

Nationalism and Multi-ethnic Governance in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Study of Consociationalism and Centripetalism

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Abstract

Organizing a state's government is a difficult task, let alone for a state split along tense ethnic lines. This essay examines two methods of governing diversity within a state, consociationalism and centripetalism, while focusing on Bosnia-Herzegovina. The essay finds that with the circumstance's facing the elites in the state, neither method would be able to work properly without the intensive international military and political presence within the ethnically divided state.

Throughout history, states have consistently been faced with a common puzzle: governance of a multi-ethnic society. Known as the nation-builder's dilemma, states have attempted to cope with this diversity in a variety of ways: rejection, assimilation/integration, accommodation, or the secession of a nation. As well, in extreme circumstances, violence has been a method utilised to literally eliminate the diversity within a state; this is known as genocide. The forceful removal of a nation from a state, or ethnic cleansing, is another form of this and is what occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) during the Bosnian war between 1992 and 1995.

In 1995 the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, ending a brutal ethnic war in BiH and creating institutions of ethnic power-sharing within the government to help ensure that violence did not return (McCulloch, 2009: 114). To do this, the government set up by Dayton utilised consociationalism. Although many scholars endorse consociationalism (for example, Lijphart, 1969, 1977; McCulloch, 2009; McGarry and O'Leary, 2006), in the years since 1995 there have been negative critiques of this method with various scholars arguing in favor of another system of multi-ethnic governance: centripetalism (for example, Belloni, 2004; Guss and Siroky, 2012; Horowitz, 1990). This raises the question: "Which method of managing multi-ethnic states is better to promote political stability in states with deep ethnic divisions, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina?" After an examination of the literature and the current situation within BiH, this essay will argue that, with the circumstance's facing the elites in the state, neither method would be able to work properly without the intensive international military and political presence within the ethnically divided state.

To argue this reasoning, this essay will be presented in three parts followed by a discussion and conclusion. Part one, titled "Consociationalism", will discuss the core dynamics of consociationalism with Lijphart's (1977) original model of consociationalism, as well as O'Leary's (2005) "complex consociationalism", forming the core of this section. Part two, titled "Consociational Institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)", will analyse the current power-sharing institutional arrangements within the state. Part three, titled "Centripetalism", will discuss Horowitz's (1985, 1990) idea of centripetalism, analysing the core values of the method, and examining the four institutions of centripetalism that are supposed to encourage moderation.

The discussion and conclusion that follow these three parts will include a direct comparative of centripetalism and consociationalism in BiH.

Consociationalism

Consociationalism is one of the leading theories within comparative politics (McCulloch, 2009: 32). This is due, in part, to the extensive research conducted by Arend Lijphart on the topic (McCulloch, 2009: 33). Lijphart argued that segmental divisions within a society are not fictional and that they must be accommodated. He sought to establish a framework for accommodation, and argued that “majority rule is akin to majority dictatorship and that instead such places require an emphasis on consensus rather than opposition and on inclusion rather than exclusion” (McCulloch, 2009: 33). Consociationalism is defined by Lijphart as bearing four characteristics: 1. Government by a Grand Coalition of political leaders (elites), representing all segments of the society; 2. Mutual veto to protect minority interests; 3. Proportionality as a standard within “political representation, civil service appointments, and the allocation of public funds” and 4. High degree of autonomy for each segment to run internal affairs (1977: 25). These four points for Lijphart’s model are reliant on elite cooperation of the different segments, and that this collaboration can offset the centrifugal forces found in divided places (1977: 1).

With these matters in mind, O’Leary discusses how a consociation can be viewed as a method where at least two or more communities can coexist in peace with neither being institutionally superior to the other(s), and in which communities can co-operate politically through self-government and through a shared central government (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 33). The veto is a very important tool within consociationalism, as it ensures minority inclusion in the decision making process. Without it, majority rule can be easily enacted by the largest ethnicity in the state within the executive (as proportionality to the ethnic populations is another characteristic), defeating the purpose of the power-sharing method. Proportionality is exercised in all levels of government, as well as the judiciary, civil service, and the security forces (McCulloch, 2009: 40). The final consociational institution defined by Lijphart is segmental autonomy, which he defines as “rule by the minority itself in the area of the minority’s exclusive concern” (1977: 41). Through autonomy, the ethnic groups have control over certain decisions within their area of concern. They are also tied to other ethnic groups by the broader institutional network, making the different segments have an interest in maintaining the stable operation of the political system, as well as inter-ethnic peace (Lijphart, 1969: 217).

With Lijphart’s model of consociationalism in mind, John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary have contributed to the theoretical refinement of the model (McCulloch, 2009: 45). According to McCulloch, McGarry furthered the idea of the importance of areas like “security sector reform, the return of exiles to their homes, the management of prisoners, and the promotion of language rights to the adoption of consociational accords” (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 45-46). Furthermore, McGarry brings forth the importance of the positive role for outsiders in the process of installing consociationalism within a multi-ethnic state, as well as the moderating potential of inter-state institutions (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 46).

More importantly, O’Leary identified “complex consociation”, which possesses all of the traditional consociational institutions, but with four more features. The first feature is that it intends to address self-determination disputes, thereby institutionally recognising the varying ethnicities (2005: 34). This can be done through the constitutional recognition of multiple ethnic groups within the state. However, this highlights the fact that many conflicts are about self-determination rather than simply about ethnicity (McCulloch, 2009: 46). According to O’Leary,

the second feature is a larger peace process designed to end conflict through the restructuring of the security sector, provisions of the return and reintegration of refugees and those peoples displaced by conflict (2005: 34). Next are features other than consociation, meaning that the political settlement can encompass other methods or principles to reduce conflict within its design (2005: 34). And, finally, the fourth feature identified by O’Leary is that complex consociations will have significant international involvement in the “adoption and maintenance of the political settlement” (2005: 35). This situation in particular can be seen in Bosnia’s High Representative, as well as the international peacekeeping force within the state.

Examining these forms of consociationalism, one can see that the latter form of “complex consociationalism” is better in the sense that it identifies issues that traditional consociationalism ignores, issues that could lead to political destabilisation if they are not addressed. While it has the core values of consociationalism, it is simply an enhanced version of it. With the understanding of consociationalism in place, this essay will now analyse the consociational system of government within Bosnia-Herzegovina that has been in place since 1995.

Consociational Institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)

A very ethnically diverse state, BiH served as a region within the former Yugoslavia and contained substantial populations of the varying national groups within the Yugoslav Federation. The most prominent of these groups were Serb and Croat populations, as well as a prominent Muslim (Bosniak) population (McCulloch, 2009: 144). The last census in the state, which occurred in 1991, stated that 43.7% of its population of 4.4 million were Bosniak, 31.4% Serb and 17.3% Croat (Dhumieres, 2013: para.7). However, this number is different now, especially considering that around 100,000 people died in the war and more than two million were displaced (O’Loughlin, 2010: 26). Following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the international community involved (which included varying members of the United Nations, NATO, European Union, and others) engaged in extensive efforts to rebuild the physical infrastructure and psychological-social trust within the war-torn state (O’Loughlin, 2010: 26). This was an exceptionally difficult undertaking, especially the task of reintegrating the varying ethnicities into a single state following such a conflict. As discussed by Heimerl, the policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide left no municipality with the same prewar ethnic composition and, even as late as 1998, only some areas had minority populations above 10% (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 145). While it has been argued that pre-war Bosnians had fluid identities that did not bind them to the three main ethnic groups, the effect of the ethnic violence and political mobilisation of the ethnicities during the war entrenched these ethno-national identities, and created great cleavages in between the ethnic groups so that by 1995, they, according to Zahar, “became the basis of the post-war political order” (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 145).

To deal with the intensely divided multi-ethnic state, the Dayton Accords outlined a system of government that falls directly under the description of “complex consociationalism”. Indeed, one of the nine conditions Lijphart identifies that helps in the implementation of consociationalism within a divided state is “prior conditions of compromise and accommodation” (as cited in McCulloch, 2009: 45). This can be seen clearly as BiH was once part of Yugoslavia, and within those years there was an integration that existed between the communities through high levels of intermarriage (around 30%), integrated schools, mixed neighbourhoods, and citizens who identified as Yugoslav rather than as one of the ethnic groups (around 5-8%) (Denitch, 1996: 61-64).

To avoid a relapse of violence, the international negotiators at Dayton outlined a comprehensive consociational agreement: it pertains that the state will involve the four traditional consociational institutions, but goes further into “complex consociationalism” in the sense that it also outlines the institutional structure of the state, autonomy provisions for the state’s Entities and cantons, the judicial system, the role of the international community within the state, the economy, issues of security sector reform, and the right of the return of refugees and displaced persons (McCulloch, 2009: 149-50).

The design itself is incredibly complex, consisting of “one state, two entities, four million citizens, and five layers of governance led by 14 prime ministers and governments” (Belloni and Deane, 2005: 231). The three ethnic groups, Croat, Serb, and Bosniak, constitute the main principalities in the system of consociational power-sharing within the state. The two entities within the one state include the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which consists mainly of the Croat and Bosniak population) and the Republika Srpska (consisting mainly of ethnic Serbs).

The Grand Coalition principle of consociationalism is seen through the three-person presidency, which represents the three ethnic groups as each group has a guaranteed presidential position. While the proportionality principle is shown through nearly every aspect of government and civil services, it is most evident: in the Council of Ministers, where the Minister and Deputy Minister may not be from the same ethnic group; in the House of Peoples, where there is proportional representation of the ethnic populace; and, finally, within the House of Representatives, where one-third of its members are from the Republik and two-thirds from the Federation (McCulloch, 2009: 150).

The autonomy principle is evident through the Federation and Republik Entities; within the Federation, autonomy provisions are further institutionalised, by which the Federation is comprised of ten cantons, five of which have Bosniak majorities, three with Croat majorities and two with mixed populations (Begić and Delić, 2013: 462 ; McCulloch, 2009: 150-51). The Republik is more centralized, largely because the Republik has a limited number of minorities and, as a result of the ethnic cleansing policy during the war, is mostly mono-ethnic (McCulloch, 2009: 151).

As for the veto, each president can exercise a veto on policies that they view as ‘dangerous’ to the ‘vital interest’ of their ethnic groups, however, when this occurs the Republik national assembly, or the Federation’s parliament, can override a presidential veto by a two-thirds majority vote (Belloni and Deane, 2005: 232). This measure ensures that no ethnic group can pass a policy that would harm or infringe upon another group’s rights, and possibly undo the peace efforts.

On top of all these layers of government is the Office of the High Representative (OHR). This is one source to exemplify the power of the international presence within BiH. The OHR is an international institution responsible for overseeing the implementation of civilian aspects of the Accord, and is funded by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), a group of 55 countries that help to sponsor and direct the peace process within BiH (Office of the High Representative, November 10, 2013: General Information section). This institution, described in Annex 10 of the Dayton Accords, was originally intended to neutrally monitor “the implementation process whose primary responsibility was to promote the full compliance of the parties and to facilitate the resolution of any difficulties arising from civilian implementation” (McCulloch, 2009: 152). However, in 1997, the “Bonn powers” were given to the OHR, allowing governmental power. This granted numerous powers, the most important of which being the ability to remove or take sanctions against non-compliant officials from Entity and State level (Chandler, 2000: 54). The

powers also allow for the removal of ‘undesirable’ political parties, and decisions on “sensitive and symbolic issues” (McCulloch, 2009: 152), such as the national anthem, flag, passports, and other items under the control of the OHR (McCulloch, 2009: 152). This is a very contentious policy, with arguments for and against the use of the “Bonn Powers”. The OHR does not control the military provisions detailed in the Accords. These originally fell under NATO, but have since been replaced by the European Union Force (EUFOR BiH) (NATO, November 10, 2013: Milestones in Relations section). It is these international military forces that have helped to implement and support the Accord’s mandates on a ground level, as well as maintain and ensure peace, and to put down violence with force if necessary.

Centripetalism

The core model of centripetalism, developed by Donald Horowitz (1985), is based on integration of the varying ethnicities within a multi-ethnic state, with means to encourage co-operation and cohesiveness amongst the different groups to allow for tensions in between the factions to ease over time. It includes five mechanisms to achieve such results: 1. Dispersion of power, often territorial, to remove ‘heat’ and interest off a single focal point through proliferation; 2. Devolution of power and reservation of offices on an ethnic basis, in an attempt to encourage intra-ethnic competition on a local level; 3. Methods to encourage interethnic co-operation, such as the use of electoral laws to promote multiethnic party coalitions for vote pooling; 4. Policies to promote alternative social alignments by promoting cross-cutting cleavages politically to unite differing groups; and 5. Reducing economic disparity through the redistribution of resources (Sisk, 1996: 40). Horowitz argues that institutions should encourage or induce ethnic groups and elites to integrate across ethnic divides, and that for effective governance and to increase the possibility of maintaining peace in a multi-ethnic state, moderates should be rewarded and extremists sanctioned (1985: 601-52; Sisk, 1996: 41). This is to set a *centripetal spin* within the state to set incentives for moderation amongst political leaders and discourage extremist outbidding. Horowitz outlines five purposes to utilise the electoral system for moderation: 1. Fragment the support of one or more ethnic groups; 2. Encourage moderation in between ethnic groups, and induce interethnic bargaining; 3. Encourage multi-ethnic coalitions; 4. Preserve balance amongst every group to prevent exclusion of the minority; and 5. Utilise a voting method to reduce the disparity between votes and seats won, to avoid a minority or plurality ethnic group obtaining a majority (1985: 632). These electoral policies are reliant on the fact that politicians, as creatures who rely on the electorate, will become more moderate in a system that promotes moderation to appeal to voters across ethnic lines, and will form coalitions with other ethnic groups to increase the chance of getting themselves elected (Sisk, 1996: 41). Where consociationalism relies on elites to work with other elites, centripetalism relies on moderate people within society to vote in moderate elites, and encourage other elites to adopt moderate rhetoric in turn.

According to McCulloch, to encourage moderation, centripetalism relies on four main institutions: 1. The Alternative Vote (AV) electoral system; 2. Formation of centrist coalitions; 3. Office of a president which is elected “by regional distribution requirements”; and 4. Administrative federalism (2009: 48). Through each of these institutions, Horowitz argues that they will encourage the ethnic ‘walls’ in-between the ethnicities to fall, and co-operation to ensue, reducing the chances of violence. Through AV, where it is majoritarian and preferential, political leaders are reliant on votes outside their ethnic group, as well as the fact that minorities help moderates get elected, inducing the majority to be dependent on minority support for

electoral success (1990: 471). It also helps to create political space for opposition to hold the government in check (McCulloch, 2009: 50-51). The coalitions are composed of varying ethnic parties who are rewarded electorally by taking moderate positions. The third institution is a single person who is president who, with AV, must be a moderate to achieve presidency, and whose obligations include redistribution of resources around the state. Also, the president will most likely be a member of a coalition, because of the aforementioned vote pooling, meaning the president will be backed by multiple ethnic groups in his/her party. The fourth institution, federalism or decentralisation, is related to consociationalism in purpose. It removes power away from the centre to allow groups some autonomy to avoid oppression by the majority (McCulloch, 2009: 53).

Discussion

After analysing complex consociationalism in BiH and centripetalism, one can see that there are positive and negative aspects within both. For example, one major issue within BiH today is the ‘institutionalized differences’ between each ethnicity. Guss and Siroky commented on this issue, stating “[the] institutional design in effect conceded that the citizens of [BiH] would always be defined along ethnic lines and vote accordingly” (2012: 310). Where BiH is divided into ethnic regions, politicians have no need to go beyond and attempt to form a multi-ethnic party. Freedom House reports that even down to the educational level, primary and secondary school curriculums are heavily politicized. In parts of Herzegovina, “students are divided by ethnicity, with separate classrooms, entrances, textbooks, and class times” (2011: section Political Rights and Civil Liberties, para.4). This can obviously be seen as problematic, for now there is a generation growing up with little to no ethnic mixing, creating an ‘us and them’ divide, hammering in the ethnic cleavages. Centripetalism might be able to answer that issue in the sense that it heavily promotes ethnic integration within the state, so this issue might not even exist should centripetalism be used. However, a counter-argument to that would be that in the immediate post-war scenario where the ethnic divides were still very raw, parents could refuse to allow their children to attend an ethnically-mixed school. To solve this current issue, BiH should now push for integration of ethnically-mixed students. While this may be difficult, especially considering the federalist nature of the state and how many towns have a very small minority, it is essential to create a positive, ethnically-mixed educational environment for students so as to enable a generational movement of positive inter-ethnic mixing and de-politicize ethnicity.

One issue with centripetalism is that it relies on the radical politicians becoming moderate to suit the moderate electorate. But the voter pool cannot be expected to be moderate, especially in a post-war environment where inter-ethnic trust is slim. Even with institutions in place to encourage moderation, the fact that the populace may not be moderate is overlooked. As McCulloch states, “[t]his mistrust need not last forever, but it is important to bear in mind that moderation at the voter level is the outgrowth of extended periods of cross-community cooperation, not something that precedes it” (2012: 125). Consociationalism answers this problem by accepting this fact, and by separating the ethnic groups into their own zones. However, as stated previously, we then encounter the issue of institutionalized ethnicities.

Another issue within BiH is the fact that in the 1996 and 1998 elections, nationalist parties (for example, the HDZ for Croats, SDS for Serbs, and SDA for Muslims (Bosniaks) (Tzifakis, 2007: 89-95)) won with an overwhelming majority for each ethnic group. This occurred because of the centrifugal forces in the state at that time, such as the violence towards

the displaced persons returning home by the local majority, the appeal of nationalist politicians, and nationalist news agencies reinforcing ethnic lines (Guss and Siroky, 2012: 311). Neither consociationalism nor centripetalism were able to fully combat these centrifugal forces, for the situation post-war between ethnicities was simply too raw for a perfectly clean transition into peace.

Seeing as centripetalism and consociationalism both have distinct issues as discussed above, and many more not mentioned in this paper, why has support for the nationalist parties fallen over the decade? For example, the SDA went from around an 80% approval rate in 1996 to 20-30% in 2006, with moderates in 2006 achieving a higher approval rating and more seats in the election than the extremists (McCulloch, 2009: 156). This may be explained by the heavy international presence within the state. It is the international community's efforts, between the military forces on the ground to the OHR, that aid in pushing progress and maintaining peace. One major issue in BiH is the fact that the governmental structure is so convoluted and complex that it is slow and frequently deadlocks (Belloni and Deane, 2005: 232), but it is the external pressure rather than domestic will that helps to push concrete reform and developments through (Berg, 2013: 469). While some argue that the OHR is very undemocratic (Belloni, 2004: 34-350; Chandler, 2000), it has also done work to push such reforms like the unification of police forces within BiH in 2008, and the unification of the military forces into one single entity in 2006 (NATO, November 10, 2013: NATO's relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina section; McCulloch, 2009: 158). But most importantly, in order to achieve any of this, it was the international intervention and work to hold the state together that has resulted in the BiH of today. While there are issues, whether it was consociationalism or centripetalism, the war ended and there is a stable, if slow, governmental structure in place with no outright ethnic violence.

Conclusion

After examining the literature and the current situation within Bosnia-Herzegovina, this essay has shown that, with the circumstance's facing the elites in the state, neither consociationalism nor centripetalism would be able to work properly without the intensive international military and political presence within the ethnically divided state. The state of BiH has gone through a vicious ethnic war and is still defined by its multi-ethnicity. While there have been serious issues to contend with, the state has achieved relative political stability. Through the intervening and current international aid, BiH is on a slow road to recovery. That is not to say the state is perfect, but it will take much longer than 18 years after Dayton to ease the wounds of the war and calm the ethnic-lines. As this essay only deals with one example of this deep and complex subject, it would be beneficial to conduct further research into other states with centripetalism and consociationalism and compare the results, as well as to further examine the effects of the international force present. Additionally, the faults within BiH should be further investigated and research into methods to solve these issues should be conducted.

To study this subject and to continue to learn from mistakes made in multi-ethnic governance worldwide is very important, and hopefully this essay will help to inspire further research to constantly perfect what is necessary to avoid ethnic-based bloodshed, for even an imperfect government is better than war.

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