Peter Emerson, Director, de Borda Institute, Belfast

Ethnic Conflict and Dichotomous Politics, Conflict Resolution and Win-Win Democratic Structures.
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Abstract

The international community is dominated by the western powers, all of which appear to be obsessed with the notion that democracy must be based on a majority vote. This implies that (almost) every political question is a dichotomy, a two-option choice between two supposedly exclusive opposites. Hence, in ethno-religious disputes throughout the world, international diplomats often advocate the wrong medicine, the exercise of the right of self-determination by means of a *closed* question, a two-option, win-or-lose, no compromise, referendum. In some instances, indeed, the democratic process itself is a cause of war.

Instead of being the win-or-lose means by which one faction in society may dominate the rest, the democratic process should be a win-win procedure by which society as a whole comes to an accommodation, i.e., a verbal or votal consensus. As in conflict resolution work, the appropriate voting procedure is based on *open* questions, and the appropriate voting procedure is a multi-option ballot, by which is identified the option with the highest average preference... and an average, by definition, involves everybody. Now *that* is democratic.

About the Author

Like Jean-Charles de Borda, Peter Emerson was first a naval officer. Then, after four years as a volunteer science/maths teacher in Kenya, he moved to Belfast in 1975, not least because of his parentage: his father was an Irish Protestant from Cork, his mother an English Catholic from Cheshire. He now works as the director of the de Borda Institute, a small but international NGO which specialises in promoting preference voting, especially in plebiscites on sovereignty. He speaks Russian, some Serbo-Croat and some Kiswahili, and his work abroad has centred on conflict zones in the Balkans, the Causasus, and last year in East Africa. His most recent work is *Defining Democracy.*