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Steiner, J.

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Preface

Jürg Steiner

University of North Carolina, University of Bern

When the discussion on consociational theory began in the 1960s, it took place in the broader context of the conditions for democratic stability. Following the atrocities committed by the Nazis and the horrors of the Second World War, it was a great challenge to political scientists to explain why democracy breaks down in some countries and not in others. In an influential article, Almond (1956) aimed to answer this question. He offered a cultural explanation and argued that democratic stability is more likely the more homogeneous the culture of a country is. According to Almond, democracy was doomed in Germany and Italy in the 1920s and 1930s because the culture of these countries was very heterogeneous at that time. For the same reason, democracy was at risk in France in the 1950s under the IV. Republic. By contrast, Almond argued, the United States and the United Kingdom had relatively homogeneous cultures and this enabled them to sustain democratic stability.

When Almond wrote his article, the focus of comparative politics was very much on the United States and the large Western European countries. In the 1960s, a great effort was made to expand the scope of comparative politics to the smaller European democracies, which gave political scientists the chance to look at the conditions for democratic stability in a new light. Of particular interest in this context were Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. These four countries were all characterized at the time by cultural heterogeneity and yet enjoyed a high level of democratic stability. A closer analysis of this seemingly paradoxical situation led to consociational theory. Its key argument was that these countries did not practice a competitive style of decision-making but rather a consociational style and that under these conditions the chances increase that democratic stability can be maintained despite the centrifugal forces of cultural heterogeneity. Other concepts used to designate this non-competitive decision-making style were accommodation, amicable agreement, power sharing, and *Proporz* (proportionality).

Various consociational scholars have used slightly differing definitions of consociational decision-making, but the following four elements are usually

included. (1) Parliamentary elections are organized in such a way that the outcome corresponds to principles of proportionality. The principle of proportionality applies also to bureaucratic positions, the police and the military. (2) All major societal groups are represented in the cabinet in the sense of a grand coalition. (3) All major societal groups have a veto power with regard to matters that they consider to be in their vital interest. (4) All major societal groups are granted a great amount of autonomy through federalist structures or some other arrangements for individual sectors of society. Consociationalism as an ideal type has to be seen as one extreme on a continuum with the ideal type of the competitive model at the other extreme. In the latter, parliamentary elections are held according to the winner-takes-all system, which leads to the emergence of two dominant political parties. Whichever party wins the parliamentary election forms the cabinet and has full power until the next election. The opposition has no veto power, and all essential power is concentrated in the country's capital. This competitive model is often also called the Westminster model since the United Kingdom comes very close to its ideal type. Or at least it did until recently, as the devolution in Scotland and Wales has brought about some decentralization.

Since its initial formulation, consociational theory has been applied to many other contexts, for example South Africa, India, Northern Ireland, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Bosnia and the European Union. In all cases, the culture was very heterogeneous and the question asked was whether using the consociational principle would increase the chances of democratic stability. The application of consociational theory to such contexts was not merely an academic exercise, but had great political implications. Indeed, under the label power sharing, consociationalism became a household term in the political discourse of many countries. Recently, it has been prominently applied to the situation in Afghanistan. Consociational scholars often act as governmental advisers. Not surprisingly, given this prominent role of the theory not only in academic circles but also in political praxis, this has resulted in much controversy surrounding the theory.

Given the importance and the controversial nature of the theory, it seems appropriate to take an in-depth look at where the theory stands today. What are the major critiques of the theory? To what extent are these critiques justified? How can the theory be improved? What is the applicability of the theory in political praxis? These were the broad questions around which a conference was organized at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University in May 1998. Both senior scholars, who had already participated in the formulation of consociational theory in the 1960s, as well as junior scholars, who could take a fresh look at the theory, attended. The conference was organized by the co-editor Thomas Ertman.

We begin the volume with a chapter by Lijphart on the evolution of consociational theory and consociational practices. Lijphart's work is most closely linked with the consociational school. The volume then focuses on consociational democracy in Western Europe. We begin with the four countries on which consociational theory was initially formulated. Given that the first focus was the Netherlands in Lijphart's *The Politics of Accommodation* (1968), it seems appropriate to begin again here with the Netherlands. Neighbouring Belgium is next, followed by Switzerland and then Austria. For each country, we begin with a general chapter, in which the question is addressed, to what extent has the development since the 1960s supported or weakened the various parts of consociational theory. A major criticism of consociationalism has always been that it leads to immobilism and low economic performance. Therefore, we decided to address the specific question of economic performance under consociationalism in the second chapter for each country. These economically oriented chapters move the volume into the area of corporatism, which as a concept has always been closely linked to that of consociationalism. In some cases, in Austria in particular, it is almost impossible to disentangle the two concepts. For this reason, a volume on consociationalism would be incomplete if it did not touch on the topic of corporatism. Indeed, corporatism is given so much emphasis in several chapters that it has also been included in the title of the volume. Nevertheless, the main focus remains consociationalism, and corporatism is only dealt with to the extent that it promotes the understanding of consociationalism. Thus, the volume is not meant to give full treatment to the concept of corporatism.

Basically, corporatism is a formal or informal cooperation between the state and key interest groups, in particular business and labour, with the goal of finding mutually acceptable solutions. Much more on the definition of corporatism and the relationship between corporatism and consociationalism can be found in the chapters by Van Waarden, Jones, Armingeon, Lehbruch and Manow. These last two mentioned chapters are in Part VI, which looks at the case of Germany. We have included Germany because corporatism has always played an important role in the history of the Federal Republic, and as Lehbruch and Manow show in their chapters, German corporatism has strong consociational roots. In fact, Lehbruch calls Germany a semi-consociational country. It is, therefore, an interesting borderline case between the competitive and the consociational models.

Schmidt takes up the challenge of examining the possibilities to apply the consociational model to the European Union. Since the volume is on consociationalism in Western Europe, and given the ascendancy of the EU in the last thirty years, it is important to address the question, to what extent is the EU able to profit from the consociational roots in some of its member

countries. With its hybrid nature of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, the European Union seems a natural candidate for the consociational model.

In the last chapter, I attempt to respond to critiques of consociational theory as they have been articulated since the creation of the theory in the 1960s. At the Harvard Conference, such a confrontation with the critiques of consociational theory occurred mainly in the general discussions. Based on these discussions, I establish a list of the critiques and then discuss to what extent I find the individual critiques justified and how they help to improve the theory.

Bibliography

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The Evolution of Consociational Theory and Consociational Practices, 1965-2000

Arend Lijphart

University of California

Abstract

Consociational theory, launched in the 1960s, at first focused mainly on the 'classic' European cases, but was soon also applied as an analytical tool and/or a normative model to many other small and large countries in all parts of the world. It has been refined and improved as a result of the constructive interaction among consociational scholars. Its prominence in comparative politics has also been underscored by the frequency and intensity with which many critics have attacked it in prominent political science journals. As an empirical phenomenon, consociationalism has declined since the late 1960s in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, but it has remained strong in multilingual Switzerland and has increased in strength in linguistically split Belgium.

1 Origins

This special issue analyses the evolution of consociationalism in Western Europe between the 1960s and the beginning of the twenty-first century. I shall take the liberty of interpreting the term 'consociationalism' broadly – as one can do with many 'ism' terms – that is, both as a theory and as a set of empirical phenomena. I shall deal with consociational theory first (and at greater length) and then turn to the historical developments in the West European empirical cases at the end of this chapter.

When did consociational theory originate? My first publications on this subject occurred in 1968. These were: the book *The Politics of Accommodation* (Lijphart 1968a), which analysed the Dutch case, and which is often cited as the first milestone in the development of consociational theory; the Dutch translation of this book – and its adaptation for Dutch readers – which appeared under the title *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (Lijphart 1968b); and my first explicitly comparative analysis of consociationalism, which became the first article in the new journal *Comparative Political Studies* (Lijphart 1968c).