

Panel Proposal for PSA Ethnopolitics, Global Justice & Human Rights, and Women & Politics
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Panel organised by Laura Wise, University of Edinburgh

Power-Sharing in Diverse Societies: Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Peace Settlements

The concept of power-sharing in deeply divided societies as an approach to ethno-national conflict management has been applied in practice to several contexts across Europe, including in Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Tyrol, and Kosovo. The papers in this panel address the structural constraints for non-dominant actors to participate in power-sharing institutions, and the challenges posed to inclusion when ethno-national divisions in society dominates the terms of the peace settlement. By exploring the opportunity structures for the mobilization of women, civic parties, non-aligned minorities, and non-titular groups, the panel aims to contribute to understandings of power-sharing approaches in post-conflict diverse societies, and the ramifications of this institutional design for fostering inclusive peace settlements.

1. Settlements for a Gendered Peace: Insights from post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina

Maria-Adriana Deiana, Dublin City University

Focusing on the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina this paper highlights a site of tension between the aspirations for transformation and inclusion set out internationally in UNSCR1325 and the gender underpinnings of consociationalism that shape the broader political, social and cultural context of citizenship in the case-study under examination. It illustrates how, despite efforts to ensure women's inclusion and representation in the democratic structures, the divisive nature of ethno-national politics inevitably takes centre stage in "post-conflict" consociational settings. In this context gender concerns are relegated to the margins of a dominant political agenda and held hostage of a de facto "ethno-national straightjacket". In asking what scope for mobilization is available to women in this scenario, the paper highlights alternative spaces for women's and feminist citizenship enactments. In doing so it sheds a critical light on narratives that cast consociationalism as a desirable conflict resolution mechanism and raises important questions on the tensions between feminist critical and transformative projects and the architecture of global governance and international peace-making.

2. The Perilous Centre Ground: Civic Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland

Cera Murtagh, University of Edinburgh

Some twenty years on from peace settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, the impact of the consociational political frameworks that the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement and 1998 Good Friday Agreement put in place have been the subject of intense scholarly debate. Amidst this analysis however, the place of civic political parties within these systems has received relatively limited attention.

This paper explores the experiences of parties in post-settlement Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Northern Ireland that attempt to reach across the ethno-national divide in their respective settings.

In the context of transitional political frameworks designed to accommodate separate ethno-national groups, it investigates, firstly, the specific impact such systems have on civic parties and, secondly, how these parties navigate those structures. This research takes a cross-comparative approach, drawing upon qualitative data collected as part of a doctoral project in Northern Ireland and BiH between 2012 and 2015. It analyses evidence obtained primarily from elite interviews and document analysis.

This paper provisionally concludes that civic parties operating in BiH and Northern Ireland encounter structural barriers within the post-settlement consociational frameworks they navigate that present them with strategic dilemmas. Nevertheless, it finds that consociational systems also offer particular openings that can be creatively seized by non-ethnic players. The paper, furthermore, reflects on the distinct findings from each case study and seeks to draw broader, comparative implications for institutional design and party strategy in transitional political settings.

3. Consociationalism and Overlapping Identities: The Accommodation of Non-Aligned Minorities in Post-Conflict Societies

Siofra Frost, Queen's University Belfast

In a deeply divided society, there exists the risk that institutional design will favour one group over others – leading to a majority dictatorship under the Westminster model of majoritarian democracy. Thus, the implementation of a power-sharing executive enables institutional design to be a means of managing this group conflict. However, this paper argues that whilst consociational power-sharing may be conducive in a society that is transitioning away from conflict, it ultimately favours the identities of the dominant, conflicting groups at the expense of minorities who have not aligned themselves along this salient, societal division.

In demonstrating this, a comparison of two consociational cases is undertaken – Northern Ireland and South Tyrol. Both cases allow for an examination of consociational power sharing at the provincial level, whilst enabling a comparison of consociations that are based upon liberal and corporate rules, respectively. In exploring the barriers that these forms of consociational executives raise towards those who do not belong to either of the dominant groups in conflict, this paper draws upon data taken from interviews with political elite and representatives of non-aligned, minority communities in both cases.

4. "It is decided in Brussels for us": Competing Discourses of Decentralization and Inclusion in Kosovo

Laura Wise, University of Edinburgh

Decentralization as a form of power-sharing intra-group conflict management has been provided for by peace agreements and political settlement frameworks across many cases worldwide. A prominent debate within literature on the subject is the tension between inclusion of minority groups through the allocation of power to the local level, and the risks such inclusive governance poses to the unitary stability of the state. Whilst international interveners often construct decentralization as a positive way of managing ethnic diversity, and consent of minority groups is needed to implement such institutional structures, few studies examine how decentralization is perceived by members of the communities it pertains to include.

This paper compares public discourses of decentralization in Kosovo at the international, national, and local levels. It traces prominent narratives from the first introduction of ethno-territorial decentralization in the 2007 Ahtisaari Plan, to the ongoing implementation attempts of the 2013 so-called Brussels Agreement. Using content analysis of minority focus group discussions and documentary analysis, it interrogates assumptions about including minority representatives in settlement negotiations and decentralized structures. The paper argues that the discursive gap in Kosovo raises questions for understanding approaches to inclusive political settlements and decentralization mechanisms in post-conflict contexts.