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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Fiftieth Anniversary Special Issue (Oct., 1997), pp. 88-117

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054028>

Accessed: 16/07/2012 12:26

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# LIJPHART, LAKATOS, AND CONSOCIATIONALISM

By IAN S. LUSTICK\*

WHEN political scientists seek validation for their research practices, many now cite Imre Lakatos, the late Jewish/Hungarian/British mathematician/epistemologist. Although Lakatos had an explicit animus against social science, his epistemology, methodological strategies, and terminology have proved enormously attractive to its practitioners, especially political scientists.<sup>1</sup> Particularly notable is the regular invocation of Lakatos's notion of competing "research programs"—streams of studies, experiments, and projects based on sets of rules telling scientists what questions to ask ("the positive heuristic") and what questions not to ask ("the negative heuristic").<sup>2</sup>

Lakatos's theory of how science can progress includes both a positivist analysis of how evidence and inference can be used to build better theory and a consideration of the self-interested and quintessentially political mobilization of resources and colleagues. The tension between these two partners in science—evidence and politics—is never completely resolved in Lakatos. In his influential essay, presented in 1965 and first published in 1970, Lakatos propounded a view of science as influ-

\* The author is very grateful for research assistance in connection with this article from Michele Commercio, Vikash Yadav, Dina Westenholz, and Hilary Lustick. He also wishes to thank the following people for helpful readings and critical comments on earlier drafts: Thomas Callaghy, Nelson Kasfir, David Laitin, John McGarry, Jack Nagel, Brendan O'Leary, and Oren Yiftachel.

<sup>1</sup> For Lakatos's harsh views on the behavioral sciences, see Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 176n. One finds additional evidence of the growing influence of Lakatos's work among political scientists in the prominent methodological guide by three political scientists—Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba—who invoke Lakatos as something of an epistemological authority for their approach. See King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 12. See also the Winter-Spring 1995 issue of *Critical Review*, containing a wide-ranging symposium on the criticisms launched against rational choice theory by Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, in *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). At least six of the contributions, both pro and con, based themselves in part on their interpretations of Lakatos's theory of research programs.

<sup>2</sup> Lakatos (fn. 1), 132. Most references by social scientists to Lakatos's work are to this essay. Between 1980 and 1995 the *Social Science Citation Index* lists an annual average of 10.5 inches of citations to works by Lakatos.

enced by processes of inference, evidence, and theory testing, combined with the political skills of entrepreneurial scientists whose grantsmanship, intellect, reputations, and rhetorical talents could sustain “degenerative” research programs or fail to advance “progressive” ones.<sup>3</sup> As Alan Musgrave has explained, “early” Lakatos explained the success or failure of research programs as based on the degree of corroboration achieved for important claims and the extent to which “new empirical content” was produced by theories refined by testing. According to Musgrave, however, Lakatos shifted in some of his later writings toward a more political explanation for patterns of success and failure of research programs—expecting that the outcome among competing programs would be determined by the relative abilities of scientist-protagonists to mobilize economic, reputational, and institutional resources, both inside and outside the academy. Accordingly, “late” Lakatos (as Musgrave put it) was unwilling to tell a scientist to stop working on a research project because of explanatory or predictive failure.<sup>4</sup>

#### ALMOND AND LIJPHART: COMPETING RESEARCH PROGRAMS IN AN EARLY-LAKATOSIAN MODE

The differences between early- and late-Lakatosian views on how research programs progress or degenerate, prevail or disappear, reflect a fundamental dispute regarding the balance between evidence and politics in contemporary social science. Few research programs in comparative politics have concentrated as much sustained effort on as distinct an array of questions as that centered on how democracy can stably operate in culturally plural, fragmented, or deeply divided societies. The trajectory of the consociational research program, as inaugurated by Arend Lijphart’s 1969 article in *World Politics*, “Consociational Democracy,”<sup>5</sup> therefore presents a valuable opportunity to explore this balance in Lakatos and in political science.

<sup>3</sup> In his later work Lakatos specifically emphasized those portions of his 1965 paper, published in expanded form in Lakatos (fn. 1), that portrayed the progress of science in “instrumental” terms. See Lakatos, “Replies to Critics,” in *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 8 (1971), 182n.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Musgrave, “Method or Madness?” in R. S. Cohen et al., eds., *Essays in Memory of Imre Lakatos* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1976). In this same volume Paul Feyerabend makes a very strong case that in 1965 Lakatos had already come to this conclusion but that it was camouflaged in his essay “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes” by his own preferences that science be otherwise than it is. See Feyerabend, “On the Critique of Scientific Reason.” Lakatos’s discomfort with this skepticist interpretation of his work, as well as his inability to deny its validity, is well reflected in his posthumous published review of Stephen Toulmin’s book *Human Understanding*. See “Understanding Toulmin,” in *Mathematics, Science, and Epistemology: Philosophical Papers of Imre Lakatos*, vol. 2, ed. John Worrall and Gregory Currie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” *World Politics* 21 (January 1969).

Of course, Lakatos himself cannot be expected to guide our judgment of the substantive merits of consociational theory. In late-Lakatosian terms the very duration of the discussion of consociationalism and the foundation it laid for Lijphart's spectacular scholarly career would signal its outstanding success.<sup>6</sup> Whether the consociational research program can or ever did meet the criteria for good science advanced by early Lakatos is another question.

Indeed, I will show that the success of the consociational research program cannot be explained on the basis of its explanatory power or heuristic value—the criteria for good science advocated in early Lakatos. Rather, its success bears witness to the late-Lakatosian claim that research programs can succeed by relying on the political and rhetorical skills of their leading practitioners and on alliances between those practitioners and political interests outside the scientific arena. The paper proceeds with an examination of the evolution of the central claims of consociational theorists, especially Lijphart, in response to criticism and a changing evidentiary base.

In his 1968 book, *The Politics of Accommodation*, Lijphart cited classics of political philosophy (Aristotle, Mill, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Madison) and well-known pluralist, group, and conflict theorists (including Leslie Lipson, Seymour Martin Lipset, Arthur F. Bentley, David B. Truman, and Lewis Coser) to portray the Dutch case as “deviant” with respect to what he described as three propositions of “pluralist theory.”<sup>7</sup> These were

1. “that viable democratic government faces grave obstacles in . . . societies with clearly discernible racial, linguistic, and religious differences”<sup>8</sup>
2. that “the existence of many secondary groups . . . help(s) preserve moderation and individual freedom”<sup>9</sup>
3. (quoting Lipset) “that the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of crosscutting, politically relevant affiliations”<sup>10</sup>

Lijphart also related his discussion to Gabriel Almond's 1956 contention that instability was to be expected in culturally heterogeneous

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion below on Lijphart's most recent intervention in this discussion; and see Arend Lijphart, “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation,” *American Political Science Review* 90 (June 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

societies—those divided by “mutually reinforcing cleavages.”<sup>11</sup> But Lijphart’s treatment of Almond in the book was perfunctory; nor did he use the terms “consociationalism” or “consociational democracy.” Instead, he employed the phrase “the politics of accommodation”—an evocative formulation, suggestive of Holland’s distinctive democratic success. He did not, however, translate that into a model of “accommodative” or “consociational” democracy that could produce stable democracy within a heterogeneous society—a framework that would require a substantial change in Almond’s typology.

Such a model is precisely what Lijphart offered in his 1969 *World Politics* article. He described it as a “research note,” intended as “a constructive attempt to refine and elaborate Almond’s typology of democracies”—a typology anchored in the expectation of democratic stability in socially integrated societies and of instability in fragmented societies.<sup>12</sup> Lijphart argued that there was need for a new category in Almond’s typology of democracies—the heterogeneous society/stable democracy. His logic, captured in the idea of “consociationalism,” was rendered plausible by the stable operation of democracy in such “culturally fragmented” or “divided” societies as Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria.

Although some of its formulations were eventually rejected by Lijphart himself, “consociationalism” as a model of political behavior and institutions had its clearest articulation in the 1969 article, which achieved some prominence by virtue of its publication in *World Politics*. It also served as the theoretical basis of a widely read 1974 volume on the topic edited by Kenneth D. McRae.<sup>13</sup> Hence, its characterization of consociational democracy and the conditions under which it could be expected to flourish largely defined the notion of “consociational democracy” for the wider field of comparative politics.<sup>14</sup>

The article emphasizes the key role leaders of rival cultural groups can play. These elites can understand the explosive dangers of majori-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>12</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 207.

<sup>13</sup> McRae, ed., *Consociational Democracy: Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Carelton Library no. 79, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Referenced either directly from *World Politics* or from the McRae volume, the article was listed as cited by the *Social Science Citation Index* at least 120 times between 1970 and 1994. An earlier article—Lijphart, “Typologies of Democratic Systems,” published in the very first issue *Comparative Political Studies* 1 (April 1968)—was listed as cited approximately seventy times during the same period. Although Lijphart referred to it in his *World Politics* article in the following year as “earlier and briefer” (p. 207n), the *Comparative Political Studies* article was not only longer but also in some ways a more systematic presentation of his basic ideas. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the analytic posture Lijphart adopted in that article was even more markedly positivist and methodologically orthodox

tarian democracy in societies where “political culture is deeply fragmented” or where society is “divided by sharp cleavages.”<sup>15</sup> Such leaders can then build institutions and foster policies to stabilize democracy by constraining certain forms of democratic competition. Lijphart takes pains to point out that such a possibility is ignored by Almond.

In setting out his challenge to Almond, Lijphart cites five publications by the latter that drew on pluralist theory to distinguish between three types of modern societies where democracy had been attempted. These were democracies of the “Anglo-American” type; “multiparty democracies,” exemplified by the Scandinavian countries, the Low Countries, and Switzerland; and “immobilist democracies,” whose prototypes were postwar Italian democracy, the Third and Fourth Republics in France, and Weimar Germany. Almond explained democratic stability in the first category, the “Anglo-American” type (including the “Old Commonwealth democracies”), by stressing crosscutting alliances associated with individuals linked by multiple group affiliations. According to this analysis, the “homogeneous, secular political culture” of these systems, combined with a unified but highly differentiated role structure, produces cross-pressures that militate against stigmatizing cultural groups. Potentially stigmatized groups manage to escape that fate because they contain individuals who are, or are likely to be, political allies of potential stigmatizers. As a result members of any population segment are discouraged from identifying more strongly with their own segment than with the society as a whole. Hence, even winner-take-all majoritarianism can produce stability, since the number of decisions/elections is not finite and the composition of majorities is expected to change significantly. Today’s losers, in other words, can support the system and acquiesce in decisions they oppose out of a belief that they will be tomorrow’s winners.

According to Lijphart, Almond attributed instability in the “continental European democracies” (the immobilist type) to the relative absence of “the kinds of ‘cross-pressures’ that moderate [their] rigid political attitudes.” Almond thus explained the immobilism of these systems as being “a consequence of the [fragmented] condition of the political culture.”<sup>16</sup> According to both Almond and Lijphart, democracy in such societies is paralyzed by cultural fragmentation and can rather easily give way to instability, authoritarianism, or even totalitarianism.

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than his approach in the *World Politics* version—a posture that, as we shall see, he substantially abandoned in the process of defending his ideas.

<sup>15</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 208.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 208.

The second category, including Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and Switzerland, appears in only some of the studies by Almond cited by Lijphart. Almond refers to these countries, according to Lijphart, as representing merely a combination of “some of the features of the Continental European and the Anglo-American” political systems—of standing “somewhere in between the Continental pattern and the Anglo-American.”<sup>17</sup> Lijphart, by contrast, believes these states constitute a category of stable democracy with its own distinctive logic. He then takes Almond to task for imprecisions and inconsistencies, for failing to theorize the pattern of stability they exhibit, and for failing to investigate or even notice the anomaly represented by cases of democratic stability that occur in the absence of the conditions specified as essential by pluralist theory.

Lijphart then asked a penetrating and conceptually sophisticated question. “In what respects are Switzerland, Scandinavia, and the Low Countries ‘in between’ the Anglo-American and Continental European democracies?” Rejecting Almond’s suggestion of a continuum of variation in democratic stability as linked to homogeneity of political culture, extent of role structure integration, or the aggregative function of political parties, Lijphart judged Almond’s typology fundamentally unsound. The small European democracies, Lijphart argued, did not fall in the middle of this continuum—neither with respect to the amount of democratic stability they display, nor with respect to the factors Almond presents as explaining variation in democratic stability.<sup>18</sup> Rather, Lijphart concluded, the evidence called for abandoning the idea of a single continuum in favor of a typology with a qualitatively distinct category of democracies, one that achieved and maintained stability by utilizing divisions among cultural segments.

Lijphart at work in the late 1960s was meticulous in his conceptual and evidentiary dissection of Almond’s work. Operating as a committed positivist social scientist, Lijphart was ready to accept (and exploit) Popperian and early-Lakatosian norms of scientific rigor, conceptual and definitional clarity, theoretical explicitness, and cruel use of evidence in the evaluation, refinement, and development of theories about political life. Lijphart treated Almond fairly, that is, as a researcher attempting to extend the range of claims about democratic stability to a wider comparative context while adhering to the core precepts and assumptions of the pluralist research program. Accordingly, Lijphart could use the standards of precision, consistency, and evidence within

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 210–11.

that program to identify the limitations of its core precepts. Finding that the pluralist research program could not remain true to the hard core of its presuppositions, Lijphart launched his own research program on how elite choice and “consociationally” structured political institutions could produce democratic stability—without cultural homogeneity, unified, society-wide systems of role differentiation, and pervasive crosscutting cleavages.

Lijphart explained democratic stability in his “deviant cases” by identifying a variable ignored by the pluralist research program.

According to the theory of crosscutting cleavages, one would expect the Low Countries, Switzerland, and Austria, with subcultures divided from each other by mutually reinforcing cleavages, to exhibit great immobilism and instability. But they do not. . . . [A] third variable can account for the stability of the consociational democracies: the behavior of political elites.<sup>19</sup>

Lijphart argued that despite tension, instability, and competition among elites, segment leaders can also produce stability, by making “*deliberate efforts to counteract the immobilizing and unstabilizing effects of cultural fragmentation.*”<sup>20</sup> In contrast to alternative interpretations of consociationalism, Lijphart’s view of these efforts was *not* as separately undertaken, serendipitously complementary policies. Rather he described, as the “essential characteristic of consociational democracy, not so much any particular institutional arrangement as the deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the system.”<sup>21</sup> Rejecting the term “grand coalition” to describe the cooperative efforts of all segment representatives on behalf of the system, Lijphart instead invoked a term he attributed to Ralf Dahrendorf—“elite cartel”<sup>22</sup>—which he used in his most succinct definition of consociational democracy: “Consociational democracy means government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented culture into a stable democracy.”<sup>23</sup>

Lijphart used the terms “elite cartel” or “cartel of elites” five times in his 1969 article.<sup>24</sup> The elite cartel had to meet four “requirements” in

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 212, emphasis in original.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Lijphart accurately cites Dahrendorf’s book *Society and Democracy in Germany* but fails to mention that Dahrendorf’s use of the term “cartel of elites” is part of a characterization of Holland, not as a “democracy,” but as “a condition of political stagnation . . . an unintentional authoritarianism.” See Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 276–77. As we shall see, this appeal to the authority of others for terms and definitions that are then used much differently than intended by their originators has been a regular feature of Lijphart’s work.

<sup>23</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 216.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the introduction of this term in the 1969 article was, without doubt, the most important difference between this version of consociationalism and that presented in the 1968 *Comparative Political Studies* article (fn. 14), in which the term does not appear.

order to fulfill the all-important role of a cooperative, purposive, cross-segmental leadership group that could bring stability to culturally fragmented democracies. These requirements, "logically implied by the concept of consociational democracy as defined in this paper," are as follows:

1. (the) ability to accommodate the divergent interests and demands of the subcultures . . .
2. (the) ability to transcend cleavages and to join in a common effort with the elites of rival subcultures . . .
3. (a) commitment to the maintenance of the system and to the improvement of its cohesion and stability . . .
4. (an) understand(ing) [of] the perils of political fragmentation<sup>25</sup>

Lijphart then surveyed "successful consociational democracies in the Low Countries, Switzerland, Austria, and Lebanon" in order to infer more general conditions "favorable to the establishment and persistence of this type of democracy."<sup>26</sup> He identified eight such conditions, providing illustrations for each from successful consociational democracies or from the work of notable political scientists (for example, Robert Dahl, Quincy Wright, David Easton, Sidney Verba, and Karl Deutsch) whose studies contain observations consistent with the eight hypotheses. According to Lijphart, the "*length of time a consociational democracy has been in operation*" helps produce "habitual" interelite cooperation. "*External threats*" and a "*multiple balance of power among the subcultures*" are both said to be likely to convince elites of the need for unity and cooperation. Meanwhile the task of the elite cartel is made easier if there is a "*relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus*" and if the different fragments are separated from one another by "*distinct lines of cleavage*" and thus have fewer opportunities for conflict with one another. This last condition has two other favorable consequences for consociationalism: strict compartmentalization fosters the "*internal political cohesion of the subcultures*" and it increases the likelihood that active parties and interest groups will in fact be those organized along subcultural lines, thereby ensuring that the cartel can provide "*adequate articulation of the interests of the subcultures.*" These last three factors make it easier for elites to deliver the acquiescence of their respective group members to the policies of the cartel. Lijphart comments that "(a) final factor favoring consociational democracy is *widespread approval of the principle of government by elite cartel.*"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 216.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 217–19, 221–22; all emphases in this paragraph are in the original.

Lijphart concluded his 1969 article with a reconstituted typology of democracies. He labeled homogeneous and stable democracies, not as "Anglo-American," but as "centripetal." Fragmented and unstable democracies were termed "centrifugal." Stable and fragmented democracies were assigned the name "consociational." Categorization within these three types was not permanent. After the demise of Weimar's centrifugal system, totalitarianism and defeat in war helped create conditions for a centripetal democracy in Germany ("the Bonn Republic"). Although the French Third and Fourth Republics were centrifugal democracies, Lijphart proposed that France could be transformed into a consociational democracy. What would be required, consistent with that which Lijphart emphasized throughout, were French elites willing to substitute "true statesmanship" for the "well-developed capacity for avoiding their responsibility," a characterization he attributes to Nathan Leites.<sup>28</sup>

### CONSOCIATIONALISM HAILED

In the late 1960s other scholars also investigated the idea that elites and/or appropriately structured institutions could preserve stability in deeply divided democracies. Their interest was prompted by failed modernization in the Third World seen as resulting from an upsurge of "primordialist" sentiments,<sup>29</sup> by signs that such parochial loyalties were also liable to disrupt putatively modern, industrialized democracies,<sup>30</sup> and by a turn from socioeconomic reductionism to theories focusing on the decisiveness of political leadership and political institutions.<sup>31</sup> Tracing the genealogy of the consociational idea, McRae pointed to Gerhard Lehbruch's 1967 and 1968 articles about "concordant democracy," W. T. Bluhm's 1968 article on "contractarian democracy" in Austria, Val Lorwin's 1962 article on "vertical pluralism," and his later work, based

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>29</sup> The locus classicus for this argument is Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963). In 1970 Donald Rothchild authored a review essay in *World Politics* on pluralism in the Third World. See Rothchild, "Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution," *World Politics* 22 (July 1970). Rothchild approached the problem in terms of "conflict regulation" and "hegemonial exchange" and made only passing reference to Lijphart's 1969 article; but he did cite the term "consociation" as it was used in an essay by M. G. Smith. See Smith, "Pluralism in Precolonial African Societies," in Leo Kuper and M. G. Smith, eds., *Pluralism in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>30</sup> In his *World Politics* article Lijphart cited (p. 220) the influential essay by Walker Connor, "Self-Determination: The New Phase," *World Politics* 20 (October 1967).

<sup>31</sup> On this point, see Samuel Huntington in his foreword to Eric A. Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*, Occasional Papers in International Affairs, no. 29 (Cambridge: Harvard Center for International Affairs, 1972).

on a 1969 paper, on "segmented pluralism" in Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.<sup>32</sup> In a 1969 paper Ronald Rogowski and Lois Wasserspring drew on this body of work to develop a deductive theory of "corporate consensualism."<sup>33</sup>

Lijphart's consociational formula displaced all of these concepts and theories, however. Indeed, in a nod to Lijphart's rhetorical and analytic success, McRae titled his book *Consociational Democracy*, even while including articles by several theorists who had advanced different formulations.<sup>34</sup> In 1974 Hans Daalder published a review essay in *World Politics* entitled "The Consociational Democracy Theme." The essay evaluated six books in three languages published between 1967 and 1974 dealing with the prospects for democratic stability in culturally fragmented societies.<sup>35</sup> Daalder hailed the "typological coining of the model of consociational democracy . . . [as] a major contribution to the literature," a conceptual advance that had acquired what he called the "imprimatur of the editors of the Little, Brown Series—Gabriel A. Almond, James S. Coleman, and Lucian W. Pye." This imprimatur was displayed by an advertisement for a 1972 book in that series by Kurt Steiner, *Politics in Austria*: it described the book as "showing 'the Austrian republic's transformation from the "centrifugal democracy" of the interwar period, to the "consociational democracy" of the Great Coalition after World War II, to the current "depoliticized democracy."'" Daalder referred to the various consociationalist and related authors as having formed, via their comments on one another's work, an "incipient school." Their success, he commented, demonstrated "that use of the small exotic case has theoretical significance."<sup>36</sup>

Daalder was the author of several articles on politics in Switzerland and in his own country, Holland. Indeed a substantial element in the warm reception accorded Lijphart for both his 1968 book and 1969 article was the excitement of scholars knowledgeable about one or more

<sup>32</sup> For complete references, see Kenneth D. McRae, "Introduction," in McRae (fn. 13), 2–8.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Rogowski and Lois Wasserspring, *Does Political Development Exist? Corporatism in Old and New Societies*, Sage Professional Paper, Comparative Politics Series, no. 01–024, vol. 2 (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1971). The authors report that this monograph was first presented as a paper at the 1969 annual conference of the American Political Science Association. See also Ronald Rogowski, *Rational Legitimacy: A Theory of Political Support* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>34</sup> McRae (fn. 32), 3ff. In his 1977 book Lijphart would use much the same argument as presented by McRae for preferring "consociationalism" to "segmented pluralism," "proportional democracy," and so forth. See Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 3–4.

<sup>35</sup> Daalder, "The Consociational Democracy Theme," *World Politics* 26 (July 1974).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 606, 609, 605.

of the small European democracies that provided his empirical base. Daalder described five of the six authors of the books he was reviewing as follows: Lehmbruch, "a German with close knowledge of Austria and Switzerland"; Lijphart, "a Dutchman who received his doctorate from Yale and studied and taught in the United States for twelve years before he returned to the Netherlands to take up a chair at Leiden University"; Steiner, "a Swiss who received a doctorate in Mannheim and is now Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina"; Powell, "an American . . . whose present book is based on original fieldwork in Austria"; and Lucien Huysse, "a Belgian who worked in Oxford for some time."<sup>37</sup> Via consociationalism these political scientists were able to capitalize on their specialized knowledge and enhance the prestige of these (often neglected) countries by theorizing the experience of small European states in a way that could expand prospects for democratic stability in the Third World and elsewhere.

Applying consociational theory to these countries, Lijphart and other early contributors to the research program were explicit about the questions they should try to answer. In early-Lakatosian terms, an expanding list of such questions, generated by work done under the rubric of consociationalism or implied by its logic, capable of attracting the attention of skilled social scientists, soluble through systematic empirical research and inferential elaboration of propositions, and constrained by the program's negative heuristic, is called a "progressive problem shift"—the sign of a successful scientific research program. Daalder provides the following list of research tasks:<sup>38</sup>

1. investigating the differential effects of political culture on prospects for consociational regimes
2. exploring boundaries between democratic and nondemocratic consociationalism
3. explaining the decline of consociationalist structures in Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland
4. analyzing the impact on consociationalist systems of cultural and ideological trends in the international arena
5. evaluating the capacity of consociational elites to absorb greater demands for participation from their constituencies

One of the six books included in Daalder's review essay was Eric A. Nordlinger's 1972 monograph *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*. Although he praised the book as "a courageous attempt to grapple with

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 609.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 616–20.

theoretical issues on a comparative basis," he also criticized it as being afflicted with "a somewhat arid quality," the result of the author's lack of "detailed first-hand knowledge of the countries on which he bases his theoretical reasoning."<sup>39</sup> These comments, while understandable as a reflection of Daalder's personal scholarly tastes, are also a harbinger of the degeneration of the consociational research program.

Nordlinger, for his part, took seriously the kind of questions Daalder identified as necessary for the development of consociational theory. Nordlinger tried to define terms (for example, "divided" versus "deeply divided") and specify propositions of consociationalist theory precisely enough to stipulate the empirical claims that were made and then distinguish those supported by available evidence from those that would have to be rejected or left for further study. His approach called for rigorous methods: eliminating explicitly normative elements; searching the histories of the countries usually used to exemplify consociationalism for limits to their corroborativeness; specifying conditions that would lead to consociational failure as well as success; and facing, at least partially, the tension between "democracy" and "elite accommodation" contained within the very idea of "consociational democracy." Nordlinger's effort produced a tightly woven but restrictive theory of the conditions under which "conflict regulation" could be achieved within "divided" but still "open" regimes. This complex set of testable propositions was founded on the parsimonious assumption that both elites and masses act to promote self-interests as they perceive those interests, rather than on the hope or expectation that elites would sacrifice their own interests for the greater good. In essence, Nordlinger theorized consociationalism as a Nash equilibrium that could arise when segmental elites found it preferable to institutionalize their intrasegmental predominance by restraining themselves in competition with one another.<sup>40</sup>

Nordlinger in fact anticipated most of the withering criticisms of Lijphart's work that would come in the mid-1970s and early 1980s—critiques of the imprecision of his terms, the awkwardness of his typol-

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 620–21.

<sup>40</sup> Among those who have tried to follow Nordlinger's approach, adhering in spirit if not in exact terminology to Lijphart's early work, are Brendan O'Leary, "The Limits to Coercive Consociationalism in Northern Ireland," *Political Studies* 37, no. 4 (1992); John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, "The Macro-Political Regulation of Ethnic Conflict," in John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, eds., *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: Case Studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1993), 35–37; Donald Rothchild, "Hegemonial Exchange: An Alternative Model for Managing Conflict in Middle Africa," in Dennis L. Thompson and Dov Ronen, eds., *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1986); and Ian Lustick, "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control," *World Politics* 31 (April 1979).

ogy, and his mischaracterization of key cases. In turn, Lijphart and other defenders of the consociational research program either ignored or implicitly rejected Nordlinger's approach—an approach based on trading the wide range of consociationalism's applicability (associated with its vagueness) and the high hopes that could be attached to its proliferation, for a tighter, bleaker, more limited, and more strictly positivist set of claims.

### CONSOCIATIONALISM CHALLENGED

The two most systematic critiques of the consociational democracy model were those written by Brian Barry in 1975 and by M.P.C.M. van Schendelen, in 1984.<sup>41</sup> Barry's review of the consociational democracy literature concentrated on Lijphart's work, evaluating empirical support for the proposition that politics, in this case "the practices of elite accommodation constituting 'consociational democracy,' was decisive in explaining "stable and effective democracy" in the presence of "isolated and dissensual blocs."<sup>42</sup> Specifically, Barry looked at the argument in Lijphart's 1968 book, that adoption of policies of "accommodation" by segment elites explained stability in Holland, and found it to be tautological. Lijphart's definition of "accommodation," as Barry shows, *includes* the elaborately specified claim that issues dividing polarized blocs are settled by leaders convinced of the need for settlement.<sup>43</sup> In other words, accommodation is simultaneously the successful settling of disputes between cultural fragments and the explanation for stable relations among cultural fragments. Barry demonstrates that whether or not Lijphart's account of Holland is an accurate description, it cannot be an explanation of Dutch political stability.

Barry identifies a similar problem with the term "consociational democracy" in Lijphart's 1969 *World Politics* article. On the one hand, Lijphart presented "government by elite cartel" (that is, consociational democracy) as the explanation for stability, rather than immobilisme, widespread violence, or other forms of instability, in societies with "fragmented political culture(s)." On the other hand, because there are so many separate but content-filled claims built into the "four requirements" Lijphart said were "logically implied" by the concept, classify-

<sup>41</sup> Barry, "Review Article: Political Accommodation and Consociational Democracy," *British Journal of Political Science* 5 (October 1975); M.P.C.M. van Schendelen, "The Views of Arend Lijphart and Collected Criticisms," *Acta Politica* 19 (January 1984).

<sup>42</sup> Barry (fn. 41), 488–89.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

ing a case as "consociational democracy" is tantamount to classifying it as a case of stability and democracy.<sup>44</sup> Thus Lijphart's definition of consociational democracy is too overloaded to do any substantial explanatory work.

Taking consociational democracy as a descriptive category rather than as an independent variable shifts attention to the typology Lijphart substituted for Almond's typology. Lijphart advances his list of possible combinations of stability and segmentation in democracies as exhaustive; by implication, then, *only* consociationalism can account for stable democracy in culturally fragmented societies. Once again Barry points to the tautological basis for the "truth" of Lijphart's claim that consociational democracies are *both* "fragmented but stable democracies" and countries with "government by elite cartel." So just as Almond's typology ruled out "any 'fragmented but stable' democracy," so Lijphart's typology ruled out any "fragmented but stable" society where "government by elite cartel" was not present.<sup>45</sup>

Barry then considered the accuracy of the case descriptions offered by Lijphart and other consociational theorists, basing his account of the cases on works authored by scholars participating in, or most in sympathy with, the consociationalist model. Citing the mildness of ethnic conflict in Switzerland, the use of majoritarian techniques such as binding referenda, and successful challenges to elite decisions, Barry observes that Switzerland is neither deeply divided, nor conflictual, nor consociational in design, nor stable because of undesigned consociational practices. "Switzerland," he concludes, "fails to fit [the model of consociational democracy] at every point."<sup>46</sup> And although Barry agrees with Lijphart and others that the Austrian Second Republic (1945–66) did conform closely to the elite cartel model, he challenges their proposition that consociationalism was a necessary condition for Austrian political stability in the Second Republic. According to Barry, the Austrian Catholic and socialist political parties were really not all that divided and conflict prone. Rather, the level of hostility between competing parties (Lijphart calls them "*laagers*") was low, and the restraining influence of the masses on their leaders was substantial—the opposite of what is entailed by the consociational model. Barry also points to confounding factors—economic prosperity and a European environment much more conducive to parliamentary democracy after

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 481, emphasis in original.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 486. Barry's discussion of Switzerland is based on work by Jürg Steiner and William R. Keech.

World War II than before it—that preclude using the Austrian case to confirm robust claims about the efficacy of elite choices and of political institutions for explaining increased democratic stability in that country after the war.<sup>47</sup>

Holland and Belgium remained, according to Barry, the two “classic cases” of consociational democracy. Accepting that consociationalism in those two countries “has contributed to the stability and general acceptability of the system in a way that a more majoritarian pattern of conflict-management would not,” Barry notes how similar these two cases are—contiguous countries with divisions rooted in “the church-state question and the challenge posed by the rise of the working-class movement.”<sup>48</sup> But, Barry argues, these divisions cannot be used to establish the applicability of the consociational model for societies divided into ethnic fragments. Thus, in Belgium the parties involved in consociational arrangements do *not* represent Flemish and Walloon sentiments; indeed, they actively oppose efforts to mobilize these linguistic/ethnic/regional identities. “Except where it is the prelude to peaceful fission of the state,” Barry warns against encouraging the formation of monolithic, politically antagonistic communities as a means of establishing consociationalism in ethnically divided societies. Leaders of such ethnically defined groups, he cautions, are likely to be caught in outbidding struggles with rivals within their segments, creating conditions for “potential civil war or of civil war averted by effective oppression by one group of the other.”<sup>49</sup>

In perhaps the most comprehensive critique of Lijphart’s theory ever published, the Dutch political scientist M.P.C.M. van Schendelen raised a question only alluded to by Barry: is the Netherlands itself really a valid illustration of consociational democracy?<sup>50</sup> The analysis focused on three of Lijphart’s works: the 1968 book, the 1969 *World Politics* article, and the 1977 book, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, the last

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 490–500. Barry’s analysis of Austria relies on work by P. G. J. Pulzer, William T. Bluhm, and G. Bingham Powell.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 504–5. Lorwin, Nordlinger, and Horowitz made similar assessments of the inappropriateness of consociationalism for societies that are “deeply divided” as opposed to divided in the manner of the small European democracies. Each therefore doubted that the model could usefully be applied to most Third World cases or to countries where class divisions coincided with cultural fragmentation. Val R. Lorwin, “Segmented Pluralism: Ideological Cleavages and Political Cohesion in the Smaller European Democracies,” in McRae (fn. 13), 35; Nordlinger (fn. 31), 92; and Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 571–72.

<sup>50</sup> See van Schendelen (fn. 41); and Barry (fn. 41), 501. For other effective critiques, see Adriano Pappalardo, “The Conditions for Consociational Democracy: A Logical and Empirical Critique,” *European Journal of Political Research* 9 (December 1981); and Sue M. Halpern, “The Disorderly Universe of Consociational Democracy,” *West European Politics* 9 (April 1986).

a reworked presentation of the theory and the work thereafter cited by Lijphart as his authoritative statement on the subject. Van Schendelen argued that the Dutch literature on the political history and dynamics of the Netherlands revealed a story very different from that presented by Lijphart to English-speaking scholars.<sup>51</sup> A close reading of this literature, he argues, shows that Lijphart's use of evidence in his depiction of Dutch political life from 1917 to 1967 as a successful, stabilizing consociational democracy was highly selective.<sup>52</sup>

Van Schendelen cites the Dutch sociologists J. P. Kruyt and H. Verwey-Jonker, who argued that the "pillarization" used by Lijphart to establish the segmentation of Dutch society was "seriously weakening" even in the 1950s, that cross-denominational cooperation was increasingly evident, and that coherent political subcultures were dissolving as "increasing numbers of people abstained from convergent memberships and preferred cross-cutting memberships."<sup>53</sup> Work by other scholars, including Lijphart himself, is said to show significant crosscutting cleavages.<sup>54</sup> Van Schendelen thus raises serious questions about Lijphart's characterization of the Netherlands as a culturally fragmented society saved from democratic instability only by consociationalism.<sup>55</sup>

At the heart of consociational theory, and of Lijphart's formulation in particular, is the decisive influence of elites committed to exercising restraint and accommodation in order to achieve system stability. While Hoogerwef, according to van Schendelen, did portray distances between Dutch elites as smaller than at the mass level, Scholten accounts for backroom deals among Dutch political leaders as stemming from a typical and nearly universal inclination of elites to use secrecy, depoliticization, and summit diplomacy to advance their own self-interest. Rather than imagine, à la Lijphart, a kind of altruistic, "system level" motive in the cooperative behavior one observes in the Dutch case, van Schendelen, citing Daudt, points to the "structure of the electoral system" (extreme proportional representation, with 10–14 parties in the Parliament) as creating incentive enough to explain cooperative behavior and the formation of large coalitions.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 48.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> See Lijphart (fn. 7), 89–92.

<sup>55</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 36. See also Ronald A. Kieve, "Pillars of Sand: A Marxist Critique of Consociational Democracy in the Netherlands," *Comparative Politics* 13 (April 1981); and Ilya Scholten, "Does Consociationalism Exist? A Critique of the Dutch Experience," in Richard Rose, ed., *Electoral Participation: A Comparative Analysis* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980).

<sup>56</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 37–38.

As for stability, van Schendelen agrees that as measured by protests, riots, and violent turmoil, Holland has been stable, but this was so already in 1917, before the consociational system was said to have gone into effect. Measured in the way that postwar Italy was measured by both Lijphart and Almond, however—by counting instances of government turnover—the Netherlands registers great instability. It had twenty-three different cabinets between 1917 and 1967, with caretaker governments ruling for an average of twenty-seven days per year. The reality, according to Kieve, was “political immobilism and deep inter-elite divisions.” “Immobilism,” of course, was the very term used by Almond and Lijphart to characterize the outcome of cultural fragmentation combined with democracy in the *absence* of consociationalism.<sup>57</sup>

Van Schendelen’s survey of research on the democratic nature of Dutch political life poses further problems for the theory. According to the standard of regular elections, he notes, Holland has been a democracy. But, as Lee Dutter puts the question directly: “Can the Netherlands really be called a democracy?”<sup>58</sup> Specifically, at what point, based on practices of exclusion, control, closed decision making, limits on majority influence, and other devices used by elite cartels, should a consociational system, however stable, be judged to no longer be democratic? Daalder, for his part, describes the “closed elite system” in Holland as an “oligarchy.”<sup>59</sup> And van Schendelen cites research depicting the Dutch population as resenting its victimization by parliamentary elites who do not represent its interests.<sup>60</sup> While not going so far as to describe the country as nondemocratic, van Schendelen echoes Barry’s criticism, that Lijphart packs too much unacknowledged theory into his typology. Van Schendelen challenges Lijphart’s position that Dutch political life should not be measured against an ideal model of democracy. He holds, contra Lijphart, that if consociationalism is less than ideal democracy but still democracy, then it should not be cast as a typological category of democracy but as a variable. This would recognize the possibility that under certain circumstances one could judge a case to be no longer democratic, regardless of how consociational it is.<sup>61</sup>

Van Schendelen seconds Barry’s criticism of circularity in the basic presentation of consociationalism and cites work by Boynton and

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Van Schendelen cites works in Dutch by J. van Putten, Geismann, and H. Daudt; see van Schendelen (*fn.* 41), 39–40.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Kwon that identifies the same problem.<sup>62</sup> But van Schendelen's catalog of Lijphart's questionable claims about Dutch political life reflects his interest in a problem that Barry did not stress: the problem of imprecision in the definition of key concepts and the various conditions said to be conducive to consociationalism. It is Lijphart's vagueness in this regard that encourages selective use of evidence in the stylization of case histories, prevents formulation of objective indicators of key variables, and precludes empirical testing.<sup>63</sup>

We have already seen how Lijphart's 1968 and 1969 definition of "accommodation" or "consociationalism" contained the theory he sought to promote. However, when it came to key elements of the theory—"democracy" and "stability" (the dependent variables) and "pluralism" or "cultural fragmentation" or "divided" or "deeply divided" societies (a necessary condition for applying the theory)—Lijphart failed to offer definitions of any kind. Only in his 1977 book did Lijphart respond to this criticism, offering explicit definitions of key terms—explicit, but far from precise.

"Democracy," he wrote, "virtually defies definition. Suffice it to say that it will be used here as a synonym of what Dahl calls 'polyarchy.' It is not a system of government that fully embodies all democratic ideals, but one that approximates them to a reasonable degree."<sup>64</sup> This is a definition that seems impossible to operationalize: what is meant by "reasonable"? what "democratic ideals" does he have in mind? Van Schendelen adds that Dahl's concept makes an oxymoron of consociational democracy: "In a polyarchy competition between the elites is, more than anything else, essential; in a consociation basically the opposite, namely intense collaboration, is crucial."<sup>65</sup>

Lijphart's definition of stability is similarly problematic. He begins by asserting that "[p]olitical *stability* . . . [is] . . . an almost equally difficult and ambiguous term."<sup>66</sup> Citing usages by Harry Eckstein and Leon Hurwitz, he explains that stability "will be used in this study as a multi-dimensional concept, combining ideas that are frequently encountered in the comparative politics literature: system maintenance, civil order, legitimacy, and effectiveness . . . [j]ointly and interdependently, these

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 43.

<sup>63</sup> On the general problem of calibrating the stylization of cases to make comparison possible but avoid selection bias, see Ian S. Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90 (September 1996), 605–18.

<sup>64</sup> Lijphart (fn. 34), 4.

<sup>65</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 32.

<sup>66</sup> Lijphart (fn. 34), 4, emphasis in original.

four dimensions characterize democratic stability." Again one encounters imprecision and the associated difficulty of developing coding rules to distinguish "unstable" from "stable" cases. Moreover, van Schendelen notes, Lijphart's invocation of Eckstein and Hurwitz as authorities for his usage is unsupported by any claims made by those authors. Hurwitz, in the work cited by Lijphart, discussed "not one but several conceptualizations of stability" concluding that "the concept of political stability remains as elusive as other abstract concepts," while Eckstein warned that his "four dimensions of stability" could be treated only as "tentative ideas" and as "provisional."<sup>67</sup>

Lijphart also drew on Eckstein to define "plural society." "Segmental cleavages," according to Lijphart, "may be of a religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic nature. A further characteristic . . . is that political parties, interest groups, media of communication, schools and voluntary associations tend to be arranged along the lines of segmental cleavages."<sup>68</sup> But as van Schendelen, citing Jürg Steiner and G. Bingham Powell, points out, with so many different kinds of cleavages, listed as dimensions which "may" determine whether the society is plural, and which could, via so many organizational expressions of the plural nature of society, "tend" to be arranged along segment lines, it becomes impossible to distinguish societies that Lijphart would classify as plural from those he would not classify as such. "On the basis of which criterion," van Schendelen asks, "can one say that some division is *not* a cleavage and that a cleavage is *not* segmental?"<sup>69</sup>

Lijphart's treatment of crosscutting cleavages is a spectacular illustration of the problem created by this vague definition of "fragmented," "segmented," or "plural." As we saw at the outset, the theory of consociationalism was advanced to explain the "puzzle" of democratic stability in the absence of crosscutting cleavages. But as one Dutch reviewer commented in response to Lijphart's first book, "Personally I think that the cleavages in the Netherlands are, generally speaking, more crosscutting than mutually reinforcing."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Lijphart himself seems to have had difficulty distinguishing between a society marked by crosscutting cleavages and one that he would classify as "plural," "segmented," or "fragmented." In *The Politics of Accommodation* he described "crosscutting links" in Holland: "[R]eligious and class lines in Holland

<sup>67</sup> Hurwitz and Eckstein as cited in van Schendelen (fn. 41), 33.

<sup>68</sup> Lijphart (fn. 34), 3-4, emphasis in original.

<sup>69</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 31, emphasis in original.

<sup>70</sup> Andries Hoogerwerf, review of *The Politics of Accommodation*, *American Political Science Review* 62 (December 1968), 1350.

run at right angles to each other . . . [and are] . . . an important factor which . . . at least mitigates the effects of the poor integration of Dutch society." As a result of these crosscutting cleavages, Lijphart concluded, "party leaders are under constant cross pressures from different wings of the party, which predispose them to moderation and compromises in both intraparty and interparty relations."<sup>71</sup>

In his 1969 *World Politics* article Lijphart omitted any discussion of crosscutting cleavages as a factor conducive to consociational success, whereas in 1977 he revived the idea, though his thinking remained obscure. Although "the theory of consociational democracy does not rely on the presence of crosscutting cleavages as a primary explanation of the political stability of plural societies . . . crosscutting divisions of equal or unequal intensities are a factor of subsidiary importance, and they may or may not be favorable to consociationalism." Thus, Lijphart's 1977 multivalent definition of "segmented" does not seem to eliminate confusion, since a factor (crosscutting cleavages) contrary to a necessary condition (segmentalism) is listed as a contributing element in the theory (consociationalism). Confusion continues to mount in the book's conclusion where "pluralism," characterized by crosscutting cleavages in much of the literature cited by Lijphart, is employed as a synonym for the "segmentalism" or "fragmentation" of a "plural" society marked by the *absence* of crosscutting cleavages.<sup>72</sup>

As noted above, Lijphart listed eight (as I count them) conditions as favoring the success of consociationalism. Having dropped five and added three or four (depending on how one counts), Lijphart ends up in 1977 with a list of six or seven conditions conducive to consociational success (including some crosscutting cleavages).<sup>73</sup> Van Schendelen remarks that all of the conditions are "empty," because none of them can be tested in any practical way.<sup>74</sup> This is so because, as Lijphart him-

<sup>71</sup> Lijphart (fn. 7), 88–89, 205.

<sup>72</sup> At the end of the book Lijphart presents a graph treating pluralism as a variable that, as it increases, slightly increases the likely success of consociationalism. As the degree of pluralism increases beyond a certain point, however, the expectations of consociational success decline (though not as rapidly as expectations of successful centripetal democracy) until such a high degree of pluralism is reached that any kind of democracy, including consociationalism, is doomed. Lijphart (fn. 34), 237. See also fn. 77.

<sup>73</sup> In 1985 Lijphart wrote that in his 1977 book, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, he "listed nine conditions conducive" to consociational democracy. See Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa*, Policy Papers in International Affairs, no. 24 (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1985), 114. In the pages he cites there are indeed nine subheadings for topics treated as such conditions. But these nine include "crosscutting cleavages" which he describes on the next page of this 1985 book as "not a favorable condition," emphasizing that "just because it was a subheading doesn't mean I meant it as a favorable condition." It is thus difficult to tell exactly how many conditions he did list as "conducive" in 1977.

<sup>74</sup> Van Schendelen (fn. 41), 34.

self emphasizes, neither separately nor jointly do these conditions ensure the presence or success of consociationalism.

Van Schendelen concludes that Lijphart probably cared little about the empirical validity of his theory or about evaluating its robustness systematically. Citing the request from the Legislative Assembly of KwaZulu for Lijphart's help in designing a consociational solution for South Africa, van Schendelen repeated Barry's warning against overzealous application of the model as a normative guide for the construction and reconstruction of states. Lijphart, he opines, "seems to attach more value to the theory's potential for engineering societies than to any other criterion of science." Thus does van Schendelen explain Lijphart's movement away from his early notion of consociationalism as a specifically Dutch phenomenon, or as an unusual constellation of practices and circumstances found in several small European democracies, and toward a much more expansive view of consociationalism as a formula to be applied in almost any country facing political instability stemming from intergroup conflict.<sup>75</sup>

#### LIJPHART RESPONDS: THE SHIFT TO LATE LAKATOS

Lijphart and his followers made some effort to respond to criticisms regarding the analytic rigor of his concepts and models, errors of inference, and interpretations of evidence.<sup>76</sup> But Lijphart's primary reaction was based on normative appeals accompanied by an epistemological shift and an evangelical prescription of consociationalism for most if not all politically troubled societies: "Consociational theory asserts that the probability of successful majoritarianism is *always* much smaller than that of successful consociationalism. Hence it *never* makes sense to recommend majority rule instead of consociational democracy for a plural society."<sup>77</sup> In the terms this essay has used, Lijphart abandoned early-Lakatosian criteria for good social science (progressive iterations of testable and increasingly robust explanatory claims within a stable

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, 26.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Conway W. Henderson, "Comment: Consociational Democracy and the Case of Switzerland," *Journal of Politics* 43 (November 1981), 1232-35; and Pierre du Toit, "Consociational Democracy and Bargaining Power," *Comparative Politics* 19 (April 1987).

<sup>77</sup> Lijphart (fn. 73), 101, emphasis added. The extremely broad referent for this statement derives in part from the expansive and ambiguous definition of "plural," a term, he observes, that "is just about as difficult to define precisely as the concept of democracy." Explaining that societies vary from 0 percent to 100 percent plural, Lijphart warns that "the degrees of pluralism are still not exactly measurable, and a judgment of the extent to which a given society satisfies each of the criteria is necessarily 'impressionistic' but unfortunately no better method is available in the current stage of development of the social sciences"; see Lijphart (fn. 73), 87.

framework of presuppositions and definitions) for late-Lakatosian criteria (effectiveness in meeting the goals, whether personal or political, of the leaders of the research program).

Lijphart's most systematic and explicit response to his critics came in his 1985 book *Power-Sharing in South Africa*. However, most of the points made by Lijphart pertain to side comments made by critics or to interpretations that defang their main contentions. David D. Laitin characterized Lijphart's technique in this book as resembling that of "Cyrano de Bergerac, sword in hand, killing off all comers. This battle is truly valiant even though the reader hardly hears the full voices of the critics; they appear to be advancing on Lijphart without weapons."<sup>78</sup>

For example, defending consociational democracy theory against criticism that it should not automatically be considered "democratic" because of control over and exclusion of masses from meaningful political participation, Lijphart ignores his own definitional use of the concept of "elite cartel." He focuses instead on the element of secrecy in consociational politics, averring that secrecy figures in the political activity of elites in all societies. He thereby shifts attention to a minor, but related point and away from the more fundamental problem. The effect is to preserve consociationalism's attractive democratic reputation without revisiting the problem of defining it. Lijphart is content to conclude summarily that consociational democracy "has been amply defined and . . . nothing needs to be added to it." He thereby avoids the need to square his declaration that "[t]here is nothing in consociationalism that true democrats have to be ashamed of . . . [i]t is fully democratic . . . just as democratic as majoritarianism"<sup>79</sup> with his earlier description of "governance by elite cartel" as requiring "elite dominance," "firm control," and "oligarchical control" within segments comprising a consociational polity.<sup>80</sup>

With prescription and engineering rather than explanation as the main objectives, and with widespread implementation as the mark of success, what seems to have come to matter most to Lijphart was the

<sup>78</sup> David D. Laitin, "South Africa: Violence, Myths, and Democratic Reform," *World Politics* 39 (January 1987), 263.

<sup>79</sup> Lijphart (fn. 73), 110–11, 84n, 109.

<sup>80</sup> Lijphart (fn. 7), 140. In 1977 Lijphart had already indicated his discomfort with this logically important but normatively unattractive aspect of consociationalism by complaining that Brian Barry's arguments were "concentrat(ing) too much on the problem of elite control of the segments"; see Lijphart (fn. 34), 234. It should be noted that in his 1985 book Lijphart repeatedly blames the concerns of critics on exaggerations and errors found in his early work on consociationalism, but he does not explain what he means, thus enabling him to claim that the hard core of his research program remains intact while making it impossible to separate out for any given time the claims, definitions, and hypotheses he still stands by from those that he has discarded. See Lijphart (fn. 73), 83, 115n.

normative and political value of arguments and evidence likely to rally support for or reduce opposition to “consociationalism” as a political formula. Hence, while admitting its “imperfectly democratic nature,” Lijphart declared that he “still fully support[ed] the proposition that plural societies do not have two alternative democratic options and that consociationalism is their only democratic option.” Instructively, his evaluation of what he described as a nondemocratic, “quasi-consociational” constitutional reform proposal developed by the South African government in 1983 turned on assessing its inclusion of some “consociational elements” as a “favorable development” against the “effect of giving consociationalism a bad name.”<sup>81</sup>

Lijphart works hard in his 1985 book to adapt consociational theory to a new academic environment. Thus, in the late 1960s and early 1970s he offered consociationalism as a meliorative response to a world of states riven by obvious and essentially noncontingent cultural divisions,<sup>82</sup> citing work by Walker Connor and others. He directed the positive heuristic of the research program toward the problem of variation in relations among segments whose identity was obvious and whose existence could be taken for granted. Although the 1985 book retains a reference to “segmental divisions” as “social facts and not a mere fiction serving the political elite,” it avoids any commitment to the essentialist idea of “primordial” identities. Instead Lijphart adopts the (now dominant) constructivist view of cultural identities—that group identities are not primordially given and unproblematically evident but are contingent upon and identifiable from political processes. Accordingly, he argues that South Africa is plural not because of a division between a black majority and a white minority (difficult for consociationalism) but because of divisions among many ethnic/tribal groups, both black and white. This attempt to extend the reach of consociationalism is, however, based on propositions that in fact contradict the fundamental assumptions that undergird it. This departure from the research program’s negative heuristic, though unacknowledged, produces multiple contradictions. “Pluralism” is thus presented variously as (1) a variable that can range in any society from 0 percent to 100 percent (2) a categorical fact (a society is either plural or not) whose appreciation precedes determination, through elections, of the *particular* segments which endow the society with its “plural character” and (3) a “social

<sup>81</sup> Lijphart (fn. 73), 109, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 220; idem (fn. 34), 16.

fact” whose particular lineaments present themselves clearly because of the obvious and noncontingent character of real segmental divisions.<sup>83</sup>

The 1985 book contains many examples of Lijphart’s substantial shift in epistemological commitments and scholarly purposes. But inferring this shift from specific instances of argument, terminology, and evidence use is not necessary. Despite categorical affirmations of the positivist credentials of consociational theory (“The theory of consociational democracy is a basically valid empirical theory”),<sup>84</sup> Lijphart explicitly rejects precision, consistency, and measurement against evidence as tests of its value.

Researchers who insist on the exact measurement of their variables are likely to get bogged down in measurement problems, and hence they may never engage in the more important scientific task of establishing empirical relationships among the variables. It is much better to use a simple, rough, and indeed “impressionistic” twofold or threefold classification of the variables—for instance, a homogeneous versus a plural society, consociational versus majoritarian democracy, and civil peace versus violence—and to relate these variables to each other than to spend all of one’s time in a probably futile effort to find exact measurements. Van Schendelen’s unrealistically high standards of empirical research would have made the development of consociational theory as well as the formulation of consociationalism as a normative model impossible. Methodological perfectionism is extremely debilitating for political theory and practice.<sup>85</sup>

This is a standard in opposition to the standards employed by Nordlinger, Barry, and van Schendelen. It even contradicts those Lijphart himself employed, using evidence and careful exegesis of theoretical and inferential logics to launch consociational democracy theory as a solution to logical and empirical problems in the pluralist theories of Bentley, Truman, and Almond. Lijphart’s struggle over time thus emerges as mainly political, to affirm consociationalism as valid (almost) regardless of its scientific status, because it serves the ends he values. Accordingly, Lijphart gives full-throated endorsement to consociationalism as a “normative model” for engineering a better state of affairs than that possible according to any other formula, democratic or otherwise.

In their extended reviews of *Power-Sharing in South Africa*, Laitin and John McGarry and S. J. R. Noel make this point, arguing that it follows from Lijphart’s previous writings that South Africa would *not* be an encouraging site for consociationalism. Laitin characterizes Lijp-

<sup>83</sup> Lijphart (fn. 73), 68, 87, 108.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–88.

hart's effort as an exercise in Sorelian myth making and agrees with van Schendelen's description of Lijphart's propositions as "empty." "If conditions are favorable for consociationalism," Laitin observes, Lijphart's theory leads him to propose a consociational system; if conditions are unfavorable, he proposes the same."<sup>86</sup> Hence, Lijphart fails to consider the threat of black majority violence as a decisive factor in the political equation, an omission Laitin attributes to the real (nonanalytic) purpose of Lijphart's project—to create a politically useful resource, a utopian "consociationalist" myth, for societies (including South Africa) he thinks need to believe in the peaceable attainment of democracy stability.<sup>87</sup> Along these same lines McGarry and Noel interpret Lijphart's insistence on applying consociationalism to South Africa as evidence that

the original descriptive and explanatory purpose of Lijphart's theory has come to be largely overshadowed by its prescriptive and normative implications . . . that . . . Lijphart himself . . . has become progressively more concerned with specifying the circumstances in which consociational democracy is both possible and the most appropriate form of government.<sup>88</sup>

In this late-Lakatosian posture, methodology is a political weapon rather than a tool for improving theory, allowing Lijphart to shift between impressionistic and precise uses of definition and evidence. Employing precise use of evidence and analysis to defeat alternatives to his position, he delegitimizes this technique as a basis for criticizing consociationalism and makes every possible allowance for the "impressionistic" nature of social science where evidence or logic is inconvenient. Ignoring the principle of parsimony, he protects his research program via ad hoc and inconsistent amendments to what had been its "hard core," basing himself on appeals to the authority of scholars who reviewed his work positively, to the sheer number of consociationalist studies of various countries, and to the attention accorded the theory by South African politicians and constitutional designers.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Laitin (fn. 78), 265.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 275–77.

<sup>88</sup> McGarry and Noel, "The Prospects for Consociational Democracy in South Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 27 (March 1989), 4–5, emphasis in original. Lijphart's lack of restraint in his application of consociationalist formulas and his singularly close identification with the term create problems for scholars such as McGarry and his collaborator, Brendan O'Leary, who have sought to use consociationalist propositions rigorously and selectively. See their interchange with one critic who uses Lijphart's shifting meanings to criticize their work. Paul Dixon, "The Politics of Antagonism: Explaining McGarry and O'Leary," *Irish Political Studies* 11 (1996), 130–41, 155–59; McGarry and O'Leary, "Proving Our Points on Northern Ireland (and Giving Reading Lessons to Dr. Dixon)," *Irish Political Studies* 11 (1996), 142–54.

<sup>89</sup> At the beginning of the chapter written as a response to his critics, Lijphart includes footnotes listing 104 separate published studies of various countries "from a consociational perspective." See Lijphart (fn. 73), 84n.

## CONCLUSION: POLITICS OVER EVIDENCE IN LIJPHART'S INDIA

This review of the consociationalist research program, its trajectory, and the changing methodological rationale of its leading exponent might well have ended in the mid-1980s. There was a general slackening of interest in the idea after that, as increasingly influential constructivist, hegemonic, and rational choice approaches came to challenge various key elements of Lijphart's consociationalism.<sup>90</sup> First, scholars seem increasingly skeptical that cultural group leaders generally prefer self-restraining accommodationism to outbidding aggressiveness. Second, partisans of democracy have been dissatisfied with a notion of democracy requiring low levels of popular participation. And finally, collapse or transformation of previously exemplary consociational countries and confusion over how deeply divided a society must or should be for consociational institutions to work have made it difficult to restore focus to the consociational program. In recognition of these trends, perhaps, and desiring to promote the "essence of consociationalism . . . the search for broadly acceptable compromises," Lijphart himself developed overlapping notions of "power sharing" and "consensus democracy" that could be applied to societies which were not "deeply divided."

Nonetheless in the mid-1990s Lijphart again raised the banner of consociational evangelism. In 1995 he hailed the "thoroughly consociational character" of the Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland proposed by the British government.<sup>91</sup> More spectacularly, in a recent article in the *American Political Science Review*, he acclaimed India as a dramatic confirmation of consociational theory. In fact, the article constitutes an excellent illustration of how Lijphart's move toward an "impressionistic" social science has allowed him to use the language of scholarly rigor, absent its substance, to advance his political objectives in late-Lakatosian style.

A classic element in Lakatos's theory was a reconsideration of the role of "crucial experiments"—observations interpreted as dramatic victories and/or decisive defeats for scientific theories or families of theo-

<sup>90</sup> According to the University of Michigan's index of dissertation abstracts, consociationalism was the focus of twenty-seven Ph.D. dissertations between 1980 and 1989 (more than half of these appeared in the period 1980–82.), but only of eight from 1990 to 1995. No dissertations on consociationalism were listed for 1994, 1995, or the first quarter of 1996.

<sup>91</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Theory and the Case of Northern Ireland" (Paper presented at the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 31–September 3, 1995), 5. Two decades earlier Lijphart judged Northern Ireland as unfit for consociational treatment, recommending partition instead. See Lijphart "Review Article: The Northern Ireland Problem—Cases, Theories, and Solutions," *British Journal of Political Science* 5 (January 1975).

ries. Although he doubted that these events were ever quite what they seemed or were made to seem, (early) Lakatos did ascribe real importance to the ability of a research program to transform an anomaly into a profoundly confirming case of its hard-core theoretical propositions.<sup>92</sup> Despite what I have shown as Lijphart's abandonment of the epistemological premises of this approach to social science, this is precisely what he sought to do in his recent treatment of India.

Lijphart sets the stage by characterizing "consociational theory" as having had "a strong influence on comparative politics," of having "spawned a vast literature," and as having "become a widely accepted conceptual framework for the analysis of democracies that can be regarded as the prototypes of power-sharing." Its "otherwise unblemished empirical validity," however, has "remained vulnerable on one major count: the glaring exception of India."<sup>93</sup> Lijphart's purpose here is to eliminate that one "exception" to the theory and turn it instead into spectacular corroboration. For this, he needed two basic elements. First, having previously described India as neither "consociational" nor a "long-term democracy,"<sup>94</sup> he needed to recode it as both. Second, since India (according to Lijphart) is now increasingly unstable, the period of Indian consociationalism must be seen as having occurred prior to the onset of this instability. With these two elements in place, the explanatory power of consociational theory can be revealed by the onset of instability in Indian democracy *after* the abandonment or degradation of consociational practices.

Despite Lijphart's assertions to this effect, however, what the exercise actually shows is how an impressionistic conception of social science (such as Lijphart articulated in 1985) can afford expansive rhetorical opportunities to a research program with aspirations for near universal application. Also associated with this impressionistic approach are vague and elastic coding rules that permit extreme selectivity in the use of evidence. His argument regarding India is summed up as follows:

The evidence clearly shows India has always had a power-sharing system of democracy. . . . As Indian democracy has become less firmly consociational, intergroup tensions and violence have increased. If this reinterpretation is correct—as I shall try to demonstrate in this article—India is no longer a deviant case for consociational theory, and, in fact, becomes an impressive confirming case.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Lakatos (fn. 1), 154–74.

<sup>93</sup> Lijphart (fn. 6), 258, 259.

<sup>94</sup> Lijphart (fn. 34), 225; and *idem* (fn. 73), 39.

<sup>95</sup> Lijphart (fn. 6), 259.

Lijphart classifies India, operating under the "Congress Party system," as "fully" consociational in its first two decades and "basically" so "in more recent decades."<sup>96</sup> This classification emphasizes as decisive the consensual and broadly aggregative, representative character of the Congress Party.<sup>97</sup> This change in coding rules was essential because every defining feature of consociationalism listed in the 1969 article was absent in India. Thus, Indian politics featured majoritarian and other distinctly nonconsociational institutions—centralized federalism, one-party majority cabinets, a "highly disproportional electoral system," political parties unrepresentative of the groups whose conflicts threaten civil peace (Muslims versus Hindus; lower- versus upper-caste Hindus), and rule by powerful prime ministers (Nehru in particular), rather than by groups of accommodating elites.

To classify the Indian case as consociational, Lijphart had to ignore or minimize these factors and instead look to practices that could be seen as consistent with some element of consociationalism or at least as "conducive" to consociationalism in any one of Lijphart's various formulations. For example, he interpreted the Congress Party's inclusiveness and "political dominance" and the heterogeneous cultural complexion of many cabinets as indicating "a consociational grand coalition,"<sup>98</sup> even though the party never won a majority of the Indian vote and even though cabinets had token, not representative, membership from different cultural groups. Although in the South African case Lijphart explains that the parties produced by elections would ipso facto indicate which homogeneities and cleavages made the society "plural," in the Indian case he ignores the absence of parties representing these groups. Instead he takes the state's acceptance of religious differences in the domain of personal law, government financing of religiously based school systems, and conformance of some Indian state boundaries to linguistic patterns to meet the consociational standard for segmental autonomy. India's plurality-based, majoritarian electoral system can be made "consociational" by attributing primary importance, not to religion or caste, but to the linguistic factor, according to which many (linguistic) minorities have their own states and predominate in them by virtue of nonproportional elections. Likewise, the prin-

<sup>96</sup> Lijphart (fn. 6), 262.

<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that in his *World Politics* article Lijphart had criticized Almond for using the presence of "aggregative" political parties to classify democracies. To make his point, he identified such parties as operating within one segment of a consociational polity (the Belgian Catholic party), as well as in a nonconsociational "centrifugal" democracy (Italian Christian Democrats). Lijphart (fn. 5), 210.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

principle of majority veto is said to have resulted in a language policy that did not establish Hindi as the exclusive official language. No constitutional establishment of minority veto is said to be necessary because of crosscutting cleavages (here appearing in a crucial supporting role for consociationalism) that divide the Hindu majority by language, caste, and sect.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, in 1996 Lijphart found a way to place India in the consociational camp. In 1969, he described “the essential characteristic of consociational democracy” as “not so much any particular institutional arrangement as the *deliberate joint* effort by the *elites* to stabilize the system.”<sup>100</sup> Lijphart’s 1996 description of India shows how dramatically the meaning of consociationalism had to be changed. In this version India is consociational even though Lijphart could find no deliberate or joint stabilizing effort by elites and even though he describes the mechanism that produces stabilizing practices as “incremental and sometimes haphazard” and as implemented, not by a cartel of elites, but by one great man—Jawaharal Nehru. Despite Nehru’s failure to grasp the (putatively) consociational logic of the system, it is his leadership, Lijphart declares in 1996, that “from the perspective of consociational theory,” makes “the adoption of power sharing by India and its maintenance for nearly half a century . . . not at all unexpected or surprising.”<sup>101</sup>

Lijphart then lists nine conditions said to favor the development and success of consociationalism. As with South Africa in 1985 and Northern Ireland in 1995, he rates India favorably—meeting seven or eight of the nine criteria. And here again loose coding rules lead to systematic selection bias. For example, Indian groups are said to be “roughly the same size” (good for consociationalism) by ignoring the Hindu-Muslim split and characterizing India as divided into “very many minorities” with no predominant groups. An “external threat” to post-independence India (favorable for consociationalism) is also identified as the brief and politically unimportant 1962 “war” with China—not the salient and chronic threat from Pakistan (about which Lijphart says only that wars with that country did not “inflare” Muslim-Hindu relations).<sup>102</sup>

The last step in the argument is to explain instability arising from Muslim-Hindu clashes as a result of a “weakening of power-sharing in

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 261. With the “numerical majority” of Hindus thus divided, Lijphart declares that there really is no “political majority in India.”

<sup>100</sup> Lijphart (fn. 5), 213, emphasis added.

<sup>101</sup> Lijphart (fn. 6), 262.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 263.

India after the late 1960s." The problem here is twofold. The main evidence for a weakening of power-sharing practices is an increase in levels of mass political participation. To the extent that "mounting democratic activism"<sup>103</sup> has made India less consociational, the reader is less apt to accept the original thesis, repeated in 1985, that consociationalism is "fully democratic," since increasing democracy would appear to mean decreasing consociationalism. More importantly, while the traces of "power sharing" or "consociationalism" that Lijphart has gleaned from the whole panoply of Indian political practices mostly pertained to relations among linguistic and regional groups, the instability Lijphart now observes in India is traced almost entirely to surging demands by lower-caste groups and by the powerful mobilization of Hindutva and Muslim sentiments. Since with few exceptions the consociationalist-type practices Lijphart found in India were not directed to the amelioration of these cleavages, the weakening of Indian consociationalism cannot be used to explain the turmoil said to surround them in recent years.

Lijphart's conclusion is that his research on India "strengthens consociational theory by removing the one allegedly deviant case and by showing instead that the crucial case of India is unmistakably a confirming case." With an impressionistic methodological posture, flexible rules for coding data, and an indefatigable, rhetorically seductive commitment to promoting consociationalism as a widely applicable principle of political engineering, it is hardly surprising that Lijphart would assert the "close fit between the Indian case and consociational theory"<sup>104</sup> or that he would suggest that further variants of consociationalism are to be found in Mexico and Japan. The thrust of my argument, however, is that to the extent his triumphal claims about the Indian case are accepted and his suggestions for further research adhered to, what will have been corroborated is not the empirical validity of consociational theory but the late-Lakatosian theory of what can drive a "successful" research program.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 263, 264.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 266, 265.