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Power-Sharing in Theory and Practice: A Review of Consociationalism

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I. Introduction

In 2022, the Northern Ireland Executive essentially collapsed. Paul Givan, First Minister of Northern Ireland and member of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), resigned in protest of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement protocols. As a result, Michelle O'Neill, Deputy First Minister and Vice President of Sinn Féin, was forced to resign as well.[1] For two years, Northern Ireland operated without a functioning Executive until the 3rd of February 2024, after DUP negotiations with the UK government led to some of their concerns being addressed. Worse still, this was the third time the Northern Irish Executive or Assembly had been suspended for multiple years.[2] The ability of one party to shut down the government can be explained by power-sharing, specifically the doctrine of consociationalism.

Social division is a fundamental issue in political science, sociology, and international relations that impacts conflict dynamics, governance, cohesion, and state stability across numerous nations worldwide. In a plural democracy, one with a multitude of distinct groups, salient segmental cleavages, and stark social differentiation, majoritarian rule can emerge, leading to oppression and possibly inter-group violence. Majorities can elect representatives and outvote minorities, effectively sidelining their interests, eroding trust in democratic institutions, and exacerbating social divisions that may already be fragile or historically tense. Differences can amount to contrasts in religion, ideology, language, or take on a regional, racial, or ethnic character. Take, for example, the previously mentioned Northern Ireland. There exists a salient

[1] David Young, Jonathan McCambridge, and Philip Ryan, "DUP's Paul Givan Resigns as Northern Ireland First Minister, as Taoiseach Brands It 'Very Damaging Move'," *Irish Independent*, February 3, 2022.
[2] Jess Sargeant and Matthew Fright, "Northern Ireland Government Formation," Institute for Government, February 1, 2024.

ethno-religious distinction between the Protestant Unionist (supporting close ties to the UK) and Catholic Republicans (in favor of reunification with the Republic of Ireland). [3]

There is widespread pessimism that highly diverse nations are inherently incompatible with democracy. [4] This fatalism is misguided and may dangerously create a self-fulfilling cycle of assumed democratic failures. Solutions abound as to how to facilitate a peaceful coexistence of these two realities, one of the most popular of which is known as consociationalism. Consociationalism, in theory, seeks to weaken majoritarianism in exchange for elite-headed, proportional representation for most, if not all, societal groups. This is achieved through a grand coalition, mutual veto, proportionality, and segmental autonomy. The central political scientist on the subject, Arend Lijphart, described the benefits of consociationalism as "the centrifugal tendencies inherent in a plural society are counteracted by the cooperative attitudes and behavior of the leaders of the different segments of the population." [5] Instead of the highly idealized maximalist approach of integration, consociationalism promises modest yet realistic goals that can be applied to environments predisposed to ethnic tension. It acknowledges inter-group tension while offering incentives for major parties to cooperate.

Consociationalism has been adapted by political theorists, from its original advocate, Lijphart, to later scholars such as Donald Horowitz and John McGarry. Over the decades, the theory and implementation of consociationalism have evolved. This review will attempt to define the theory and make sense of its history. Furthermore, consociationalism is not without its ardent supporters and skeptical detractors. This paper will also explore the defense of the former group and give attention to the latter's criticisms.

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[3] McGarry, John, and Brendan O'Leary. "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and its Agreement: What Critics of Consociation Can Learn from Northern Ireland." Government and Opposition 41, no. 2 (2006): 249–277.

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[5] Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 1.

II. Classic Lijphartian Consociationalism, History, and Definition

Before discussing consociationalism and its characteristics, the philosophical underpinnings of ethnicity and history must be elucidated.

Primordialism and Constructivism

Consociationalism is built upon the theory of primordialism, the idea that ethnic identities are inherently fixed. Primordialists see ethnic identities as being far from malleable and rooted in human nature, something cosmopolitan nations must work around. Primordialism originated as part of the 18th and 19th-century German Romanticism movement, and its development was closely tied to the rise of nationalism. How to define these ethnic identities was subject to debate, ranging from the virtue of mutually shared language, religion, territory, or kinship to the highly problematic sociobiological theory of Pierre van den Berghe, who looked at genetic linkages. [6] Lijphart admitted to being highly influenced by primordialist sentiment in many of his early works, largely due to its peak in popularity within academic circles in the 1970s. As can be seen by the evolution of consociationalism, by the turn of the century, Lijphart largely moved past primordialism, viewing ethnicity as resilient and socially grounded, but neither essentialist nor immutable. [7]

Nowadays, primordialism has been almost entirely overtaken by its antithetical philosophical rival, constructivism. Whereas primordialists see ethnicity as an ancient and

[6] Coakley, John. "Primordialism in Nationalism Studies: Theory or Ideology?" Nations and Nationalism 24, no. 2 (2018): 327–347. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12349.
[7] Lijphart, Arend. "Constructivism and Consociational Theory." APSA-CP: Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association 12, no. 1 (2001): 11–13.

unchanging reality, constructivists view ethnicity as a social construct that can be highly influenced through political institutions. While primordialists would see ethnicity as an obstacle to be accommodated, constructivists would look into language consolidation, depoliticizing ethnicity, and economic modernization as strategies to ease ethnic tension. [8] Given consociationalism's foundations in primordialist thought, it has attracted significant critique from constructivist scholars. As this paper will explore, authors like Donald Horowitz challenge consociationalism for its tendency to reify ethnic divisions and overlook the potential for more integrative or transformative approaches.

History

Consociationalism is often credited to Arend Lijphart, who formalized the concept in his 1969 article, "Consociational Democracy." This, however, is not the first instance of the theory as he first used the term, though in a less defined way, in his 1968 case study on the Netherlands, *The Politics of Accommodation,* 1968. Lijphart did not invent the term consociationalism, as he derived it from David Apter's 1961 study of Uganda, but it can be traced back to Johannes Althusius' writings in the early seventeenth century, in its Latin form *consociatio,* describing systems of shared authority.

The theory itself is highly influenced by Gerhard Lehmbruch's 1967 monograph on "proportional democracy," which closely followed consociational thought. Sir Arthur Lewis's Politics in West Africa (1965) contained what Lijphart later characterized as the first modern scholarly history of consociational theory. The theory was also influenced by early 20th-century Austro-Marxists like Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, who produced works on multinational

[8] Kanchan Chandra, ed., Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5–6

power-sharing arrangements. [9] Over the following decade, Lijphart would refine his theory of consociationalism, which will be discussed further in this review.

Definition

Consociationalism can be defined by four characteristics and facilitated by nine favorable conditions, all of which serve to diminish majority rule. Though the number of these favorable factors has undergone a number of alterations, at their peak in 1977, they were:

1. Segmental isolation and federalism,
2. A multiple balance of power among the subcultures
3. External threats
4. Small population size
5. Overarching loyalties
6. Moderate multiparty system
7. Representative party system
8. Crosscutting cleavages (in some instances)
9. Tradition of elite accommodation.[10]

Regarding the four characteristics, the first, the Grand Coalition, is followed by mutual veto, proportionality, and segmental autonomy. However, subsequent developments in the theory increasingly positioned the grand coalition as the central feature, with the remaining three viewed as supportive or secondary mechanisms. [11]

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[9] Arend Lijphart, Thinking about Democracy: Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.
[10] Dixon, Paul. "Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism in Wonderland and the Northern Ireland Peace Process." Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 2023, 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2221512.
[11] McGarry, John, and Brendan O'Leary. "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and Its Agreement: What Critics of Consociation Can Learn from Northern Ireland." Government and Opposition 41, no. 2 (2006): 249–277.

Grand Coalition

A defining characteristic of consociationalism is the presence of a grand coalition. Within this governing coalition are representatives from all significant segments of society; this ensures that all major societal cleavages are included in decision-making. This is in contrast to what Lijphart calls the 'British Model,' a common competitive democracy wherein a majority in government is at odds with a large opposition out of government. [12] The grand coalition is an acknowledgement of the inherent differential political stakes between homogeneous societies and heterogeneous ones. Gabriel A. Almond describes it thusly: Homogeneous societies, especially pragmatic ones where the population shares a high degree of consensus, can have politics be no more than a game. In this game, the outcome is not foreseen, and the stakes are not too high, leading to, at most, fierce but not harmful competition. In this environment, the British Model, with its adversarial nature, excels. Antithetically, heterogeneous or plural societies find politics as more than a game: a battle with high stakes and a threat to their way of life. [13] With this in mind, a grand coalition would be more apt than a majority-led government.

Mutual Veto

Despite involvement in the political process via the previously mentioned grand coalition, minorities are still at risk of being outvoted. Though they can now make a case to their coalition partners, the minority might still find itself victim to the majority, undermining inter-group cooperation. The protective mechanism for this comes in the form of the mutual minority veto, allowing all minority groups to protect their political interests.

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[12] Ibid., 25.
[13] Gabriel A. Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics 18,* no. 3 (August 1956): 398-99.

History and modern politics show the dangers associated with a powerful veto. One needs only to look at the Polish-Lithuanian *liberum veto*,[14] or the United Nations Security Council's P5 [15] to see how a veto can gridlock legislation and foster animosity. Lijphart dismisses this criticism as inconsequential for three reasons. One: A veto is held by all minorities, so the possibility of retaliation makes groups hesitant to exercise their power excessively. Two: Because the veto provides security, its use would be unlikely; its very existence deters threats to minority interests. Three: Since the threat of gridlock is so high, all groups would naturally be more incentivized to collaborate to further a common interest. [16]

Proportionality

The tenet of proportionality, as it is related to consociationalism, is devised to complement the aforementioned grand coalition. It stipulates that, while all groups are given a say in government, their influence should be proportional to their population. All civil service, cabinet positions, and other decision-making bodies should be staffed in proportion to the size of each group. Taking Lebanon as an example that will be delved into later, the President must be Christian, the Prime Minister must be Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament must be Shia Muslim. [17] The benefit to this is that it ensures voices will be heard, proportional to their constituents. Even if a dominant group holds a parliamentary majority, the grand coalition ensures that minority voices are included. Through proportionality, these voices are represented in government according to their share of the population.

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[14] Daniel Stone, The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
[15] David Bosco, Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
[16] Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies, 36-37.
[17] Lebanon, The Constitution of Lebanon, September 23, 1926, as amended, art. 95.

Lijphart admits that, in the case of highly divisive topics, proportionality cannot prevent the culmination of either majority rule or a minority veto, both outcomes inevitably causing strife. What proportionality does achieve is a delay of legislation, as all voices have the chance to be heard. This delay can bring with it the opportunity of negotiation and possibly compromise between the leaders of the majority and minorities.[18] This elite, top-down-centered philosophy is a commonality in the theory of consociationalism. The desired result is that decision-making elites seek to pass legislation and, depending on the size of their proportional group, either aim for a majority or work to avoid a minority veto. This solution, while not foolproof in avoiding friction, does help to alleviate it.

Segmental Autonomy and Federalism

The final characteristic of consociationalism is the granting of self-rule by minorities. Barring topics of national and common interests, all matters are delegated to segments that reflect social cleavages. A certain manifestation of autonomy comes in the form of federalism, which can be especially attractive when subnational boundaries align with physical geography. This autonomy grants freedom to minorities to govern themselves as they see fit, further reducing tensions between groups, as matters of culture, education, and private life can be relative to each group. [19] This can also empower minorities by compartmentalizing authority. Some groups that find a lack of power in the center might find themselves to be a majority in one or more states. [20] Autonomy also succeeds in the dispersion of power, which in turn leads to a dispersion of animosity. The national government can shed the weight of politics and the

[18] Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies, 38-41.
[19] Ibid., 41-44.
[20] Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 617.

animosity often associated with it to subnational legislatures, diluting the hostility towards the nation as a whole.

Secession

Though not technically an aspect of consociationalism as put forward by Lijphart, his philosophy towards secession is worth noting. When a nation is fraught with segmental cleavages, it has three possible solutions at its disposal. It can reduce intergroup friction through assimilation, subsuming smaller identities into a larger national one. This method is both drawn-out and has a propensity to aggravate the subject population. Overall, assimilation has a very low chance of success. It also fails to prevent acute tensions from boiling over in the short term. The second solution is consociationalism. In theory, it helps to lower structural tension while maintaining a stable democracy. Consociationalism is not perfect, and its application may be inauspicious in certain nations. In that case, or cases where it has been tried and failed, the idea of secession should be seriously considered. In a scenario where a nation would need to fragment, it would ideally do so along social cleavages, leading to more homogenous states. In reality, new states would not be completely homogenous as groups tend to intermingle, and minority populations could face pressures to resettle.[21] The true cost would be enormous and multidimensional. Displacement, ethnic cleansing, the financial cost of resettlement, and weakened global influence are just some of the possible costs of dismantling a nation. The track record of peaceful secession is mixed. While there have been a number of bloodless secessions, such as Norway in 1905 or the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, there are just as many violent ones, like the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 or the violence following the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991. Nevertheless, there may be times when it is preferable; however, given

[21] Ibid., 44-47.

the weight of possible conflict in mind, the breakup of a state should be subject to deliberative consideration.

III. Evolution of the Theory

While Arend Lijphart set the groundwork for consociationalism, the theory has greatly evolved since its initial presentation. It has been refined, modified, and challenged by academics in light of new empirical cases and changing models of theory. The following examines how consociationalism in academic research has evolved, following the development of the theory as much as its criticism has, regarding its practicability, democratic accountability, and long-term sustainability in highly fragmented societies.

Donald Horowitz

One of the most prominent critics of consociationalism is political scientist Donald L. Horowitz. While he agrees with Lijphart on the dangers of nihilism regarding multi-ethnic democracies, he finds fault with much of consociationalism. Contrary to Lijphart's advocacy of institutionalizing ethnic group identities through practices like guaranteed representation and group autonomy, Horowitz's centripetal design reduces the salience of ethnic cleavages. Rather than freezing identities, centripetalism invites politicians to reach out across groups. This is achieved by such electoral systems as the alternative vote, which compels candidates to secure second- and third-preference votes from other parties. These systems, in Horowitz's view, promote interethnic accommodation and redraw the political landscape in the long term, as opposed to merely containing it. Therefore, while consociationalism is founded on elite bargains

and tolerance of immutably entrenched cleavages, centripetalism seeks to transform identities and build national cohesion from the bottom up.

Lijphart's model draws heavily from the experiences of Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands, heterogeneous yet stable democracies. He attributes their success to the cooperation of segmental elites within a shared democratic framework. However, Horowitz, building on economist Val R. Lorwin's critique, argues that the pluralism of these smaller European democracies is fundamentally different from that of states in Africa or Asia. In Europe, even where ethno-linguistic fragmentation is prominent, such as in Belgium, political competition often centers more around class or religion than ethnicity. These societies also tend to have stronger national identities that help mitigate fragmentation. By contrast, countries like Malaysia or Uganda feature more ascriptive and exclusive political systems, where ethnic identity is more central to party affiliation and political mobilization. According to Horowitz, applying the consociational model to such deeply divided societies overlooks the intensity and structure of identity-based politics in non-Western contexts. [22] This calls into question how applicable consociationalism even is to other areas of the world that are most prone to inter-group violence. It is possible that Europe's lower ethnic salience is a result, rather than a prerequisite, of consociationalism. However, it is difficult to ascertain which came first: moderation and fluidity due to consociationalism or consociationalism due to moderation and fluidity. Without clear causality, Horowitz argues, consociationalism should not be recommended as it could just be a Eurocentric idiosyncrasy. [23]

The second major criticism by Horowitz is the assumption that proportional representation in a grand coalition by segmental elites will have intra-group unity. Seldom can a

[22] Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, 564–565.
[23] Ibid, 573.

single set of leaders speak for an entire ethnic group. Even within ethnic groups, especially related to the issue of leadership, conflict and tension are still factors. This becomes especially prevalent when the leadership positions itself towards cooperation with other groups. As Horowitz puts it, "In short, a principal limitation on interethnic cooperation is the configuration of intraethnic competition, both present and anticipated." [24] Members of the group might see their leader's geniality as a form of pandering or selling out to other groups. This can undermine the legitimacy of the leader and ignite intra-group competitions, particularly among ambitious contenders who tend to mobilize their support on the back of nationalist feelings. It might be possible that the formation of a grand coalition causes intra-group competition.[25] While Lijphart might see these ethnic groups, with established unitary leaders, as the foundation to a consociationalist state, the stability of that foundation can be called into question.

Centripetalism

As consociationalism grew in popularity throughout the second half of the 20th century, it became subject to increased scrutiny, particularly following its implementation in deeply divided societies such as Lebanon and Bosnia. Critics like Horowitz pointed towards its propensity to reinforce division and its structural deficiencies as reasons to reevaluate the theory. By the 1990s–2000s came the evolved theory of centripetalism. While consociationalism is marked, primarily, by constraints: It constrains the government to be in a proportional grand coalition, it constrains the legislature with a multitude of veto points, and it constrains groups to be represented by a unitary elite, centripetalism uses incentives to accommodate, moderate, and temper political rhetoric, as well as depoliticize ethnicity. It attempts to engineer a kind of centripetal spin within a political system, pulling parties towards the center to unify the

[24] Ibid., 574.
[25] Ibid.

electorate. [26] Examples of this can be found in the presidential elections in Nigeria and Indonesia. They have what is called a "distributive requirement" that forces the candidate to secure votes not only nationally but also across a wide geographic and ethnic range, rewarding moderation and interethnic appeals. In Nigeria, for instance, presidential candidates need to secure at least 25% of the vote in two-thirds of the states, whereas in Indonesia, candidates need to gain a similar spread across provinces. [27] This is what is known as vote-pooling. This design compels politicians to appeal beyond their ethnic or regional bases, cultivating cross-cutting alignments and lowering the political salience of sectarian identity. Unlike consociationalism, which institutionalizes divisions by ethnic group and often freezes elite domination, centripetalism seeks to dilute these divisions through structural electoral incentives. Horowitz argues that these incentives yield more democratic and inclusive outcomes by promoting more moderate politics and coalition-building that transcends ethnic lines. This approach is not intended to preserve group identity in politics but to make group identity less politically salient, thus seeking national integration through electoral pragmatism rather than institutional guarantees.

The second electoral system Horowitz advocates of is the alternative vote (AV). With the AV, voters rank their preferred candidates on a numbered scale. After all the votes are counted, if any candidate fails to achieve a majority, then the one with the fewest votes is eliminated. From there, all votes for the eliminated candidate are redistributed to the voter's second choice. The process continues until a candidate reaches a majority. How this can benefit a plural democracy comes in the incentive for groups to moderate their position to appeal to a wider group of voters. Because voters are not locked into a single choice, like in first-past-the-post voting, candidates

[26] Benjamin Reilly, "Institutional Designs for Diverse Democracies: Consociationalism, Centripetalism and Communalism Compared," European Political Science Review 4, no. 3 (2012): 262.
[27] Trzciński, Krzysztof. "Centripetal Federalism." 50 Shades of Federalism, October 2017. https://50shadesoffederalism.com/theory/centripetal-federalism/.

have the possibility of garnering marginal votes from other ethnicities. Since voters will not tend to give preference to candidates outside their ethnic group, candidates are incentivized to depoliticize ethnicity to attain wider appeal and gain some alternative votes. [28]

John McGarry, Brendan O'Leary, and Northern Ireland

Political scientists John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary offer nuances to consociationalism, insights into its usage in Northern Ireland, and alternative perspectives on Horowitz's claims. This paper opened with the recent collapse of the executive for two years in Northern Ireland as a result of consociationalist policy. Ironically enough, though, viewing Northern Ireland within its historical context of profound ethno-nationalist violence known as the Troubles (1960s to 1998), it might be one of the most successful cases of consociationalism. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), which ended the conflict, Northern Ireland has seen a substantial decrease in ethnically motivated violence. While there have been breakdowns in ceasefires, difficulties in implementation, and there still remain semi-active paramilitary groups, current stability in Northern Ireland has considerably improved. Consociationalists, like Lijphart, McGarry, and O'Leary, point to the power-sharing provisions of the GFA, which stipulate a grand coalition of Unionists and Nationalists, as an example of consociationalism. [29]

A criticism addressed by these two authors is that a grand coalition in Northern Ireland, which is highly inclusive for groups in government, stifles constructive opposition. They argue that democracy, by nature, requires meaningful political contestation; otherwise, ruling parties

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[28] Horowitz, Donald L. "The Alternative Vote and Interethnic Moderation: A Reply to Fraenkel and Grofman." Public Choice 121, no. 3/4 (2004): 507–16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30026553.
[29] McGarry, John, and Brendan O'Leary. "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and Its Agreement: What Critics of Consociation Can Learn from Northern Ireland." Government and Opposition 41, no. 2 (2006): 249–277.

are not challenged or held accountable. [30] McGarry and O'Leary respond to the critique by highlighting the range of institutional mechanisms through which accountability takes place within the system. While multiple parties are in the executive office together, backbench members of one party can still hold the ministers of another party to account by debating within the Assembly and, in this manner, provide cross-party scrutiny. Furthermore, committees in the Assembly that hold ministers to account and scrutinize them are chaired by members from different parties, providing cross-party checks and balances. They go on to add that not all parties are in government simultaneously since a system of proportionally allocating ministerial positions is applied. This automatically ensures that there are parties that will be out of the executive and will form an opposition. Finally, McGarry and O'Leary write that parties are not forced into government but can choose to remain in opposition, or strategically occupy both roles—depending on their political interests, as the DUP has done at times. [31] As evidenced earlier in this paper by the DUP dissolving the Executive, even in a consociationalist government, opposition can still be present.

The authors also critique Donald Horowitz's promotion of the Alternative Vote (AV) system in ethno-national conflict states like Northern Ireland, arguing that AV would result in majoritarian and disproportionate constituency-level results. AV would shortchange minority voters in constituencies with a strong nationalist or unionist majority, thereby compromising inclusivity. They argue that both within and between ethno-national blocs, disproportionality would result, cementing political polarization rather than ending it. They also argue that AV does not encourage cross-community appeals. Indeed, under AV, candidates are incentivized to garner maximum first- and second-preference votes to remain in contention. This would incentivize

[30] Ibid., 267.
[31] Ibid., 268.

appealing within one's ethnic bloc rather than crossing divisions. It is possible that AV may not encourage moderation or inter-group cooperation in divided societies. Politically, McGarry and O'Leary emphasize that AV would not have been attractive to the hardline parties that had signed up to the Good Friday Agreement, such as Sinn Féin, UDP, and the PUP, since it would have decreased their chances at the polls. [32]

Instead of the AV, the authors applaud Northern Ireland's STV, the Single Transferable Vote system, which challenged party strength proportionately and rewarded lasting moderation. STV applies the rankings of the voters and parcels out seats across multi-member constituencies on that basis. In the event a candidate is allocated more than a certain quota of the votes, their surplus is moved to other candidates based on their second or third preference. It penalizes those who not only have strong first-preference support but can also draw in from between the communities to transfer their votes. Sinn Féin, for example, initially suffered under STV, gaining high first-preference vote counts but receiving very few transfers from more centrist nationalist voters, particularly those for the SDLP. But as Sinn Féin adopted more centrist stances and supported the peace process, it became more popular across the board. Therefore, the party began to gather transfer votes and went on to gain more seats, demonstrating the manner in which STV could facilitate moderation as well as cross-community appeal.[33] Overall, the AV operates as a majoritarian system, undermining smaller parties to support major, more moderate ones. This is in line with integrationalist policy, possibly influenced by constructivism. Meanwhile, the STV helps to disperse and share power, and it is consociationalist and somewhat primordialist in its logic.

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[32] Ibid., 271.
[33] Ibid., 274.

Lijphart Revisited

Arend Lijphart's seminal work was *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977), wherein he defined consociational democracy with four characteristics: Grand Coalition, a Mutual Veto, Proportionality, and Autonomy. In the same book, he also looked at his home of the Netherlands, as well as Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium, as case studies. It is worth mentioning that, even by the time this book was published, these classic examples were experiencing a decline in their consociationalism. This, Lijphart claims, is not from the system's failure but rather success in its ability to assuage their ideological and religious differences. Lijphart also deems consociational practices in Lebanon (1943-1975), Malaysia (1955-1969) as successes, but only moderate in relation to his European examples. [34]

After his work gained immense popularity, Lijphart expanded his theory in *Patterns of Majoritarian & Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (1984). In this book, he comparatively examined the political institutions of 21 democracies and sampled how different electoral and political institutions determine governance and democratic stability. Lijphart offered a differentiation between democracies, one being "majoritarian" and the other "consensus" democracies. Consensus democracies are characterized by widespread power-sharing, inclusiveness, and proportionality of representation, which create more cooperative, stable governments. Majoritarian institutions, more focused on the dominance of the majority and typically involving the application of a winner-takes-all system, tend to produce higher political polarization and instability. Majoritarian societies can, in theory, have 49.9% of the population outside the government and legislative process. Although this would not be a substantial problem if other parts of the population were granted alternating power, say through

[34] Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies.

subsequent elections, problems arise when that same majority can retain power for consecutive terms. This comparative approach taken by Lijphart became the primary method for examining how certain types of democratic institutions can influence the functioning of democracies, particularly in multi-divided societies. [35]

Lijphart expanded on his views of consensus democracy in his 1999 book, *Patterns of Democracy*. His main argument is contrary to the popular belief that consensus democracy is outperformed by a majority British Model in terms of policy outcomes. He even finds, through specific metrics like inflation, that consensus democracies are superior. Consensus democracies are also "kinder and gentler" as seen through their propensity for environmental protection, lower rates of incarceration, lower usage of the death penalty, greater amounts of foreign aid given, and greater likelihood of being a welfare state. [36]

Finally, in 2008, Lijphart summarized most of his theories into a book called *Thinking About Democracy. Power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice.* While it goes over much of what was already discussed in this paper, it does respond to the earlier-mentioned criticism by Horowitz. Lijphart is very skeptical regarding Horowitz's prescription of the AV to deeply divided countries. When applied to the modern state of Iraq, the idea of Kurdish and Sunni minorities not protesting the election of a majority Shi'ite government seems unrealistic. Even if Shi'ites were forced, through the AV, to appeal to minorities and moderate their positions, ethno-religious salience within the country and past grievances could still easily cause fractures. [37]

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[35] Lijphart, Arend. Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
[36] Lijphart, Arend. Thinking about Democracy: Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice, 89.
[37] Ibid, 77.

Recent Developments

After gaining a steady increase in attention in the early 2000s, the 2010s saw an explosion of interest in consociationalism. Possibly due to increasing ethnic pluralism, democratic backsliding, and rising populism, 2018 saw the most published articles on consociationalism, 17 with consociationalism in the title, and 33 that held it as a keyword or in their abstract. [38] Consociationalism also enjoys a high degree of confidence among a number of scholars. When asked by a survey if "consociationalism is the best available solution to ethnic conflict," 29% of respondents agreed, 36% disagreed, and another 36% neither agreed nor disagreed. [39] When a third of scholars state that a theory is not only a good course of action but the "best", that shows its gravitas within academia.

In spite of this confidence, consociationalism's success has more recently been criticized by academics like Paul Dixon. Dixon's critique is that consociationalism has claimed a large number of recent successful cases, from 5 in 1995 to 50 cases in 2019. This, he states, is not due to the auspicious nature of the theory but rather a manipulation of its definition. [40] The definition as was originally outlined in Democracy in Plural Societies (1977), involved 9 conditions and 4 tenets of consociationalism (Grand Coalition, Mutual Veto, Proportionality, Segmental Autonomy). [41] Consociationalist advocates can play with definitions, applying only some characteristics while ignoring others in order to consider a successful case consociational. An example would be the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 being considered consociationalist, despite permitting the exclusion of Sunnis from government. Though sectarian-based power-sharing was implemented through the Muhasasa Ta'ifia system, which required a Sunni Speaker of

[38] Matthijs Bogaards, Ludger Helms, and Arend Lijphart, "The Importance of Consociationalism for Twenty-First Century Politics and Political Science," Swiss Political Science Review 25, no. 4 (2019): 341–356.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Dixon, "Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Societies," 10.
[41] Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies, 36-37.

Parliament, actual decision-making within parliament was highly diminished. [42] This looseness of definition risks making consociationalism an overused catch-all term for any power-sharing arrangement, thereby losing its analytical value. Opponents argue that this not only detracts from scholarly precision but also allows policymakers to conceal flawed or exclusionary systems behind the veil of inclusiveness. Dixon and others suggest stricter conformance to the original model or rethinking the way we define and study political settlements in highly divided societies. Ultimately, differences over what can be qualified as consociational reflect deeper fault lines over whether institutional design is valuable in achieving sustainable stability and quality power-sharing.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, consociationalism remains an intriguing and nuanced response to maintaining democratic political stability in divided societies. This essay has followed the development of the term from its first use after the Second World War in post-war Netherlands and Belgium to more contemporary contexts, such as in Northern Ireland. As consociationalism had developed, it grew to define four characteristics and at most nine favorable conditions for itself. Despite its rigid definition, it is the opinion of some critics that advocates do not follow said definition, manipulating it to make the theory appear in a more favorable light. The contrary view is that consociationalism can be defined by a myriad of forms, and so it is deserving of its accolades within the sphere of political science. Other criticisms still remain as to whether or not the implementation of realized political segregation does entrench ethnic diversity, or practically acknowledges it. The difficulty in asserting causality: does consociationalism cause moderation,

[42] Dixon, "Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Societies," 12.

or is moderation ideal for consociationalism, confuses objective analysis. Objectivity in general is a problem with consociationalist advocates, who, ironically, cannot reach a consensus over which nation can be considered a case study of their theory or not. Future scholarship may either take a more fundamentalist turn to deflect criticism or continue in a more fluid and ambiguous form. Nevertheless, the debate between consociationalism and centripetalism is an evolution of the older primordialist versus constructivist debate. Though it has evolved, the debate still highlights humanity's dialectical conceptualization of identity and political structure in divided societies.

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