethnofederalism is chosen over simple federalism by those states in which ethnic divisions are deepest and most intractable prior to the adoption of these institutions, which seems intuitively plausible, the empirical observation that ethnofederalism fails at a higher rate than simple federalism is neither surprising nor especially illuminating. This "endogeneity" problem is well known,[38] but critics have struggled to deal with its implications. Relatedly, if a deeply divided state suffers collapse or secession along the lines of ethnic divisions that predate the implementation of the attempted ethnofederal solution, then it raises doubts about the status of ethnofederalism as a "cause" of failure. These issues highlight the need to address institutions both as independent variables (they shape and constrain preferences, thereby "causing" outcomes) and as dependent variables (they are the outcome of bargaining among the actors that create them). For the case against ethnofederalism to be convincing, critics must address both, but for the most part, the focus has been exclusively on ethnofederalism as an independent variable; as the "cause" of a variety of negative outcomes, whether institutional dissolution, secession, or state collapse. Their standard analytical narrative begins with ethnofederalism already in place (for reasons unknown and unexplored) and then proceeds, via the specified causal logics, to outcomes (X to Z via Y).[39]

For critics, then, history begins at point X with a blank slate. It then becomes relatively straightforward to construct a counterfactual argument that, had an alternative institutional choice (anti-ethnic federalism, say) been adopted in preference to ethnofederalism, it would have furnished political actors with different incentives, thereby producing different causal logics and different (superior) outcomes. But to establish that there were feasible alternatives to ethnofederalism at the implementation stage—an indispensable part of the argument—it is necessary to examine institutions as a dependent variable and to factor in the context within which this choice was made. This includes the institutional context. Most states are not born ethnofederal. They begin life with

38. For an excellent discussion of the endogeneity problem in the context of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, see Arman Grigoryan, "Ethnofederalism, Separatism, and Conflict: What Have We Learned from the Soviet and Yugoslav Experiences?" *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2012), pp. 4–9. For statistical evidence that ethnofederalism is "endogenous to legacies of ethnic mobilization," see Benjamin Smith, "Separatist Conflict in the Former Soviet Union and Beyond: How Different Was Communism," *World Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2013), pp. 350–381.

39. See, for example, Roeder's "schematic representation" of the relationship between institutions and outcomes in Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 210.

Table 2. Institutional History of the World's Ethnofederations, 1945–Present

	Born Ethnofederal	Previous Institutional Arrangement
Failures	Category 1	Category 3
	Malaysia (1936–65) Pakistan (1947–71) Serbia-Montenegro (1992–2006) Soviet Union (1922–91)	Czechoslovakia (unitary 1918–68; ethnofederal 1968–94) Ethiopia/Eritrea (ethnofederal 1952–62; unitary 1962–93) South Sudan (unitary 1956–72; ethnofederal 1972 to late 1970s; unitary 1983–2005; ethnofederal 2005–11) Yugoslavia (unitary 1918–39; ethnofederal 1946–92)
Successes	Category 2	Category 4
	Aland Islands/ Finland Bosnia and Herzegovina Pakistan (1971–) Russia Switzerland Zanzibar/Tanzania	Aceh/Indonesia (unitary) Ajara/Georgia (autonomous region within Georgia during Soviet times) Atlantic Region North and Atlantic Region South/ Nicaragua (unitary) Belgium (unitary) Bougainville/Papua New Guinea (unitary); Canada (unitary 1763–91; separate entities 1791–1840; vague form of federalism 1840–67) Comarca Kuna Yala/Panama (unitary); Corsica/France (unitary) Ethiopia (unitary) Faroe Islands/Denmark (unitary) Friuli-Venezia Giulia/Italy (unitary) Gagauzia/Moldova (unitary) Greenland/Denmark (unitary) India (non-ethnic federation inherited from British) Iraq, post-2005 (unitary) Mindanao/the Philippines (unitary) Papua/Indonesia (unitary) Sardinia/Italy (unitary) Sicily/Italy (unitary) Scotland/United Kingdom (unitary) South Africa (unitary with elements of anti-ethnic federalism) Spain (unitary) Trentino-South Tyrol/Italy (unitary) Val d'Osta/Italy (unitary) Vojvodina/Serbia (autonomous region within Serbia 1945–89, autonomy revoked 1989, then restored in 2000) Wales/United Kingdom (unitary)

one set of institutions, then adopt ethnofederalism at some point in their subsequent history. For these "holding-together" ethnofederations, there is also the potential effect of prior institutional arrangements to consider. Table 2 briefly illustrates the context within which ethnofederalism was implemented in the universe of post-1945 ethnofederations, and identifies, where relevant, the previous institutional incarnation of each.

"The Worst Form of Institutional Arrangement. . . ?"

The logic underlying the organization of table 2 may not be immediately obvious and requires some explanation. Cases in category 1 were all ethnofederal at birth, and all were failures according to Roeder's criteria for success and failure. Cases in category 2 are all examples of successful ethnofederations (again, according to Roeder's criteria) that were born ethnofederal and that survive to the present day. Category 3 comprises cases in which failed ethnofederations were preceded by failures of unitary institutions, or vice versa in the case of Ethiopia-Eritrea. Finally, the cases in category 4 are all examples of surviving ethofederations that were preceded by failures of alternative institutional forms.

CATEGORY 1: ETHNOFEDERAL FAILURES

Cases that fall into category 1 constitute the strongest evidence in support of ethnofederalism's critics. In these cases, the implementation of ethnofederalism arguably increased the willingness of ethnic groups to separate from the common state and furnished groups with the institutional resources to achieve this. The result, therefore, was either the secession of one or more ethnic subunits (as in the cases of Serbia/Montenegro, Malaysia, and Pakistan) or state collapse through multiple secessions (as happened to the Soviet Union). These states were all born ethnofederal, so there were no prior institutional forms to help share the burden of blame for this failure.

For these examples to yield useful policy prescriptions, however, requires making the argument that some other institutional form was feasible at the implementation stage, in the sense of being minimally acceptable to all parties, and that it could conceivably have worked better than ethnofederalism. Ethnofederalism may have failed, but could anything else have succeeded in these cases? The detailed counterfactual histories necessary to establish the superior performance of an alternative are beyond the scope of this article. If, however, failure is to be defined according to Roeder's criteria, then all four ethnofederations in this category failed; given this, an alternative cannot logically have performed worse than ethnofederalism. Whether alternatives were feasible at the implementation stage is more difficult to judge. With one exception (the Soviet Union), there was no serious ethnic violence that either preceded or accompanied the creation of these systems, so the need to terminate an unwinnable ethnic conflict did not dictate the choice of ethnofederalism.[40] Two of the

40. There was, of course, a large amount of violence that accompanied the partition of India, but this did not involve conflict between the two "wings" of Pakistan's federation.

four cases that fall into this category (Serbia-Montenegro, Malaysia-Singapore) can be defined as "coming together" federations; that is, they were voluntary unions of preexisting entities. As such, their federal structures were part of the "deal" that created the common state in the first place. The relevant choice, then, was not between ethnofederalism and some institutional alternative, but between ethnofederalism and the noncreation of a common state.[41] It should also be noted that the chronologies involved in these two cases do not fit comfortably with the logic of critics' arguments. In both cases, the federating entities had clearly defined identities prior to the formation of shared institutions, so ethnofederalism cannot plausibly be held accountable for creating identities where none previously existed, and neither lasted long enough to become an "incubator of nationalities" in any meaningful sense. In the case of Serbia-Montenegro, the relationship lasted from 1992 until (effectively) 1998, when Montenegro elected a president running on an independence platform and adopted a currency different from Serbia's. Thereafter, Montenegro was generally considered a "de facto," or "unrecognized" state until its formal independence in 2006.[42] The Malaysia-Singapore relationship proved even less durable, lasting less than two years (September 1963 to August 1965) and ending with the expulsion (or "involuntary secession") of Singapore from the federation.

The case of Pakistan is more complex. The country began postpartition life as an ill-defined ethnofederation of four relatively homogeneous linguistic units, two linguistically heterogeneous units, and a variety of tribal areas and princely states. The major problem confronting the framers of Pakistan's first constitution was how to deal with East Bengal[43]—a linguistically homogeneous (Bengali-speaking) province that contained an absolute majority of the country's population (approximately 56 percent) and was separated from West

41. In the case of Serbia-Montenegro, the main battle lines in Montenegro divided those favoring a federation between Serbia and a "sovereign" Montenegro and those advocating outright independence. Based on the country's 1990 election results, supporters of "unification" with Serbia (i.e., full integration), as represented by the platform of the People's Party, accounted for approximately 12 percent of the voting electorate—roughly equal to the percentage of ethnic Serbs in the population. When the two entities formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, neither a unitary state nor an alternative form of federalism was considered a serious option. Similarly, a unitary structure for the Singapore-Malaysia case was unthinkable given the demographics involved. A unitary structure would have created a majority Chinese state that would have been totally unacceptable to Malays. For details of the negotiations and calculations surrounding the creation of the federation, see Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malay Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945–1965* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2005).
42. See Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 12.
43. Until the passage of Pakistan's first post-independence constitution in 1956, the country operated under an amended version of the Government of India Act of 1935, which established a federal system throughout the territory of pre-partition India.

Pakistan by nearly 1,000 miles of hostile territory. The "solution" was to amalgamate West Pakistan's various autonomous territories into a single federal subunit and to federate this with a renamed East Bengal (East Pakistan). The so-called One Unit Plan, as embedded in the 1956 constitution, resolved the problem of East Pakistan's numerical dominance by providing equal representation for the two subunits in a unicameral parliament. Subsequently, relations between Pakistan's two wings steadily deteriorated, resulting in a nine-month military confrontation in 1971 between West and East Pakistan (with Indian involvement) that ended with the defeat of the West and the independence of the East as Bangladesh. As with the previous two cases, none of the alternatives to ethnofederalism that might, in theory, have existed at the time was seriously entertained.[44] Given the unique challenge of holding together a state in which one subunit containing a majority of the population was separated from the other by 1,000 miles, the only issue up for debate was whether or not to federate West with East as a single unit or multiple subunits.[45] The inevitability of some form of ethnofederalism that included East Bengal as a single unit is not seriously questioned by experts, and was not questioned at the time by Pakistan's political leaders.[46] It also seems implausible that any alternative institutional arrangement could have held Pakistan together where ethnofederalism failed. The absence of feasible alternatives to ethnofederalism is especially stark in the case of Pakistan, but it also applies to Serbia-Montenegro and Malaysia-Singapore. In these cases of "coming together" federations, the one viable option would seem to have been not coming together in the first place. With the benefit of hindsight, Pakistan could perhaps have avoided a costly secessionist war by choosing to keep its two wings separate from the outset. In the other two cases, the costs associated with coming together were minimal, in that neither stayed together for long, and both came apart peacefully. In general, however, the "not coming together" policy prescription that follows from these three cases has no relevance to the large majority of ethnofederations. As table 2 illustrates, more than 90 percent of ethnofederations are "holding together" systems for which "not coming together" was never an option.

This leaves the Soviet Union. As the bedrock of the anti-ethnofederal argu-

44. Katherine Adeney, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 71.
45. The One Unit Plan that was eventually adopted actually made Pakistan's system less ethnofederal than it had been by creating a single, ethnically heterogeneous subunit in the West out of several more homogeneous units.
46. See, for example, Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Federalism and State Disintegration—United Pakistan, 1947–1971: Some Historical Lessons for Afghanistan and Iraq," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (October 2010), pp. 504–521; and Khalid Bin Sayeed, "Federalism and Pakistan," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 9 (September 1954), pp. 139–143.

ment, the failure of ethnofederalism in the Soviet Union is of peculiar significance. It is the case from which the argument was originally derived, and the case most frequently used, whether appropriately or not, as evidence of ethnofederalism's failings. The merits of the case have been debated at length elsewhere, so there is little sense retreading old ground. The Soviet system of ethnofederalism irrefutably enhanced the capacity to secede by furnishing republics with institutional resources that were mobilized when the opportunity arose to push for independence from the Soviet Union. These same institutional resources would not have been available under a unitary system. The institutional resources argument is limited, however, in that it is an argument about the facilitation of secession, not its causation; ethnofederalism is an intervening variable that facilitates the translation of cause (discontent, for whatever reason, with the Soviet system) into effect (successful secession). There is nothing wrong with this argument, but it stops short of the claims that critics typically make about the effects of ethnofederalism.

To transcend this limitation requires an additional argument, namely, that ethnofederalism increased the willingness/desire of ethnic units to secede by hardening/deepening ethnic identities, or even creating these from scratch. It is unclear, however, that the empirical evidence supports this argument. Logically, if ethnofedferalism had this effect on ethnic identity, then those republics with the longest experience as ethnic units in the Soviet system should also have been those with the strongest desire to secede; this was not the case, however. The most enthusiastic secessionists were those with the shortest exposure to the effects of the system (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia), whereas the longest-serving republics all voted overwhelmingly to preserve the Soviet Union as late as March 1991. This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that ethnofederalism strengthened attachment to the common state over time rather than hardening or deepening exclusive ethnic identities. It is also consistent with the more plausible explanation that demand for secession was higher in those republics with strongly defined pre-Soviet identities or experience of independence or both. This too is problematic for critics of ethnofederalism. If those republics with the most developed pre-Soviet ethnic identities were those in which demand for secession was highest (and vice versa for those republics where pre-Soviet identities were weak or nonexistent),[47] then a reasonable conclusion to draw is that ethnofederalism had no constitutive effect on ethnic identities. Either way, little in the Soviet experience suggests that ethnofederalism functioned as anything

47. This is what Benjamin Smith finds in his careful statistical analysis of separatist conflict in the Soviet Union. See Smith, "Separatist Conflict in the Former Soviet Union and Beyond."

more than an intervening variable linking demand to supply in the process of state collapse.

Were there alternative institutional forms that could have been chosen and would have avoided this fate? Roeder's suggestion was to have regionalized the Soviet Union according to principles of economic efficiency, along lines advocated by Gosplan in 1922. But according to John Morrison (the source Roeder cites for the proposal), Gosplan's plan for economic *rayons* faced the "very practical obstacle" that it conflicted with the existing delimitation on the basis of nationalities and some "fundamental theoretical objections." Among these, according to Morrison, was the complete absence of the economic data necessary to make this form of delimitation in large swathes of the Soviet Union. Writing in 1938, Morrison notes, "[F]or vast areas in Siberia and Central Asia sufficient data upon which to base a delimitation are not even now available, after a decade and a half of intensive scientific exploration and investigation."[48]

More interesting than this proposed alternative is how Roeder describes the process of delimitation that actually occurred. In his words, "[T]he designers sought to control the nation-states most likely to foster centrifugal pressures in the future by dividing them and submerging them within new segment states."[49] Thus, "over strong objections from Georgian nationalists," Moscow submerged Georgia in a newly created Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. The opposite approach was adopted in Central Asia, according to Roeder. Here, Moscow adopted a divide-and-rule approach to border delimitation to preempt the emergence of a nation-state project based on Turkestan. By this reading, the constant drawing and redrawing of borders in Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s was an attempt "to prevent the crystallization of nationalism around the most threatening nation-state projects."[50] The same logic apparently underpinned the division of the Mountain Autonomous Republic and the mid-Volga regions.[51] The divide-and-rule logic that, in Roeder's view, characterized the delimitation of borders in much of the Soviet Union is more characteristic of anti-ethnic federalism than ethnofederal-

48. John A. Morrison, "The Evolution of the Territorial-Administrative System of the USSR," *American Quarterly on the Soviet Union*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (October 1938), p. 31.
49. Roeder, *Where Nation-States Come From*, p. 60.
50. Ibid., p. 61. Other scholars who make the "divide and rule" argument about the delimitation of Central Asian borders include Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism* (London: Macmillan, 1953); and Steven Sabol, "The Creation of Soviet Central Asia: The 1924 National Delimitation," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1995), pp. 225–241. For an alternative perspective, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).
51. Roeder, *Where Nation-States Come From*, p. 62.

ism. Indeed, is corresponds closely to the logic underlying the design of the Nigerian system, a system Roeder praises as "the use of federalism to avoid the dangers of ethnofederalism."[52] In effect, then, the designers of the Soviet federal system did what Roeder recommends should be done to avoid the perils of ethnofederalism.

All four category 1 cases were failures of ethnofederalism. The problem in all four cases was the lack of feasible institutional alternatives; or, arguably in the case of the Soviet Union, the failure of an alternative (anti-ethnic federalism) that was actually implemented. Their failure supports the empirical validity of the argument against ethnofederalism, but the absence of alternatives negates its prescriptive utility. If ethnofederalism is chosen only in cases where feasible alternatives do not exist, then it is not really a "choice" at all, and prior knowledge that there is a high probability of failure is of marginal utility. This changes if the empirical evidence indicates that ethnofederalism is certain to fail, but, as the cases in category 2 demonstrate, ethnofederalism succeeds in at least as many cases as it fails.[53]

CATEGORY 2: ETHNOFEDERAL SUCCESSES

Cases that fall into category 2 fit a pattern that cuts against the arguments of critics. These are states that were born ethnofederal, but that have suffered neither state collapse nor secessions, nor the dissolution of ethnofederal institutions. By Roeder's criteria, therefore, they are ethnofederations that have, to date, succeeded. None of these cases (with the possible exception of the Aland Islands) provides a ringing endorsement for the elegance of ethnofederalism as a solution to ethnic problems. Pakistan has struggled with serious internal instability since its creation and has been only sporadically democratic since the secession of East Pakistan in 1971. Russia's ethnofederation endures, but has become significantly more centralized under President/Prime Minister Vladimir Putin than it was under Boris Yeltsin. With respect to Switzerland, the success of the system is beyond dispute, but some scholars question the validity of Switzerland's classification as an ethnofederation.[54] The success of the Aland Islands, meanwhile, must be balanced against the caveat that the entity in question has the good fortune to be sandwiched between Finland and

52. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 217.
53. If the empirical evidence were to indicate that ethnofederalism has a near 100 percent failure rate, then this would be useful knowledge for institutional designers. If ethnofederalism is certain to fail, then presumably political leaders of potential "coming together" federations, such as Malaysia, could choose to stay apart rather than implement a doomed institution.
54. See, for example, Paolo Dardanelli and Nenad Stajanović, "The Acid Test? Competing Theses on the Nationality-Democracy Nexus and the Case of Switzerland," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 357–376.

Sweden. The most questionable "success" in this category is Bosnia. There is little evidence that the accommodation of ethnic groups via the provision of federal homelands has done much to improve ethnic relations, and it is arguable whether Bosnia has avoided secession or state collapse only through the active, often dictatorial involvement of the international community.

All that stands out about the cases in categories 1 and 2 is their collective weakness as evidence either for or against ethnofederalism. States born ethnofederal appear to succeed and fail at about the same rate. It is difficult to see what feasible alternatives were available in the cases of failure, in which case ethnofederalism failed where nothing else would likely have succeeded; at the same time, none of the successes comes without caveats.

A more interesting and informative body of evidence is provided by cases that fall into categories 3 and 4.

CATEGORY 3: AMBIGUOUS CASES

Cases in category 3 experienced failures of both unitary and ethnofederal institutions at different points in their political evolution. These are ambiguous cases because it is unclear to which institutional form the eventual failure should be attributed. Much depends on where the emphasis is placed. It seems plausible that the manner of the failure in these cases was dictated by ethnofederal institutions; both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia split along lines that more or less followed the trajectory of subunit boundaries, and it is unlikely that the international community would have recognized the independence of South Sudan had it not enjoyed some prior existence as an autonomous, territorially defined entity. Even if ethnofederalism plausibly explains how these systems failed, however, the issue of why they failed is less clear. A brief analysis of their evolution from unitary institutions, through ethnofederalism, to failure, can help to shed light on why these systems failed.

In the case of Yugoslavia, if the narrative begins in 1946 with the implementation of the state's ethnofederal system, then it is difficult to dispute the plausibility of the relationship between ethnofederalism and state collapse in the 1990s; but Yugoslavia's history did not begin in 1946. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was created in December 1918 as a voluntary union of the South Slav territories of the Habsburg Empire (the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs) with the independent Kingdom of Serbia.[55] The intention to create this new entity had been announced in the Corfu Declaration of 1917, but the declaration failed to articulate precisely the terms of union. It offered

55. Simultaneously, the Montenegrin parliament voted to depose its monarch and unify with Serbia.

some deference to the new state's "tri-national" character, provided for "local autonomies" on the basis of "natural, social, and economic conditions," but left the key issue of institutional design—most importantly, whether the state was to be unitary, federal, or confederal—to be determined by an unspecified "numerically qualified majority" of an elected constituent assembly.[56]

The assembly elected in November 1920 was dominated politically, if not numerically, by two Serb parties—the Democratic Party and the Radical Party—both of which were firmly committed to establishing a centralized, unitary state. The main Croatian party, the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (HRSS), strongly opposed the idea of a unitary state, favoring instead a form of confederation based on ethnic units, or even outright independence for Croatia. As a result, in part, of the HRSS's decision to boycott the assembly's proceedings, centralist forces were able to dominate the Constitutional Committee and ram through the so-called Vidovan Constitution (on a simple majority vote). The constitution divided the state territorially into thirty-three powerless, intentionally nonethnic *oblasti* and located all meaningful power in the hands of the king and his government in Belgrade.[57] From the outset, a significant portion of the kingdom's population bitterly opposed the Serbs' unitary, centralized vision for the new state.[58] "Henceforth," according to Jill Irvine, "the most urgent question in the new kingdom became designing a constitutional order that would, if not ensure Croats' support, at least diminish their hostility to a manageable level."[59] In the absence of such support, the kingdom became increasingly ungovernable during the 1920s. In January 1929, King Alexander dissolved parliament, banned all political parties, and imposed a dictatorship. Declaring, "It is my sacred duty to preserve the unity of nation and State by all means,"[60] the king embarked on an ambitious attempt to impose a "Yugoslav" identity on his people. This official ideology of "integral Yugoslavism" involved, among other things, renaming the state "The

---

56. "The Corfu Declaration, 20 July 1917," http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/greaterserbia_corfudeclaration.htm.
57. Also absent from the assembly were fifty-eight elected deputies from the Communist Party, the activities of which had been banned some months earlier. To secure the necessary majority for passage of the constitution, the Serb-dominated cabinet bought off the Agrarians and the Yugoslav Muslim Organization. For details on the motivations of the latter party, which provided the pivotal votes necessary for passage, see Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 373–377.
58. Based on voting patterns in the 1920 elections and the platforms of the various political parties, Banac conludes that the population "was divided fairly evenly" on the (con)federalism versus unitary state issue. See ibid., pp. 387–392.
59. Jill A. Irvine, *The Croat Question: Partisan Politics in the Formation of the Yugoslav Socialist State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993), p. 36.
60. Quoted in Dejan Djokic, "Disintegrating Yugoslavia: King Alexander and Interwar Yugoslavism," in Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 147.

Kingdom of Yugoslavia"; prohibiting all political parties and organizations representing religious or "tribal" interests; creating a Yugoslav National Party to promote national unity; and overhauling the education curriculum at all levels to reflect the common ancestry of the Yugoslav nation.[61] Territorially, nine new provinces (*banovine*) replaced the thirty-three *oblasti* of the former regime. These were named mostly after rivers to avoid references to ethnic homelands and were deliberately delimited to cut across historic (ethnic) boundaries. According to Pieter Troch, "Banovine were intended to become the primary regional spaces of identification."[62] The futility of this exercise in social engineering was apparently evident to the king himself, and it did not long survive his assassination in 1934.[63] By the late 1930s, even many Serb political leaders had come to realize that the only viable way to solve the Croat question and safeguard the unity of Yugoslavia in the face of the expected war to come was to provide some form of territorial autonomy to Croatia. This came in the form of the 1939 Sporazum, an agreement between Serb and Croat political leaders to create an explicitly ethnic Croatian *banovina* and to restore traditional Croatian governing institutions, such as the *sibor* (parliament) within this territory.[64] The Sporazum was intended to be the prelude to the reorganization of the state along ethnofederal lines, but the Axis powers' invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941 interrupted its implementation. The ensuing "Yugoslav apocalypse" involved multiple simultaneous wars, but the ethnic dimension to the conflict was undeniable.[65] "With normal peacetime controls eradicated," as Walker Connor puts it, "the awesome depth of ethnic animosities within Yugoslavia was soon revealed."[66] Recognizing this, the one truly multiethnic fighting force in the region—Josip Broz Tito's Communist Partisans—intentionally couched its rallying slogans not in the context of ideology or Yugoslav unity but in the context of national (ethnic) liberation.[67] From the outset of the war, the Partisan army was itself organized along ethnofederal

---

61. For a detailed treatment of the integral Yugoslavism ideology that focuses on efforts to use education to promote Yugoslav identity and unity, see Pieter Troch, "Yugoslavism between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (March 2010), pp. 227–244.
62. Ibid., p. 235. According to Troch, as part of the changes to the curriculum, students were required to study the history of the newly created *banovina* in which they resided.
63. In 1934 King Alexander reportedly suggested that the amputation of Croatia was the only viable remedy to the Croat question. For details, see Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 109–110.
64. For a useful assessment (from a Serb perspective) of the Sporazum, see Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983).
65. This term is taken from Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine, *Bosnia: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 136.
66. Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 153.
67. For a detailed analysis of Tito's strategy and examples of the various ethnic slogans used by the Communists, see ibid., chap. 6.

lines and as early as 1943 the Yugoslav Communist Party pledged to establish an ethnofederation based on the state's constituent nations in postwar Yugoslavia. Accordingly, Yugoslavia's first postwar constitution, adopted in 1946, created an ethnofederation of six republics and two autonomous entities.

When Yugoslavia's prewar experience is incorporated into a complete history of Yugoslavia's institutional evolution, it becomes less clear which institutional form bears responsibility, and to what extent, for the ultimate collapse of the state. The original union was generally favored by all groups, including the Croats,[68] but there was sharp disagreement between (most) Serbs and (most) Croats over the internal organization of the new state.[69] The eventual choice of unitarism was not a compromise, and it was deeply resented by Croats.[70] Over time, this resentment only increased. Unitarism manifestly failed in the Yugoslav context. The primary sources of tension between Serbs and Croats over the 1918–39 period were the failure of the unitary Vidovan Constitution to preserve the territorial autonomy of historic "Croatdom," and fear among Croats that unitarism would allow the numerically preponderant Serbs to dominate the state.[71] Unitarism helped to create a "Croat question" that it was then unable to answer.

Czechoslovakia's political evolution followed a similar, if notably less violent, trajectory to that of Yugoslavia. Formed in the immediate post–World War I period, the new state of Czechoslovakia (or, Czecho-Slovakia) united two territories of the defunct Habsburg Empire—the formerly Austrian-controlled Czech lands and the Hungarian-administered Slovakia. Although the Pittsburgh agreement of May 1918 had recognized two distinct national

---

68. In fact, it can be argued that the Croats were ideologically committed earlier and more deeply than the Serbs to the idea of a unified South Slav state. The idea of Yugoslavia originated with Croat intellectuals as early as the 1830s in the guise of an "Illyrian" state. See Tihomir Cipek, "The Croats and Yugoslavism," in Djokic, *Yugoslavism*, pp. 71–83.

69. Within each group, there was considerable diversity of opinion with respect to the proper organization of the state; these views changed over time. Some Serb nationalists, for example, favored the establishment of a Greater Serbia either within or at the expense of a unified Yugoslavia. Some Croats, meanwhile, favored independence, whereas others were prepared to tolerate a "unitary" system that was flexible enough to provide autonomy for Croatdom. On the diversity of Croatian views, see Cipek, "The Croats and Yugoslavism," pp. 71–83. For Serb perspectives, see Jasna Dragovic-Soso, "Rethinking Yugoslavia: Serbian Intellectuals and the 'National Question' in Historical Perspective," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 2004), pp. 170–184.

70. On the eve of the passage of the constitution, Anye Trumbić, the generally moderate Croatian political leader, lamented, "A centralist system is pushed through under the guise of unity. . . . This system represents a danger to peace and harmony among the people and to the pacification of conditions in the state. . . . This constitution will sharpen the tribal conflicts all the more." See Trumbić, quoted in Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 402.

71. To an extent, the fears of Croats were borne out by events. Over the 1918–39 period, Serbs dominated positions of political power and all but monopolized the officer corps of the armed forces. See Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*, pp. 140–141.

identities within the common state, designated the Slovak language as "the official language in schools and in public life" in Slovakia,[72] and identified autonomous political institutions for Slovakia,[73] the new state's first constitution, promulgated in 1920, "was in every respect the constitution of a centralized, unitary state."[74] It contained no reference to Slovak autonomy and declared "Czechoslovak" to be the official language of the state, thus denying Slovak claims to a separate linguistic identity. From a Czech perspective, the insistence on a unitary state was driven by concerns that recognition of Slovak autonomy would inexorably lead to autonomy demands from the state's other ethnic minorities (Germans and Hungarians).[75] It would also leave it vulnerable to either disintegration or predatory neighbors.[76] As a result of their numerical preponderance and a number of historically derived advantages, Czechs were always likely to control the key institutions of state.[77]

Throughout the life span of the First Republic (1918–38), the political space was dominated by five statewide, Czech-dominated parties that were all, though in varying degrees, hostile to expressions of Slovak nationalism and opposed to institutionalized autonomy for Slovakia.[78] With none of these parties capable of gaining anything close to a majority of seats in parliament, the First Republic was governed by a series of unstable coalitions comprised of various permutations of the five main parties.[79] Nationalist parties, whether Slovak, German, or Hungarian, were deemed "unacceptable" coalition partners and were almost entirely excluded from government, denying them the substantial patronage benefits associated with participation in

---

72. The Pittsburgh agreement is quoted in Alois R. Nykl, "Czechoslovakia or Czecho-Slovakia?" *Slavonic and East European Review, American Series*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1944), pp. 104–106.
73. The declaration stated that Slovakia "will have its own administration, its Diet, and its Court." See ibid., p. 106.
74. Elisabeth M. Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination in Czechoslovak Constitutions, 1920–1992," p. 9, http://folk.uio.no/stveb1/Czechoslovak_constitutions.pdf.
75. According to the 1921 census, Czechs made up approximately 51 percent of the population, Slovaks 15 percent, Germans 23 percent, Magyars (Hungarians) 6 percent, and others (mainly Ruthenians, Jews, and Poles) 1 percent. Figures taken from Elisabeth M. Bakke, *Doomed to Failure? The Czechoslovak Nation Project and the Slovak Autonomist Reaction, 1918–38* (Oslo: Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, 1999), p. 168. The Germans were overwhelmingly concentrated in Czech lands, and the Hungarians almost exclusively lived in Slovakia.
76. Carol Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia: The Making and Remaking of a State, 1918–1987* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 136.
77. The Czech lands were, for example, more economically developed. The Czechs had also experienced democracy under Austrian tutelage and were, therefore, much better prepared than Slovaks in terms of political expertise and institutions for democracy under the First Republic. For details of the various Czech advantages relative to Slovaks, see Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, chap. 1.
78. To an extent, the Agrarians were an exception. A less rigid opposition to the idea of Slovak autonomy enabled the party to poll well among Slovaks, unlike the other four parties.
79. Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, pp. 59–60.

government. In this way, the Czech-dominated parties, supported by a cadre of "Czechoslovak" Slovaks, were able to keep the "Slovak question" off the political agenda. In place of a serious debate about the role and status of Slovaks within the political system, the government substituted an ideology of "Czechoslovakism" by which Czechs and Slovaks were considered two branches of the same ethnic group, and the Slovak language was deemed a dialect of Czech. The belief among many Czech leaders was that Slovak nationalism was a "backward" and "primitive" ideology that would wither away once Slovaks had become more economically developed and educated to the level of their more enlightened Czech neighbors.[80] Hence, the government made considerable efforts to inculcate a sense of Czechoslovak identity via the education system. As perennial President of the First Republic Tomáš Masaryk put it, "There is no Slovak nation. . . . The Czechs and Slovaks are brothers. . . . Only cultural level separates them—the Czechs are more developed than the Slovaks. . . . We are founding Slovak schools. It is necessary to await the results; in one generation there will be no difference between the two branches of our national family."[81]

By the mid-1930s, however, Czechoslovakism had not achieved the desired results.[82] The newly educated generation of Slovaks was less Czechoslovak and more nationalistic than earlier generations;[83] the main political party representing an autonomist/separatist platform—Hlinka's Slovak People's Party—reliably garnered 30–35 percent of the vote in Slovakia in every post-1920 election; and the rhetoric of its leaders had, if anything, escalated in intensity.[84] The crunch came in the aftermath of the 1938 Munich agreement, which cost Czechoslovakia the German Sudetenland. Faced with hostile forces on all sides, the Czech government reluctantly agreed to the Zilina accord of 1938. The accord provided regional autonomy for Slovakia, complete with its own

80. Ibid., p. 156.
81. Tomas Masaryk, quoted in Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, p. 138. For details of how the ideology of "Czechoslovakism" manifested itself within the education system, see Elisabeth M. Bakke "The Making of Czechoslovakism in the First Czechoslovak Republic," in Martin Schulze Wessel, ed., *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik, 1918–1938. Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten* [Loyalties in the Czechoslovakian Republic, 1918–1938. Political, national, and cultural affiliations] (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2004), pp. 23–44. The full text is available on Bakke's website: http://folk.uio.no/stveb1/Czechoslovakism_Loyalitaten.pdf.
82. According to Bakke, "It was quite obvious already by the mid-1930s that Czechoslovakism had failed." See Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination in Czechoslovak Constitutions, 1920–1992," p. 43.
83. Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, p. 26. It is also notable in this context that Slovak nationalist deputies in parliament during the First Republic were drawn disproportionately from the most educated sectors of Slovak society, suggesting that level of education and degree of nationalist sentiment were not necessarily inversely related. See ibid., pp. 187–189.
84. Ibid., pp. 85, 159.

parliament and ministries; recognized Slovakia as a "sovereign" and "equal" nation; and officially changed the name of the country by reintroducing the hyphen (i.e., Czecho-Slovakia) that had been present in the Pittsburgh agreement, but absent from the First Republic.[85] The stillborn Second Czecho-Slovak Republic lasted about six months before Slovakia bowed to German pressure and declared independence as the Slovak Republic in March 1939.

The Slovaks' (albeit tarnished) experience of self-government during World War II helped to shape the bargaining context for immediate postwar efforts to address the Slovak question. In 1945 the Košice agreement recognized Slovaks as a "nationally sovereign nation,"[86] and it legitimized the existence of two institutions: the Slovak National Council and a board of commissioners as legislative and executive arms, respectively, of an autonomous Slovak government. Following the Communist takeover in 1948, however, the government gradually stripped this "asymmetric" solution of meaningful content.[87] While the constitutions of 1948 and 1960 both recognized Slovaks as comprising a separate nation, and stressed the equality of the two constituting nations, "the institutional setup . . . was that of a centralized, unitary state."[88] Along with this diminution of institutional autonomy, Communist leaders launched a series of purges of party ranks to weed out "bourgeois nationalists."[89] What was "astonishing" and "crushing" in Leff's view, was that "less than five years after the Košice guarantees, Slovaks faced trial on charges of asserting their national identity."[90] Slovak nationalism was impervious to attempts to eradicate it, however, and during the Prague Spring of 1968, the Slovak Communist Party secretary, Alexander Dubček, introduced the Action Program. Among other things, this called for granting Slovakia full autonomy within a systemwide federation. Although the Soviet intervention of 1968 led to the removal of Dubček, a constitutional law was passed in October 1968 that fundamentally altered the institutional landscape of Czechoslovakia. The law created a

85. For details of the terms of the Zilina accord, see Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination in Czechoslovak Constitutions, 1920–1992," p. 13.
86. Quoted in Brad Adams, "The Politics of Retribution: The Trial of Jozef Tiso," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (March 1996), p. 259.
87. For details of the steady erosion of Slovak autonomy, see H. Gordon Skilling, "Czechoslovakia: Government in Communist Hands," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (August 1955), pp. 424–447; and H. Gordon Skilling, "The Czechoslovak Constitution of 1960 and the Transition to Communism," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (February 1962), pp. 142–166, especially pp. 156–159.
88. Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination in Czechoslovak Constitutions, 1920–1992," p. 10. The 1960 constitution, for example, scrapped the board of commissioners and gave the Czechoslovak parliament the power to annul laws passed by the Slovak National Council if they conflicted with the constitution or other laws.
89. See Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, "Slovak Nationalism in Socialist Czechoslovakia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (June 1980), pp. 220–246, especially pp. 242–244.
90. Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, p. 167.

symmetrical ethnofederation with separate Czech and Slovak regional governments and an upper house of parliament, the Chamber of Nations, in which Czechs and Slovaks were equally represented. Various supermajority requirements, meanwhile, ensured that Slovakia had de facto veto power over all important decisions. Although the powers of regional governments relative to the federal government were recalibrated in the latter's favor in 1970, these basic federal institutions survived intact until the state's official dissolution in January 1993.

As with the case of Yugoslavia, if Czechoslovakia's institutional history begins in 1968 (or 1948), then the argument that ethnofederalism bears responsibility for the collapse of the state is persuasive. If this history is traced to its logical starting point, that is, 1918, a different picture emerges. Unitary government backed by a state-sponsored campaign to promote an ideology of Czechoslovakism failed to assimilate most, but not all, Slovaks into the Czechoslovak state.[91] The perpetuation of the "Slovak question" was the result of the First Republic's failure to furnish Slovaks with autonomous status within a Czech-dominated state. The problem only worsened during the life span of the republic. Hence, the political and institutional framework established under the First Republic "(paved) the way for the emergence of a durable identity politics that became more firmly rooted with each passing decade."[92] By this narrative, ethnofederalism failed in 1993 because it was unable to resolve a problem bequeathed to it from preexisting unitary institutions.

Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia have been pivotal to the argument against ethnofederalism virtually from the outset. Without these two, the failure of the Soviet Union's ethnofederal system is an anomaly; with these two, it becomes part of a pattern. Yet to characterize Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as failures of ethnofederalism is to simplify and distort a complex reality. Both certainly failed as ethnofederations in the 1990s, but they also failed as unitary states in the 1930s. Moreover, it is arguable that they failed as ethnofederations because they were unable to resolve problems created and exacerbated by the imposition of prewar unitary institutions.

The other two cases in this category, Sudan-South Sudan and Ethiopia-Eritrea, have been relatively peripheral to the debate on ethnofederalism. In-

---

91. Although difficult to measure, the failures of Czechoslovakism and unitarism are not seriously questioned by scholars and are, in some ways, self-evident. Czech leaders chose to dissolve unitary institutions and grant autonomy to Slovakia in 1938 not because they wanted to, but because they thought it was the best way to sustain the territorial integrity of the state in the face of external threats.
92. Carol Skalnik Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation versus State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), p. 27.

deed, it is reasonable to question whether either really belongs in the debate at all.[93] Having said this, the two merit brief consideration, if for no reason other than that they highlight the difficulties involved in attributing blame for failure to specific institutions.

Prior to South Sudan's formal separation from the rest of the country in 2011, Sudan had been wracked by civil war for most of its independent existence. At the core of the problem was a country divided along multiple, reinforcing lines of cleavage. North of the 10th parallel, the population was largely Muslim, Arabic speaking, and "primarily Middle Eastern in orientation and historical consciousness";[94] south of the line, the population was multilingual (though English is a shared language), African, and either animist or Christian. These basic identity differences were reinforced by a history of fraught relations between North and South and the British colonial policy of ruling the two parts of the country as separate administrative units.[95] The two parts of Sudan were unified in preparation for independence in 1956 without the consent of the South and against the advice of the South's British colonial administrators.[96] In place of the scheduled referendum on independence, as agreed with the departing British, the Sudanese parliament preemptively issued a declaration of independence to take effect on January 1, 1956. In an effort to win over the small cadre of reluctant Southern members, the declaration included a clause stating that "the claims of Southern Members of Parliament for federal government in the three Southern provinces shall be given full consideration."[97] When the National Constitutional Committee submitted its report to parliament in 1958, however, it recommended that Sudan adopt a unitary form of government with Islam as the official state religion and Arabic as

---

93. Specifically, there are legitimate questions as to whether either South Sudan or Eritrea can accurately be described as "ethnic" units. Eritrea has at least nine distinct ethnic groups, each with its own language, to say nothing of the Christian/Muslim divide that splits the population roughly in half. This divide was evident at the time the Ethiopia-Eritrea federation was created, with (mainly) Muslims opposed to the union with Ethiopia, and (mainly) Christians in support. Although an Eritrean "nationalist" identity had arguably emerged by the end of the 1970s, it was an identity based around the Eritrean state, not around the conception of a shared ethnic heritage. For analyses of the contents of Eritrean "national" identity, see Mesfin Araya "The Eritrean Question: An Alternative Explanation," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1990), pp. 79–100; and John Sorenson, "Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 310–317. Likewise, with South Sudan, it is problematic to speak of a single defined ethnic identity. There is considerable racial, religious, and linguistic diversity among the peoples of the South; what unites them is not sharing the predominant ethnic and religious characteristics of the North (Arab and Muslim).

94. Haim Shaked, "Anatomy of an Autonomy: The Case of Southern Sudan," in Yoram Dinstein, ed., *Models of Autonomy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1981), p. 159.

95. Ibid., p. 160.

96. Dunstan M. Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan* (New York: Africana, 1981), pp. 35–41.

97. Ibid., p. 69.

the official and national language. Understandably, the South found all of these recommendations unacceptable. Before the new constitution could be approved, however, Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Abboud staged a military coup in November 1958 and brought an end to Sudan's brief flirtation with democracy. The political system under Abboud was unitary, centralized, and dictatorial. The Northern-dominated Sudanese government adopted an aggressive policy of Arabization and Islamization in the South with the goal of coercively assimilating the region into the rest of the country.[98] The aim was national unity through homogenization, but the result was "to antagonize the South and widen the cleavage between the parts of the country."[99] The end product was the emergence of organized resistance to Khartoum, led by exiled political leaders and Southern troops.[100] The ensuing civil war resulted in the deaths of up to half a million people and lasted until 1972. In that year, the Khartoum government and Southern forces reached a peace agreement at Addis Ababa that included the Southern Provinces Regional Self-Government Act. The act provided a limited form of autonomy for South Sudan that was, in the view of Haim Shaked, "a reasonable and dignified compromise between two conflicting attitudes."[101]

While the 1972 agreement succeeded in bringing an end to the ruinous civil war and ushered in a period of relative peace between North and South, the South struggled to create the sorts of durable political and administrative institutions that the agreement required, and instability plagued the entire country throughout the 1970s.[102] The death knell for the agreement, however, came in the late 1970s with the discovery of significant oil deposits in the South. In an effort to assert the central government's control over these oil fields, Sudanese President Gaafar al-Numeiri abolished the autonomy of the South and divided it into three regions "in an effort to split the southern opposition."[103] Shortly thereafter, al-Numeiri introduced sharia throughout Sudan

98. For details, see Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflicts of Identity in the Sudan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), pp. 137–140; and Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan*, pp. 80–93.
99. Deng, *War of Visions*, p. 139.
100. Many analysts trace the onset of civil war to the Torit Mutiny of 1955, in which African troops of the Equatoria Corps mutinied against their Arab officers. The mutiny was brutally suppressed by Northern forces, however, and many Southern participants fled to neighboring countries, from which they would organize an armed insurgency in the 1960s. For details, see Scopas S. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 49–72.
101. Shaked, "Anatomy of an Autonomy," p. 155.
102. For details, see Terje Tvedt, "The Collapse of the State in Southern Sudan after the Addis Ababa Agreement," in Sharif Harir and Tvedt, eds., *Short-Cut to Decay: The Case of Sudan* (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1994), pp. 69–104.
103. Thomas Benedikter, *The World's Working Regional Autonomies: An Introduction and Comparative Analysis* (London: Anthem, 2007), p. 262. On this, see also Donald Rothchild, *Managing Ethnic*

in 1983. This action prompted a rebellion by Southern troops under Arab command led by Col. John Garang, who then established the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement to carry on the armed struggle against Khartoum. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 eventually brought the war to a halt. The treaty amalgamated a series of protocols that had been concluded between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement and the central government, including the pivotal Machakos Protocol of July 2002, which recognized the right to self-determination of South Sudan. It also established a complex political arrangement to govern relations between the center and the periphery that put Sudan somewhere between a federal system and a federacy.[104] Critically, the agreement contained an explicit right for South Sudan to hold a referendum on independence (or continued unity) at the end of the interim period. In July 2011, South Sudan duly exercised its option and voted to secede from Sudan, thus creating Africa's latest independent country.

By any reasonable assessment, every attempt to design institutions to hold together the South and North failed miserably. Unitary institutions, backed by attempts at coercive assimilation, failed on two occasions to create a unified common state (1956–73, and 1983–2005), but ethnofederalism also failed twice (1973–83, and 2005–11).[105] This track record of failure means that, realistically, the case of South Sudan provides evidence of very little, other than the apparent inability of South and North to coexist in the same state regardless of institutional design.

The case of Ethiopia-Eritrea stands out as rare, if not unique, in that it involved a substate entity, Eritrea, seceding from a unitary state, Ethiopia. Ethiopia-Eritrea began life as a federation after the big four postwar powers proved unable to decide the fate of the former Italian colony of Eritrea. Because Eritrea was claimed by Ethiopia for historical and strategic reasons, opinion in Eritrea regarding its future status was divided between those wanting independence and those favoring union with Ethiopia.[106] The United

Conflict in Africa: Pressures and Incentives for Cooperation (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), pp. 234–235.

104. For details, see Marc Weller, "Self-Governance in Interim Settlements: The Case of Sudan," in Weller and Stefan Wolff, eds., *Autonomy, Self-Governance, and Conflict Resolution: Innovative Approaches to Institutional Design in Divided Societies* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 158–179.

105. It is perhaps unreasonable to describe the second ethnofederal period as a failure, in that it was generally understood that the institutions established by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement were intended to govern relations between the two entities only until the South Sudanese had the opportunity to vote on independence.

106. It is almost impossible to gauge the scale of support for either independence or union with Ethiopia, because no reliable opinion poll was conducted. A commission of investigation established by the four powers conducted interviews with rural Eritreans and found strong support for union in the (mainly Christian) Highlands, and overwhelming opposition in the (mainly Muslim)

Nations General Assembly, empowered to make a final, binding recommendation on Eritrea's future status, was also divided, but was ultimately able to muster an affirmative vote for the idea of a federation.[107] Accordingly, General Assembly Resolution 390-A(V) of December 1950 determined that "Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown." It also established some broad guidelines for the division of powers between Eritrea and the federal government and mandated the establishment of the Imperial Federal Council, with equal representation, to "advise upon the common affairs of the federation."[108] Resolution 390 was incorporated into a Federal Act, which the newly elected Eritrean Assembly ratified along with the draft Eritrean constitution in July 1952. Following the requisite ratification by the Ethiopian emperor, the Eritrea-Ethiopia federation came into being on September 15, 1952. Almost immediately, the agreement began to unravel. The Ethiopian government suspended the Eritrean constitution in 1952, unilaterally replaced the Eritrean president in 1953, suspended the Eritrean Assembly in 1956, replaced Arabic and Tigrinya with Amharic as the state's official language in 1956, and banned the flying of the Eritrean flag in 1959.[109] Finally, what little remained of Eritrea's autonomy was formally eliminated in 1962, when the Eritrean Assembly voted for its own elimination "at gun point" and Eritrea was officially annexed by Ethiopia.[110] By this point, armed resistance to Ethiopia had already begun to form in the shape of the Eritrean Liberation Front. Under its successor, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the Eritreans conducted a successful guerrilla campaign against Ethiopian government forces and eventually won a series of decisive military victories in the late 1980s. In 1991 the Front announced the formation of a provisional government for Eritrea, and in 1993 Eritreans voted almost unanimously for independence from Ethiopia in a referendum agreed to by a new regime in Addis Ababa.[111]

Lowlands. The commission could reach no definitive conclusion, however, about the strength of feeling across Eritrea as a whole. See Araya, "The Eritrean Question," p. 84.

107. For details of the debate at the United Nations on the various proposals for Eritrea's fate, see Semere Haile, "The Origins and Demise of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 15 (1987), pp. 9–17.

108. United Nations General Assembly, 5th sess., *Eritrea: Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea; Report of the Interim Committee of the General Assembly on the Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea*, December 2, 1950, Resolution 390-A(V).

109. For an account of the various measures taken by the Ethiopian government to undermine Eritrean autonomy during the 1950s, see Richard A. Lobban Jr., "The Eritrean War: Issues and Implications," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1976), pp. 335–346.

110. Zdenek Cervenka, "Eritrea: Struggle for Self-Determination or Secession," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1977), p. 41.

111. The "yes" vote on independence was 99.83 percent, according to Albert C. Nunley, "Eritrea Detailed Election Results," *African Elections Database*, http://africanelections.tripod.com/er.html.

The case of Eritrea-Ethiopia is often considered an example of failed ethnofederalism, and in the technical sense, it was. Ethnofederal institutions were dissolved in 1962 in the same way that unitarism was dissolved in Yugoslavia (1939, or 1946), Czechoslovakia (1938, or 1948, or 1968), and Sudan (1973 and 2005). The dissolution of these institutions makes Ethiopia-Eritrea a failure of ethnofederalism in the same sense that the other three were failures of unitarism. If, instead, failure is defined by the institution in place at the moment of secession or state collapse, then the three are failures of ethnofederalism, and Ethiopia-Eritrea is a failure of unitarism, but all four cases cannot simultaneously be considered failures of the same institutional form.

More reasonably, all four should probably be considered failures of both institutional forms. In the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak cases, it is plausible that these states collapsed in the way they did because they were ethnofederal at the time; it is at least as plausible, however, that they were ethnofederal in the first place only because they had failed as unitary states. To put this another way, neither Yugoslavia nor Czechoslovakia would have failed as an ethnofederation had it succeeded as a unitary state.

CATEGORY 4: CRITICAL CASES

The most interesting category for current purposes is category 4. On one level, these cases are examples of ethnofederations that, like those in category 2, have succeeded. In this sense, they strengthen the case in favor of ethnofederalism. At a deeper level, however, these cases allow for a reasonably direct comparison between the respective merits of unitarism and ethnofederalism as institutional mechanisms for the management of ethnic problems. In all of these cases, unitary institutions preceded the implementation of ethnofederalism, and in most cases, ethnic groups resisted being governed under unitary institutions. In some of these cases, unitary institutions provoked violent ethnic conflict. In others, dissatisfaction with unitary institutions produced well-orchestrated and institutionalized campaigns for either autonomy or outright secession. In all cases, however, unitarism did nothing to diminish the willingness of ethnic groups to separate from the common state despite, in many cases, the infliction of severe levels of repressive violence; if anything, the inverse is true. Moreover, ethnic groups in all cases were able to create and mobilize institutional resources to challenge the common state (in terms of governments, organized leadership, armed forces, or political parties) and, in many cases, to accumulate the more superficial, symbolic attributes of statehood (e.g., flags, anthems, and maps of imagined homelands). In this substantive sense, unitary institutions failed, and the need to implement ethnofederal institutions is symptomatic of this failure; they were implemented to resolve

a problem that unitary institutions either created or could not resolve, and they have, to date, succeeded. Unitarism also failed in all of these cases based on Roeder's measure of "failure." In none of these cases was the state dissolved, but in all cases, unitary institutions were dissolved in favor of ethnofederal institutions.

Hence the cases in category 4 are more than just examples of successful ethnofederalism; they are cases in which ethnofederalism succeeded where unitarism failed. The importance of this observation merits reiteration. Nearly two-thirds of all cases discussed in this article fit a pattern that permits some degree of direct comparison between the efficacy of ethnofederalism and that of the main institutional alternative, unitarism. In all twenty-seven of these cases, ethnofederalism has, to date, succeeded in the same cases where unitary institutions failed. These cases provide what Donald Horowitz terms "quasi-experimental" conditions within which to compare the performance of institutions.[112] The identities of the cases themselves do not change and the only relevant variable (more or less) that varies in all twenty-seven is institutional form. Based on the evidence presented here, then, ethnofederalism has demonstrably outperformed unitarism in the management of ethnic divisions in nearly two-thirds of the cases examined in this study.

The four categories described above collectively contain forty-three cases; of these, only four can be classified as unambiguous failures of ethnofederalism (Serbia-Montenegro, Malaysia-Singapore, Pakistan, and the Soviet Union). Of these four, it can reasonably be asked, "if not ethnofederalism, then what?" In the first two cases, the obvious answer is that failure could have been avoided by not trying in the first place. The net effect of ethnofederalism was to delay this outcome by two years in the case of Malaysia-Singapore, and approximately six years in the case of Serbia-Montenegro. In the case of Pakistan, no institutional alternative could likely have held together two wings of a country separated by 1,000 miles of enemy territory.[113] The standout case remains the Soviet Union both because of its inherent importance as an entity, and its centrality, historically, to the case against ethnofederalism. In other words, the strongest evidence for the argument remains the case from which the argument originally derives.

---

112. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 602.

113. It is possible that had a united Bengal been granted independence at the moment of partition, a costly and bloody war could have been avoided. The independence of a united Bengal was floated as a possibility during the 1940s. Following deadly communal clashes between Muslims and Hindus in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946, however, the partition of Bengal became all but inevitable. For details, see Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932–1947: Contour of Freedom* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

The remaining thirty-nine cases paint a different picture. Four of these are ambiguous. Ethnofederalism failed in all four, but so did the main institutional alternative. In three of these cases, unitarism preceded ethnofederalism, and, arguably, created the problem that neither institutional form was able to resolve. This leaves thirty-two successful examples of ethnofederalism. In many of these cases, the flaws inherent in the institution are evident. Ethnofederalism is never likely to be a system that functions elegantly and effortlessly. For this reason, it is unlikely to be the option of first choice (at least for a majority ethnic group). This much is clear from the large number of category 4 cases. These are all examples where ethnofederalism has been chosen only after institutional alternatives have demonstrably failed.

LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

The main finding of this analysis—that ethnofederalism outperforms unitary institutions—is limited to a specific universe of cases. Beyond this universe (i.e., ethnofederations, broadly defined), nothing can be concluded about the respective merits of ethnofederalism and unitarism as institutional approaches for the management of ethnic problems.[114]

There are several potential objections to the argument, of which two merit closer attention. First, case selection is always likely to be controversial. The cases selected by Roeder lead him to conclude that ethnofederalism and autonomous ethnic regions have a high failure rate; the different cases selected here yield a different conclusion. So, why should the conclusion reached here enjoy any more (or less) validity than Roeder's if it is mainly a function of the cases selected for inclusion? This is an objection that would seem to apply to the category of federacies rather than full or partial ethnofederations. Regarding the latter two categories, scholars may disagree at the margins on how to categorize Nigeria or about whether cases such as Switzerland or Cameroon merit inclusion or exclusion, but the cases included here in these two categories are not really controversial. The major difference in case selection concerns federacies and revolves around how to count cases and whether or not to include as "failures" autonomy arrangements that were never implemented. With regard to counting cases, the main issue is whether a state such as Denmark, which enjoys federacy relationships with two entities (Greenland and the Faroe

114. There are a sizable number of cases in which unitary institutions have successfully managed ethnic diversity; unitarism is, for example, the norm in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, despite the ethnic diversity of many of the states in the region. Elsewhere, states as diverse as Turkey, Kenya, Israel, Thailand, and (mainland) France have all managed their ethnic problems, in one way or another, under unitary institutions, and none have experienced secession, state collapse, or the dissolution of institutions.

Islands), should be counted as one case or two. It makes more sense intuitively to count Greenland and the Faroe Islands as two separate federacies, because each can fail or succeed independently of the other. In any case, even if Denmark and all similar states (e.g., Italy or the United Kingdom) are counted as single cases, the success rate of federacy diminishes only marginally.

As to the issue of if, and how, to count autonomy arrangements that have never been implemented, not much can be said. Roeder identifies five of these cases as "failures" of autonomy (China, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) on the grounds that they "were never implemented." On what grounds is it legitimate to classify nonimplemented institutions as either failures or successes? According to Roeder's own criteria, failures of ethnofederalism can occur either through the dissolution of the institutions or through the secession of one or more ethnic subunits. By these criteria, autonomy arrangements that have never been implemented cannot logically fail. The secession of ethnic subunits cannot be attributed to institutions that have never been implemented, and institutions that do not exist cannot be dissolved. Or, to put it another way, nonimplemented autonomy arrangements are irrelevant to the argument based on Roeder's own criteria. A final point to note is that the list of federacies used for current purposes (table 2) is a conservative list. Excluded are the significant number of overseas territories governed as de facto ethnic federacies by mainly European countries. Examples here would include Aruba (the Netherlands), Gibraltar (the United Kingdom), Mayotte (France), and Niue (New Zealand). In all, sixteen of these territories meet the substantive definition of federacy, but are excluded from table 2 on the grounds that these are either the remnants of blue-water empires rather than indigenous territories or are too small to be of significance.[115] Of these sixteen cases, however, fourteen would be classified as successes, and only two as failures.[116] Other federacies that arguably merit inclusion include China's five ethnic regions, all of which would qualify as successes. The obvious objection is the lack of genuine autonomy afforded these regions, but the same can be said of the Soviet Union for most of its history. The lack of real autonomy within the Soviet system, however, does not prevent its inclusion in most accountings of ethnofederal failures. Hence, a more inclusive list, for which a plausible argument could be made, would increase the success rate of federacies even further.

---

115. The sixteen territories are Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, and the Turks and Caicos Islands (United Kingdom); New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Mayotte, and the Wallis and Futuna Islands (France); the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau (New Zealand); and Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, and Suriname (the Netherlands).

116. The two failures would be the Netherlands Antilles, which was dissolved in 2010, and Suriname, which achieved independence in 1975.

Another, potentially more serious, objection concerns the criteria used for determining success or failure. Critics might justifiably point to many of the cases included here, such as Bosnia, Russia, Mindanao, and even Belgium, and question the extent to which these can legitimately be classified as "successes." In the case of Bosnia, for example, the ethnofederal system survives, but it is scarcely an exemplar of efficient governance. Moreover, whether it would have survived at all in the absence of NATO's military presence and a range of Western-imposed institutions, such as the Office of the High Representative, is open to question. Having recently broken Iraq's world record for delay in government formation following an election, Belgium remains mired in gridlock at the federal level, mainly as a result of political issues arising from the language divide. Likewise, the implementation of a number of federacy arrangements, such as Aceh and Mindanao, may have diminished, but have not eliminated ethnic conflict between the autonomous entities and the common state. Moreover, several of the federacies classified as successes are of relatively recent vintage, and certain of these cases—most notably, Scotland, Bougainville, and, perhaps, Catalonia—may be heading in the direction of separation rather than consolidation.

There are three possible responses to these legitimate concerns. First, no serious advocate of ethnofederalism touts it as a panacea for all of the ailments that afflict a state. Most advocates view ethnofederalism as a difficult, but potentially workable, compromise in the absence of viable alternatives. It is an institutional arrangement for holding together a common state, not a recipe for smooth, efficient governance; as such, it should be judged on how well it performs that former function rather than the latter. Second, it may be the case that Bougainville exercises its option to secede from Papua New Guinea at some point in the near future, or that Scotland votes to secede from the United Kingdom in 2014. Reasonably enough, these could then be interpreted as failures of ethnofederalism. At the same time, were these entities to secede, they would move from category 4 to category 3 (not category 1). In other words, they would become examples of failed ethnofederations that had also previously failed as unitary systems. Finally, the criteria used here to define success and failure are those that most accurately reflect the theoretical argument advanced by critics of ethnofederalism. The main accusation of critics is not that ethnofederations foster inefficient government, or that they fail to eliminate all forms of conflict, but that they cause secession (or the dissolution of institutions). Given this, it seems reasonable to classify ethnofederations as successes to the extent they do not produce these outcomes.[117]

---

117. It should also be noted that the criteria used here are those deemed most appropriate by Roeder, who is among the most vocal of ethnofederalism's critics.

Conclusion

Three straightforward conclusions follow logically from the preceding analysis. First, the success rate of ethnofederations (permissively defined) is far higher than acknowledged by critics, higher even than many defenders of ethnofederalism seem prepared to concede. The argument of critics is at its most compelling when the subject is federations in which all subunits are organized into ethnic homelands (e.g., the Soviet Union), but this argument suffers from a lack of real-world relevance. Historically, there have been few full ethnofederations, and in the contemporary world, there are few states for which a fully ethnofederal system would be a relevant option. As the case against ethnofederalism has expanded its reach to encompass a larger universe of cases, so the argument has increased its real-world relevance, but at considerable cost to its empirical heft. In contrast to full ethnofederations, partial ethnofederations and federacies have an excellent track record: many more have succeeded than failed.

Second, in a large majority of cases, ethnofederalism is not implemented as a panacea, or because it is the choice of "first resort." It is implemented only after an alternative institutional form, usually unitarism, has failed; it is implemented precisely because the alternative failed. Therefore ethnofederalism is invariably the choice of last resort, because it is the only choice available in the absence of feasible alternatives.

Combining conclusions one and two yields a third conclusion that speaks to the prescriptive utility of the argument against ethnofederalism. Of the forty-three ethnofederations listed in table 2, the difficult cases for practitioners are those that involve ethnic violence. Scotland can be granted autonomy from the United Kingdom based on the will of its people without the fear of violent retribution, ethnic cleansing, or imminent war between the two entities; and, if the Scots vote for independence in 2014, it will likely occur with the minimum of mutual animosity and bloodshed. There is no compelling role for academics or practitioners to play in any of this.

Not all ethnofederations are born in such fortuitous circumstances, however. They are negotiated as part of an end to a violent ethnic conflict or to prevent simmering disputes from escalating to full-scale violence. These are the difficult cases in which decisions made about the design of political institutions can have real-world life or death consequences, and where, ideally, academic insights should have the most prescriptive resonance. Unfortunately, these are also the cases in which there are no feasible institutional alternatives to ethnofederalism, either because the alternatives are unacceptable to one of the parties to the conflict, or because the alternatives have already been tried and have demonstrably failed.

In the case of Bosnia, for example, those charged with finding a negotiated solution to the conflict "chose" ethnofederalism because it was the only institutional form on which all three parties (Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) could minimally agree. Unitarism (preferred by Bosniak leaders), or some form of federation based on nonethnic or anti-ethnic criteria (the choice of several Western academics),[118] was outside the range of acceptable options for two of the three groups (Serbs and Croats). It serves no purpose after the event, therefore, to criticize the architects of the Dayton peace accord for choosing ethnofederalism over unitarism, or a form of federation organized around river drainage basins.[119] The only options available at the time were to try and retain Bosnia as a unified entity via ethnofederalism, to pull it apart by recognizing its constituent parts as independent states, or to allow the war to continue until one party was in a position to impose a solution on the others. Whatever its defects, ethnofederalism begins to look more appealing when weighed against more war or partition as the only alternatives.

Given the nature of the conflict in Bosnia, it is probably fortunate that there were few takers for the "more war" alternative; not so for partition, which received the strong endorsement of several well-known scholars.[120] Yet if the case for partition is to be taken seriously as a realistic alternative to ethnofederalism—if it is to have prescriptive value, in other words—then some rather elementary questions need to be addressed. What exactly is partition? Who has the power, the right, and the willingness to act as "partitioner" in any given case? How is the international community of states expected to transcend its pathological aversion to recognizing new states? What happens when one party to the conflict, invariably the dominant ethnic group, rejects partition (as it did in Bosnia)? What happens when partition rewards the aggressor and punishes the victim (as it arguably would have done in Bosnia)? Beyond these basic questions, there is a logical problem associated with advocating for partition over ethnofederalism. Failed ethnofederations create one or more new states via secession; partition guarantees exactly the same outcome, just through a different mechanism. As regards outcomes, then, partition is equivalent to a failed ethnofederation, so why is it preferable?

---

118. See, for example, David Campbell, "Apartheid Cartography: The Political Anthropology and Spatial Effects of International Diplomacy in Bosnia," *Political Geography*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (May 1999), pp. 395–435; Jeremy Crampton, "Bordering on Bosnia," *GeoJournal*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (August 1996), pp. 353–361; and Stjepko Golubic, Susan Campbell, and Thomas Golubic, "How Not to Divide the Indivisible," in Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War* (Stony Creek, Conn.: Pamphleteer, 1993), pp. 209–232.

119. Crampton, "Bordering on Bosnia," p. 359.

120. See, for example, Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 136–175; and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera, "When Peace Means War," *New Republic*, December 16, 1995, pp. 16–21.

It is also unclear that partition is a relevant policy option for many, if any, contemporary ethnic disputes, or what partition even means in several of them. In the case of the Abkhazia-Georgia dispute, for example, the "partition" of Abkhazia has already taken place, against the wishes of Georgia, and without the recognition of the international community. There are several other "partitioned" entities in the same position for which options are somewhat limited. The "self-partition" (with external assistance) of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria may have prevented further bloodshed, though this is obviously questionable in the case of South Ossetia. The relevant problem for practitioners, however, is what to do with them now. They are already in a state of "having been partitioned," so pro-partitionists have nothing to contribute to this debate. Some may find it "remarkable" that nongovernmental organizations persist in pushing for ethnofederalism as a solution in these cases,[121] but it is clear that these entities will not be reunited with their parent states under any alternative institutional arrangement, and it is equally clear that the international community is not about to recognize their formal independence.

So, in the absence of an ethnofederal solution, the status quo prevails and the world must deal with the negative consequences of "unrecognized states" in the system. In truth, the preference of practitioners for ethnofederal solutions to ethnic problems is not difficult to understand. Notwithstanding the "substantial body of prior expert opinion warning against this," it is neither puzzling nor remarkable that those charged with terminating or avoiding ethnic conflict would opt for a solution that has a track record of success and to which the alternatives are plausible only from the safe distance of an ivory tower.

121. Roeder, "Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms," p. 204.