

Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Social Conflict

Author(s): Robert E. Goodin

Source: *British Journal of Political Science*, Oct., 1975, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Oct., 1975), pp. 516-519

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/193443>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *British Journal of Political Science*

JSTOR

In the introduction to this Note, I raised one question which I must return to here. If intergenerational stability or instability in political attitudes exists, what significance does this have for the operation of the political system? Connell stresses intergenerational stability while showing that it does not appear to be explained by the influence of the family. However, he still finds the occurrence of such group-correspondence crucial. This can only be because he views such intergenerational consensus as important for an understanding of the operation of the American political system. I must question this position. Such a view is not difficult to understand, but it seems to me to avoid a great number of crucial questions which provide much of the subject matter of sociology and political science.<sup>16</sup> Overall I believe that Connell, having admirably destroyed one important myth of political socialization – the omnipotence of the role of the family, seizes upon what may be another myth. It seems to me that it has yet to be proved that political socialization has much utility as a key variable in an understanding of the way political systems operate. Yet this is what it aims to do, indeed claims to do, but seems to me to fail to do.

### ***Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Social Conflict***

ROBERT E. GOODIN\*

Cross-cutting cleavages do seem to help moderate social conflict.<sup>1</sup> This can be explained in either of two ways. One argument focuses on the logic of electoral competition. Where parties must appeal to an electorate with diverse tastes along many dimensions, politicians must take moderate positions (defined as near the median voter) in most dimensions of cleavage if they are to win. A socialist party which draws its support from both Protestants and Catholics cannot take extreme positions on the religious question without alienating potential supporters and jeopardizing its electoral chances.<sup>2</sup>

At another level, cross-cutting cleavages work through the individual citizen to damp social conflict. The former explanation suggests that political parties, if they are to win,

<sup>16</sup> D. Marsh, 'Political Socialization: the Implicit Assumptions Questioned', *British Journal of Political Science*, 1 (1971), 453–65.

\* Department of Politics, University of Strathclyde.

<sup>1</sup> See Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Principles of Sociology* (New York: Century Co., 1920), pp. 164–5; Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, trans. K. H. Wolff and R. Bendix (New York: Free Press, 1955); Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 72–81; William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); and Douglas W. Rae and Michael Taylor, *The Analysis of Political Cleavages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), Chap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See James Madison, *The Federalist*, Number 10, further developed by Robert A. Dahl in *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 104–5 and *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). Similar themes are found in David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Knopf, 1960), pp. 157–67; Kornhauser, *Politics of Mass Society*, pp. 80–1; and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 31. The fullest development is Brian Barry, *Interests, Conflicts and Outcomes* (mimeo.), which builds on the 'city block' model of Douglas Rae and Michael Taylor, 'Decision Rules and Policy Outcomes', *British Journal of Political Science*, 1 (1971), 71–90.

must *respond* to those making moderate demands. This argument suggests that cross-pressured individuals will *make* more moderate demands than they would otherwise have made. Studies of electoral behavior consistently demonstrate that cross-pressured voters are in fact less partisan.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this note is to analyse more formally why this should be true by examining the logic of individual choice.

Assume that an individual simultaneously occupies two different and partially incompatible roles. Dahrendorf identifies three central aspects of social roles: '(1) They are quasi-objective complexes of prescriptions for behavior which are in principle independent of the individual. (2) Their particular content is defined and redefined not by any individual, but by society. (3) The behavior expectations associated with roles are binding on the individual, in the sense that he cannot ignore or reject them without harm to himself.'<sup>4</sup> To say that roles are partially incompatible, then, means that the behavior which Group 1 expects from incumbents of role 1 is contradictory to that Group 2 expects from occupants of role 2.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, it is the behavioral performance rather than intentions or even the results that determine the degree of role-fulfilment. The soldier being court-martialed for disobeying orders cannot defend himself by arguing that it would have been militarily foolhardy to obey. An individual fulfils his role perfectly if and only if he fully satisfies all expectations about how incumbents of that particular role should behave. His behavior is bound to have consequences for group well-being, to be sure, but it is the fact of his performance rather than its effects that counts in determining how well he has played his role.

The cross-pressured individual dearly wants to satisfy fully both sets of expectations. Indeed, 'he cannot reject [either of] them without harm to himself.' But since they are partially incompatible he must sacrifice some increment of role 1-fulfilment for each increment of role 2-fulfilment and *vice versa*. Essentially, he is forced to trade off one good for another, and the indifference curves in Fig. 1 represent the choices he would make provided that each good had diminishing marginal utility, that is, provided that each unit of role-fulfilment were not quite so rewarding as the previous one.

Let *ab* be the welfare possibility frontier, that is, the most the individual can get from one role at a given level of fulfilment of the other. This frontier is exogenously determined, and actors are seemingly forever in doubt as to its precise boundaries. And, finally, assume that there is no lumpiness, so that the individual can choose any combination of role-fulfilments up to his welfare frontier. This 'feasible set' is represented by the shaded region of Fig. 1.

It is clear from Fig. 1 that cross-pressures logically make individuals more moderate.

<sup>3</sup> These are the conclusions of Lipset, *Political Man*, pp. 88, 203–16 and Robert E. Lane, *Political Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), pp. 197–203 on the basis of a long series of voting studies including: Herbert Tingsten, *Political Behavior* (London: King, 1937); Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); and Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Homo Sociologicus', *Essays in the Theory of Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> How such expectations come to be formulated is problematic. Unless some member of the group is dictatorial in the sense used by Kenneth Arrow in *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New York: Wiley, 1963) rational choice models would predict a serious problem of collective choice. Empirical evidence of the lack of role consensus bears out this prediction; see Neal Gross, Ward S. Mason and Alexander McEachern, *Explorations in Role Analysis* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

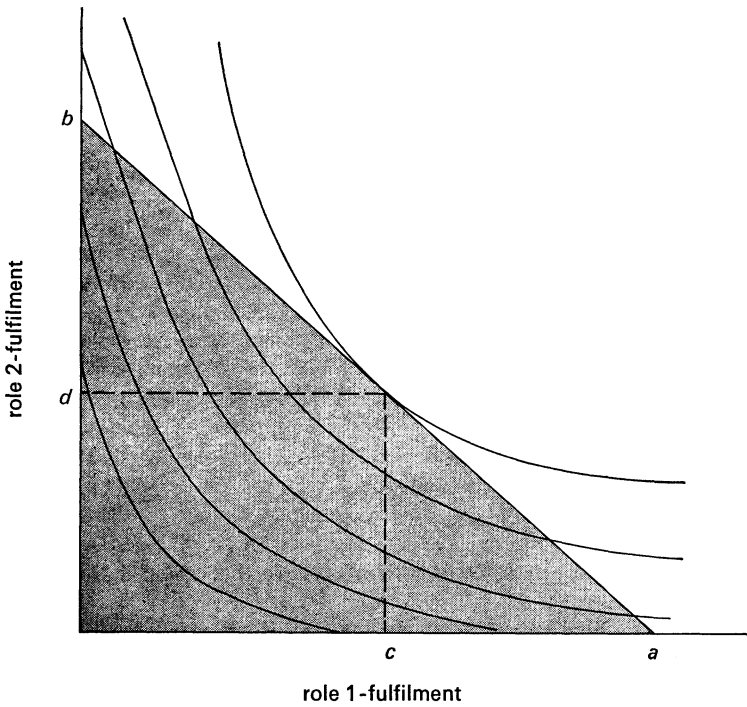


Fig. 1

Had an individual occupied only role 2 he would have chosen  $(0, b)$  because that is the highest point in his feasible set. Had he occupied only role 1 he would have chosen point  $(a, 0)$  because that is the point furthest to the right in his feasible set. But since he occupies both roles he chooses the combination  $(c, d)$  which maximizes his gains from the combination, i.e., takes him to the highest possible indifference curve. Thus, the logic of choice forces the cross-pressured individual to be less partisan on both the horizontal axis (choosing  $c$  instead of  $a$ ) and on the vertical axis (choosing  $d$  instead of  $b$ ).

This conclusion is perhaps the less important contribution of this formulation. In addition, this formulation forces to the surface an assumption which also underlies the logic of electoral competition model. The assumption is that the policy space is infinitely divisible – that individuals can choose any combination of role-fulfilments and that parties can choose any package of programs within the budgetary constraints defined by the welfare possibility frontier. A great danger to societies with cross-cutting cleavages is that moderate positions might be untenable for a variety of natural or human reasons. Some goods simply cannot be divided up and parcelled out. Even when goods are in principle divisible, groups may stubbornly demand all or nothing from individuals and political parties alike.

The seriousness of this can be demonstrated by revising Fig. 1. Suppose that Group 1 informs the individual that, although it is willing to allow a little slack, it considers anything below an  $s$  level of role 1-fulfilment to be no better than nothing at all. Similarly, Group 2 sternly warns him that anything below  $t$  level of role 2-fulfilment is, in its eyes, no better than nothing at all. These demands narrow the individual's feasible set to the shaded region in Fig. 2, and in response he redraws his indifference map as indicated.

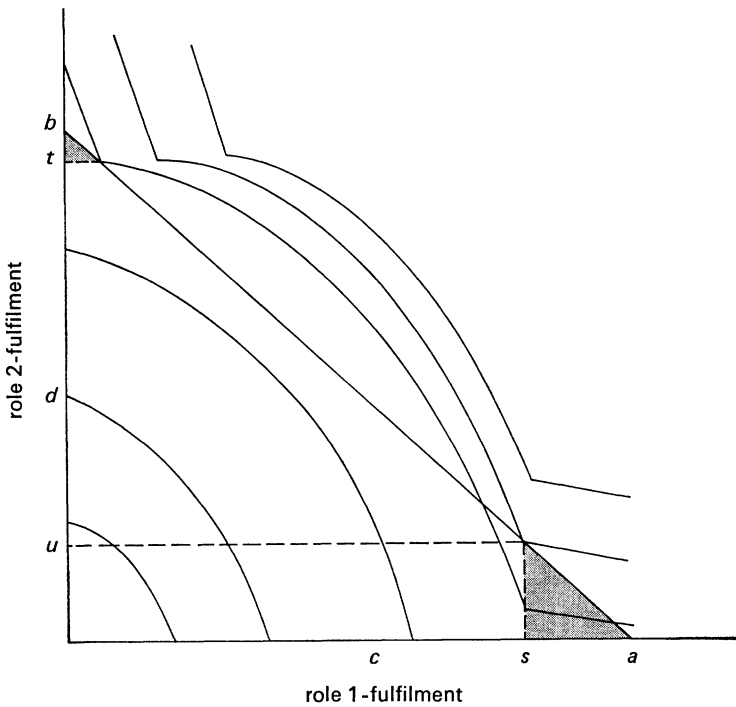


Fig. 2

The best he can do under these circumstances is to choose  $(s, u)$ . Just as the cross-pressured individual is left with no choice but to fulfill one role virtually perfectly at the expense of the other, so parties advocating middle-of-the-road policies will find no support at all.

Cross-cutting cleavages, then, 'knit the community together' only by the leave of the competing groups. And it is arguable that, where groups are prepared to 'be understanding' in this regard, the divisions are such as would hardly have wrenched the society apart anyway. Cross-cutting cleavages prove unreliable in damping social conflicts precisely where damping is most needed: where groups are intransigent in making extreme demands.

### **Correction**

FRED I. GREENSTEIN\*

I report with regret that several of the tables in 'The Queen and the Prime Minister' [this *Journal*, IV (1974), 257-87], contained small mechanical errors, largely affecting percentage distribution by one or two per cent. Should anyone need a 'laundered' reprint of the article, please let me know. There is one error of substantive importance: in Table 6 (p. 282) the correct percentage of French and U.S. white children perceiving