Peace and Democracy – Can We Have Both?

Scott Gates & Håvard Strand, Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)
Kaare Strøm, University of California, San Diego (UCSD)

Power-sharing agreements as a means of resolving conflict have received widespread support in the international community. Power-sharing lowers the security risks that groups face and reduces the likelihood that they will turn their backs on civilian political institutions. Facing post-election violence, governments of ‘national unity’ have been created in Kenya and Zimbabwe. With the exception of the threat of internal bickering, these broadly based governments have the potential of becoming very powerful. Given the moral position and real power that post-conflict governments often possess, effective opposition to a power-sharing government is virtually impossible. Post-conflict democracy is contingent upon a separation of government and opposition. Power-sharing arrangements undermine democracy by first removing any existing opposition; secondly, by barring the emergence of new opposition elites; and, finally, by pre-arranging seat allocation, thereby invalidating any real influence from voters. Dispersed political authority vests power in civil society, thereby creating a dynamic environment for the peaceful creation and development of new elites and grassroots organizations. This offers an alternative path to peace and democracy.

Introduction

After a contested election in Zimbabwe, the international community again pressed for a power-sharing solution. Led by the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pushed for the creation of a government of national unity to resolve the post-election crisis in Zimbabwe. In Sudan too the power-sharing agreement involving the north and the south was only signed after considerable efforts on the part of the international community, especially the efforts of the U.S., U.K., Norway and neighboring countries.

In Kenya, extreme violence erupted in the wake of a disputed election. After over 1200 deaths and painstaking negotiations led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the leaders of the two rival political parties, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, signed a power-sharing agreement. The joint government comprises President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga and 40 cabinet positions allocated to the two major political parties. International pressure for a power-sharing agreement is widespread. In addition to Kofi Annan playing a prominent role, during his Africa tour in 2008 President George Bush, too, called for a power-sharing solution to end the political violence.

The power-sharing arrangement ended the violence, but the coalition government has been criticized. Instead of being a check on each other, you see them give a blind eye to each other’s actions’, says Florence Simbirisi-Jaoko, head of the Kenyan National Commission for Human Rights in Nairobi (Christian Science Monitor, 13 March 2009). Yet, despite the failure of the government of national unity to deliver much beyond ending the post-election violence, the formula for power-sharing remains high among international actors.

The Case for Power-sharing

Advocates of power-sharing claim that such a political arrangement may reduce the threat of conflict by giving all potential parties to a conflict a stake in positive cooperation and a set of mutual guarantees of security and basic interests. In this way, power-sharing lowers the security risks that groups face and reduces the likelihood that they will turn their backs on civilian political institutions. Many scholars and practitioners therefore argue that a power-sharing arrangement is the best way to avoid civil conflict in fragile and divided societies.

The appeal of power-sharing in this conception stems from three properties. First, it may be possible to pre-negotiate the political payoff such that each player’s incentive conditions can be satisfied. For example, it may thus be possible to over-compensate smaller parties that have relatively few political resources but are highly militant. Second, power-sharing protects each party from post hoc surprises. Therefore, and contrary to more competitive environments, no party will have the incentive to renegotiate on its agreement once the dust of political
contestation settles. Third, and most obviously, if each party's demands can be met, a return to violent armed conflict can be deterred. In a democracy, elections create winners and losers. Winners take office and losers prepare for the next election. Contemporary research on the belief that winners do not transgress against losers and that elections are held regularly. In a post-conflict situation, interpersonal trust is typically low, and losers can be just as likely to prepare for the next election. Power-sharing institutions can to some extent make everyone a winner and thereby prevent a return to conflict.

The Case Against Power-Sharing

Yet, the democratic credentials of power-sharing institutions are not self-evident. Democracy creates winners and losers, and the assignment of these roles should not be known prior to an election. In his elegant conception, Adam Przeworski, identifies democracy with the execution of the will of the people. Mixed set of more or less democratic politicians, from Roosevelt to Chavez, have run into this problem, which can serve as a lesson: the democratic inclined back down, whereas the autocrats pack courts, shut down newspapers, imprison the opposition and plunder government assets. A purely cynical, power-driven perspective on politics will equate political and military power, which is what the most stable power-sharing agreements have done. However, while the president of Cambodia the balance on the ground is Lebanon. In Lebanon, a rigid power-sharing arrangement was haled as a source of peace and stability in an otherwise troubled region. The discrepancy between the division of power and the demography of the country made Lebanon synonymous with mayhem.

What will work?

Is it what we want to achieve? In any protracted conflict, establishing some form of peace has top priority. Peace can be established through power-sharing arrangements, but these arrangements 'bear the seeds of their own destruction'. A power-sharing government can provide short-term peace by reducing uncertainty and accountability, but the long-term effect of these democratic short-comings is seldom peace, freedom or prosperity. Long-term peace must be based on an institutional arrangement that respects both the immediate political situation and future possibilities.

Between 1989 and 2003, Liberia experienced four elections. The positive aspect of power-sharing is that it brings the extremist parties into mainstream politics. Having achieved this, power-sharing can be an effective way to limit the potential excesses of extremist leaders.

Limiting the power of the executive is a very important aspect of democracy. Independent courts, a free press and an impartent and somewhat divided opposition are key elements in this recipe. However, in a post-conflict situation, the provision of security is paramount. Everyone wants security, and a government of national unity represents everyone; therefore the government can be seen as the embodiment of the will of the people. If this argument is accepted, the need for limitations of executive power is obsolete. Any limitations on the executive limit the proper execution of the will of the people. A mixed set of more or less democratic politicians, from Roosevelt to Chavez, have run into this problem, which can serve as a lesson: the democratic inclined back down, whereas the autocrats pack courts, shut down newspapers, imprison the opposition and plunder government assets. A purely cynical, power-driven perspective on politics will equate political and military power, which is what the most stable power-sharing agreements have done. However, while the president of Cambodia the balance on the ground is Lebanon. In Lebanon, a rigid power-sharing arrangement was haled as a source of peace and stability in an otherwise troubled region. The discrepancy between the division of power and the demography of the country made Lebanon synonymous with mayhem.
In a democracy, elections create winners and losers. Winners take office and losers prepare for the next election. The electoral system, the belief that winners do not transgress against losers and that elections are held regularly. In a post-conflict situation, interpersonal trust is typically low, and losers can be just as likely to prepare for the next election. Power-sharing institutions can to some extent make everyone a winner and thereby prevent a return to violence.

Post-conflict elections and won by warlords and extremists. The peace process in Northern Ireland has seen the moderate parties replaced by the more extreme parties on either side in recent elections. The positive aspect of power-sharing is that it brings the extremist parties into mainstream politics. Having achieved this, power-sharing can be an effective way to limit the potential excesses of extremist leaders.

The Case Against Power-Sharing Yes, the democratic credentials of power-sharing institutions are not self-evident. Democracy creates winners and losers, and the assignment of these roles should not be known prior to an election. In his elegant conception, Adam Przeworski defines democracy with the ex ante openness of the process of democratic contestation. The greater the ex ante uncertainty about electoral results, the more democratic the regime.

This conception of democracy will strike many observers as incomplete. For example, we would probably not consider a political system in which political contests were entirely unpredictable as perfectly democratic, such as in a lottery. Democracy, in most people’s minds, implies that political rewards are governed by a process that reflects popular sovereignty and the performance of the political contest as judged by the people. Thus, Kees smeekes defines democratic competitiveness as the sensitivity of the political outcomes (e.g., election results) to the performance of the relevant players.

Power-sharing institutions clearly run counter to the spirit of Przeworski’s and ‘s concerns, as it is in the very nature of such institutions to reduce ex ante uncertainty about the outcomes of political contestation. In the same way, power-sharing essentially reduces competitiveness by limiting the volatility of political outcomes and thus effectively blunting the impact of democratic competition.

Post-conflict power-sharing institutions are often designed and negotiated by the parties to the conflict. It is in the signatories’ common interests to limit the number of parties to the agreement in order to secure the largest possible share for themselves. In a number of countries, often cited as examples of the successful implementation of power-sharing agreements, we can see that the growth opportunity for new political ideas, organizations, and elites is severely limited. The only way for a new group of leaders and regimes is through armed rebellion – a purely perverse incentive.

Power-sharing is often seen as a transitional arrangement which will build trust between the parties until all of them can and will accept a period of opposition to the future right to challenge the government in an election. But such arrangements exclude all political actors who were not on the table when the original deal was struck. They are in practice excluded from executive power.

Limiting the power of the executive is a very important aspect of democracy. Independent courts, a free press and an impertinent and somewhat divided opposition are key elements in this recipe. However, in a post-conflict situation, the provision of security is paramount. Everyone wants security, and a government of national unity represents everyone; therefore the government can be seen as the embodiment of the will of the people.

If this argument is accepted, the need for limitations of executive power is obsolete. Any limitations on the executive limit the proper execution of the will of the people. A mixed set of more or less democratic politicians, from Roosevelt to Chavez, have run into this problem, which can serve as a lesson; the democratically inclined back down, whereas the autocrats pack and plunder government assets.

What will work? It is what we want to achieve? In any protracted conflict, establishing some form of peace has top priority. Peace can be established through power-sharing arrangements, but these arrangements “bear the seeds of their own destruction.” A power-sharing government can promote short-term peace by reducing uncertainty and accountability, but the long-term effect of these arrangements is to drive long-term separations is seldom peace, freedom or prosperity. Long-term peace must be based on an institutional arrangement that respects both the immediate political situation and future possibilities.

Between 1989 and 2003, Liberia experienced four severe devastating years of civil war. While peace agreements were negotiated to end the conflict -- from the first set of peace agreements in 1991 to the final Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003. After the least ambitious peace agreement in 1997, the warlord Charles Taylor won the subsequent election having campaigned on the slogan “He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I’m gonna vote for him anyway.”

Peace proved to be desperately elusive. Over time, the allocation of power within these peace agreements evolved, with growing shares of power allocated to the leaders of the warring factions. Increasingly, these factions were led by politicians whose main credentials were the possession of weapons and political skills. Leaders such as Samuel K. Doe, Prince Johnson and Charles Taylor delivered few benefits to their respective ethnic and regional constituencies, and instead plunged Liberia into a chaos of looting, plundering and ethnic massacres. Inter-factional fighting over territory, resources and, ultimately, political power kept the war running until finally in August 2003 U.S. Marines and UN troops arrived to oust Taylor.

The signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, backed up by a substantial force of United Nations peacekeepers, opened the door to a very different kind of political contestation and leadership. The ensuing 2005 presidential elections pitted former soccer star George Weah against the eventual victor, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who became Africa’s first female president. When active hostilities ceased, leadership became radically different from what it had been just a few years before.

Not all is well in Liberia. Free elections are undeniably a good thing, and a very important aspect of democracy. Independent courts, a free press and an impertinent and somewhat divided opposition are key elements in this recipe. However, in a post-conflict situation, the provision of security is paramount. Everyone wants security, and a government of national unity represents everyone; therefore the government can be seen as the embodiment of the will of the people.

If this argument is accepted, the need for limitations of executive power is obsolete. Any limitations on the executive limit the proper execution of the will of the people. A mixed set of more or less democratic politicians, from Roosevelt to Chavez, have run into this problem, which can serve as a lesson; the democratically inclined back down, whereas the autocrats pack and plunder government assets.

What will work? It is what we want to achieve? In any protracted conflict, establishing some form of peace has top priority. Peace can be established through power-sharing arrangements, but these arrangements “bear the seeds of their own destruction.” A power-sharing government can promote short-term peace by reducing uncertainty and accountability, but the long-term effect of these arrangements is to drive long-term separations is seldom peace, freedom or prosperity. Long-term peace must be based on an institutional arrangement that respects both the immediate political situation and future possibilities.

Between 1989 and 2003, Liberia experienced four severe devastating years of civil war. While peace agreements were negotiated to end the conflict -- from the first set of peace agreements in 1991 to the final Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003.

Table 1: Peace agreements 1989–2006. Failure implies that the parties to the peace-sharing arrangement returned to conflict. Source: Jarstad (2008: 112)
Peace and Democracy – Can We Have Both?

Scott Gates & Håvard Strand, Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)
Kaare Strøm, University of California, San Diego (UCSD)

Power-sharing agreements as a means of resolving conflict have received widespread support in the international community. Power-sharing lowers the security risks that groups face and reduces the likelihood that they will turn their backs on civilian political institutions. Facing post-election violence, governments of 'national unity' have been created in Kenya and Zimbabwe. With the exception of the threat of internal bickering, these broadly based governments have the potential of becoming very powerful. Given the moral position and real power that post-conflict governments often possess, effective opposition to a power-sharing government is virtually impossible. Post-conflict democracy is contingent upon a separation of government and opposition. Power-sharing arrangements undermine democracy by first removing any existing opposition; secondly, by barring the emergence of new opposition elites; and, finally, by pre-arranging seat allocation, thereby invalidating any real influence from voters. Dispersed political authority vests power in civil society, thereby creating a dynamic environment for the peaceful creation and development of new elites and grassroots organizations. This offers an alternative path to peace and democracy.

Introduction
After a contested election in Zimbabwe, the international community again pressed for a power-sharing solution. Led by the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pushed for the creation of a government of national unity to resolve the post-election crisis in Zimbabwe. In Sudan too the power-sharing agreement involving the north and the south was only signed after considerable effort on the part of the international community, especially the efforts of the U.S., U.K., Norway and neighboring countries.

In Kenya, extreme violence erupted in the wake of a disputed election. After over 1200 deaths and painstaking negotiations led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the leaders of the two rival political parties, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, signed a power-sharing agreement. The joint government comprises President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga and 40 cabinet positions allocated to the two major political parties. International pressure for a power-sharing agreement is widespread. In addition to Kofi Annan playing a prominent role, during his Africa tour in 2008 President George Bush, too, called for a power-sharing solution to end the political violence.

The power-sharing arrangement ended the violence, but the coalition government has been criticized. Instead of being a check on each other, you see them give a blind eye to each other’s actions’, says Florence Simbiri-Jasolo, head of the Kenyan National Commission for Human Rights in Nairobi (Christian Science Monitor, 13 March 2009). Yet, despite the failure of the government of national unity to deliver much beyond ending the post-election violence, the fondness for power-sharing remains high among international actors.

The Case for Power-sharing
Advocates of power-sharing claim that such a political arrangement may reduce the threat of conflict by giving all potential parties to a conflict a stake in positive cooperation and a set of mutual guarantees of security and basic interests. In this way, power-sharing lowers the security risks that groups face and reduces the likelihood that they will turn their backs on civilian political institutions. Many scholars and practitioners therefore argue that a power-sharing arrangement is the best way to avoid civil conflict in fragile and divided societies.

The appeal of power-sharing in this conception stems from three properties. First, it may be possible to pre-negotiate the political payoffs such that each player's incentive conditions can be satisfied. For example, it may thus be possible to over-compensate smaller parties that have relatively few political resources but are highly militcant. Second, power-sharing protects each party from post-hoc surprises. Therefore, and contrary to more competitive environments, no party will have the incentive to renge on its agreement once the dust of political

Lessons Learned
- Power-sharing can secure peace because belligerent parties are induced to lay down their arms and join the government.
- Power-sharing can serve to moderate extremist groups by bringing them into a broad coalition government.
- Key aspects of democracy (ex ante uncertainty and accountability) are lacking in power-sharing arrangements because of their inclusive nature.
- Stable democracy depends on a dynamic and vibrant civil society to check sovereign authority, balance competing interests and produce new elites.
- Consolidating democracy in a post-conflict environment can only occur through dispersion of political authority.


About the Authors:
Scott Gates is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) and Professor II of political science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). His research interests include wars, post-conflict peacebuilding, child soldiers and governance.

Kaare Strøm is Professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego and CSCW Working Group Leader. CSCW. His research interests include political parties, coalition theory, institutions of parliamentary democracy and power-sharing.

Håvard Strand is Senior Researcher at CSCW. His research interests include civil wars, democratization/regime stability, and applied statistical methods.

About the project
The aim of the GROWNet (Geographic Research On War Network) project is to shift the focus of civil-war research from the conventional focus on country-level factors to conflict mechanisms involving sub-national and trans-border groups and organizations. Building on ground-breaking theoretical and empirical work, the project challenges previous conclusions regarding the role of identity, inequality, and institutions in conflict processes. Based on new empirical data and tools, such as geographic information systems and spatial econometrics, this project contributes directly the field of peace research.

GROWNet is a collaborative network of conflict researchers in Switzerland, Norway and the United Kingdom with funding from the European Science Foundation through an ECRP grant for the project “Disaggregating Civil Wars.” Plans are underway to expand GROWNet to eight partners in Europe under the heading of ENCoRe (European Network for Conflict Research).

Read more about the project at http://www.ict.ethz.ch/research/ecrp.

About CSCW
CSCW aims to clarify the ways in which actors respond to civil war, in all its phases from onset to post conflict, whether as primary participants, general citizenry or intervening powers. The staff of CSCW includes PRIO researchers and eminent scholars from other institutions in several countries, including countries with a record of recent conflict. Together with doctoral candidates and selected MA students, they bring the insights and complementary strengths of economics, history, political science, philosophy, demography, geography, and sociology to bear on a set of related research questions.

About PRIO
The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) is an independent and multidisciplinary research institute located in Oslo, Norway. The Institute is also involved in the promotion of peace through conflict resolution, dialogue and public information activities. PRIO owns and edits Journal of Peace Research and Security Dialogue.