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The Limits of Inclusion: Representation of Minority and Non-Dominant Communities in Consociational and Liberal Democracies

The essence of conflict transformation often rests in putting postconflict societies on the trajectory towards liberal democracy because these are believed to respond best to concerns of their individual members. Group sensitive political representation is widely acknowledged to be crucial for ensuring that the majority of society has an opportunity to participate in this process. Recognising that within the state ‘there is more than one people with reasonable claims’ (O’Leary 2005) is fundamental to consociational systems and their anticipated transformation into liberal democracies. To ensure war-to-peace transition after intergroup conflict, consociations vest representatives of parties previously engaged in violence with responsibility for maintaining peace and an opportunity to co-own political outcomes. This fundamentally liberal democratic commitment to accommodate group identities has a direct impact on what is being represented in consociational practice. No doubt, consociationalism ensures peace remaining ‘the best kind of democracy that can be realistically expected’, at least for the moment (Lijphart 1977, 43). But the problematic linkage between groups and their representatives in consociations replicates the challenge faced by liberal democracies: identities of citizens are not unidimensional, change over time and need not overlap with those of their political representatives. Thus, neglect of the internal heterogeneity of conflicting parties and of other groups’ presence during institutional engineering in societies emerging from identity-based violence impacts directly on citizens representation during and after the transition.

Consociations offer institutional settings for the majority of citizens to identify with and participate in political process after conflict. Enhancing political cooperation requires inclusion of all significant groups in the executive power-sharing, proportional
representation, group veto rights, and segmental autonomy. These consociational principles ought to ensure representation of largest possible majority of citizenry and as such follow suit of liberal democracies which too, privilege interests of the majority and not of individuals. To ensure stability, liberal democracies undervalue individual citizens’ input unless it serves the numeric majority, while consociations neglect input of groups too small to challenge the political arrangements in the name of intergroup peace.

Neglecting ‘others’, i.e. anyone who does not identify with the ethno-divide (Agarin, McCulloch, and Murtagh 2018), might be justified to stop violence. Yet, if ‘others’ are co-opted into bringing peace, but are not allocated guaranteed representation, the outcomes of transitions will result in political regimes that are democratic for a selected group of citizens, rather than for all citizens (Diamond 1994). This is often obscured by the fact that several groups are represented in consociational governments and jointly form the majority in these state’s political community (Lustick 1979).

The perceived nature of the conflict underlies the types of institutional accommodation: If the conflict is perceived to have taken place between ethnic groups, the revised state institutions aim to placate conflicting ethnic constituencies (e.g. in South Tyrol or Bosnia), whereas if grievances associated with the conflict are centred on issues of faith, postconflict representation tends to prioritise religious communities (e.g. in Lebanon). Consociations guarantee representatives of these significant groups the ability to participate in the government by two means: On one hand, consociations strive to accommodate groups by amending criteria for political representation. The groups whose identities are deemed politically (more) relevant are offered a reserved place in the government institutions to project their collective interests into the governance outcomes (McGarry and O’Leary 2013). On the other hand, consociations seek to extend the opportunity for participation, reflecting the liberal democratic principles of equal rights, treatment, and franchise which are available
to all citizens regardless of their primary social identities. As such, the institutions of consociations allow for the possibility of political regimes ‘owned and ruled’ by the double majority of groups and of citizens, to evolve into liberal democracies where only a majority of constituencies, i.e. of citizens, is necessary to maintain stability.

Liberal and consociational democracies, therefore, should be compared rather than contrasted ‘if democracy is conceived of as a continuum and in light of the diverse forms democratization takes’ (Smooha 1990). However, Sammy Smooha judged liberal democracies and consociations to be comparable because both are ‘ethnically neutral’: they privilege participation and representation of all as citizens, regardless of their individual identities. This, however, assumes that there exist ‘ethnicity blind’ political institutions in liberal, as well as consociational democracies which is not the case: It is widely acknowledged that both reflect the interests of more powerful groups among the citizenry as ‘the emphasis is less on what is just and more on what is necessary’ (Phillips 1995, 15). In fact, liberal and consociational democracies are ‘ethnically biased’, bringing about the stability and subordinating the interests of groups that lack the numerical strength to destabilise politics. It is this paper’s contention that liberal democracies and consociations are, against common wisdom, very much alike with regard to minorities and non-dominant groups: guaranteed representation afforded to only some groups in the latter, reflects the cultural bias in favour of majorities in the former. As such, the aspiration for broad inclusion during conflict transformation overseen by consociations is inevitably constrained.

In what follows, I review the challenges and draw parallels with the accommodation of group diversity in liberal democracies and in consociational systems. I then discuss how both political systems work to expand our understanding of who a state’s constituents are, yet fail to regard non-dominant groups as relevant agents of political participation. The article concludes that consociations follow suit of liberal democracies not only in subsuming the
interests of non-dominant groups to be similar to those of the majority, but also often hamper the evolution of issue-based political participation by inscribing identity-based representation in the institutions of government for some groups and not for others. The paper argues that understanding the limits of inclusion in liberal democracies and consociations invites us to think about alternatives available for participation and representation for non-dominant groups in both systems.

**Liberal Democracies’ Constituent Communities**

Throughout the 20th century, we have seen the entrenchment of political systems based on egalitarian rule, political liberties, and universal participation of all (or nearly all) people affected by government decisions (Bollen and Paxton 2000, 59). Indeed, those who live in liberal democracies are generally more satisfied with the ways their regimes perform, and those who do not – despite recent retrenchment – would prefer to live in democracies (Klingemann 1999).

Considerable political capital has been extracted out of this nearly universal preference for liberal democratic governance. Its two constitutive principles – recognition of identity diversity and the individual autonomy – are central to building peace after conflicts. However, there is the dilemma about the forms of exclusion which are acceptable in the context of liberal democracies, ranging from the benign neglect of individual interests to the marginalisation of entire groups different from the majority. On one hand, liberal polities recognise and accommodate a diversity of identities, interests and opinions amongst their citizens. On the other, mass enfranchisement renders some of this diversity irrelevant as a result of the collective decision-making: ultimately, only a fraction of the interest diversity
found in society is deemed politically representable. To limit the fundamental tension between mass political participation and elite representation at the heart of the democratic politics, citizens in liberal democracies have a range of opportunities to hold their political representatives accountable. Multiparty systems, multilevel governments, permissive electoral rules allow for correctives to decision-making during the elections, while non-electoral participation, e.g. in civil society groups and in protests, encourages political representatives to veer on the side of inclusion when making decisions.

The governments of the state thus acts as the place-holder for political community and represents most significant segments in citizenry, regardless of their internal differences. Yet, of course, no democracy can represent all the interests of even major identity groups all the time. What they do represent, however, is the narrower view of the state citizenry (usually that of the ethnic majority) whose political participation weights heavier against the interests of those in minority. This, in the words of Charles Taylor (2003: 198), amounts to ‘procedural liberalism’, which, while recognising the diversity and different aspirations of citizens, does so only with regard to the ‘established and assimilated difference’. As Bhikhu Parekh argues, the role of minority culture in political life is relevant only in so far it is politically relevant and consequently, minorities’ integration is encouraged for (rather than through) their participation in governance (Parekh 2000, 346). Political participation of minorities therefore should not challenge the existing political power relations or hierarchies of representation. Will Kymlicka’s notion of the ‘benign neglect’ of minorities points to the fact that liberal democratic states often impose disadvantages on non-dominant groups that majorities do not face or even recognise (Kymlicka, 1995: 110). As a result, this packages universal equality as an option for individuals willing to become co-opted into the political projects of the majority.
For example, EU member-states promote minority rights rather than revise the prerequisites for citizens’ participation in state-wide politics or the requirements to assume public office. Contemporary Germany recognises four autochthonous groups with distinct languages (Frisians, Danes, Roma, Sorbs) as national minorities, yet to participate in national politics their representatives must be fluent in German and be aware of the culture and norms of the state majority. Ephraim Nimni explains, such group-based equality ‘takes the form of a disguised and sweet dictatorship of the majority that endorses the celebration of individual rights and freedom of expression and individualism’, while imposing severe limits on minority representation (Nimni, 2007).

The culture of the majority prevails as the blueprint for the institutional design of liberal democracies the world over. Kymlicka and Straehle (1999, 75) argue that liberal democracies are reluctant to extend group rights to minorities and instead favour a non-discrimination approach as a form of governance based upon majority rule. Even when liberal democracies draw the distinction between multiple layers of identities and embedded interests for private and public purposes, they effectively construct hierarchies for groups’ access to and representation in politics. The salience of citizenship as the only politically relevant category allows not only the progressive assimilation of minority private identities into liberal body politic, it also undermines the neutrality of public space and state’s commitment to equality of citizens (Kymlicka 1995, 130).

Liberal nation-states have often been perceived as seeking ways of retaining control for the majorities over political processes in ‘their’ states while paying lip service to non-dominant groups’ representation. Minority representation is acknowledged to be more tokenistic than effective as it often fails to translate group interests into outcomes that are equally beneficial for the individual members of the majority (Parekh 2000). This reflects the tension at the heart of liberal democratic governance paradigm: equality and opportunities for
participation are extended to individuals, yet political representation is predetermined on these individuals’ articulating their interests as members of the wider group, e.g. party members or state citizenry, though not necessarily as a single political constituency. Underpinning this criticism of liberal democracies is the acknowledgement that accommodation focuses squarely on limiting the recognition to only some groups (see e.g. Patten 2014). Similar reservations should be raised in relation to societies fragmented along the group lines and ensuring transition to peace by installing consociational regimes.

**Constituent Political Communities in Consociations**

What consociations are and what they do has changed significantly since their ideal type was described by Arend Lijphart (1968) and extended by John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary (1993). Yet, as the author D explains (this issue), they remain uniquely focussed on the accommodation of group identities rather than on those of individuals. Indeed, the original model has been augmented to account for different starting conditions in societies where consociations have since been applied. Yet, fundamentally, Lijphart impressed that ‘what societies need is a democratic regime that emphasises consensus instead of opposition, that it includes rather than excludes’ (Lijphart 1984, 33). As such, consociations maintain peace and stability by emphasising consensus between identity groups that are to be represented (Lijphart 1984). Rather than accounting for the diversity of citizens, consociations draw upon the politically relevant identity groups, and specifically upon their leaders, to bridge ‘sub-cultural cleavages’ (Lijphart 1977, 16). What Lijphart implies about consociations is that it delivers equality in participation and affords representation only *to the dominant groups in society*, rather than to all citizens.

By acknowledging the importance of securing the place for the *significant groups*, consociations are comparable in their effects on citizen participation and representation to
liberal democracies: They put citizens’ shared interests in peace at the centre of political participation, though they are not as successful in privatising individual (ethnic and language, religion and gender) identities as liberal democracies are. Instead, in consociations individual interests are galvanised around the group identities that are (recognised as) politically relevant. As Nenad Stojanović demonstrates, ‘it is de jure easy for an Other to join a significant consociational segment, but social control or insufficient linguistic skills … make this choice de facto difficult’ (2017, 360). This leads politics to serve majority identity groups and marginalise others. ‘Minority accommodation’ in consociations means little more than the special provisions for representation of groups previously involved in the conflict, rather than a concession to all people affected by conflict (Brass 1991, 342).

Thus, similarly to liberal democracies, consociations acknowledge the diversity of identities, welcome the participation of all segments of citizenry and facilitate their representation in the structures of government. But unlike liberal democracies, consociations take a narrower view on the ‘relevant identity groups’ by relocating only those groups’ representatives that have genuine potential for thwarting peace from streets into the offices of government (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). Consociations emphasise that all citizens as individuals have been affected by the conflict and benefit from political participation in consociational democracy. At the same time, they portray groups as the winners of the conflict transformation by acknowledging that the difference between the identity groups has challenged the earlier political organisation when some groups were underrepresented in political institutions. Regardless of the criticism of administering democracy only to selected groups, however, the ‘peace dividend’ consociational democracies bring to postconflict divided societies has made them preferable to other forms of governance for deeply divided societies.
However, this approach is ethnocentric in as much as liberal democratic view of citizenry devoid of any sub-cultural identities is. The representation of formerly conflicting parties in consociations not only reasserts the link between the state and their communities but, it also opens avenues for the state to dominate identities, interests, and issues that do not fit with their views on state institutions after the end of conflict. Political institutions designed to serve some groups over others, following Sammy Smooha’s verdict, confound what are ‘in fact ethnic democracies’: Participatory political regimes that regulate and pre-empt conflicts by prioritising the right of groups over individual equality as their foundational trade-off between war and peace. As such, they extend control over rather than ensure representation of all those deemed less significant to ending violence (Smooha 1990).

Both liberal democracies and consociations therefore recognise the centrality of significant identity groups as the core of the political community, while most other groups – notably minorities in liberal democracies, ‘others’ in consociations – receive auxiliary protection, either via collective group rights, or via individual rights to be free from discrimination. In both types of democracy, it is the majority that confers group rights upon the minority communities as a token of recognition of significant differences between groups constituting the bulk of citizenry. In both liberal and consociational democracies, it is the dominant majorities who by means of democratic institutions serve democracy to ‘others’, individuals who do not or prefer not to identify in terms of groups and can enjoy benefits of equality and non-discrimination as individuals, rather than as members of other groups.

Political representation in consociations succeeds in building peace not because formerly excluded minorities are marked for participation in government, nor because it opens avenues for the long-term accommodation of diverse interests of people affected. As a tool for stopping violence consociations neglect (many) other socially significant yet politically irrelevant identity groups (Wolff 2003). Any other identity group can be side-
lined, regardless of whether it is ethnic but constitutes a very small share of the population (e.g. Jews in Bosnia), avoids ethnic while referencing its other primary ascriptive and socially relevant identity for representation (e.g. gender or sexuality), or aspires representation on the basis of ideological preferences (e.g. environmentalists or socialists). Despite including more than just one group and rhetorically committing to universalist recognition of diversity, consociations, like liberal democracies, institutionalise representation of only select groups, usually those centrally involved in conflict.

Non-dominant ‘others’, i.e. citizens who find themselves in a position of political irrelevance, fare the same in a consociation as minorities do in a liberal democracy. This is because both liberal and consociational democracies take for granted that political institutions structure the lives of minorities and others while distributing ‘democracy’ and ‘peace dividend’ to a multi-national majority of a reconfigured polity. Specifically, consociations establish a three-way hierarchical order: First, there emerges a residual category of citizens whose identities are necessarily de-prioritised in political representation – often referred to as ‘others’. Consider, the case of Bosnia where Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs are considered ‘constituent peoples’ and have a set of reserved seats in the panoply of state, federal and local institutions. Only those identifying with the constituent peoples can be elected to the presidency, which rotates between these groups, or gain legislative representation, as each of these groups has a reserved number of seats in the second chamber of parliament (Jusić und Stojanović 2015). As has been acknowledged in the Sejdić and Finci (2009), Zornić (2014) and Pilav (2016) cases brought against Bosnia at the European Court of Human Rights, this has an impact on the outcomes of the participation of individuals who do not identify with the prevalent political identities (Stojanović 2017).

Second, token representation of minorities can result in their demobilisation from participation when they are outnumbered and nearly always lack political clout in
governments. For example, ten seats for micro-minorities are guaranteed in the Kosovo Assembly on the Committee on Rights, Interests of Communities and Returns and representatives of these groups have the right to appeal to the President of the Assembly on issues of minority concerns. These provisions, however, have not prevented the political elites of Albanians and Serbs, the two main ethnic groups, from overlooking group-specific interests of other ethnic groups when drawing up policies on education and the visibility of minority cultures in public, policies which are all arguably central to sustaining ethnic minority identities. Likewise, the guarantee of 30 per cent of seats for women in the Kosovo Assembly has barely changed the electorates’ preferences for greater female representation in decisive political offices of the country (Agarin, McCulloch and Murtagh 2018).

Finally, as consociational institutions curtail input, importance and significance of political issues that do not map neatly on group identities represented, they open up space for novel forms of challenging the political status quo. Under some conditions, this might offer critical opportunities for non-dominant groups to hold the balance-of-power. During times of political deadlock between the DUP and Sinn Féin, the two parties sharing power in the Northern Ireland executive, the Alliance Party has been called upon to field the speaker of the Assembly (1998) as well as to take up the portfolio of the Minister of Justice (2010). This suggests that the non-aligned party could play as a power-broker (Jarrett 2017). The group-based representation underlying consociational political logic thus largely determines the level to which issues affecting non-dominant groups can be accommodated for in the political opportunity structure favouring vested interests of the ethnopolitical blocks with guaranteed political representation (Wolff 2003).

Consociations claim to bring peace to citizens after intergroup violence and thus tend to be seen differently from liberal democratic form of governance (O’Flynn 2013, Jarstad und Sisk 2008). But both consociational and liberal democracies equate the majorities’
domination with free choice for minorities to assimilate (or not); and both accept the assimilation of further identities into politically relevant segments within citizenry as a necessary trade-off for peace and stability. During war-to-peace transitions, decent treatment of the opposition features as the aspiration for the new form of politics in consociations. Once the formerly conflicting groups settle to govern jointly in consociations, political inclusion of any further segment of citizenry as a ‘relevant’, veto-holding group is often a non-starter (McCulloch 2013). Instead of jointly reaching out to ‘others’, the majority, now composed of the groups that constitute consociations, defers the inclusion and postpones guaranteed representation of non-dominant ‘others’, just as liberal democracies do with their minorities. Members of non-dominant groups therefore can legitimately claim that the foregrounded egalitarian approach to political participation and representation in consociations is akin to those of liberal democracies.

**Limits of Representation of Non-Dominant Groups**

The consociational model brings certain formerly excluded groups into the halls of government and primarily undermines the rule of a single majority group by requiring other politically relevant groups’ representation. But political representation in consociations is based exclusively on all-around identities (such as ethnicity, denomination), leaving the interests of non-dominant groups’ open for co-optation into ethnic blocs with the guaranteed right to block by the dominant majorities.

Mandated cooperation between elites of formerly conflicting groups presents several challenges for the representation of their electorates’ preferences. First, the effectiveness of consociations is measured by their response to the core identities within the state rather than to the concerns of the general public, encouraging joint governance between elites of dominant groups and co-opting non-dominant groups to attain that goal. The representation
of the interests of members of the ‘others’ follows from, rather than accompanies the consolidation of dominant groups’ political identities in the otherwise shared polity.

Consider the effects of group representation in Macedonia’s Assembly following the 2001 Ohrid Agreement that established power-sharing. The Ohrid Agreement put an end to interethnic violence, making the participation of the non-Slav political elites in the government mandatory and explicitly recognising the rights of ‘communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia’. This pattern of elite cooperation closely reflected the informal practice followed throughout the 1990s when ethnic Albanians joined successive Macedonian governments. Yet, the reconfigured state institutions allowed for their representatives to make joint decisions with Slav Macedonians since the 2002 constitutive elections. In that election, the Social Democratic Union-led multiparty and multi-ethnic coalition emerged as a clear winner. Yet, the elections that followed resulted in the coalitions of VMRO-DNMNE as a party of Slav Macedonians with the Democratic Party of Albanians (2006-8) and the Democratic Union for Integration (2008-16). These two main parties representing Albanian Macedonians have switched effortlessly between being in government and in the opposition, without engaging with the question of state ‘co-ownership’ - the issue that catapulted them into the office in the first place. To win the votes, Albanian Macedonians’ political parties appealed to the narrow gauge, ascriptive group identities of their constituency. However, once elected, the parties chose to prop-up coalition governments in cooperation with Slav Macedonian political elites thus bridging the sub-cultural cleavages among the elite, but doing little to foster cooperation in their constituencies (Daskalovski 2004).

This, however, did not expedite political progress in the country or foster economic development. The Albanian Macedonian electorate subsequently became frustrated with the tendency of their political representatives to serve elite rather than community interests prior
to the interethnic conflicts of 2001 and later, under the new constitutional arrangement (Lyon
2015). The evidence emerging of state capture, compound with the lack of political reform
brought both Slav and Albanian Macedonian communities into the streets during the
weeklong protests in the so-called Colourful Revolution in 2015 (Irwin 2016). It appears that
both Slav and Albanian Macedonian elites have been sharing the ‘peace dividend’ among
themselves, rather than passing it to groups they represent in the National Assembly.

Second, elites might perceive their groups to still be at logger-heads and, in order to
fulfil the formal institutional requirements, cooperate on issues that are least conflictual. This
brings the ‘peace dividend’ to societies, but fails to convince elites of the need to move from
identity to issue based politics. Indeed, Kenneth McRae asserts that political elites might
engage in different political mechanisms, as ‘in the harsher conditions of the real world,
consociational systems often stand quite close to control systems and may sometimes cross
the invisible theoretical line that sets them apart’ (McRae 1990, 104). It is clear, however,
that in consociations, elements of co-optation are implemented by political elites to protect
the interests of their constituents, as well as their own, from changing the balance of power in
government (O’Leary 2005, 14). This has implications for the outcomes of governance and
the accountability of state to groups that have been deemed insufficiently politically
significant.

For example, in Lebanon, the portfolio of the president goes to a representative of a
Maronite Christian sect, of prime minister to a Sunni, and the speaker of the Assembly to a
Shia, while the seats in the parliament are equally split between Christians and Muslims.
Thus, this division significantly underrepresents other Christian, as well as Alawite and
Druze groups, in the institutions of government. The confessionalism in parliament
furthermore enforces a norm that legitimate representation is only obtained by sects and
allows Maronites, Sunnis and Shi’as to jointly dominate state institutions, and co-opt the
interests of other sects (Author G, this issue). Likewise, New Caledonia’s consociation, as discussed by Author H (this issue), offers an example of the continued salience of the independence issue as the main dividing line of domestic politics: despite the successful transition from violent to political conflict, cooperation and coalitions between an array of political parties continue to reflect the pro- and anti-independence cleavage, co-opting other policy positions into these extremes of political spectrum.

Third, consociations emphasise that groups are the winners of conflict transformation. Once politically relevant groups secure the spoils of peace for themselves, they cannot be expected to accommodate ‘others’ beyond guarantees of token representation, unless bringing them into decision-making is perceived to elicit pay-off for the dominant groups. O’Leary describes situations where a dominant coalition ‘deliberately excludes another segment. This can be seen as a combination of consociation and control; consociation for the dominant group who in turn exercise control over the dominated’ (O’Leary 2013, 14). Ian Lustick, referring to the National Pact in Lebanon, suggests that in any polity, any one group may interact with another by means of consociational power-sharing while marginalising any other group that is not a part of consociational arrangement (Lustick 1979, 336). Lebanon offers an illustration where the Christian sects can block other groups from enjoying the benefits of shared power by concentrating the power in the executive and exercising communal control over the military (Author G, this issue). Similarly, the continued marginalisation of Palestinians in Lebanon is due to a fear of upsetting the precarious ethno-political balance underpinning the allocation of government portfolios (Deets 2018).

The modalities of political representation in consociations matter for identity salience in all groups affected by conflicts, not solely for the identities of individual members of these groups: The neglect, co-optation, and marginalisation of ‘others’ are therefore appropriate if ending the conflict is the declared goal of institutional reform. This locks non-dominant
groups out of sharing the ‘democratic dividend’ during conflict transformation. As a result, their members will find it hard to see benefits from peace brought about by consociational arrangements in the same way as it benefited those clearly positioned along the main ethnopolitical cleavage. Acknowledging that deep societal cleavages affect all citizens and not only those from the major societal identity groups is rarely enough in postconflict society (Kennedy, Pierson and Thomson 2016). The prevalence of ethnically labelled parties in Belgian politics (DeWinter and Baudewyns 2015) and, despite the 2018 electoral reform, continued sectarian political representation in Lebanon (Deets 2018), indicate the attractiveness of ethnic politics where consociational institutions afford special rights to group-based representation. Similar outcomes can also be witnessed in liberal democracies where minorities are side-lined in decision-making if their participation is not perceived by the majority to benefit political stability.

Thus, whereas it is acknowledged that the presence of minorities deeply challenges the architecture of the liberal democratic state (Kymlicka 1995, 130; Patten 2014), the privileged representation of some identities over others has so far not been seen as a fundamental challenge to consociations (McCrudden and O’Leary 2013). This is in part because the success of consociations is judged on their ability to bring peace, not to ensure equal representation of all citizens. But as postconflict societies complete the transition from war-to-peace and conflict generated identities lose past political salience, consociations increasingly face difficult questions about the legitimacy of their exclusive institutions.

**Opportunities for Engaging Non-Dominant Groups**

The significance of non-dominant groups’ exclusion from liberal democracies and consociations is clear: By re-balancing power relations between conflicting groups, they consolidates new political hierarchies. At the same time, consociational and liberal
democracies mount pressure on individuals that might not (want to) identify with the politically salient identities to align with the groups guaranteed representation. Each time the group identity, rather than the issues and interest of their constituents, is invoked, attention is drawn to the greater power gained by those in a numerical majority. The designated right to representation in government becomes the modicum of these groups’ perception of political equality and freedom, and makes it difficult to reform consociational systems, much like it is difficult to restructure institutions of liberal democracies and make them more inclusive for minorities.

Liberal democrats, like consociationalists, are concerned with equality and participation in culturally diverse societies, assuming that the protection of the rights of individuals as members of groups is sufficient to ensure non-discrimination. However, the set of neutral political, economic and social rights, based purely on individual needs, is wholly insufficient in the context of the majoritarian decision-making prevalent in liberal democracies. To counter this, liberal democracies have opted for some remedial group rights, such as differential rights for women and, to a lesser extent, some group rights to minority communities (Phillips 1995, Nimni 2007). Despite the presence of similar provisions in consociations and oftentimes dedicated quotas for micro-minorities and gender identity groups, majoritarian decision-making allows for perfectly reasonable and democratic ways to limit the impact of such identity-based representation (Byrne and McCulloch 2018). In both consociations and liberal democracies, the participation and influence of groups are oftentimes curtailed precisely because the civil and political rights of individuals are invoked. In fact, in liberal democracies, the numeric majority habitually monopolizes political levers, which directly impacts the cultural survival of minority groups’ identities and their social relevance (Kymlicka and Straehle, 1999).
The electoral arithmetic, however, brings about cabinets that are composed of the established groups, minimising the opportunities for non-dominant groups to be represented in consociational governments, similarly to curtailed opportunities for minority representation in liberal democracies. Both encourage political representatives to follow the liberal democratic principles and join the relevant groups once elected to parliament: Minority groups often seek to broaden their electoral base to avail of the seats in parliament and engage in decision-making even if from the benches of the opposition. Non-dominant groups in consociations too, form parties, lobby, or mobilise civil society groups to claim the space left aside of the politically salient ethno-divide and bring their identities into consociations’ political process. Most consociations make provisions for interest representation of individuals, i.e. voters need not identify with any group to participate (with notable examples of South Tyrol and Lebanon) and in some, elected candidates can designate after the elections (e.g. in Belgium and Northern Ireland) (Stojanović 2017). However, while socially relevant categories form the basis for political participation of ‘others’ and minorities alike, their representatives, once elected, often gain significance if they can ascend to the position of power-broker or king-make, i.e. as partners of those representing majorities.

Although individual participation can usher in the transformation of identity-based representation, the right to veto afforded in consociations to some ethnopolitical entrepreneurs but not to others upholds the principle of self-governance by and for groups guaranteed representation at expense of ‘others’ (McCrudden and O’Leary, 2013). Thus, consociations follow the lead of liberal democracies when enticing all voters to participate as citizens, but they do so to serve the interest of the selected groups. The positive outcomes of individual participation, therefore, shall be limited only to those citizens of consociations who return representatives able to access the veto instruments. Parties representing politically significant groups would be likely to cooperate and circumnavigate potential veto excluding
others from joint government coalitions. Veto-holding parties in consociations affords some segments of the electorate structural advantages for controlling the process of agenda-setting and power to defer engagement with contentious policies and issues. Thus, representatives without a guaranteed right to veto decisions, *de facto* become observers rather than participants in decision-making, making veto-holding parties less likely to seek their cooperation regardless of voters’ bread-and-butter concerns.

The variant levels of cooperation between the elected elites follows from the strong commitment to representation of groups in consociational systems. It falls into two practical models for consociationalism with distinct opportunities for participation by and input from ‘others’ (Lijphart 2007, 6): Corporate consociations have a predetermined set of groups that are represented and share power by establishing ratios for representation in parliamentary bodies or allocating positions within the executive, thus sharing the power horizontally (McCulloch 2014, 503). Corporate consociations build representation around the socially relevant, conflict-generated identity categories and lock members of thus externally-bounded groups into categories represented by and representable in postconflict politics (Byrne and McCulloch 2018). Liberal consociationalism, on the other hand, allows considerably more space for open-ended representation which leaves the decision with the voter on who is to share power (McGarry and O’Leary 2013). Liberal consociations therefore allow citizens who do not identify with the main political divide to leverage more out of their participation: Here, the institutions of government that represent effectively on the basis of identities are affected by the continuous alignment of preferences expressed at the ballot box with the identities representable at high-table politics.

The success of each type of system in transition from identity to interest-based politics depends on their elites’ ability to recognise the value of consensual, rather than majoritarian decision-making to make consociational democracies work. Wolff notes that
corporate consociationalism ‘rests on the assumption that group identities are fixed and that
groups are both internally homogeneous and externally bounded’ (2003), while ‘liberal
consociation rewards whatever salient political identities emerge in democratic elections’
(McGarry and O’Leary 2013). Thus, cooperation foregrounding interests over identities is
likelier in liberal consociations where transition to ‘normal’ democratic politics does not
entail assimilating the difference to a degree that it happens in corporate consociations.

‘Consensus’ in corporate consociations means joint decision-making by elites of pre-defined
relevant communities, often without the guaranteed representation of ‘others’. At the other
side, ‘others’ are harder to neglect, co-opt or control in liberal consociations, not in spite, but
because these rely heavier on individuals’ choice- and interest-based participation. Thus, in
corporate consociations, identity is particularly salient in the realm of representation where in
liberal ones, identities are more relevant at the point of citizen participation in the political
process.

Yet, identity-based political representation at large misrecognises the salience of
identity for political participation of those included. As can be seen in South Tyrol, the rights
and interests of German, Ladin and Italian speakers are protected by the 1972 Autonomy
Statute. However, the German and Ladin communities repeatedly aligned when in
government to keep the power held by the Italian community in check. At the same time,
over time, greater cooperation between all three groups has increased both in politics and
across society, ultimately leading to public discussions on amending the consociational
arrangements in the province (Larin and Roggla 2019). This points to innovative avenues for
participation in divided societies: Overcoming ethnic cleavages is easier where interest-based
political representation is not limited to identity-based political allegiance of the followship.
The relative success of civic parties, such as the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland, Naša
Stranka in Bosnia and the Greens in South Tyrol, shows the potential pay-offs of interest-
based representation (See Author E, this issue). Consistently receiving the share of the vote in excess of the demographic group identifying in non-sectarian terms, such civic parties successfully tap groups in the electorate which are prepared to forego ascriptive ethnopolitical identities and redefine political participation in terms of their interests as citizens of political community.

At the same time, institutional contexts for non-dominant groups’ participation in consociations matter too. Corporate consociations are more likely to prefer the political representation of non-dominant groups to take the form of civil society groups, while liberal consociations would be more likely to see parties emerge as avenues of political organisations. In both contexts, ‘ethnic seepage’ equally affects issues around which non-dominant ‘others’ rally and are prone to challenge dominant groups’ agendas. Particularly in liberal consociations where opportunities for non-dominant groups to gain formal representation are higher, civic mobilisation might be the precursor to revisiting the consensus of identity-based politics. Individuals and groups, including gender and sexual minorities, micro-minorities and members of groups preferring non-ethnic labels find no political opportunity structure to facilitate, sustain and translate issues that cut across the boundaries of politically relevant identity groups (Agarin, McCulloch and Murtagh 2018; Kennedy, Pierson and Thomson 2016; Lyon 2015). All is left for them is to engage jointly in civic activities on issues of broader social relevance in lieu of narrowly understood participation in electoral politics.

In Northern Ireland, politics has seen the progressive turn to issue-based politics, yet political representatives have repeatedly failed to legislate for marriage equality and on women’s reproductive rights. Although widely viewed by the electorate as reflecting the systemic commitment to uphold the status quo in politics, Northern Ireland society has seen broad civic mobilisation in favour of LGBT rights, as well as for women’s reproductive
rights. The Love Equality and Alliance for Choice movements engage across the ethno-
national divide with the Northern Ireland political parties and directly with political
institutions. The Alliance for Choice specifically has sought to reach to the (more sceptical)
protestant segment of society and is working jointly with the non-sectarian Alliance Party,
while the Love Equality campaign has lobbied for reform of power-sharing since the veto
mechanism, the Petition of Concern has been used to undermine passing of the legislation in
2015. Overall, one can attest both groups’ contribution to change in public visibility and
anticipate political reform on non-identity issues.

By facilitating the political participation and representation of all citizens, liberal
democracies share out the ‘democratic dividend’ across the entire society: all citizens of
liberal democracies have the right to political participation and to the political representation
of their interests, regardless of individuals’ majority or minority identities. Consociations too,
can help establish an overarching loyalty of all citizens affected by political decisions to
political institutions once everyone affected benefits from ‘peace dividend’: Popular
mobilisation around rights that cut across identity-groups can change social attitudes and
encourage political representatives in consociations to re-focus on representing electorates’
interests and incentivising participation in politics of wider constituencies.

Conclusion

This article contrasts the avenues for accommodating the identities, interests and issues of
non-dominant groups in liberal democracies with the opportunities available for groups not
explicitly mentioned in consociations to attain representation and participate in institutions of
government. As a result of a preference for majoritarian decision-making in both types of
democratic systems, non-dominant groups remain marginal actors. The article emphasised
that in consociational and liberal democracies alike, non-dominant groups, their interests and
issues raised are more likely to be framed as challenges to political stability rather than as opportunities for reform. In one way or another, the core groups of consociations and liberal democracies exercise joint control over non-dominant groups to beef up perceptions of stability and to guarantee but descriptive representation to non-dominant groups. This is bound to undermine the politics of compromise they seek to establish. Thus, and although consociations are effective tools for conflict transformation, they create problems for participation and representation of non-dominant groups which challenges the perception of political regime effectiveness in the long-term.

Consociations seek to establish consensual policy-making as the norm and anticipate cooperation despite groups’ mutual perception of each other as a security threat and history of distrust. In fact, institutional reforms that bring about consociations accommodate distinct types of identities, privilege their agency and establish a hierarchy of interests that maps onto these identities. The participation-representation nexus which focusses on non-dominant groups’ access to and input into consociational political allows us to ask questions about the relative significance of identity politics in divided societies transitioning from conflict to peace. This perception correlates to domestic political dynamics: First, there seems to be an implicit assumption that non-dominant groups’ participation in politics is utterly destabilising because their interests are distinct from those of the majority; second, shift from identity to issue-based politics in corporate consociations is difficult due to the perception held by ‘politically relevant’ groups about politics as a zero-sum game. And third, even in liberal consociations the representation of issues, interests, and identities of non-dominant groups is oftentimes sacrificed when these do not fit in the otherwise salient hierarchy of the established groups’ agendas.

Consociations are successful in keeping the state in ‘one piece’ after ethnic conflict because they deliver fair governance to all affected people, inviting conflicting parties to join
governments. To secure a place and voice for representatives of parties formerly involved in violent conflict is nothing short of acknowledging that the conflict was structured around group categories and the fact that past political hierarchies have been undermining peace. However noble the aspiration of bringing peace to deeply divided societies, administering democracy to groups involved in conflict puts the inclusion of identities and interests of groups and individuals not centrally involved in conflict on the backburner in consociational, more than it does in liberal democracies. Among the former, corporate consociations may entrench group-based division between the groups, but there is ample space for non-dominant groups to play a significant role in civil society and in private, especially under liberal consociational settings.

In both liberal and consociational democracies the representation of non-dominant groups remains a valuable resource for changing the very rationale of political participation. In societies fragmented along the group lines and transitioning from conflict, issues and interests of non-dominant groups might overlap with concerns of dominant groups. In such contexts, representation is far more than just as a token of recognition of individual membership in the democratic political community as is often the case in liberal democracies. Representation of non-dominant groups’ identities in consociations offers individuals an opportunity to participate focussing on interests and issues, not only their identities. And as the relevance of conflict identities withers away, all members are likely to identify as citizens of a shared political community, as is widely observed in liberal democracies.

Political participation and representations in consociations benefit most the citizens who are members of groups acknowledged explicitly in re-balancing of political institutions. For citizens to continuously engage in issue-based politics, consociations too – over time – should re-balance their institutional settings away from being prescriptive about
representations based on identities, allowing participatory democracy to bring further benefits of more accountable governance to all affected.
References


