

## Steps in My Research and Thinking about Power Sharing and Democratic Institutions

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The decision by the *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* to celebrate its tenth anniversary by devoting a special issue to my work on power sharing and democratic institutions is a great honor which I deeply appreciate. I am also grateful to the editors for inviting me to write a short foreword on the evolution of my research and theorizing about these topics. This has been a step-by-step process that I can describe best by the sequence of my principal books as outlined in figure 1.

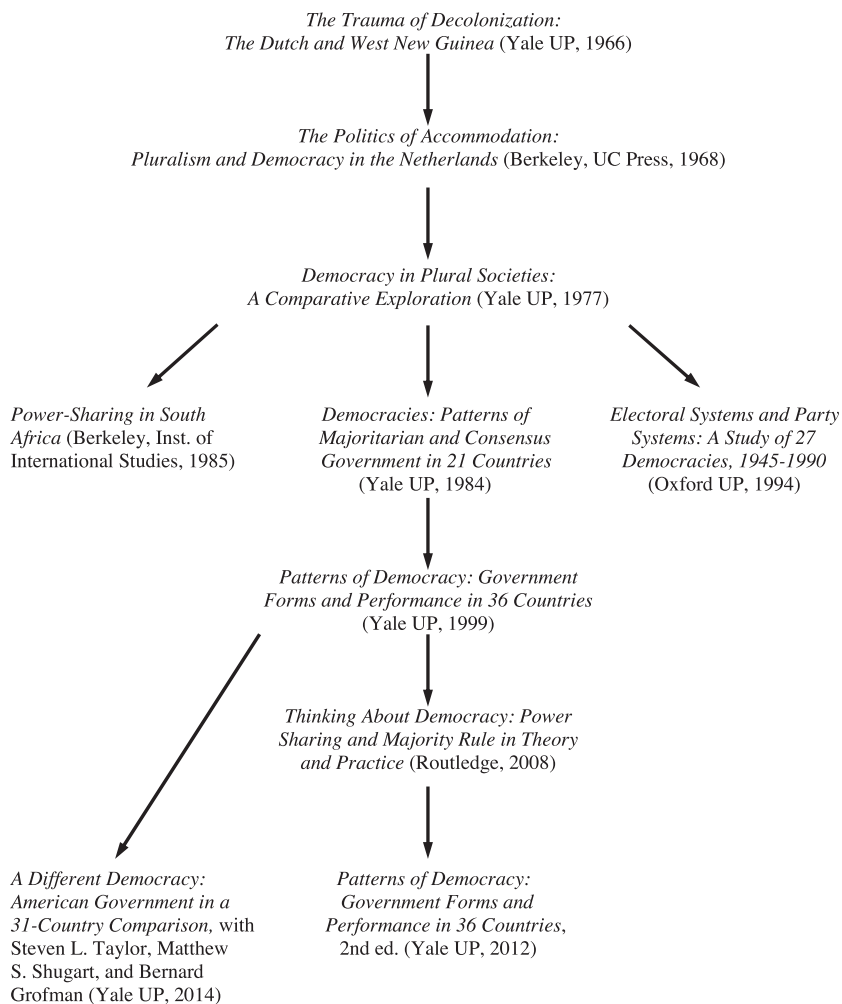
The first step was my 1963 Yale doctoral dissertation, published as a book by Yale University Press in 1966 under the title *The Trauma of Decolonization*, on Dutch government policy toward West New Guinea, the last remnant of the Dutch East Indies colonial empire. The Dutch recognized Indonesia's independence in 1949, but they stubbornly resisted surrendering West New Guinea until 1962, in spite of the territory's evident lack of economic value—contrary to the prevalent Marxist and non-Marxist theories of imperialism and colonialism that posited economic advantages as the main explanations. West New Guinea presented an especially clear deviant case because Holland's net economic interest in the colony was not just minimal but actually negative: the efforts to maintain possession put Holland's extensive trade with and investments in Indonesia at risk—not an imaginary risk because, in late 1957, Indonesia retaliated by confiscating all Dutch property and expelling nearly all of the 50,000 Dutch nationals. No other objective advantages were at stake either, and subjective and psychological factors were therefore not just contributing factors but the determining forces behind Dutch colonialist policy.

I need not say more about this first book because it was only indirectly linked, in two ways, to my subsequent work on democratic institutions. First, while I was working on the project, I was struck by the fact that the case of Dutch policy toward West New Guinea was also a deviant case in terms of the normally unemotional and level-headed pattern of policy making in the Netherlands. I was thus led to a general analysis of the country's government and politics. Second, I made use of the deviant case-study method again, by

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Figure 1. The Sequence of Arend Lijphart's Principal Books, 1966-2014



analyzing the Dutch case in the framework of Gabriel Almond's and Seymour M. Lipset's theories of democratic stability; Almond and Lipset had argued that subcultural and mutually reinforcing cleavages made stable democracy very difficult, if not impossible. Dutch democracy, however, was far from unstable and dysfunctional, in spite of the deep religious and ideological divisions in Dutch society. My basic argument was that cooperation at the elite level could overcome the conflict potential inherent in such deep cleavages. I used the term "politics of accommodation" for this democratic pattern—synonymous with what I later called "consociational democracy," or "power-sharing democracy." My book entitled *The Politics of Accommodation* was published in 1968.

Because I am often called the "father" of consociational theory, I should emphasize that several other scholars were also working on this subject in the late 1960s. In fact, two important books preceded my *Politics of Accommodation*: Gerhard Lehmbruch's *Proporzdemokratie* (Tübingen, Mohr), which compared the Swiss and Austrian cases, was published in 1967, and Sir Arthur Lewis's *Politics in West Africa* (London, Allen and Unwin) appeared as early as 1965. Other significant studies by Hans Daalder, Luc Huyse, Val R. Lorwin, Kenneth D. McRae, Eric A. Nordlinger, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., and Jürg Steiner were published both in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their contributions have been a major source of inspiration and encouragement for me.

When *The Politics of Accommodation* was published in 1968, I had already started looking at other cases of consociational democracy, which I described and analyzed in a series of articles and book chapters. This research culminated in my 1977 book *Democracy in Plural Societies*, in which I defined consociational democracy in terms of four basic principles: (1) power-sharing executives in which all important groups are represented; (2) cultural autonomy for these groups; (3) proportionality in political representation, civil service appointments, and government subsidies; and (4) a minority veto power with regard to the most vital issues such as minority rights and autonomy. I also tried to identify the background factors favorable to the establishment and maintenance of consociational democracy. The nine principal cases that I analyzed were the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Lebanon, Malaysia, Cyprus, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles. My overall conclusion—which was also intended to be an explicit policy recommendation for constitution-writers in plural (deeply divided) societies—was that a consociational system was a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for stable democracy in such countries.

In the years between my 1968 and 1977 books, my approach changed in four respects, all of which also characterized the further evolution in my research and writing from the 1980s on. First, I included more and more countries: from the single case in 1968 to the nine cases in 1977 mentioned in the previous paragraph, and then to twenty-one, twenty-seven, and thirty-six countries in my 1984, 1994, and 1999 books—as indicated in the subtitles of these three books (see figure 1). Second, this increase in the number of cases made for a change

in my basic research approach: from the case-study method, to the comparative method, to the statistical method. Especially in the last chapters of my 1999 *Patterns of Democracy* (and also in the book's 2012 second, updated edition), the large number of cases allowed me to make effective use of correlation and regression analysis. Third, I have become more and more explicit about linking my empirical conclusions to policy recommendations. This was mainly implicit in *The Politics of Accommodation*, but quite explicit in *Democracy in Plural Societies*—and in all of my books since then. Political scientists tend to be very cautious about making policy recommendations—much too cautious, in my opinion. Empirical propositions link independent with dependent variables, or causes with effects. Many of these effects can be described as desirable or undesirable. If that is the case, and if the causes, whether behavioral or institutional, can in principle be changed, a clear recommendation about these causes is implied. In much of my own work on governmental institutions, political parties, and electoral systems, I have therefore included discussions of the policy relevance of my findings.

Fourth, I have become increasingly critical of what used to be the conventional wisdom that the power-sharing type of democracy may have advantages in terms of democratic quality and stability, but has the serious drawback of providing less effective government. In the past, I, too, was completely convinced of the validity of this conventional wisdom, and it has taken me many years to liberate myself from it. In my undergraduate and graduate student days in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I regarded the Westminster majoritarian model as the best form of democracy in every respect and multiparty democracy with proportional representation, coalition cabinets, and so on, as clearly inferior. This admiration for the Westminster model represents a long and strong tradition in American political science. In a second phase, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, I became strongly aware of the dangers of majoritarian democracy for religiously and ethnically divided societies, but I still believed that it was the better choice for more homogeneous countries. Only from the mid-1980s on did I become more and more convinced that the consociational and consensus models of democracy were superior to the majoritarian model for all democracies and in almost all respects.

My next step entailed a twofold effort. First, I wanted to use the contrast between consociational and majoritarian democracy as a general framework for the analysis of all democracies, not just democratic government in divided countries. Second, I wanted to define and measure the four basic characteristics of consociational democracy more precisely, and I made a major attempt to operationalize and quantify degrees of executive power sharing, degrees of proportionality, and degrees of minority veto power. In my 1984 *Democracies*, I ended up with eight new characteristics that could indeed be expressed in quantitative terms and that were clearly similar to the four traits of consociational democracy—but also clearly not exactly the same as consociational democracy. I called this similar concept “consensus democracy.” *Democracies* was a

systematic comparison of twenty-one democratic systems in the 1945-1980 period. Its most important conclusion was that the characteristics distinguishing majoritarian from consensus democracy cluster along two dimensions: an executives-parties dimension (based on the organization and operation of executives, party systems, electoral systems, and interest group systems) and a federal-unitary dimension (based on the relationships between central and lower-level governments, the organization of legislatures, and rules for constitutional amendment). This dichotomous clustering also allowed me to draw a two-dimensional “conceptual map” of democracy on which each of the democracies could be located.

Two other books were also “next steps” after *Democracy in Plural Societies*, but more specialized than *Democracies*. One, my 1985 *Power-Sharing in South Africa*, was entirely devoted to a policy recommendation; it was published in the “Policy Papers in International Affairs” series of the Berkeley Institute of International Studies. In the 1980s, the outlook for peace and democracy in South Africa was grim, and most observers regarded a violent bloodbath as almost inevitable. I disagreed with this pessimistic view and argued that a positive outcome was still possible if the contending parties could be persuaded to accept a consociational solution. I analyzed the potential for power sharing in South Africa, and found that the background conditions were far from completely unfavorable. I also tried to outline the type of consociational democracy that would suit the South African situation best, and I recommended *inter alia* a legislature elected by proportional representation and a proportionally constituted power-sharing executive. The 1994 interim constitution adopted both of these principles by prescribing one of the most proportional election systems used anywhere in the world and mandatory power sharing in the cabinet.

The second book, my 1994 *Electoral Systems and Party Systems*, was inspired both by my earlier finding of the crucial role of election by proportional representation in power-sharing systems and by the fact that the design of electoral systems is one of the most powerful tools that constitution-makers have at their disposal. I tried to nail down the exact relationships among the different elements of electoral systems (electoral formulas, district magnitudes, electoral thresholds, and so on) as the independent variables and degrees of proportionality in election outcomes and the numbers of parties in the party system as the dependent variables. The book is mainly a technical treatise but with important policy implications. If one wants proportional election outcomes and adequate minority representation, it is not difficult at all to achieve these goals by designing the proper electoral system.

The next step along more general theoretical lines was *Patterns of Democracy*, published in 1999. My original plan was to simply prepare an updated edition of *Democracies*, but when I began to work on the revision, I realized that it offered me a great opportunity for much more drastic improvements. I decided to add not just the more recent data, updated to 1996,

but also fifteen new countries, new operationalizations of the institutional variables, two completely new institutional variables, an attempt to gauge the stability of the countries' positions on the conceptual map, and an examination of the performance of the different types of democracy with regard to a large number of public policies. As a result, while *Patterns of Democracy* grew out of *Democracies*, it became an entirely new book rather than a second edition. As a result of all these changes, it would not have been surprising if my new findings would have diverged from my earlier ones; on the contrary, however, they were powerfully reinforced. Probably the most important new finding in *Patterns* was the overall superiority of consensus democracy (along the executives-parties dimension) with regard to government performance. Consensus democracies score a great deal higher with regard to variables measuring democratic quality (such as political equality, women's representation in legislatures and cabinets, and voter participation) than majoritarian democracies, while scoring at least as well as—in fact, slightly better than—majoritarian systems on government effectiveness, as measured by macroeconomic performance indicators and the control of violence. The clear policy recommendation was that, in designing a democratic system, the consensus type is the preferable choice. Moreover, an important corollary to this recommendation was that the most crucial ingredient for creating a consensus democracy was the combination of proportional representation and a parliamentary (rather than presidential) form of government.

*Thinking About Democracy*, published in 2008, was mainly a collection of my more important articles and chapters published between 1969 and 2004 on power sharing, election systems, and parliamentary versus presidential government, but with new introductory and concluding chapters. For the purpose of the present commentary, the one reprinted article that is worth mentioning is my 1996 “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy,” originally published in the *American Political Science Review*. I demonstrated that India was an almost perfect example of consociational democracy—an important response to the frequently heard criticism that consociationalism can work only in relatively small countries: the case of India, the world's largest democracy, offers a powerful refutation.

The updated edition of *Patterns of Democracy*, published in 2012, adds fourteen more years to the analysis and covers the period from 1945 to 2010. It gave me the welcome opportunity to test whether my main findings and conclusions continued to be valid—and they were amply confirmed. In fact, the evidence with regard to the interrelationships of my ten majoritarian versus consensus characteristics and with regard to the superior performance of consensus democracy (along the executives-parties dimension) had become even clearer and stronger. A major reason for these stronger results was the higher quality of the new data, compared with the data that I had at my disposal in the mid-1990s and their availability for many more countries.

The final book listed in figure 1 is *A Different Democracy*, which will

be published by Yale University Press in 2014. Like my books on South Africa and electoral systems, it is also a sideways offshoot of the main line of my research efforts. It originated in conversations that I had with Bernard Grofman while I was working on the first edition of *Patterns* in the 1990s. We were struck by the fact that, of the thirty-six countries in the analysis, the United States was the most difficult case to classify. We moved from this first impression to a more systematic examination of American political institutions and procedures compared with those of other democracies. We found that, across the board, when there are differences in democratic institutions and practices, the United States is almost always in the minority, usually a small minority, and frequently a minority of one—indeed a “different democracy,” to cite the book’s title. The book that we decided to write on this subject was long delayed by other commitments, but with the help of two additional co-authors—Matthew S. Shugart and Steven L. Taylor—it was recently completed. We cover thirty-one countries in our book, which breaks the trend of including more and more countries in my studies; the reason is that, for comparisons with the large American democracy, we decided that the smallest countries (with fewer than five million inhabitants) should be excluded. In addition to institutional variations, we look at a host of indicators of government performance, on which the United States generally does not score well. We forego explicit policy recommendations, but our implicit conclusion is that Americans should be more self-critical, more willing to consider political and constitutional reforms, and less eager to advocate American-style democracy for other countries.

