

All in it together?

Size, consensual politics and democracy in Mauritius, Trinidad, Fiji and the Solomon Islands

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Introduction

According to the scientific literature on democratisation, democracy has enjoyed a remarkable degree of success in small and insular nations, with several island states having developed into stable democracies, even in spite of low levels of economic and social development (Srebrnik 2004). In the final years of the 20th century, however, several *coups d'état* in former British colonies, coupled with worsening conditions, have drawn the attention of political scientists towards the pitfalls of small and insular democracies, revealing that ethnic tensions, in some cases, were more severe than previously assumed and that they could even be strong enough to topple an apparently robust set of Westminster-based democratic institutional arrangements (Fry 2000; Reilly 2000). The intent of this paper is to explain why some small island states have stable, functioning democracies whereas in some cases, democratic breakdown or erosion has ended decades of apparent democratic stability.

The concrete question that is asked is as follows: what is the impact of consensual or majoritarian politics and institutions upon democratic stability in small and insular nations? In view of the relapse into less democratic forms of government caused by ethnic tensions and distributive conflicts, it is relevant to our understanding of size and democracy to question whether it is still the case that the small scale of democracy in small and insular nations is the main determinant for the stability of democracy, and to seek to understand how institutional design in an environment of ethnic diversity and distributive conflict has influenced democratic stability in small island states. Furthermore, by studying this topic we can further specify the description Reilly (2000) gives of the “Africanisation” of small island states and assess its effects. The question is socially relevant as well, because in a way, its conclusions may be able to provide information about other small-scale democratic processes, such as decentralised governance in new democracies, which is often compared to small island states for the sake of its scale (Diamond 1999, 121).

In attempting to answer the question, this paper makes use of the comparative method. The author conducted a four-case small-N comparative study based on the framework for institutional analysis provided by Lijphart's (2000) *Patterns of Democracy*. Among the sources used were the constitutions of the four nations, data on indicators of a number of variables, such as disproportionality or cabinet duration and evidence of democratic practices as provided by the descriptions of other authors. The four cases were selected from among ethnically heterogeneous small island nations, with two nations – Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago – enjoying continuing stability, and two others – Fiji and the Solomon Islands – in which democracy has eroded or broken down by *coups d'état* or

other abuses. The method for the selection of cases will be elaborated below.

Theory, concepts and case selection

It is a well-documented and much-researched finding that democracy has enjoyed remarkably high degrees of success in small and insular nations (Srebrnik 2004). Several island states have developed into remarkably stable democracies, even some in spite of low levels of economic and social development which would, under normal circumstances, not be an environment conducive to the development of democracy (*ibid.*). Various attempts to explain this have been made in the scientific literature, but the most commonly found explanation is that in small island states the distance between politicians and citizens is smaller and that, especially in the case of islands, their small size and insularity foster a homogeneity of attitudes (Anckar 2002, 386-387). Through this attitudinal homogeneity, the social norms of behaviour would be clearer to members of these small societies, thus leading to cooperativeness and a willingness to accommodate different interests (Anckar 1999, 30).

Recent studies of small island states, especially in the Pacific, suggest flaws in the attitudinal homogeneity thesis. According to Reilly (2000, 262-263), a pattern of “Africanisation” can be observed across the South Pacific in which the state is viewed more and more as a means of accruing wealth and exploiting resources such as minerals and land. The crucial observation here is that ethnic tensions combine with such distributive battles over control of resources, and lead to the instability of democratic institutions and even, in some cases, of the state itself (Reilly 2000, 262). This trend leads us to question whether attitudinal homogeneity is a strong enough force to explain the prevalence of democracy among small island states, or whether such an attitudinal homogeneity exists in the first place. Either the homogeneity of attitudes wasn’t a sufficient condition for the stability of democracy, or there is some variable mediating between attitudinal homogeneity and small size.

Such a mediating variable might be found in the institutions and the political system of the countries in question. In ethnically diverse nations of small size, the way politics is conducted might be expected to have a large influence on the stability of democracy. An adversarial style of politics can easily be constructed to be detrimental to the stability of a small, ethnically-diverse democracy, as the party system will most likely be based on an ethnic and/or regional cleavage, leading to centrifugal forces in society. On the other hand, a consensual system, combined with the small distance between electorate and

politicians in small countries, might lead to a homogeneity of attitudes, consensus on the rules of the game in a broader sense, and therefore to democratic stability.

In line with the categorisation above of institutions into “consensual” and “adversarial” categories, this paper will consider institutional setup and political practice primarily in a Lijphartian sense. In his influential work *Patterns of Democracy*, Lijphart (1999, 7) presents democratic institutions on a continuum, ranging from consensus democracy on the one end to majoritarian democracy on the other. Although the scale is made up of several separate institutional components, consensus systems tend to divide power horizontally and vertically among separate actors, striving for consensus, while majoritarian systems, exemplified by the Westminster model of politics, centralises power in the executive, which also controls Parliament (*ibid.*).

In addition to this broad distinction, Lijphart (1999, 3) conceptualises two separate components of the consensual-majoritarian scale: the *executives-parties dimension*, which concerns the arrangement of executive power, the party and electoral systems and interest groups, and the *federal-unitary dimension*, which concerns both vertical and horizontal division of power, with component variables such as constitutional rigidity and the degree and strength of bicameralism. While an argument can be made to include central banks in this second dimension, as Lijphart does, the prevalence of central bank independence in both Westminster and consensual system as well as its different focus – monetary or economic rather than political – from the other variables, means that it is not useful in our analysis of political institutions, which should concern the general characteristics of politics rather than of specific policy fields, no matter how important they are.

In this paper, it has been decided to use all the variables of the executives-parties dimension, except for the interest group system. The primary reason for this is that information on the last aspect of the executives-parties dimension, the interest group system, might be difficult to obtain for small island states and that therefore, inclusion would not be feasible with the time and resources available. In addition, there are conceptual problems with the variable: it has been argued by Roller (2005, 112) that because of the inclusion of the interests of groups in a corporatist system would improve policy performance, the variable can pollute the executives-parties dimension with influence from the dependent variable. Of the five variables on the federal-unitary dimension, the central bank independence variable will be excluded for the same reasons outlined above, as well as practical reasons derived from limited time and resources. The rest of the variables will be used, although because of the small size of the countries studied, there is of course a limit on how far decentralisation

can go and therefore how much decentralisation or federalism we are likely to find, and it may well be that its usefulness is limited for this reason. Nevertheless, I have chosen not to omit the variable because of the important role devolution arrangements can play in accommodating ethnic and social diversity.

A central problem with this purely institutional perspective on political systems is that the institutions may not fully represent political practice in a democracy. The four cases used in this case study are all former British colonies, and their institutions therefore closely resemble the Westminster system despite some institutional differences. Nevertheless, the democratic and political system can be expected to differ across the various nations in ways beyond those included in a purely institutional analysis, and it would be worthwhile to be wary of taking too much of an institutional perspective.

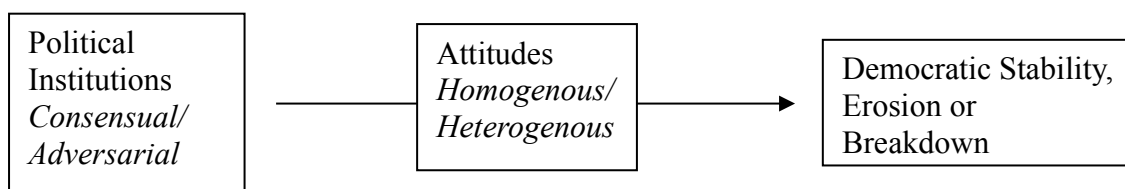
The same point is made by van Cranenburgh (2006) in her discussion of the practical application of Lijphart's theory to the case of Namibia. She argues that though the institutions in post-independence Namibia appear consensual, the behaviour of political actors resembles the majoritarian model, particularly through the dominance of the ruling SWAPO Party (Van Cranenburgh 2006, 595). She concludes that in some African cases, the ten variables proposed by Lijphart cannot be used to adequately investigate the institutional setup of new democracies (Van Cranenburgh 2006, 599). Although her argument primarily concerns one-party dominance in new democracies, van Cranenburgh's contribution is useful because it reminds us of the importance of elite behaviour that was prevalent in Lijphart's earlier work on consociational democracy. In light of the similarities we can expect between our four former British colonies in terms of institutions, this behavioural focus is a necessary adjustment we will have to make to the Lijphartian model.

The relationship between the various variables used in this research proposal is as shown in figure 1 below. The variables described above – political institutions and homogeneity of attitudes – act as independent variables, whereas democratic stability or its opposites, democratic erosion or breakdown, act as the dependent variables. As argued above, I will primarily focus on whether the political system is consensual or adversarial. I expect that when conflict flares up, consensus-based political systems will be better-placed to contain it, thereby fostering a homogeneity of attitudes which will maintain or perhaps even enhance democratic stability in the manner proposed by the homogeneity of attitudes thesis. However, where the political system is primarily adversarial, the expectation is that conflict will lead to increased ethnic or class divisions, eventually leading to democratic decay.

Despite the fact that there might also be differences depending on the level of

ethnic heterogeneity in a country, I have chosen to select cases from among small islands with ethnically heterogeneous societies, in order to ensure the comparability of the cases and the feasibility of the study. In addition to the cases of Fiji and the Solomon Islands – two Pacific islands where a *coup* signified a case of democratic breakdown -, I have chosen two islands where democracy seems stable: Mauritius, seen by Leftwich (2000, 180-181) as the primary example of a democratic developmental state combining consensus democracy with a strong focus on economic development; and Trinidad and Tobago, which experienced instability in the 1980s and the early 2000s but maintained its democracy afterwards. While regional effects might distort the findings of the research project, with the two examples of democratic erosion being located in the Pacific and the other two in Africa and the Caribbean, the cases are otherwise comparable. In addition, all are former British colonies, adding to the practicality of the study by staying within the constraints of my knowledge of languages.

Figure 1: Relationship between the variables



Results

The theory as conceptualised above will be applied to the cases on a variable-by-variable basis, considering each nation in turn for each of the variables so as to compare the four nations in terms of the consensualism or majoritarianism of their political systems. On each variable, the institutional characteristics of each of the cases will be described. In addition to this qualitative description, additional quantitative data may be used such as indicators developed by Lijphart (2000) or the Rose (2000, 357) index of proportionality.

Degree of democracy and democratic stability

Before we start describing the political systems of the four nations, we must first bring into focus the difference between the four cases with respect to the dependent variable and paint a general picture of the way in which democracies have been stable or not. The cases were selected because they were different in terms of democratic stability: in selecting the cases, it was assumed that Fiji and the Solomon Islands represented democratic erosion or breakdown, whereas the selected cases of Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago represented examples of democratic stability.

All four nations have known challenges to democratic governance and democratic values over the years of their independent existence. In Mauritius, this took the form of a state of emergency following the emergence of the Mauritian Militant Movement and the challenge it posed to the existing order by advocating strikes and disorder (Bräutigam 1997, 50). In Trinidad and Tobago, this took the form of instability through the 1980s and a brief rule without Parliament between 2001 and 2002 (Ghany 2006, 95). In both Fiji and the Solomon Islands, the history of democratic breakdown and erosion is more extensive, occurring mostly in the 90s (Fry 2000). The two groups differ in the most important respect that both Trinidad and Tobago and Mauritius seem to have made it through those crises of legitimacy with their democracy intact, whereas instability was prolonged in Fiji and the Solomon Islands after the coups which suspended democratic functions.

This is borne out by the Freedom House (2012) indicators. In publications making use of these scores, countries classified as “Free” are usually seen as democracies or even liberal democracies, whereas “Partly Free” or “Not Free” indicates a degree of illiberalism or authoritarianism (Diamond 1999, 12). None of the four cases has an impeccable record of continuing scores in the “Free” range. Mauritius, relapsed into “Partly Free” during the period from 1978 to 1981, during which a state of emergency as a response to the MMM challenge was in effect (Bräutigam 1997, 50; Freedom House 2012). Trinidad and Tobago, too, relapsed into being “Partly Free” from 2001 through 2004, possibly because the Prime Minister decided to rule without Parliament from 2001 to 2002 (Freedom House 2012; Ghany 2006, 95). Both then returned to “Free” status (*ibid.*).

In contrast, Fiji and the Solomon Islands have not recovered from the challenges their new democracy faced in the form of the coups. Since 2000, the scores for the Solomon Islands rapidly degraded, so that at present, the country has scores of 4 and 3 on political and civil liberties, respectively (Freedom House 2012). In Fiji, the situation is even worse, with a

score as high as 6 on political freedom indicating serious problems with democratic governance (*ibid.*). The scores have declined since the *coup* in line with the expectations outlined above. There is therefore a difference in terms of democratic stability between Mauritius and Trinidad on the one hand and Fiji and the Solomon Islands on the other, with the former two being markedly more successful in addressing challenges to democracy.

1. Single-party majority cabinets versus broad multiparty coalitions

In Mauritius, the constitutional setup does not necessarily require coalitions, but political practice does. Due to the multiparty nature of the system, government in Mauritius is overwhelmingly consensual: only one party, the MMM, has ever succeeded in winning an overall majority of the seats (Bräutigam 1997, 53). Even in that case, a coalition government resulted because of the rules for the registration of coalition tickets with the electoral commission (*ibid.*). Such an environment encourages contesting the elections in coalitions, or else the formation of a coalition cabinet afterwards. Mauritius, therefore, tends towards the consensual end of this variable, because all of its cabinets have so far been formed in coalition. In addition, Bunwaree and Kasenally (2005, 18-19) note that the coalitions are often oversized, leading to a skewed legislature dominated by the executive, thus fulfilling the definition given by Lijphart (2000, 2) of a consensual system as one where politicians search for large majorities, not necessarily minimum-winning majorities.

There is another characteristic of the coalition governments of Mauritius that is significant for our study of ethnically diverse small democracies. Due to the ethnic support bases of the parties and certain characteristics of the electoral system (which shall be touched upon under indicator 4 below), no ethnic majority has ever formed in the National Assembly, making the coalition not just multi-party but also multi-ethnic. This is significant because it forces coalitions to be more consensual and more considerate of the various ethnic groups on whom they depend for their support, thus making the system arguably even more consensual (Lijphart 2000, 33).

Trinidad and Tobago is an entirely different matter. Until the recent formation of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), the nation had a two-party system in which the two main parties were ethnically based: the People's National Movement had its Creole base, whereas the United National Congress and its predecessors were based around the Indian population (Premdas and Ragoonath 1998, 34-35). As a consequence, almost all of the governments Trinidad has had since its independence have been single-party governments. Until the NAR won a landslide victory in 1986, government had even been dominated by the

PNM; afterwards, the PNM and the UNC have alternated in power while the NAR has been reduced to a Tobagan rump and has since disappeared from Parliament entirely (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2002a; 2002b; 2010c).

Recently, Trinidadian elections have returned two hung parliaments: once in 1995 and once in 2001. The first ended in a coalition between the UNC and the NAR (Premdas and Ragoonath 1998, 50). The second ended in the appointment of the PNM leader as Prime Minister, a failure to elect a Speaker of the House of Representatives and thereafter a decision by the PM to rule without Parliament until 2002, possibly explaining the relapse in Freedom House figures from 2001 through 2004 (Ghany 2006, 95). In 2010, an electoral coalition led by the UNC secured a majority in the House of Representatives. Trinidad, therefore, tends more towards the majoritarian end of the scale, with single-party governments being the norm as under any Westminster system.

The case of Fiji is interesting because under its constitution as revised in 1997, Fiji forces multi-party coalition cabinets including every party with more than 10 per cent of the seats in the lower house of the legislature¹. However, this provision was never implemented under Prime Minister Qarase because of the exclusion of the Labour Party from the cabinet led by the Fijian Political Party (Lal 2002, 99-100). Overall, coalitions seem to be a relatively recent occurrence in Fijian politics: in keeping with its Westminster tradition, the nation only occasionally had coalition governments until the 1997 reform, only in 1994 and 1987, with the 1987 coalition being an electoral coalition formed to defeat the ruling Alliance Party, which was immediately deposed by a *coup d'état* (Fry 2000, 297). Fiji can be classified as an originally majoritarian system which is gradually evolving towards a more consensual style of politics, although the political culture, as witnessed by Qarase's refusal to appoint Labour Party ministers, still appears to be adversarial.

In the Solomon Islands, judging whether cabinets are single-party cabinets or coalitions is not as straightforward as it seems because of the loose party system and large number of independents elected to Parliament: in the last two elections in 2006 and 2010, the independents formed the single largest "grouping" in Parliament, with there being more independent MPs than those from any single party affiliation (National Parliament 2012; Ogan 1999a, 1007). Independents regularly play a large role in electing the Prime Minister. Therefore, because of the loose party structure and many defections, it is hard to determine precisely who is and who is not in cabinet. The prevalence of independents and the fact that

1 As per section 99 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997. http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed: 24th of May 2012)

only one party (the People's Alliance Party) has succeeded in getting a majority makes coalitions a necessity, thereby placing the Solomon Islands in the consensual column despite the non-applicability of the party bases of coalitions (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1989).

2. Executive-legislative relations: dominance versus balance

In keeping with their Westminster traditions, all four countries have a parliamentary system in which the executive has to maintain the confidence of the legislature to remain in office. In addition, most also have a cabinet system of government in which the Prime Minister is technically first-among-equals. The lack of institutional differences in the formal relationship between Parliament and Cabinet makes it impossible to judge the dominance of the Cabinet in the legislature in all four cases relative to each other without resorting to a numerical indicator².

Lijphart (2000, 129-135) uses the average duration of a cabinet government as an indicator for the dominance of the executive in the legislature. Even though it is difficult to operationalise in another manner, this indicator can be criticised because it relates more to the stability of a government than to its actual power, although the two are obviously related. I have calculated the indices in the same way as Lijphart (2000, 129-135) did, with the exception of the Solomon Islands, where only the broader definition of cabinet change is used because the narrow definition, using only changes in party composition, would be ineffective given the loose party system. In addition, because of complications arising from the various coups or attempted coups in Fiji since independence, only democratically elected cabinets are included in the Fiji score, excluding those installed by coups or holding office *ad interim*.

The results reveal a range of degrees of cabinet dominance. Of all four cases, the Solomon Islands come in lowest with an average cabinet duration of only 2.4 over the course of 24 years. Furthermore, even if cabinet change were to be defined narrowly instead of the broad definition used in this case, I am led to believe that the figure would not be much lower given the many times a Prime Minister was replaced by Parliament (Larmour 2000, 149-150). Mauritius is second-lowest, averaging 3.9 in an average of the two scores, slightly higher than Lijphart's (2000, 132) figure because of two stable 2000s Cabinets. Fiji has a slightly higher figure of 4.5 years, although the necessary selections in the data might have skewed the figure. Most telling is perhaps Trinidad's score of 6.7, signifying that the Westminster system's dominant cabinets have been taken over from the colonising nation after

² Integral data about cabinet composition was not available; the numerical indicator, therefore, is based on data pieced together from various articles detailing the political history of the four cases and may thus be somewhat unreliable.

independence. Judging by these figures, and in line with the expectation that multi-party coalitions deliver less dominant cabinets, the cabinets seem weak in all cases except Trinidad, making Trinidad more majoritarian than the other three cases.

3. *Two-party versus multi-party systems*

The operationalisation of the party system variable will be in accordance with the method used by Lijphart (2000, 65-67) for calculating the effective number of parties. Only those parties are counted which have potential for government participation or blackmail potential as a perpetual opposition party (*ibid.*). Up to a 2.5-party system, in which two main parties alternate in government, occasionally joined by a smaller third party, this paper regards a system as a two-party system. If a system has more parties than that, it is regarded as a multi-party system.

Calculating the effective number of parties for Mauritius was complicated by the fact that since elections are contested on an allied ticket – without a stable system of alliances –, most sources give the division of seats in Parliament among the alliances, with an effective number of “parties” that can be as low as 1.2 for 1982 and as high as 2.44 in 1976. It is, however, evidently not a two-party system, seeing as alliances among the parties are shifty and can change from one election to the next. To classify it as a two-party system would therefore be a fallacy, and for this reason I will use a qualitative analysis of the Mauritian party system instead of the quantitative indicator.

Mauritius has three major parties, thus qualifying as a multi-party system. Each of those parties primarily represents the interests of an ethnic group: the Labour Party primarily represents Indo-Mauritians, the Mauritian Militant Movement commands the support of a large share of muslims and Creoles and a significant minority of Indians, and the Mauritian Socialist Movement primarily represents Hindus (Bunwaree and Kasenally 2005, 10-11). In addition, there are several smaller parties, most prominently the Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD), which used to appeal to Creoles but lost a large share of its votes following the creation of the MMM (*ibid.*). The Mauritian system is therefore clearly a multi-party system in which parties command clearly ethnic support, adding to its consensual value in terms of behaviour as well as institutions.

As mentioned earlier, Trinidad and Tobago has two major parties: the primarily Creole-based PNM and the primarily Indo-based UNC, which command a large share of the vote in constituencies dominated by their core ethnic group owing to a communal appeal in local campaigning that goes on despite inter-communal appearances in national campaigns

(Premdas and Ragoonath 1998, 36-37). They were joined for some time by the inter-communal NAR, which started strong but was later reduced to a Tobagan rump and disappeared from Parliament altogether thereafter (*ibid.*). As described above, Trinidad and Tobago was dominated from independence by the PNM, which governed continuously since 1986 (Premdas and Ragoonath 1998, 35). The system was therefore a dominant-party system at first – with a fully PNM Parliament in 1971 delivering an effective number of parties of 1 – and later developed into a two-party or 2.5-party system: since the PNM's dominance was broken in the 90s, the effective number of parties has never been below 1.7, which is the most recent score. Like the Mauritian party system, the Trinidadian system has ethnically-based parties, but coupled with the “them or us” dynamics of a two-party system, this only enhances its adversarial nature because only one party, and thus one ethnic group, can rule at any one time. This puts the Trinidadian party system clearly into the majoritarian, adversarial two-party column.

Like Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji has, for most of its existence, had two large parties which seem to be ethnically based (Ogan 1999b, 354). Since the 80s, this has taken the form of competition between the primarily Indo-based Fijian Labour Party (FLP) and the parties supported by the indigenous Fijian community, the Fijian Political Party (SVT) and since 2006 the United Fiji Party. This is supported by the figures: since 1992, the effective number of parties is consistently above 3 and closer to the 3.5 threshold that Lijphart considers to be a sign of a multi-party system with a dominant party.

Even in the more recent coalition-based setup, rivalry between the FLP and the SVT seemed to have been fierce, with the two parties consistently being among the largest in Parliament, but never commanding a single-party majority. This rivalry is expressed in the refusal of the SVT Prime Minister to appoint ministers from the FLP despite the constitutional multi-party coalition requirements (Lal 2002, 99-100). Despite this two-party competition, Fiji's elections are not two-horse races and therefore, despite their two-party elements, I consider them to be a consensual multi-party system instead, even though in practice the system still seems to be very adversarial.

The identification of the party system in the Solomon Islands as two-party or multi-party is complicated by the fact that the nation's political parties have historically been rather loose political alliances, with numerous defections and a large independent contingent in Parliament bearing witness to this fact (Ogan 1999a, 1007). It is clear that it is certainly no two-party system, seeing as the only single-party government collapsed rather soon and thus the alternation in power typical of a two-party system does not seem to be present in the

Solomon Islands (Larmour 2000, 150). It is difficult to call the Solomon Islands a multi-party system, though, because of the fluctuating party structures: nevertheless, one can argue that the party system is very consensual, as the large number of defections and independent MPs will undoubtedly necessitate cooperation between the parties instead of partisan competition.

4. Electoral systems: proportional versus disproportional.

As the four cases are all former colonies of Great-Britain, it is perhaps unsurprising to see many traits of the Westminster system replicated in their constitutions. In the case of the electoral system, there also seems to be a British colonial heritage in that all four of the nations under study elect their Parliaments by means of a plurality system. There are, however, differences influencing the proportionality and the consensual or adversarial nature of the elected Parliaments. The degree of proportionality of electoral outcomes will be quantified by means of the Rose (2000, 357) index of proportionality. The calculated Rose index values are shown in table 1 below.

Mauritius elects its National Assembly by means of a special modified plurality system with multi-member constituencies, with each constituency returning three members. In addition, a number of losing candidates, the precise quantity of which has varied over several versions of the electoral rules but is currently at a total of 8 seats, are awarded seats as “best losers” in order to ensure adequate community representation³. This means the system is rather disproportional: it has an average Rose index score of 79.4, meaning there is a considerable degree of disproportionality between the share of the votes a party obtains and its share of the seats.

Trinidad’s general elections still take place according to the archetypal Westminster formula: members are elected from each of the nation’s 36 single-member constituencies, with the plurality candidate being returned as the constituency’s member of parliament (Rose 2000). Strangely enough, when looking at the Rose index, the outcome of the system as seen in 1995 seems to be very proportional, with Rose indices as high as 97.8 in 1995, which might be due to the close election of that year, which resulted in a hung parliament because of the close results in the five marginal constituencies (Premdas and Ragoonath 1998, 44; Rose 2000). The average Rose index value of 87.0 indeed makes Trinidad and Tobago the most proportional of all the four cases.

The Fijian electoral system is complicated by a division of the constituencies

³ Schedule I, section 5 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968 (as amended):
http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=38c54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#first (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

among ethnic groups, with 23 seats reserved for ethnic Fijians, 19 for Indians, 1 for Rotumans and 3 for members of other races, as well as 25 seats elected by all voters, although this number has changed over time⁴. Only members of the ethnic group to whom the seat is reserved may vote and stand for the reserved seats in the national assembly⁵. One would expect such a system to deliver disproportional results, as ethnic Fijians are overrepresented. Nevertheless, disproportionality seems to fall in just below Trinidad at 86.9, although there seems to be a trend in which the system is becoming increasingly disproportional, with the 1999 election having a Rose index of just 68.4.

Like Trinidad, the Solomon Islands return their members of parliament from single-member constituencies under a first past the post electoral system (Ogan 1999a, 1007). For some reason, Rose (2000) excludes the Solomon Islands from his list of electoral systems altogether. I have, however, calculated the index of proportionality, for which I have counted the independents as a party to account for their presence in the Solomon Islands political system. The average index score comes up at 65.6, putting it way below the other systems in terms of proportionality.

Except for the very high levels of disproportionality in the Solomon Islands, the results in terms of proportionality are remarkably close: one would have expected larger differences in the cases of Mauritius and particularly Fiji given their special ways of allocating seats. Nevertheless, differences are clearly visible: despite the difference being lower than expected, Mauritius still has a lower average Rose Index than Fiji and Trinidad and Tobago, and since the parity of representation between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians was abolished in Fiji in the 1990 Constitution, Fijian electoral outcomes have become more and more disproportional (Hartman 2001, 649). Therefore, Fiji and Trinidad would be the more consensual of the four cases, moreso than the Solomon Islands and Mauritius, although all countries are located on the majoritarian side of the continuum because of using the plurality system.

Table 1: Rose Index of Disproportionality⁶

Fiji⁷	1972	1977	1977	1982	1987	1992	1994	1999	Average
		(april)	(sept)						

4 Section 51 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

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6 Rose (2000, 357) calculates this index as follows: the sum of the differences between each party's share of the votes and share of the seats in a particular election is divided by two and subtracted from one hundred.

7 The calculations of the Rose index values for Fiji was based on data from Hartmann (2001, 657-666).

Rose Index	92.4	95.1	82.5	96.8	93.2	86.6	80.0	68.4	86.9		
Mauritius⁸	1967	1976	1982	1983	1987	1991	1995	2000	Average		
Rose Index	93.7	88.0	72.5	85.0	86.2	69.9	70.8	69.3	79.4		
Solomon Islands⁹	1980	1984	1989	1993	Average						
Rose Index	65.4	77.3	47.2	72.4	65.6						
Trinidad and Tobago¹⁰	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1995	2000	2001	2002	Average
Rose Index	85.7	84.2	87.3	71.9	74.7	79.9	97.8	97.4	96.4	95.1	87.0

5. Federalism, decentralisation and centralisation

The Constitution of Mauritius does not make any provisions for local government, nor for any vertical division of powers in the sense of federalism. The only exception to this rule is the small island of Rodrigues, which is part of Mauritius (Meyers 1999, 728). However, even in the case of Rodrigues, provisions for the arrangement of government functions between the island and the central government are not enshrined in the constitution, but rather by act of parliament, although provision is also made in section 75E that requires the Rodrigues Assembly to assent to changes made to its status and the Assembly can raise its own revenue if an act of parliament so provides¹¹. Therefore, I do not agree with Lijphart's (1999, 189) assessment of Mauritius as a highly centralised unitary state, as devolutionary provisions constitute a moderate degree of decentralisation.

Like Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago has not enshrined the powers or even the

8 The calculation of the Rose index values for Mauritius was based on electoral data archived by the Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa, obtained via <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/mauelectarchive.htm> (last accessed: 18th of June 2012).

9 The calculation of the Rose indices for the Solomon Islands was complicated both by the extremely loose party system, in which it is not uncommon for newly-elected MPs to change party shortly after the election and the lack of percentages of the vote for the 1997 and 2001 elections (Steeves 2001, 800-801). The data used are taken from Steeves (2001, 803-804). In the calculation, the Independents were treated as a single party.

10 The calculation of the Rose index values for Trinidad and Tobago was based on data from Caton (2005, 639-642).

11 Section 75 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968 (as in force at present): http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=4cb54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#rodass (last accessed: 24th of May 2012)

existence of local government in its constitution¹², which features the term only two times. Also like Mauritius, the smaller island in the nation, which has faced disparity in terms of wealth and power to its larger neighbour, has received some degree of self-governance in the form of devolution (Anderson 1999, 1114). However, this devolution arrangement is not constitutionally enshrined as it is in Mauritius, nor can the Tobago House of Assembly raise revenue on its own like its Rodrigues counterpart. Therefore, Trinidad and Tobago is slightly less decentralised than Mauritius, but roughly unchanged from Lijphart's (2000, 189) judgment of Trinidad and Tobago as a slightly decentralised state, which already included the existence of the Tobago House of Assembly.

Fiji, too, does not legislate for the existence and responsibilities of local government in its constitution and is therefore not a federal state, although the existence of local authorities is assumed in the constitution as in both other cases¹³. However, Fiji has historically had and still has an elaborate system of local and communal government, with the Great Council of Chiefs having particular responsibility for all matters relating to ethnic Fijians and a Council of Rotuma with greater responsibilities than normal local government governing the distinct island of Rotuma (Ogan 1999b, 353). Fiji is therefore more decentralised than Trinidad and Tobago but less so than Mauritius, although it has to be said that the responsibilities of the Great Council of Chiefs do confer upon the system a degree of asymmetry, as no group beyond indigenous Fijians has a similar mechanism.

Again, like the other three cases, the Solomon Islands have no system of decentralised governance enshrined within their constitution, although the constitution does seem to assume its existence¹⁴. Ogan (1999a, 1007) mentions that there has been continuous pressure on the Solomon Islands government to decentralise government functions because of geographic and linguistic fragmentation, leading to the establishment of provincial assemblies with a premier and a staff. By 1997, there were 9 provinces and 1 administrative subdivision constituting the capital, Honiara (*ibid.*). The arrangement used to devolve powers to these provincial governments is similar to devolution, although the ordinances of the assemblies have to be approved by the responsible Cabinet Minister before they can take effect (*ibid.*). Therefore, the Solomon Islands have a slightly decentralised system of government, but I still classify them as majoritarian, as the devolution provisions have no constitutional basis and a Cabinet Minister at the national level has to approve every ordinance of the local assemblies.

12 Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago 1976 (with later amendments):

<http://www.tparliament.org/documents/1048.pdf> (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

13 Constitution of Fiji 1997: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

14 Constitution of the Solomon Islands 1978: http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/consol_act/c1978167/ (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

6. Unicameralism versus bicameralism

Of the four countries under examination, two have unicameral Parliaments: the Solomon Islands and Mauritius, respectively called the National Parliament and the National Assembly (Meyers 1999, 728; Ogan 1999a, 1007). The question of bicameralism is usually associated with the representation of the various subnational entities in a federal state (Lijphart 2000, 203). Especially in Mauritius, where the National Assembly, as we have seen, is elected partly with the goal of at least symbolically representing all the communities by means of the “best losers” seats, this needn’t be the case, exactly: in such a case, even a unicameral parliament can be slightly consensual in nature because its composition divides power among different ethnic groups. Therefore, while both are extremely majoritarian because of the concentration of power in one house of Parliament, I consider Mauritius to be the more consensual of the two.

Both Fiji and Trinidad and Tobago have similar provisions in their bicameral parliaments as regards the power of the upper house of their respective legislatures. The arrangements mirror the traditional Westminster arrangements as seen in the United Kingdom, where the political primacy rests clearly with the lower house. Accordingly, both the Senate of Fiji and its Trinidadian counterpart need not pass money bills for the bills to be presented to the President for assent, and they may not present such bills¹⁵¹⁶. On other matters, the upper house in both nations has a suspensive veto: although Fiji has an extra requirement of 6 months between the two passed bills in the House, in both nations the Senate can delay a bill for one parliamentary session, whereafter the House can choose to pass the bill again and present it to the President for assent¹⁷. Therefore, both nations are more consensually-oriented than the nations with a unicameral Parliament, with Fiji being more consensual.

7. Constitutional rigidity versus flexible constitutions

The standard requirement for amending the Mauritian constitution stands at passage by a majority of at least two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly¹⁸. However, some

15 Section 49 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

16 Section 63 and 64 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago 1978: <http://www.ttparliament.org/documents/1048.pdf> (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

17 Section 65 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago 1978 and section 47 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997 (links given above)

18 Section 47 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968: http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=4cb54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#assembly (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

provisions of the constitution enjoy special protection, meaning that the requirements for constitutional amendments are much more stringent than the general two-thirds requirement¹⁹. For a large number of sections, most of them pertaining to government institutions, and entire chapters pertaining to the judiciary, the constitution can only be amended by a vote of at least three-quarters of the National Assembly²⁰. For sections 1 and 57(2), dealing with the name and form of the state and the parliamentary term, respectively, an even more stringent requirement is put, which seems to me almost impossible to meet: a three-quarters approval of the population in a referendum prior to the introduction into the Assembly, followed by unanimous adoption by the Assembly²¹. This makes the constitution of Mauritius fairly rigid, especially in view of its complex, divided party system.

The Trinidadian Constitution is simpler to amend: while some sections pertaining to the government institutions are protected by the same two-thirds and three-quarters provisions as their counterparts in Mauritius (with the Senate having to pass the bill by two-thirds on all occasions to which the relevant sub-sections apply, even if the House has to vote three-quarters), the rest of the Constitution seems to be amendable by a simple majority²². This protects the Constitution's major provisions against abuse by the government of the day, while leaving the rest of it rather flexible. Therefore, the Constitution of Trinidad is considered to be more flexible and therefore, more majoritarian than its Mauritian counterpart.

In Fiji, too, the Constitution can only be amended by a vote of at least two-thirds of the membership in both Houses of Parliament²³. However, special conditions imposed upon the passage of constitutional amendments, by which in the House two-thirds of the representatives elected for each of the communities except for the Rotuman representative and in the Senate two-thirds of the members appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs have to vote in favour, giving them more influence²⁴. Again, this provision is more stringent and thus

19 Section 47 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968:

http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=4cb54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#assembly (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

20 Section 47 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968:

http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=4cb54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#assembly (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

21 Section 47 of the Constitution of Mauritius 1968:

http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=4cb54555fc808010VgnVCM100000ca6a12acRCRD#assembly (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

22 Section 54 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago 1978:

<http://www.tparliament.org/documents/1048.pdf> (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

23 Sections 191 and 192 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

24 Sections 191 and 192 of the Constitution of Fiji 1997: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/fj00000_.html (last accessed 24th of May 2012)

more consensual, although like the division of seats among communities, it is asymmetrical in that ethnic Fijians, represented by their reserved representatives and the Great Council of Chiefs have two opportunities to veto constitutional amendments.

The Solomon Islands have a similar arrangement to Trinidad and Mauritius in that a basic requirement of a two-thirds majority in the National Parliament is codified for constitutional amendments, and that a number of sections are protected²⁵. As in the other cases, these protected sections can only be amended by means of a three-quarters majority in lieu of a two-thirds majority and they mostly deal with the institutions of Parliament, the Courts and the Auditor-General, as well as fundamental rights and freedoms²⁶. Therefore, the Solomon Islands have a more rigid constitution than Trinidad but a less rigid constitution than Fiji or Mauritius, which require more stringent criteria to be met before certain constitutional amendments can be made.

8. Judicial review

As in the case of the rules governing constitutional amendments, the language used by the constitutions of the four countries under study is roughly similar to each other where it pertains to judicial review. In all cases, the constitution is declared to be the supreme law, and all other laws invalid insofar to the extent that they contradict the constitution. Without any provision barring the courts from ruling on the constitutionality of legislation, this enables the court systems of all four nations to review passed legislation for compliance with the constitution. The independence and assertiveness of the courts varies, but that information was hard to come by within the available time and resources, but the Mauritian High Court is mentioned to have established a reputation for their independence in reviewing the constitutionality of legislation (Meyers 1999, 728).

Consensual or majoritarian?

All that remains now is for us to judge whether there is a clear enough difference between the two cases in which democracy broke down or eroded on the one hand and the two cases in which democracy remained stable on the other. This is, in some respects, made more difficult by the fact that the constitutions of the four cases are continuously evolving and reforming, and that the current constitutions (which were used for the analysis) may not have been in

25 Section 61 of the Constitution of the Solomon Islands 1978:
http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/consol_act/c1978167/ (accessed 24th of May 2012)

26 Section 61 of the Constitution of the Solomon Islands 1978:
http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/consol_act/c1978167/ (accessed 24th of May 2012)

force in this form at the time of the crises of democracy. Nevertheless, I believe I have charted the developments well enough to make this judgment. An overview of the results on all eight components is given in table 2 below.

The verdict on Mauritian politics is, perhaps, clearest. Ruled by coalition cabinets since its first democratic election, and having perhaps the most rigid constitution of all the three cases, the Mauritian success story seems easy to explain in terms of its consensus institutions. We have seen earlier that, even in some areas where the institutions appear more majoritarian (following Lijphart's classification) than their counterparts in Trinidad, Fiji or the Solomon Islands, the results of these institutional choices often involve more in a consensus direction. The primary example of this is the electoral system. Far from resulting in regular strong majority governments, the disproportional electoral system with its multi-member constituencies and "best losers" actually a rare case in which disproportionality works the other way to ensure that all the various groups are adequately represented and balanced against each other. The observation that Mauritius seems to exhibit traits of consociational democracy seems to be well-grounded in its institutional framework, in which the grand coalition is constructed by means of shifting alliances (Lijphart 1977, 32). There seems to be a homogeneity of attitudes in Mauritius in that the consensual elements of the constitution are valued by the voters even if they are only symbolic in the current situation: people and politicians alike seem to share an attitude that the consensual system of government prevents race riots and instability.

In Trinidad and Tobago, however, the institutional setup is puzzling, to say the least, and it may even confound the hypothesis that majoritarian political institutions may produce democratic breakdown. Far from being a consensual polity in which attempts are made to address institutionally the issue of a multi-ethnic society, Trinidad has an electoral system that produces regular majority governments, to the extent that for a long period since its independence, the country was ruled by a single dominant party, the PNM, which primarily represents the interests of the Creole population. With its one-party governments, relatively flexible constitution and recently-emerging two-party system, Trinidad seems to resemble the Westminster model much more closely than one would expect based on our hypothesis that consensus democracy contributes towards democratic stability.

What can explain this puzzling conclusion? Perhaps democracy in Trinidad and Tobago wasn't as thoroughly consolidated as it at first seemed. The fact that the parties still make communal electoral appeals in local election campaigns despite reconciliatory narratives on the national stage, along with the fact that the most recent hung parliament

resulted in the appointment of a Prime Minister who, in peril of failing to obtain the confidence of Parliament, prorogued Parliament until finally asking for its dissolution in 2002, points towards the fact that democracy is not as stable as it seemed. This is borne out by the Freedom House (2012) indicators, which show a relapse from free to partly free as recent as the period from 2001 through 2004. Seen in this light, the seemingly counterintuitive fact that Trinidad has a majoritarian set of institutions can possibly be reconciled with the hypothesis, although it still remains problematic given the fact that democracy seems to have recovered from 2004 onwards.

Fiji is another case where the results do not seem to fit the hypothesis that consensual systems lead to democratic stability. Despite having a multi-party system and, more recently, a mandatory multi-party government, making it appear to be one of the more consensual of the four cases, its democracy still remains unstable, with military coups and a refusal to carry out the constitutional multi-party cabinet requirement all occurring in the last decade, after the more consensual provisions were introduced in 1997.

However, the abuses seem to fit a pattern similar to the one that van Cranenburgh (2006) found in Namibia, where consensual institutions are overshadowed by an adversarial mindset. The asymmetrical provisions of the constitution, including the powers of the Great Council of Chiefs and the overrepresentation of indigenous Fijians in Parliament, seem to prejudice the system slightly in favour of this community. I believe, therefore, that it may not have been fully coincidental that it was an ethnic Fijian Prime Minister who refused to appoint Ministers from the predominantly Indian FLP to the Cabinet despite a constitutional requirement to do so. Bearing in mind that the 2000 coup by George Speight was also an expression of the fear of ethnic Fijians, their fear of losing their dominance may translate in adversarial practices, leading to instability (Fry 2000).

In the Solomon Islands, the only two aspects that are more consensual than the other cases are the extremely loose party system, necessitating coalitions and its very assertive Parliament. Still, on balance, I believe the Solomon Islands to be slightly more majoritarian than Fiji, and certainly more so than Mauritius, because of its electoral system, which is the same as the Trinidadian one. Nevertheless, the Solomon Islands are closer to the Fijian constitution and the Mauritian practice than to the majoritarianism of Trinidad and Tobago, and should therefore be seen as slightly consensual. This need not cast doubt on our hypothesis, however, seeing as the extremely loose party system could well be envisaged to result in instability, as evidenced by the low average Cabinet duration.

Table 2: Overview of results on the 8 components

Component	Mauritius	Trinidad & Tobago	Fiji	Solomon Islands
<i>1. Single-party majority versus broad coalition</i>	Broad coalition (consensual)	Predominantly single-party (majoritarian)	Forced broad coalition, though not in practice (slightly consensual)	Broad coalition (consensual)
<i>2. Executive-legislative relations</i>	Balance (consensual)	Dominant, long-lived Cabinets (majoritarian)	Balance (slightly consensual)	Balance; very assertive Parliament (consensual)
<i>3. Effective number of parties</i>	Multi-party, but elections are usually fought by two alliances. (consensual)	Two-party system (majoritarian)	Multi-party system (consensual)	Loose party system; lot of independents. (very consensual)
<i>4. Proportional versus disproportional electoral system</i>	Plurality in MMCs with “best losers”, disproportional, (majoritarian)	Plurality in SMCs, remarkably proportional (slightly majoritarian)	Plurality in MMCs, with communal seats, proportional (slightly majoritarian)	Plurality in SMCs, very disproportional (majoritarian)
<i>5. Degree of decentralisation</i>	Unitary, with Rodrigues devolution constitutionally protected. (slightly consensual)	Unitary, with devolution to Tobago not constitutionally enshrined (majoritarian)	Unitary, with devolution to Rotuma and role of Great Council in matters pertaining ethnic Fijians (slightly majoritarian)	Unitary, with devolution to all provinces not constitutionally enshrined (majoritarian)
<i>6. Unicameralism versus bicameralism</i>	Unicameral but with effort for ethnic balance (slightly majoritarian)	Weak bicameralism with suspensive veto (slightly consensual)	Weak bicameralism with suspensive veto (slightly consensual)	Unicameral (majoritarian)
<i>7. Rigid versus flexible constitutions</i>	Fairly rigid (consensual)	Some protected sections, rest by simple majority (slightly majoritarian)	Fairly rigid (consensual)	Fairly rigid, but less so than Fiji and Mauritius. (slightly consensual)
<i>8. Judicial review</i>	Yes, High Court with assertive reputation (consensual)	Yes (consensual)	Yes (consensual)	Yes (consensual)
Overall rating	Consensual	Majoritarian	Consensual	Slightly Consensual

Conclusion and Discussion

Do consensual political systems, therefore, lead to democratic stability through a homogeneity of attitudes? Yes and no. In Mauritius, it certainly seems to have been the case that the consensual setup of the institutions, which seems to be built to ensure power-sharing, has fostered a homogeneity of attitudes in that all citizens readily accept the authority of the government and the legitimacy of the democratic system, with communal violence being seen as the nightmarish alternative. The success story of Mauritius seems to fit very well into the Lijphartian framework by its consensual political system.

However, plausible as it may be in the Mauritian case that consensual institutions are indeed a necessary condition for the stability of democracy in newly democratic, ethnically diverse small island nations, it also appears that on its own, it does not appear to be sufficient. In the case of Fiji, we have seen another instance of van Cranenburgh's (2006) "*consensual institutions and majoritarian practices*", albeit in another manner. While Namibia is majoritarian in its one-party dominance, Fiji is majoritarian in that one community is privileged over the others by asymmetrical constitutional provisions. That is a dangerous prospect for democracy, as we have seen in the regular occurrence of coups and irregularities in the past decade. While the letter of the constitution may be consensual, the ethnic Fijian government, it appear, chose to disregard it for some time, leading to tensions. The case of Fiji shows that without basic consensual practices or at least attitudes to accompany them, consensual institutions run the risk of becoming a dead letter.

Therefore, when consensual institutions are accompanied by consensual attitudes on the elite level, they indeed lead to a homogeneity of attitudes and democratic stability. We have to bear in mind, though, that this conclusion is based on only three cases, as we had good grounds to assume that there was another possible explanation for instability in the Solomon Islands to be found in its loose party system. In addition, it was based only on the letter of the constitution and observations made by others. Further study might thus be needed to find further support for this relationship, as its external validity is limited. If, upon further study the case of Mauritius were found to be the only case supporting Lijphart's theory, that would pose problems for the relationship found in this paper.

The attitudinal homogeneity thesis, this paper shows, may have to be modified: not attitudinal homogeneity on its own leads to democratic stability in all small island nations, but rather attitudinal homogeneity arising from political circumstances and consensual politics. In addition, this paper adds further support to the findings made by van Cranenburgh

(2006) in the case of Namibia, revealing some of the problems with a purely institutional perspective like the one adopted by Lijphart (2000) in his *Patterns of Democracy*. We will have to look more carefully at attitudes at the elite level and political practices, in addition to institutions, if we are to draw any definite conclusions about a political system.

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