

## Arend Lijphart and Consociationalism

John Fuh-sheng Hsieh

### Abstract

Arend Lijphart has made a great contribution to our understanding of nonmajoritarian democracy (i.e., consociational and consensus democracy). His efforts remind us that nonmajoritarian democracy is at least as legitimate as the majoritarian model, and may perform even better in many ways. For example, it helps achieve political stability in divided societies, and generally provides “kinder, gentler” outcomes in many policy areas. The purpose of this essay is to examine Lijphart’s contribution to the study of consociational and consensus democracy, with an emphasis on the latter, particularly the “theoretical” part of it. The case of Taiwan is brought to the fore to show that Lijphart’s arguments may have some limitations. Interestingly, Taiwan is a divided society, but has been able to achieve democratic stability even without significant power-sharing arrangements. Many other factors may have to be included to account for democratic stability in a divided society such as Taiwan. Of course, a counter-example cannot refute Lijphart’s thesis, but it may alert us to other possibilities for the phenomena we are seeking to explain.

**Keywords:** Majoritarian democracy, nonmajoritarian or power-sharing democracy, consociational democracy, consensus democracy, grand coalition.

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Arend Lijphart is known for his works on comparative methods,<sup>1</sup> electoral systems,<sup>2</sup> and nonmajoritarian or power-sharing democracy.<sup>3</sup> The most

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**John Fuh-sheng Hsieh** is Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina, Columbia. <Hsieh@sc.edu>

<sup>1</sup> See Arendt Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 682-693, and “The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research,” *Comparative Political Studies* 8, no. 2 (1975): 158-177.

<sup>2</sup> Arendt Lijphart, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Arendt Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); *Democracies: Patterns of*

significant of all, of course, is his contribution to the debate on power-sharing democracy (i.e., consociational and consensus democracy). It is his tireless and persistent effort that draws our attention to the “legitimacy” of nonmajoritarian versus majoritarian, or Westminster model, democracy. His works are essentially descriptive, but have important normative and prescriptive connotations as well.

The purpose of this essay is to examine Lijphart’s contribution to the study of consociational and consensus democracy, with an emphasis on the former. The two notions are different, but they are closely related. However, there is a disconnect in Lijphart’s treatment of the two concepts. In a sense, consociationalism represents a relatively complete theory, including a delineation of the notion itself, the favorable conditions for consociational democracy, and the consequences—most importantly, democratic stability—of a consociational arrangement. Yet, the idea of consensus democracy is essentially an exercise of typology of democratic systems, although Lijphart also has tried to compare the policy outputs and outcomes of consensus democracies against those of majoritarian democracies. But the comparison of policies is not conclusive. In this essay, I say something about both consociational and consensus democracy, but focus more on the “theoretical” aspect of consociational democracy. Later, I also take a look at the case of Taiwan to show whether power sharing is necessary for democratic stability in a divided society. Indeed, Taiwan is an interesting case because, although it is a divided society, it has been able to maintain stability, even though power sharing has never been taken seriously by its pundits and politicians alike.

## **Majority Rule and Minority Rights**

To many people, majority rule is the essence of democracy. But there is always the danger of tyranny of the majority under unrestricted majority rule. And what distinguishes between modern liberal democracy and, say, Athenian democracy in ancient Greece, is the incorporation of the protection of individual and/or minority rights through mechanisms such as constitutionalism in modern democracies.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, there are many ways to protect individual or minority rights: constitutional guarantees of individual or minority rights, checks and balances among executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, deliberation in the legislature, guaranteed minority representation in the legislature, federalism, and so on. (There are, of course, noninstitutional arrangements such as civil society, free press, and so on, that may, to a certain

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*Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Democracies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); and *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999 and 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1987).

extent, serve similar purposes.) These should be important considerations in designing modern liberal democratic institutions.

In a similar vein, James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in *Calculus of Consent* discuss the tradeoffs between the reduction of external costs and the reduction of decision-making costs in designing democratic constitutions.<sup>5</sup> External costs refer to the costs associated with the action of others on oneself, while decision-making costs are those related to the log-jams in the decision-making process. To place them in the debate between majority rule and minority rights, means that simple majority rule, as compared to supermajority rule—including, for instance, the presence of additional veto players in the process<sup>6</sup>—is less harmful in terms of decision-making costs, but more damaging in terms of external costs as far as the individuals or minority groups who are not in the majority are concerned. Buchanan and Tullock argue that, at the initial constitution-making stage under unanimity rule, the optimal choice is the point at which the combined total of the two types of costs is at a minimum.<sup>7</sup> But, of course, it is difficult to ascertain where such a point is. It may differ in different contexts. On issues vital to individuals or minority groups, external costs may loom very large, and a point toward higher decision-making costs with lower external costs may be desirable. Contrarily, if the issues involved are less critical, the point may be moved in the other direction.

In today's world, the protection of individual rights in terms of negative liberty, and in some cases, even positive liberty, becomes universal.<sup>8</sup> This is, indeed, what liberal democracy is all about. But there are significant differences across democracies in terms of engaging various groups in society in the policy-making process. The major difference between majoritarian and nonmajoritarian democracies revolves exactly around the participation of minority groups in the political process, with the former leaning toward majority rule and the latter toward the inclusion of as many groups as possible in the process.<sup>9</sup>

Generally, if the minority or minorities feel that the interests involved are critical or vital to them, that is, the external costs are high in Buchanan and Tullock's terms, they are less willing to give in to the "tyranny" of the majority. If not satisfied, they may demonstrate in the streets to fight against the other side or rebel against the authorities. This often occurs when societies are divided along the lines of race, language, religion, culture, or region. In such situations,

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<sup>5</sup> James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Buchanan and Tullock, *Calculus of Consent*.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 2.

minority or minorities are relatively well-defined in terms of who they are and what their interests are. One of Arend Lijphart's major contributions is to examine the ways in which societies try to cope with such divisions. He shows that many of these societies are doing very well. They are able to maintain stable democratic rule, despite the centrifugal tendencies in their societies.

Lijphart argues, for a democracy to function well, it is critically important that a minority, particularly a sizeable one, can expect to be included in the majority at some point.<sup>10</sup> If a minority group feels that it has no chance of being part of the majority and will thus be unable to be in the governing coalition, that is, it becomes a permanent minority, then the only recourse it has to defend its own interests—often seen by the group as rights—may be to fight in the streets, leading to social instability. Consequently, in order to fend off such a possibility, in many deeply divided societies, leaders representing various groups develop schemes so that the minority groups will be able to participate in governing. This is what Lijphart calls consociational democracy. He wrote about the case of the Netherlands,<sup>11</sup> and then expanded it to other cases.<sup>12</sup>

Lijphart identifies several mechanisms that can be used by the leaders of divided societies to prevent them from disintegrating into chaos. Such mechanisms include grand coalition, segmental autonomy and federalism, proportionality, and mutual veto.<sup>13</sup> The key feature of these mechanisms is to ensure that the minority or minorities will be included in the decision-making process, particularly in the policy areas that are deemed dear by the minority or minorities. And, given the centrifugal nature of mass politics, the elites play a key role in facilitating cooperation among the various groups in such a society.

To be sure, Lijphart does not treat the emergence of consociational democracy as deterministic. Instead, he talks about favorable conditions. For example, he argues that: a multiple balance of power is more conducive to consociational democracy than a dual balance of power or a hegemony by one of the segments; the presence of segmental parties is conducive to consociational democracy; smaller states have a better chance of becoming consociational; cross-cutting cleavages and overarching loyalties may moderate the conflict potential of cleavages, and thus help consociational arrangements; segmental isolation is conducive to consociational democracy, since federalism can be rather easily applied; a prior tradition of elite accommodation is conducive to consociational democracy; and so on.<sup>14</sup> These may be seen as contextual factors facilitating elite cooperation.

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<sup>10</sup> Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.

<sup>11</sup> Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*.

<sup>12</sup> Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

Later, Lijphart extends the notion of consociational democracy to the patterns of democratic institutions, in general. In *Democracies* and *Patterns of Democracy*, he distinguishes between majoritarian and consensus democracies. The former refers to the model of democracy stressing majority rule, while the latter to the type of democracy emphasizing power sharing. The distinction goes beyond plural vs. nonplural societies. It focuses on the incorporation of minority rights in the institutional design across all democracies.

Basically, in a majoritarian democracy, a majority is pitted against a minority or minorities. Majoritarian democracy is associated with a single-party majority government, facilitated by a majoritarian electoral system and two-party competition, often characterized by executive dominance over the legislature and a pluralist interest-group system. This is what Lijphart calls the executives-parties dimension. And, there is another dimension contrasting the two types of democratic institutions, which corresponds to the federal-unitary division. In a majoritarian democracy, a unitary and centralized government is often instituted with a unicameral legislature representing the country as a whole. The constitution is flexible, which can be amended by a simple majority and is not subject to judicial review. Further, the central bank is not independent.

In contrast, consensus democracy is characterized, on the executives-parties dimension, by multiparty coalition government, executive-legislative balance of power, a proportional representation electoral system, a multiparty system, and a corporatist interest-group system, and on the federal-unitary dimension, by federal and decentralized government, a legislature with two differently constituted chambers, a rigid constitution subject to judicial review, and an independent central bank.<sup>15</sup> This is equivalent to saying that a large number of veto players are added to the political process.<sup>16</sup>

## Discussion

The notions of consociational democracy and consensus democracy are different, but they are closely related. They both center on the issue of providing minorities with some say in the political process.<sup>17</sup> But consociational

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<sup>15</sup> The lists of characteristics in *Democracies* and *Patterns of Democracies* are slightly different. The discussion here is based upon the latter version.

<sup>16</sup> Tsebelis, *Veto Players*.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Lijphart himself mentioned that, in preparing for *Democracies*, he “originally continued to use the label consociational for this nonmajoritarian alternative” (later called consensus democracy) before he finally “became convinced that the new concept deviated too much from the original consociational idea.” See Arend Lijphart, “Varieties of Nonmajoritarian Democracy,” in *Democracy and Institutions: The Life Work of Arendt Lijphart*, ed. Markus M. L. Crepaz, Thomas A. Koelble, and David Wilsford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 229.

democracy focuses on only one specific type of society, namely, a plural or deeply divided society, while consensus democracy deals with the general pattern of the protection of minority rights in all democracies. Both involve the executive-legislative and federal-unitary dimensions. That is, to Lijphart, power can be shared in the “normal” policy-making process between executive and legislative branches of government, or shared outside this normal policy-making process, particularly among different levels of government. The major consideration in designing democratic institutions in either the consociational or the consensus mode is to ensure that minorities will be included in the policy-making process in some way. In a divided society, the task is conceivably much more difficult, since the majority-minority division is more rigid, and the minority groups are more sensitive toward their interests or rights.

To Lijphart, both consociational and consensus democracies are designed to protect minority rights so as to achieve higher-level goals. For consociational democracy, the goal is democratic stability. This is because there is a potential for serious conflict in a divided society if the minority or minorities feel that they are mistreated; thus, how to avoid conflict is the major concern for consociational democracy. As shown by Lijphart’s works, stability has been maintained in many—albeit not all—divided societies through consociational arrangements. The aim of consensus democracy goes beyond achieving social stability. This form of democracy includes both divided and nondivided societies. Here, Lijphart lists a number of policy areas for discussion, including macro-economic management, control of violence, democratic quality, women’s representation, political equality, electoral participation, satisfaction with democracy, government-voter proximity, accountability and corruption, popular cabinet support, and so forth, and concludes that consensus democracy compared to majoritarian democracy is “kinder, gentler.”<sup>18</sup> But the results are not conclusive. It is difficult to determine whether the “kinder, gentler” outcomes are brought about by the specific institutional arrangements identified by Lijphart, or by other factors such as the cultural or ideological tendencies of the people in the societies.

Obviously, Lijphart’s treatments of consociational democracy and consensus democracy are not just descriptive about what has been going on in the real world, but also normative and prescriptive. If, for instance, stability or “kinder, gentler” policy results are our goal, then consociational democracy or consensus democracy should be the choice. Indeed, Lijphart himself has been engaged in many consulting jobs of this kind. His proposal for the constitution of South Africa is a notable example.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, chap. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1985).

Arend Lijphart identifies many mechanisms for protecting minority rights in both consociational and consensus democracy, but it may be argued that his list is not exhaustive. One interesting case is Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> Currently, in a Nigerian presidential election, the winning candidate must receive not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the states. This is not power sharing per se, but it provides some incentive for the politicians to work closely with a variety of groups in society. This is an implicit, if not an explicit, type of power sharing.

In the contemporary world, minority rights also can be protected by many other means. Civil society, free press, new forms of communication (e.g., social media), outside intervention, and so forth, may expose or directly help relieve the plight of the minority or minorities. These are not conflict-regulating practices per se, but they do provide additional mechanisms so that problems can be easily identified and solutions made available to those who seek remedies.

Among the consociational arrangements discussed by Lijphart, grand coalition government, in which the representatives of all major minority groups are included, represents the prototype of such arrangements. This is in contrast to the Size Principle formulated by William H. Riker, which states that, in a zero-sum game with side payments, players will form a minimum winning coalition—large enough to win but no larger. This is because, when the total payoff of the game remains constant, the larger the number of players in the winning coalition, the smaller the amount of payoff each in the coalition receives. So logically, the players will form a coalition of minimum winning size.<sup>21</sup> But the game may not be zero-sum. In a deeply divided society, for instance, the total payoff may drop to a very small amount as a consequence of the disintegration of the whole society. Thus, the players may try to form a grand coalition to ensure the maximum possible total payoff.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that, in a deeply divided society, the formation of a grand coalition may be the logical outcome of the game. In many of his works, Lijphart provides convincing evidence that such a scenario occurs from time to time in the real world.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, "Comparing Democratic Systems," *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 4 (1990): 73-79.

<sup>21</sup> William H. Riker, *A Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962).

<sup>22</sup> I have proved the formation of grand coalitions in nonzero-sum games with the notion of the core. See John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "The Elites vs. the Masses: A Critique of the Consociational Democracy Theme [in Chinese]," *Annals of the Chinese Association of Political Science*, no. 10 (1982): 61-84.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, and "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 258-268.

However, Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle offer an interesting counter-argument. They maintain that democratic elections may bring about instability in a deeply divided society because politicians in such a society may appeal to various ethnic groups by outbidding each other, thus heightening social tensions, in contrast to elite cooperation in Lijphart's model.<sup>24</sup> Will politicians seek to cooperate or to outbid? The key to answering this question resides in the nature of the game. As noted above, if the game is nonzero-sum, that is, the total payoff of the game might change from something to almost nothing, politicians may have a strong incentive to cooperate in order to prevent the society from disintegrating. But if the game is seen as zero-sum (i.e., the total payoff will remain the same throughout), politicians may try to outbid or even play brinkmanship in order to gain popular support. Whether one or the other occurs varies from case to case, depending very much upon how the game is structured.

But can we say, with some certainty, what will happen in a particular case? Will politicians cooperate or outbid? It is probably not easy to answer these questions in a definite manner. For one thing, politicians need to gain popular support for their political survival. Thus, if the masses, even though caring about their groups' interests and rights, feel that stability is much more important since the alternative is worse, they may exert some pressure on the politicians to moderate their positions, thus setting limits for outbidding by the politicians. Conceivably, this may have something to do with cultural tendencies in a society. Indeed, in certain political cultures, people may value stability highly, and may be afraid or tired of the dire consequences of political instability. Thus, whether the game is structured as zero-sum or nonzero-sum is an empirical question that can be determined only by taking into account a variety of contextual factors.

In the following section, I will take a closer look at the case of Taiwan which is a divided society, and where the notion of power sharing has never been taken seriously. An interesting question is: Without a power-sharing arrangement, how has Taiwan been able to maintain stability, given the seemingly incessant mobilization of the electorate in political competition? Politicians seem to outbid all the time, but Taiwan has not collapsed as a result. On the contrary, it has been quite stable over the years. Consequently, can Taiwan deepen our understanding of democratic stability in divided societies?

### **Taiwan: A Divided Society**

Taiwan is a divided society—divided along the lines of ethnicity and national identity. On the one hand, there are several ethnic groups in the society.

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<sup>24</sup> Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1972).



According to the 2012 Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies (TEDS) survey,<sup>25</sup> Minnan Taiwanese account for 73.4 percent of the total population, Hakka Taiwanese 12.3 percent, mainlanders 11.5 percent, and aborigines 0.8 percent.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, there is also a clear division over national identity. Some on the island believe that Taiwan and China are two different countries, and should be separated from each other for good; others insist that Taiwan is an integral part of China, and that Taiwan and the mainland should be reunified sooner or later; still others support the status quo, which favors neither unification nor outright *de jure* independence. Currently, Taiwan enjoys *de facto* independence, but its polity contains a certain degree of Chineseness (e.g., the official name of the country is the Republic of China; the national flag and national anthem are the same as the ones used in China in the early twentieth century; the constitution was adopted in China back in the 1940s; and so on).

To be sure, ethnicity and national identity are closely related. As table 1 shows, generally, Minnan Taiwanese are more likely than others to support Taiwan's independence, but there is also a sizeable number of them in favor of the status quo or even unification. Mainlanders are more inclined to support unification and the status quo, but there are some who favor independence. Hakka Taiwanese stand somewhere in between.

Nevertheless, on closer examination, one discovers that national identity rather than ethnicity determines an individual's political inclination. If a Minnan Taiwanese indicates that she is in favor of unification, it is almost

Table 1. Ethnicity and National Identity

	Independence	Status Quo	Unification	Total
Minnan Taiwanese	380 (31.9%)	616 (51.7%)	196 (16.4%)	1,192 (100.0%)
Hakka Taiwanese	45 (22.6%)	109 (54.8%)	45 (22.6%)	199 (100.0%)
Mainlanders	16 ( 8.2%)	130 (67.0%)	48 (24.7%)	194 ( 99.9%)

Source: 2012 Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies Survey.

Note: Cell entries are numbers of respondents, with row percentages in parentheses.

Row percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>25</sup> The TEDS surveys are conducted by a consortium of political scientists from various academic institutions in Taiwan and sponsored by Taiwan's National Science Council. Professor Chi Huang has been the coordinator of these surveys since 2000.

<sup>26</sup> The figure for the aborigines in the survey is lower than the actual number. In accordance with the 2010 census data, aborigines account for 2.3 percent of the total population.

certain that she is for the Pan-KMT (or Pan-Blue) camp, composed of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party or KMT) and its allies. Or if a mainlander says he prefers independence, we know that he is most likely a supporter of the Pan-DPP (or Pan-Green) camp, including the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the parties closely allied with it.

Table 2 shows the relative salience of ethnicity and national identity, along with several other issue and demographic variables, in shaping voters' attitudes toward Taiwan's two major political forces. Because several important variables are missing in the 2012 TEDS survey, I include the results from the Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies 2008P Survey as well. In both models, the dependent variable is the respondents' support for the Pan-KMT as against the Pan-DPP camp. For independent variables, in the 2008 regression model, there are four position issues (more or less welfare, more or less environmental protection, independence vs. unification, and reform vs. stability) and one valence issue (clean government),<sup>27</sup> plus ethnicity, interaction terms between ethnicity and national identity,<sup>28</sup> and such demographic variables as gender, age, and education. The environment, stability, and clean government issues were not addressed in the 2012 survey, so these variables have been removed from the 2012 regression model.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, the national identity issue is significant. Environmentalism and the reform vs. stability debate are also significant in the 2008 data. Clearly, national identity overwhelms the other position issues. (These position issues are measured on the same 11-point scale, so that they can be compared.) National identity is, indeed, the dominant issue shaping Taiwan's partisan politics.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, clean government also was a significant concern in 2008, but the sign is positive rather than negative as in earlier surveys, showing that concern for clean government is not a permanent feature in shaping the party configuration in Taiwan. The ethnicity variables are generally not significant after controlling for other variables such as national identity, except that being a mainlander was more likely to indicate support for the Pan-KMT camp in

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<sup>27</sup> The attitude on the clean-government issue is coded from voters' responses to the question about whether corruption was one of the two most important issues in the 2008 presidential election.

<sup>28</sup> These interaction terms try to capture the possibility that national identity is formed in different ways for different ethnic groups.

<sup>29</sup> In the 2012 survey, there was a question about the most important issue in the 2012 elections. Unfortunately, very few respondents chose corruption, so the clean-government issue had to be dropped from the model.

<sup>30</sup> John Fuh-sheng Hsieh and Emerson M. S. Niu, "Issue Voting in the Republic of China on Taiwan's 1992 Legislative Yuan Election," *International Political Science Review* 17, no. 1 (1996): 13-27, and "Salient Issues in Taiwan's Electoral Politics," *Electoral Studies* 15, no. 2 (1996): 219-235. Cf. Tse-min Lin, Yun-han Chu, and Melvin J. Hinich, "Conflict Displacement and Regime Transition in Taiwan: A Spatial Analysis," *World Politics* 48, no. 4 (1996): 453-481.

Table 2. Logistic Regression for Leaning toward the Pan-KMT Camp

Variable	2008		2012	
	B	S. E.	B	S. E.
Intercept	-4.045**	.740	-2.249**	.604
Less Welfare	-.029	.025	.015	.022
Less Environment	.088**	.031		
Unification	.499**	.100	.501**	.104
Stability	.088**	.028		
Clean Government	1.283**	.391		
Minnan Taiwanese	-.745	.549	-.585	.532
Mainlanders	1.373	.921	2.086**	.968
Minnan x Unification	.068	.111	-.065	.111
Mainlanders x Unification	.198	.207	-.099	.203
Female	.472**	.156	.226	.139
Older	.089	.070	.066	.064
Better Educated	.228**	.073	.149**	.064
Number of Cases		1,126		1,187
Nagelkerke R2		.492		.358

Source: 2008P and 2012 Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies surveys.

The reference category is the Pan-DPP camp.

\* indicates  $p < .10$ .

\*\* indicates  $p < .05$ .

2012. Undoubtedly, it is national identity rather than ethnicity that determines voters' attitudes toward Taiwan's two major political forces. Moreover, females in 2008 and better-educated respondents in both 2008 and 2012 were more likely to favor the Pan-KMT camp.

National identity is a highly emotional issue. For many people, it is a life-and-death choice. Indeed, Taiwan's society is very polarized because of the split in people's allegiance. One manifestation of this is that almost all media can be classified as either pro-Blue (often labeled as pro-unification or pro-China by the other side) or pro-Green (also labeled as pro-independence), and many people read, watch, or listen to only pro-Blue or pro-Green media. People do not change their minds on matters of national identity very often. That is why the results of Taiwan's elections have been quite stable over time.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "Continuity and Change in Taiwan's Electoral Politics," in *How Asia Votes*, ed. John Fuh-sheng Hsieh and David Newman (New York: Chatham House, 2002), 32-49.

## Why Can Taiwan Achieve Democratic Stability?

In light of the fact that Taiwan is a divided society, why has Taiwan been able to maintain political stability over the years? To be sure, large-scale political rallies have not been uncommon in Taiwan, but these events seldom have resulted in serious riots in the streets. Political violence, albeit not unheard of, has been very rare.

This is quite puzzling, given Lijphart's power-sharing model. First of all, power sharing has never been a popular idea in Taiwan. It is true that some politicians such as Shih Ming-teh, who was former DPP chairman but later left the party, have talked about grand coalition government, but Shih's idea did not attract much attention in political circles. In the 2012 presidential election, DPP candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, also raised the idea of forming a grand coalition government shortly before polling day. It was apparently a campaign strategy, as there has not been much follow-up by the DPP since the election.

As a matter of fact, the leaders of the major political forces in Taiwan seldom meet and talk to each other. Thus far, almost all the cabinets have been formed by a single party, adding occasionally one or two cabinet members from other political groupings as a symbolic gesture. One possible exception was the cabinet formed right after the DPP's Chen Shui-bian was sworn in as president in 2000. He appointed Tang Fei, a military man and a KMT member, to be the premier. But Tang's cabinet was not recognized by the KMT as a coalition government, and was short-lived. In less than five months, he was replaced by a bona fide DPP man.

Basically, the institutional arrangements in Taiwan are more majoritarian than power-sharing as identified by Lijphart. From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, Taiwan maintained a two-party system, but it fragmented within, first, the KMT camp and then the DPP camp from the mid-1990s until 2008. One factor contributing to the fragmentation of the party system is the multimodal nature of the national identity cleavage—*independence, unification, and status quo*. Another important factor was the semi-proportional single non-transferable vote system (SNTV) used for the legislative elections, providing room for small parties.<sup>32</sup> But when the electoral system changed to the mixed-member majoritarian system in 2008, the party system soon reverted to two-party competition.<sup>33</sup> When the KMT is able to control both the presidency and the Legislative Yuan, the executive branch dominates the political process. Even when the DPP controlled the presidency while the KMT or the Pan-KMT camp remained the majority party or majority coalition in the Legislative Yuan from 2000 through 2008, the DPP formed a minority government, resulting in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "The Origins and Consequences of Electoral Reform in Taiwan," *Issues & Studies* 45, no. 2 (2009): 1-22.

a stalemate in the policy-making process. Besides, Taiwan has a unicameral national legislature, and is a highly centralized unitary state, all contrary to power sharing as argued by Lijphart.<sup>34</sup>

Actually, it can be argued that Taiwanese politicians have a notorious record of outbidding, similar to the type of politicians depicted by Rabushka and Shepsle.<sup>35</sup> But unlike what Rabushka and Shepsle would predict, the situation has not become out of hand, and there is no sign indicating that it will change significantly in the foreseeable future.

Why has there been little power sharing in Taiwan? One important reason is that views on national identity cannot be shared. Indeed, for the purists, independence or unification is an ideal that cannot be achieved halfway. As long as there are sizeable numbers of purists in society, it is difficult for politicians and the general public to accept and to be engaged in power sharing in a significant way. Politics is perceived as zero-sum. To some extent, the long history of authoritarian rule under the KMT with a heavy-handed executive branch fostered the tendency of playing the zero-sum game. Outbidding is natural under the circumstances.

But why has Taiwan been able to maintain stability, even without power-sharing arrangements? For one thing, even though national identity is a highly emotional issue much like in Northern Ireland, the situation is more amenable in Taiwan. Unlike the case of Northern Ireland, there is a ready-made compromised position (i.e., the status quo) in Taiwan, which, although not acceptable to the purists, is a position with which many pragmatists can live for the present.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the situation has been less serious in Taiwan than in Northern Ireland. That is why I have called Taiwan a mildly divided society.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that the division is not real; indeed, Taiwan society is polarized.

Another reason for Taiwan's stability is that the two-party or quasi-two-party system has facilitated the moderation of political competition. As argued by Downs and many others, two-party competition often forces the two parties

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<sup>34</sup> On some other measures, Taiwan is quite majoritarian as well. For instance, it has an essentially pluralist interest-group system, and its central bank is not very independent. It is true that Taiwan has a rigid constitution with judicial review, which provides some kind of power sharing, but these are secondary features. In addition, there is a filibuster-type arrangement in the Legislative Yuan, giving the minority parties some room to maneuver in the legislative process. But again, this is only secondary.

<sup>35</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies*.

<sup>36</sup> In the case of Northern Ireland, it is difficult to find a compromise between remaining in the United Kingdom and being part of the Irish Republic. Fortunately, after years of effort, a compromised position, the "Good Friday" Agreement of 1998, finally emerged, paving the way for the solution of the Troubles over the past several decades.

<sup>37</sup> John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "Democracy in a Mildly Divided Society," in *Democratization in Taiwan: Challenges in Transformation*, ed. Philip Paolino and James Meernik (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 11-24.

to converge at the center.<sup>38</sup> Although Lijphart favors multiparty competition, two-party competition actually has diluted the divisive nature of political competition in Taiwan.

Furthermore, there is a strong tendency on the part of Taiwan’s general public to favor political stability. Table 3 shows the results of a series of surveys asking the respondents to pick a point between 0 standing for reform, and 10 for stability. I regroup the respondents’ responses in five categories: extreme reform supporters (0-1), moderate reform supporters (2-4), neutrals (5), moderate stability supporters (6-8), and extreme stability supporters (9-10). As made clear in the table, Taiwanese are overwhelmingly in favor of stability. This tendency may reflect the cultural legacy of Taiwanese society, and may also show the precarious status of Taiwan in the international arena vis-à-vis China. These conditions may set the limits for politicians in outbidding each other.

Related to this is the existence of the communist regime on the mainland as an external threat to Taiwan. This surely instills a certain degree of nonzero-sum mentality in the general public in Taiwan: outbidding can be pursued only to a certain extent. However, ironically, with the extended deterrence provided by the United States, the communist threat may be played down by the politicians and the general public with regard to how far politicians can go.

Table 3. Taiwanese Voters’ Attitude toward the Reform vs. Stability Issue (%)

Year	Extreme Reform Supporters	Moderate Reform Supporters	Neutrals	Moderate Stability Supporters	Extreme Stability Supporters	Total
1992	1.3	2.8	15.5	31.0	49.4	100.0
1995	3.2	9.3	20.9	30.0	36.6	100.0
1996	1.7	3.2	35.1	28.2	31.8	100.0
1999	6.5	8.2	17.1	25.2	43.1	100.1
2000	4.5	9.9	15.7	28.4	41.6	100.1
2002	5.3	8.4	17.9	24.0	44.5	100.1
2008	6.1	10.1	16.7	27.0	40.1	100.0

Source: Based on surveys conducted by Opinion Research Taiwan in 1992 and the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University in 1995-2000. The 2002 and 2008 figures come from the 2001 and 2008P Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies surveys.

Note: Row percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

## **Conclusion**

Arend Lijphart has made a great contribution to our understanding of democratic politics. His efforts remind us that majoritarian democracy is not the only game in town; power-sharing democracy is at least as legitimate as the majoritarian model. Indeed, according to Lijphart, power-sharing democracy may perform better than majoritarian democracy in many ways. It can help to achieve political stability in divided societies, and generally provides “kinder, gentler” outcomes in many policy areas. However, the examination of the case of Taiwan shows that Lijphart’s arguments may have some limitations. After all, even without power sharing, a divided society such as Taiwan may still be able to enjoy democratic stability. Many other factors may have to be included to account for democratic stability in divided societies. Of course, a counter-example cannot refute Lijphart’s thesis, but it may alert us to other possibilities for the phenomena we are seeking to explain.

