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Centripetalism – An Integrating Political System for Multiethnic Countries. An Outline of the Empirical Theory

The article deals with a specific political system, bearing the characteristics of interethnic power-sharing (co-governing), which is referred to as centripetalism. The centripetal system was shaped in two important multiethnic countries: Nigeria and Indonesia, especially because of the large number of population and available energy resources. These countries have a presidential system of government. Centripetalism gives power to political elite representatives of various ethnic groups, thus stimulating reconciliation, cooperation and political integration across ethnic divisions. This is to weaken the significance of these divisions under the conditions of multiethnicity. The broader objective of centripetalism is an overall reduction of conflicts in relations between ethnic groups represented by political elites. There are three specific institutional arrangements within the centripetal system: 1) territorial structure which “breaks” large ethnic groups so that their members live in separate territorial-administrative units; 2) territorial distribution of votes (support) in presidential elections which is required to be elected president; and 3) supra-regional and interethnic political parties. The objectives of the article are to explain the nature of centripetalism; to present the complex ethno-political context in countries where this system has been implemented; to discuss the major institutions of the Nigerian and Indonesian centripetalisms; to attempt to answer the question of whether centripetalism meets the objectives for which it has been established; and to indicate its defects.

Keywords: political system, power-sharing, centripetalism, multiethnic state, ethnic conflict