



Keil, S., & McCulloch, A. (Eds.): Power-Sharing in Europe: Past Practice, Present Cases, and Future Directions

Palgrave, 2021, ISBN 978-3-030-53589-6, 105.99 €.

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Accepted: 19 April 2021 / Published online: 3 May 2021
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The study of power-sharing is a long-standing and discussed research field in Political Science. Since the end of the 1960s, following Arend Lijphart's footsteps, a tradition of scholars has explored how democracy works in divided societies. The accurate collection of chapters edited by Soeren Keil and Allison McCulloch provides more and less versed students with fresh theoretical framing and new case-based evidence. It re-evaluates critiques and expands the frontiers of research on power-sharing, or its specific affiliate, consociationalism—namely, governing segmented societies through elite cooperation, proportionality, mutual veto, and autonomy.

McCulloch's theoretical chapter presents the three main topics of the book: power-sharing 'adoptability', 'functionality' and 'end-ability'. The authors, thus, propose descriptive inference on how consociationalism is adopted, functions, and eventually ends, in a set of European cases—the birthplace of consociational theory. Among the research questions: Why do political actors accept to share power to solve their disputes? How to evaluate power-sharing performance in fostering social peace and democracy (or rather entrenching deadlock and brinkmanship)? Why does consociationalism expire and what comes after? The bunch of case studies is diversified, including historical (the Netherlands, Austria, Cyprus), contemporary (Belgium, Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, South Tyrol, Northern Ireland) and 'possible' future (again Cyprus, Spain) consociational democracies. Each author addresses the leading topics (adoptability, functionality, end-ability) more relevant to his/her context, plus other issues, e.g. the impact of different power-sharing types, external actors, etc.

The chapter by Matthijs Bogaards focuses on the Netherlands and Dutch debates on the inclusion and modernisation goals of *pillarisation* (notably, cleavage institutionalisation). In fact, the purpose of regulating social groups (pillars) and connecting their elites (arches) underpinned the 1917 Pacification Pact, making the

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Netherlands one of the first consociational democracies. Granting community schools, proportionality and consensual decision-making favoured the integration of social, religious and ideological groups. Pillars' emancipationist power has intellectual roots even before Lijphart, elaborated in a context divided between Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists, Socialists and Liberals. However, pillarisation being a historical reaction to social pressures, it was gradually quenched in the 1960s, after having achieved its main goals. However, in the 1990s, when Lijphart presented pillarisation as a solution to accommodate foreign-descent communities (the "Muslim pillar"), this 'separate but equal' integration, based on a 'emancipation by isolation', was criticised by Dutch commentators—with no considerations on feasibility or minority opinions. This overview suggests that while consociationalism for integrating historical communities often appears uncontested, its application for people with more recent migrant background is deemed controversial. Furthermore, the chapter sheds light on how in the Netherlands consociationalism diluted in a pragmatic elite consensus ('polder politics'), devoid of the goal of accommodating social differences.

From pillars to *lager*, Peter Bussjäger and Mirella M. Johler explore Austrian power-sharing, mixing consociationalism, federalism and corporatism. Periodising Austria's political history, they locate the power-sharing timespan between 1945 and 1966, during the grand coalitions of Social and Christian democrats, to solve ideological divisions and centre-periphery cleavages. Despite legacies in multilevel governance and cooperative federalism, last trends of liberalisation, centralisation, and corruption scandals cast a different light on the working of the Austrian political system. Contrariwise, Sean Mueller depicts Switzerland as a case of power-sharing adaptation and resilience. Elaborated for a society with cross-cutting cleavages, power-sharing became the core of the Swiss political regime, contending the primacy of 'first power-sharing democracy' with the Netherlands, and changing over time to accommodate different cleavages (religion, language, centre-periphery, class, ideology) or other challenges. Patricia Popelier, in turn, considers Belgium a 'disintegrative' case of consociationalism, where power-sharing and federalism entail contrasting logics. In short, power-sharing in Belgium offers incentives for federalism to work in a majoritarian and centrifugal manner—paradoxically crucial for both systemic instability and preservation. This is explained through a history of Belgium's decentralisation and power dispersion, entrenching the Walloon-Flemish cleavage. Investigating diverging trajectories of power-sharing and multilevel governance also characterises the chapter by John Hulsey and Soeren Keil on Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo. Scrutinising power-sharing's impact on party competition dynamics, the authors evaluate the internationally brokered settlements in these countries and argue that liberal, less formalised arrangements in North Macedonia worked better in boosting institutional change and party alternation.

Cera Murtagh then presents Northern Ireland as a case of mixed success. If power-sharing contributed to end an infamous conflict and promote minority inclusion, it has paradoxically tended to exclude other (non-ethnic, gender, sexual-orientation-based) communities. However, consociational institutions did evolve over time and, despite the worrying post-Brexit scenario, the chapter upholds a moderately positive outlook. South Tyrol, investigated by Elizabeth Alber, is instead as



a highly successful example of consociationalism to manage ethnic conflict. The combination of power-sharing, autonomy, segregationist and integrationist elements is the core of the South Tyrolean model, although inter-elite trust-building, time and institutional adaptability also played a great role. Originally enough, the book includes cases with no (present or past) power-sharing experience. Paul Anderson sketches the adverse conditions for consociationalism in Catalonia, going through the majoritarian roots of Spanish democratic consolidation and detrimental consequences of a political conflict shifted to a zero-sum centre-periphery, legalistic-illegal clash. Finally, John McGarry elucidates the causes of Cyprus' 'consociational breakdown' and Greek Cypriots' hostility towards power-sharing. He connects those phenomena, respectively, to the persistent lack of a comprehensive settlement proposed by international organisations (including security and property concerns) and more recent incentives (i.e. EU membership) for the majority group to maintain the *status quo*. Although consociationalism is unlikely to be adopted in the short term, it should remain the touchstone for future cooperative settlements in Catalonia and Cyprus.

In the conclusions, the editors draw more generalising coordinates. Firstly, Keil and McCulloch argue that how power-sharing is introduced tends to determine its long-term working. Secondly, keeping in mind its underneath purposes (peace and democracy), to analyse power-sharing adaptability and end-ability, one should look at its 'longevity' and 'functionality'. In fact, power-sharing can 'wither away', fulfilling its objectives or becoming deemed unsuitable for new social divides (the Netherlands, Austria). It can alternatively 'stick' and manage social, political or institutional change (Switzerland, South Tyrol, Belgium—though with the mentioned caveats). In the 'new wave' cases, a rigid power-sharing, introduced by external actors, is more prone to 'block' the system (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo)—although local elites keep a role in fostering change (Northern Ireland, North Macedonia). Contrariwise, power-sharing might end because of the same problematics it aimed to solve, such as external influence/internal imbalance (Cyprus). In short, as power-sharing expires or adapts, its performance and record need to be evaluated on its long-term goals. The authors, thus, propose future research directions, e.g. the impact of new ideologies and intertwining with federalism.

The book offers compelling insights on power-sharing democracies in Europe. Its theoretical framework and empirical analyses constitute an informative source for those interested in democracy and divided societies. However, two observations might be arising in a slightly more critical perspective. Firstly, the definition of power-sharing/consociationalism tends to vary across the chapters. If this confers breath and flexibility to the empirical analysis, it might sometimes disorient the reader, not fully able to always distinguish among consensus, consociational, power-sharing, federalism, cooperative or participatory governance. Moreover, despite the theoretical framework and conclusions, and empirical analyses on different power-sharing types and contexts *without* power-sharing, it might be argued that the volume's comparative aspect is left implicit or only sketched. In short, many could be the possible generalisations from the examples of power-sharing democracy investigated in the book. Much more remains to be done, however, not only to systematise descriptive inference from empirical cases, but also to draw comparative



causal pathways within/across them. These two observations notwithstanding, the volume is an original retake on power-sharing theory and practices in Europe. Further research shall resume from where it needed to leave off. Among the suggestions inspired by the reading, how does power-sharing interact with regime quality and change? What happens in divided societies devoid of consociationalism, characterised by majoritarianism? Luckily, power-sharing research agenda remains fertile.

Declarations

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