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Professor Paul Dixon
Visiting Professor
Birkbeck College
University of London
p.dixon@bbk.ac.uk

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Introduction

The interpretation of the Northern Ireland Peace Process is highly controversial because it not only has implications for the future of Northern Ireland, but general 'lessons' are also drawn for dealing with global conflict. The academic literature can be usefully divided into Constitutional Traditionalists and New Constitutionalists. *Constitutional Traditionalists* believe that they have the universal solutions for global conflict. While *New Constitutionalists* argue that successful constitutions are and should be flexible and pragmatic to deal with the political context and ongoing conversations or debates about constitutional change.

Constitutional Traditionalists: 'One size fits all'

Constitutional Traditionalists claim that they have the single correct, technocratic interpretation of agreements such as the Belfast/Good Friday (1998) and St Andrews (2006) Agreements. They use this claim to try and influence ongoing debates about the reform of the institutions, Brexit and the future of Northern Ireland.

Consociationalists are dominant within the academic literature. They argue that the Belfast Agreement 1998 was built on a sectarian/communal logic and, therefore, the Agreement should be implemented to reinforce communalism. This is because they believe that reinforcing communalism and segregation ("Good fences make good neighbours") demobilises the people and allows political elites to cut deals over their heads. They, therefore, tend to be hostile to any attempts to reform the Northern Irish institutions to make them more democratic and diminish the importance of communalism by, for example, removing or reducing the influence of designations (Dixon 2020).

On Northern Ireland, Consociationalists tend to use their approach to advance Irish nationalism if not republicanism (Dixon 2018a 76-77). Although the BFA was supposed to be based on 'moderate' powersharing – between the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Alliance Party, and the Ulster Unionist Party – Consociationalists justified the triumph of the

hardline parties in 2007. By 2017 they had decided that the conflict was resolved. Brexit seems to have led to a shift among Consociationalists towards arguing in favour of Irish unity rather than powersharing. Nationalist politicians intimately involved in the negotiations of the BFA, such as Martin Mansergh, have doubted that Bertie Ahern or Tony Blair had ever heard of Consociationalism.

No leading political actor in Britain and Ireland has claimed that Consociationalism influenced their thinking or was in any way a major influence on the negotiations. Indeed, the Agreement was explicit in seeking to transcend communal divisions. For example:

> . . . An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing. (Belfast Agreement 1998: p.18, para. 13)

Advocates of a *Cosmopolitan* (Civil Society or Transformationalist) approach, reinforce the Consociationalists' claims because they argue that communalism was reinforced by the Belfast Agreement. They argue that since communalism is the problem in Northern Ireland anything that can be done to reduce its importance, whether in the constitutional architecture or in wider societal reform, would make the region less likely to return to violence and improve community relations. Cosmopolitans support the removal of designations and prefer weighted majorities to encourage Northern Ireland to go beyond its communal divisions towards a less polarised and more egalitarian future (Wilson 2010).

Hardline loyalists and dissident or radical republicans share a hostility to the compromise represented by the Belfast Agreement and work for the collapse of powersharing and a return to war.

New Constitutionalists: Practical Solutions

New Constitutionalists reject the idea that there are simple, universal 'solutions' to the diversity of global conflict. Peter Harris and Ben Reilly argued in their handbook *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict*

> '… It would be ludicrous to prescribe one overall single design for use across a variety of situations, each in many ways unique. … Anyone can suggest *ideal* solutions; but only those involved can, through negotiation, discover and create the shape of a *practical* solution.' (Harris and Reilly 1998: 2-3)

New Constitutionalists argue that successful agreements should be ambiguous, dynamic, and open to interpretation because it is this fluidity that allows politicians to reach accommodation. Constitutions are not endpoints which closes off debate but rather should be seen as part of an ongoing process, or conversation. The constitutional process should not be seen in isolation from the wider political culture, since it is this culture and context which shapes politics and 'the art of the possible'. The dilemma is to conduct government on agreed principles and with predictability but to 'avoid freezing into place the voices of one moment' (Hart 2001: 156).

Political actors employed theatrical political skills to successfully negotiate the Belfast Agreement and this involved tough negotiations, 'constructive ambiguities' and deception. An accommodation was reached but it required ongoing negotiations and the theatrical skills of politicians from all sides to keep the peace process alive and transform Northern Ireland (Dixon 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aspiration to transform Northern Ireland's political culture and make it less communally antagonistic has been widely expressed (at times) across the political spectrum. But this process will require 'political skills' and pragmatism in order to achieve a compromise that is deliverable and sustainable across the political parties.

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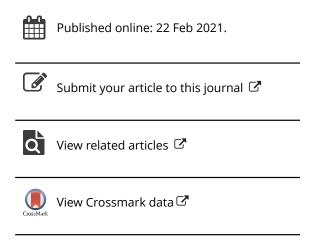# Bringing politics back in: interpretations of the peace process and the security challenge in Northern Ireland

Paul Dixon

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Bringing politics back in: interpretations of the peace process and the security challenge in Northern Ireland

Paul Dixon

Department of Politics School of Social Sciences Birkbeck, University of London, London, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT
There are contrasting interpretations of the Northern Ireland peace process which have competing implications for the lessons to be drawn from the conflict. This article offers a Constructivist Realist critique of three leading perspectives on the peace process: Neoconservative, Cosmopolitan and Conservative Realists (or Consociationalists). The Neoconservative perspective emphasises the importance of security policy in defeating terrorists before negotiations. By contrast, Cosmopolitans and Conservative Realists emphasise the importance of constitutions and tend to ignore security. Constructivist Realists argue that all three accounts are over-generalised, provide inadequate understandings of politics and, therefore, the relative success of the peace process.

Introduction

The Northern Ireland peace process has been a remarkable achievement that was unanticipated when the IRA declared their ceasefire in 1994. Less than four years later a deal was accepted by the principal political parties and this has been the foundation for a much more peaceful Northern Ireland. The Good Friday (GFA) or Belfast Agreement (1998) was built on and intended to strengthen the moderate political parties. When the moderate parties were surpassed by the hardline parties at the 2003 Assembly election, it was difficult to envisage that these triumphant parties, Sinn Féin and Ian Paisley's DUP could possibly govern Northern Ireland in a power sharing executive. In May 2007, after the St Andrews Agreement 2006 made minor modifications to the GFA, the seemingly impossible occurred: Sinn Féin and

the DUP agreed to share power. Since then, there has been relatively stable if ineffective regional government. Northern Ireland has gone from being perceived as one of the most intractable conflicts in the world to a possible model for the management of violent conflict.

This article is a Constructivist Realist critique of three leading and contrasting theories of the peace process, Neoconservatives, Cosmopolitans and Conservative Realists (or Consociationalists).[1] These theories not only claim to provide satisfactory interpretations of the peace process but – reinforced by the Northern Ireland case – claim to provide global approaches to managing violent conflict. *Neoconservatives* emphasise the importance of the war, and particularly intelligence, in defeating the IRA. This victory led to an IRA surrender process. The lesson is that terrorists must be defeated before engaging in negotiations.[2] *Cosmopolitans* play down the importance of the war and suggest that the peace process was propelled from below by civil society and the people. They are highly critical of the constitutional architecture of the agreement for reinforcing the dominance of what Toby Dodge has appropriately called 'sectarian authoritarianism'.[3] *Conservative Realists* also emphasise the importance of constitutions rather than security. But they claim the GFA for themselves and their Consociational theory because they believe that an imposed, top-down, 'sectarian authoritarian' constitutional settlement was the most effective way of ending the conflict.[4]

The debate between these three perspectives has several dimensions:

- First, whether the peace process and the GFA were positive or negative developments.
- Second, the relative importance of the security dimension, constitutional architecture and politics in bringing about an accommodation.
- Third, whether or not the peace process morally compromised democratic norms.
- Finally, whether democracy or elitism is more effective in managing conflict.

Constructivist Realists criticise the tendency to bracket off constitutional and security policy rather than considering the range of factors that influence conflict (external, economic, social, media) and, in particular, the importance of representative, democratic politics during the peace process and its success. Constructivist Realists argue that the three perspectives represent a threat to politics and democracy. Neoconservatives are focused on security and impatient with the constraints and messy morality of democratic politics. In effect they advocate a more authoritarian state in order to defeat enemies both on the front line and the home front. Cosmopolitans assume a moderate consensus among the people and hold politicians and representative democracy responsible for distorting the people's will for peace. Their assumption that

consensus is both possible and desirable is incompatible with the inevitable pluralism of democratic politics. Conservative Realists are opposed to any meaningful democracy because they believe that popular influence on policy prevents political elites from agreeing the Consociational constitutional arrangements necessary to manage violent conflict.

By contrast, Constructivist Realists argue that their perspective, combined with a theatrical metaphor, provides a framework for a more realistic or accurate analysis of the context facing political, security and other actors. This realism is essential in order to make judgements about the kind of peace that can be achieved. Constructivist Realists begin with the analysis of the particular *political* context in order to make prescriptions, rather than attempting to impose over-generalised and abstract security or constitutional blueprints on complex political situations. The theatrical metaphor can be used to go beyond simplistic top-down or bottom-up interpretations of politics. It can provide a more nuanced understanding of politics by suggesting that there is an interaction between actors and audiences as well as a front and a backstage area. This can be used to show politics as a craft and reveal the political skills, including deception and manipulation, which were deployed to drive the peace process forward. This is both a defence of politics and representative democracy.

This article will first, critically review Neoconservative, Cosmopolitan and Conservative Realist perspectives before outlining the Constructivist Realist alternative . In a short article, simplification is necessary (there are divisions within these perspectives), but the references provide justification for the interpretation and a guide to alternative perspectives.

Neoconservatives: hard power

Neoconservatives are usually considered to be Idealists because of their public presentation of themselves as on the side of the 'Good' (God, democracy and human rights) in the battle against 'Evil' (dictatorship, totalitarianism and terrorism). They claim a moral certainty or 'moral clarity' in the battle between good and evil in which you are either with us or against us. For some, however, this Idealist rhetoric conceals a cynical Realism and support for US nationalist and imperialist ambitions.[5] There are those within the Neoconservative tradition who appear to acknowledge the gap between their public Idealism and private Realism and have embraced an elitist, conservative Realism. From this perspective, religion and other illusions are seen as necessary to keep the mass of population under the control of the elite.[6]

Neoconservatives argue that political will and unity is essential for defeating the enemy. The state by demonstrating political will rallies the nation behind the war against the enemy. This political will is demonstrated by: the unity of the state and lack of dissent; a resolute determination to win, displayed by a willingness to militarily escalate the war; and the refusal to compromise. The theory

is that the enemy, seeing the state's determination, realises that resistance is futile and makes the rational decision to surrender. Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (1966), the Conservative politician Enoch Powell and, more recently, General Sir Rupert Smith's *The Utility of Force* (2006) all express this emphasis on the importance of political will.

A war against evil justifies democratic states using authoritarian methods to defeat the enemy. Indeed, some suggest that authoritarianism rather than democracy is necessary to defeat the enemy. This was the 'Revisionist' argument for America's defeat in Vietnam and similar arguments were heard in Northern Ireland and during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The 'Revisionists' were often high-ranking ex-military officers or civilian officials who took the view that the military were prevented by politicians from escalating the war in order to win. The politicians, media and anti-war movement 'stabbed the military in the back' by raising questions about the war and undermining the military's winning strategy. Revisionists want to empower the military and control public debate in order to secure victory.[7] Leslie Gelb described this as the 'Reactionary' position on the Vietnam war: ' … Reactionaries believe that the system produced bad policy because democracy requires compromise, and that overly accountable leaders lacked the autonomy and security to go to the unpopular extremes of either withdrawal or unlimited war'.[8]

The authoritarian state, Neoconservatives argue, is capable of imposing a rational, united approach and carrying out the brutal measures that are necessary to win wars. Since this view is generally considered to be unacceptable in liberal democracies the argument may be advocated by using euphemism or historical analogy. Some argue that brutality is effective and leave the observer to draw the implication although a few will make the argument explicit.[9] By contrast the liberal democratic state is weak because it suffers from post-colonial guilt and will not adopt the necessary 'indiscriminately ruthless measures' to defeat insurgents.[10] Democracy, with its tolerance of pluralism, dissent and human rights, signals weakness and, therefore, encourages the enemy to resist.

The 'Orthodox view' of Vietnam emerged from the writings of journalists and academics who argued that the war was unwinnable because the Americans were fighting a popular revolutionary struggle. This perspective argues that the media were largely supportive of the war and that it was elite division and recognition that the war could not be won that precipitated wider, popular disillusion. They argue for the importance of civilian control of the military, toleration of a free press and accepting the importance of public debate in wartime.[11]

The deployment of hard over soft power is preferred, because Neoconservatives seek the military defeat of the enemy rather than a negotiated, compromise accommodation. The World War Two comparison is used to suggest that an evil enemy, like the Nazis, are not to be negotiated with, or

appeased. The enemy must be either eradicated or at least defeated, the alternative is the catastrophe of the Holocaust. Any threat, no matter how insignificant, must be met with resolute force otherwise political will and the credibility of force is damaged. Such appeasement is the slippery slope towards the defeat of the West. The notorious 'domino theory', used to justify the global war against communism, claimed that defeat anywhere represented the fall of the first domino that would lead inevitably to the triumph of the enemy. Neoconservatives are alarmists, exaggerating threats in order to generate more authoritarian and belligerent policies towards a range of enemies. Some Neoconservatives take a less hardline approach but insist on certain stringent preconditions before 'talking to terrorists'.[12]

Neoconservatives were, initially, opposed to the Northern Ireland peace process.[13] They opposed even talking to terrorists, let alone making concessions, because they argued that the IRA were not defeated but employing the 'Tactical Use of the Armed Struggle' to achieve Irish unity. The Conservative and then Labour governments were embarked on a 'surrender process' of concession to terrorists that corrupted core values and democratic norms. The British government had deceived unionists about its 'back channel' contacts with republicans and was choreographing a withdrawal and gradually handing over power to nationalists. This process of surrender was driven by the economic impact of the bombings in the City of London in 1992, 1993 and 1996. Anti-peace process Neoconservatives focused their criticism of the government on security rather than constitutional issues arguing that the government was making concessions to terrorist threats rather than the ballot box. They opposed the GFA's provisions that allowed the release of paramilitary prisoners, Sinn Féin to enter government without decommissioning and the reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Neoconservatives also attacked the political skills or lying and manipulation that were used to keep the peace process moving forward.[14]

Michael Gove, one of the few self-confessed Neoconservatives, was a prominent critic of the peace process. In 2000 he published *The Price of Peace: An analysis of British policy in Northern Ireland*. Gove suggested that he was committing 'blasphemy' by being bold enough to criticise the peace process. The Belfast Agreement was a 'Trojan Horse' for New Labour's tactics and plans, such as enshrining visions of human rights 'which privileges contending minorities at the expense of the democratic majority'.[15] The Labour government was under the 'flawed assumption' that 'armed terrorists can be converted to democracy by re-shaping democracy to suit terrorists'. They had paid a 'very high price' to buy an IRA ceasefire. He declared:

> 'Principles once proclaimed as inviolable and democratic safeguards once considered non-negotiable, have been progressively cast aside in order to keep the IRA on side. Terrorists have felt no need to prosecute a full-scale war because they have seen that the simple threat of an escalation of violence has

delivered their goals. Terrorists have not gone legitimate. Terror has been legitimised.'[16]

The IRA was a 'fascist organisation' that 'should have been marginalised, contained and combatted' but instead has become a 'privileged interlocutor': 'This is a stunning advertisement for the efficacy of the use of force as a means of influencing our politics'. Gove argued that the state should 'not make concessions at the point of a gun' and if they refused to compromise then terrorists would see that no political concessions would be forthcoming and 'eventually' their campaign would 'falter'.[17]

By the early 1990s effective intelligence work and the use of lethal force meant the IRA had been 'severely restricted in their operations'. Importantly the future Conservative cabinet minister and candidate for Prime Minister claimed that the security forces could have 'progressively reduced' the IRA threat although 'We cannot know if the IRA could have been defeated'. Instead, the Labour government had 'appeased' the IRA and it was a 'moral stain' that the army, police and parliament had been 'humiliated' by concessions in the ongoing peace process.[18] There could be no compromise between 'Ulster's' future as part of the UK or a united Ireland, 'Attempts to fudge or finesse that truth only create an ambiguity which those who profit by violence will seek to exploit'.[19] The alternative was 'resolute security action' combined with a political determination not to allow Ulster's constitutional position to be changed by force. This would rob the republicans of hope and result in their defeat.

By 2006, Gove was still very critical of the peace process. He claimed Margaret Thatcher had 'achieved military ascendancy' over the IRA but this had been squandered by Prime Minister John Major's 'weakness' in entering a peace process. There is evidence to suggest, however, that there were important developments in the peace process during Thatcher's leadership (most particularly statements by the Secretary of State Peter Brooke) and that, contrary to popular perception, she was pragmatic in engaging with the IRA.[20] Major and Tony Blair, Gove claims, had appeased republicans and were 'incapable of setting, and then defending, a firm bottom line'. After 9/11 Gove applied his framework to the 'appeasement' of fundamentalism and claimed British 'weakness' on the IRA had inspired 'Islamist terrorism'.[21] This pro-unionist, anti-peace process narrative resonated with popular unionist scepticism about the peace process and this contributed to the DUP's electoral triumph in 2003.

The Neoconservatives' position was undermined by important developments in the peace process. The IRA began decommissioning in 2001, something that Neoconservatives believed they would not do. In July 2005, the IRA declared that its armed campaign was over and stood down. There was a 'final act' of decommissioning in September 2005 and in 2007 Sinn Féin

endorsed the police and the rule of law before entering powersharing with the DUP.

Neoconservative theory had failed to describe the success of the peace process, so its advocates performed a volte face. John Bew (who joined Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Number 10 Policy Unit in 2019), Martyn Frampton and Inigo Gurruchaga's *Talking to Terrorists* (2009) attempted to claim that the peace process was not a process of appeasement or surrender to the IRA but reflected the *victory* of the British state over the IRA. The key lesson was still the same, 'hard power' works and terrorists should not be talked to until they have been effectively defeated. Victory was largely attributed to the 'dirty war' which involved shoot to kill and the penetration of the IRA by informers and the loyalist backlash.[22] The police, military and intelligence services have competed to claim responsibility for success in the war and draw from this experience generalisable lessons for the future.

Contrary to Gove, Neoconservatives now argued that hard power and 'moral clarity' had succeeded, 'clear red lines' were not crossed and 'democratic norms' were not undermined. This was because the British state only talked to the IRA *after* it had been defeated. In both anti and pro-peace process Neoconservative accounts the security dimension is emphasised, and politics and negotiations are relatively unimportant. The lesson was that other terrorist organisations – such as the Taliban, Hamas and Hezbollah – should not be talked to until they had been defeated.[23]

Neoconservatism's critics argue that their theory ignores the success of politics and negotiations and conceals its authoritarianism behind a democratic façade.[24] During the Cold War Neoconservatives supported authoritarian regimes, dirty wars and terrorists (the Contras in Nicaragua, Cuban exiles, the People's Mujahedin in Iran, or rebels in Syria). There was a tendency towards total war in which democracy and the human rights of their 'enemies' were not observed. The exaggeration of the enemy's threat was used domestically to justify a growing authoritarianism and erosion of democracy in order to defeat the enemy without and within.[25] The Neoconservatives moralistic interpretation of conflict was a prescription for escalating violence seeking domination rather than accommodation. Ironically, the Neoconservatives' fanaticism, militarism and antipathy to politics, is mirrored by Irish Republican Dissidents who share the view that the IRA was defeated.

The Neoconservative's ideologically-driven account of the peace process is suggested by the volte face they performed over whether the IRA had lost or won the war. There is no significant evidence (particularly contemporaneous evidence) to suggest that the IRA was defeated or, indeed, believed that they had been defeated.[26] Indeed, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, who is close to the Neoconservatives and negotiated the GFA did not argue that the IRA had either won or been defeated. He argued there was 'deadlock' in the war between the security forces and the IRA. Dean Godson,

Director of Policy Exchange and author of an exhaustive biography of Trimble *Himself Alone* (2004) provides important evidence on the extent to which behind the scenes Trimble tried to help the Sinn Féin leadership manage the republican movement and prevent a return to war.[27]

British and Irish governments and leading British (Conservative and Labour) and Irish (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour) political parties also did not think that the IRA had been defeated and took a pragmatic realist approach to the negotiations. Until very late in the peace process (at least 2002) the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was unsure of whether the IRA would relaunch their 'armed struggle'.[28] The peace process also appears to have been emerging *before* the 1990s, when the Neoconservatives claim the IRA were defeated. This indicates that the peace process emerged from a situation of stalemate rather than defeat (or victory). The IRA was running a highly effective military campaign into the 1990s. The security forces were successful in, to some extent, containing the IRA's threat, but the IRA was not defeated.[29] Neoconservatives have also been damaged by their association with the 'Global War on Terror' and its failures in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Cosmopolitanism: Utopian idealism

Cosmopolitanism suggests a belief in a world state to which all people can belong. After the end of the Cold War some 'New Cosmopolitans' believed that globalisation, and the triumph of the West, was bringing about a global democratic revolution driven by the emergence of a global civil society. There was a common assumption that globalization, including European integration, was transcending out-dated national or ethnic identities. Irish nationalists commonly assumed that globalization would erode the importance of borders and lead to a united Ireland. In this new context, peace activists began to advocate the use of the military or humanitarian intervention in the 'New Wars' to prevent genocide and promote human security.[30] Cosmopolitans are a broad church, including, paradoxically, both pacifists and advocates of the use of force.[31]

In Northern Ireland, Cosmopolitanism resonated with politicians such as Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997–2007), Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1997–99), President Bill Clinton (1993–2001) and Hillary Clinton. President Clinton oscillated between an optimistic Cosmopolitan perspective and a primordial belief that 'irrational, 'ancient enmities' would not be transcended (*The Irish Independent*, 1999; Dixon 2010: 221–24). In Northern Ireland, the Cosmopolitan position was championed in particular by Robin Wilson, editor of *Fortnight* magazine and head of the *Democratic Dialogue* think tank. But it also resonated with the Opsahl Commission (1992–93) and has been influential particularly among theorists and practitioners in the humanitarian, human rights and conflict resolution sectors. This perspective is

similar to the Transformationalist or Civil Society approach. The assumptions of the Cosmopolitan approach have been apparent throughout the recent conflict in Northern Ireland and in the 'first peace process' 1972–74.[32]

Cosmopolitans tend to take an instrumentalist view of conflict where malign political actors manipulate communal passions to their own personal advantage. When Cosmopolitans do champion political parties they have tended towards the moderates, placing their hopes in the Women's Coalition, and for some the SDLP or Alliance party.[33] The 'Peoples Peace Process' emphasises the importance of civil society and the people in delivering peace from the bottom up. 'The people' are assumed to be benevolent and it is their mobilisation that will put pressure on the malign political actors to negotiate.[34] Negotiations are about building deeper relationships of trust – perhaps in conflict resolution workshops – between the politicians and parties. There is aspiration towards a deeper understanding between political or 'civil society' actors and, ultimately, consensus through dialogue. The mobilisation of the people and civil society would also shift the debate away from divisive sectarian issues to bread and butter political issues where there might be common ground.

The Opsahl Inquiry, 'An independent commission of inquiry', was established in 1992. This inquiry invited the people of Northern Ireland, as well as outsiders, to submit ideas on the possible ways forward for the region. The 'Citizens' Report', published in 1993, sought to mobilize civil society to put pressure on what it perceived to be an intransigent political elite to find a compromise solution in line with the will of the people. Opinion polls indicated to these 'civil society' advocates that public opinion was more 'moderate' than their political representatives and that if the people were mobilized this gap could be closed and a compromise settlement to the conflict reached.[35]

Some Cosmopolitans are highly critical of representative democracy. Mary Kaldor argued: ' . . . The new [nationalist] politicians may have been elected [in Yugoslavia], but they do not have the legitimacy to be said to "represent" the people because of their exclusionary policies'.[36] They advocate an alternative deliberative model of democracy that will empower the moderate people to seize power to end violent conflict or else pressurise their political representatives into accommodation. This more authentic, deliberative alternative may include: quangos, citizens' juries, preferenda, referendums, consensus conferences and surveys. Talk of a 'missed generation' and an emphasis on the voice of youth was used to argue that future generations would be more moderate. This contrasted with the ossified older generations who controlled Northern Irish politics. Northern Irish political culture was marked by 'infantilism and irresponsibility' while the political class was criticised for its 'insularity', ignorance and lack of training.[37]

Cosmopolitans embraced a reformist agenda, including integration and materialist measures such as: improvements to fair employment legislation;

security reform; education for mutual understanding; the promotion of integrated schools and community relations programmes and redistribution of wealth and income. 'Revisionist' history with its critique of communal myths may also be useful in defusing antagonistic identities. Some have suggested that the promotion of women in politics would have a desirable effect because they are more concerned with 'bread and butter' issues and in negotiations more likely than men to be pragmatic, approachable and incorruptible. The hope was also expressed that a common Northern Irish identity might emerge or a 'third' community that lay between the 'ethnic' blocs.[38]

Cosmopolitans have been divided over the Good Friday/St Andrews Agreement. Robin Wilson argued that civil society had played an important role in the Good Friday Agreement but that Consociational settlement had reinforced sectarianism and marginalised civil society.[39] Other Cosmopolitans argued that political elites may be ahead of their followers in supporting peace.[40] There was initial support and, indeed, enthusiasm for the GFA but this has fallen away as the moderate parties were overtaken by their hardline rivals and the checks and balances of powersharing inhibited effective policy-making. The Agreements are criticised for their sectarianism, or Consociationalism (see below), which reinforced rather than attempted to challenge sectarian authoritarianism. Bringing paramilitaries into negotiations was also problematic because this undermined democracy, justice and human rights.[41] Cosmopolitans have focused on constitutional questions rather than consider the broader security constraints on what is politically possible. By 2010, Robin Wilson was highly critical of the peace process:

> In 1997, Northern Ireland was characterised by deep communal division and paramilitary violence at the margin and neutral but remote direct rule from Westminster. In 2010, Northern Ireland is characterised by deep communal division and paramilitary violence at the margin and an accessible but communalised and dysfunctional government at Stormont.
>
> Why has so little changed despite all the hype?[42]

Cosmopolitans like Neoconservatives provide an unconvincing account of politics. They are both Idealists who focus with moral clarity on what should be rather than 'what is'. For Idealists the Ideal is always possible. This moral absolutism has united Neoconservatives and Cosmopolitans in a powerful coalition urging military intervention and against 'talking to terrorists' because it undermines the rule of law and democracy.[43] Wilson argues that in the peace process reconciliation has taken a back seat to Realpolitik and almost argues that 'reconciliation' is more important than ending violence. The compromises of the peace process, including on 'universal norms' to bring Sinn Féin into negotiations, have empowered sectarian forces and prevented reconciliation.[44] Again, similar to the Neoconservatives, Prime Minister Blair's behaviour is described as creating 'moral hazard' for making

concessions to republicans that polluted the democratic process.[45] There is a reluctance to consider whether realism, rather than Realpolitik, motivated Blair's and Mowlam's Cosmopolitanism. The radical drop in violence and relatively stable government has, arguably, created a better context in which reconciliation could take place. While the Labour government did neglect the plight of the moderate parties after 1998, this should be understood within the broader context of sectarian polarisation.[46]

The Cosmopolitan approach mistakes the world as it ought to be for the world as it is. The people are not necessarily moderate and after the GFA increasingly supported the most antagonistic political parties. Civil Society, depending on how it is defined, may also be a force for communal polarisation rather than cohesion and did not play an important role in reaching accommodation. Political actors, particularly the UUP and Sinn Féin leaderships, were ahead of key audiences in supporting the peace process.[47] The Cosmopolitan hostility to the British state ignores the role the state has played in supporting and funding civil society, moderate parties and also in pursuing an integrationist peace process.

There is a lack of clarity about the Cosmopolitan argument. They appear to simultaneously recognise deep communal divisions and claim that the people are moderate.[48] If it is argued that there are deep communal divisions then it is not surprising, and may even be praiseworthy, that political actors used manipulation to achieve accommodation. By claiming that the people are moderate they 'wish away' or deny the 'real' conflict that exists among the people. This means that they cannot understand why political actors struggled to advance the peace process and why they used manipulation to circumvent popular scepticism and opposition. This manifested itself in growing support and electoral dominance of the more hardline and communalist political parties such as Sinn Féin and, in particular, the DUP. There is evidence that opinion polls have fairly consistently overstated the moderation of public opinion throughout the conflict.[49]

Cosmopolitans share with Conservative Realists (Consociationalists) the illusion that the right constitutional architecture could deliver peace to Northern Ireland. This means that they insufficiently account for the role of politics and the security dimension. They favour more direct forms of democracy, but these often threatened the peace process rather than supported it. The 'peace polls' actually demonstrated that there was little popular support for compromise prior to the Agreement and that communal relations were getting worse rather than better.[50] There were also upsurges of communal hatred during the peace process particularly during the marching season at Drumcree (particularly 1995–2000) but also the picketing of Harryville Church in County Antrim (1996–98) and the protests surrounding the Holy Cross School in North Belfast (2001–02). The referendum on the GFA (1998) almost led to its defeat and it was only saved through the use of deception (on this

some Neoconservatives were right. The Brexit referendum (2016) has also jeopardised the peace process. Deliberation among the political parties or the public has often failed to produce agreement which then has had to be imposed by the British and Irish governments. Paradoxically, the Cosmopolitans' scepticism of election results can also look like a rejection of democracy and an assertion that it is the unelected leaders of civil society who 'really' represent the people. Cosmopolitans could not account for why the Northern Irish politicians who negotiated the Agreements were largely the same politicians who had been criticised by Cosmopolitans for being incompetent or worse.

The 'idealism' of Cosmopolitans and Neoconservatives leads to their condemnation of the political skills that made the peace process possible. Realists tend to start from the context in order to judge what is possible and accept that ideals are contestable. Ideals should not be pursued without calculation of their likely consequences.

Conservative realism: consociationalism

Conservative Realism, like all the other perspectives, encompasses a broad range of actors who do not necessarily agree with one another. David Trimble was leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and supported the GFA. Although he articulated contrasting 'cultural', 'liberal' and 'civic' unionism he could also be described as a Conservative Realist because of his pragmatic approach to negotiating the peace process. A key theme of Trimble's speeches was the contrast between unionist ideals and the real-world constraints that prevented their realisation. In his Nobel Peace Prize speech in December 1998 the UUP leader invoked Realist thinkers including Edmund Burke, who 'is the best model for what might be called politicians of the possible. Politicians who seek to make a working peace, not in some perfect world, that never was, but in this, the flawed world, which is our only workshop.' He was pragmatic and sought a 'peace within the realms of the possible'. This involved an appreciation not just of his own political difficulties but those also of his rivals in order to achieve an accommodation in the ongoing negotiations of the peace process.[51] This section, however, discusses Consociationalism which has, through its academic power and rhetorical skills, successfully marginalised or incorporated alternative perspectives to achieve an almost unchallengeable position.[52]

Consociationalism is very difficult to define because its definition has changed over time and these definitions are ambiguous and even contradictory. This 'Alice in Wonderland' definition – which means that 'Consociationalism' is whatever its leading theorists currently choose it to mean – is problematic for those who want to know what Consociationalism is and whether or not it is a useful approach to conflict management. But because Consociationalism is whatever its leading advocates currently decide it is then the definition can

be changed to suit the particular audience either incorporating critics or ignoring them. So Consociationalism can be defined as synonymous with powersharing or else requiring no powersharing at all. It can be defined as primordialist or it can be defined as constructivist. It was originally defined to be segregationist, but it has since been decided that it can be integrationist or intercultural. Consociationalists have claimed success for their theory in nearly 50 cases but also claim that it is not a panacea and is sensitive to context.[53] Tellingly, a survey of Consociationalism found almost no opposition to the theory because serious critics are either incorporated or ignored.[54]

Consociational theory was originally built on a 'Realist' approach to politics. Classical Consociationalists, like Arend Lijphart, claimed to realistically or accurately describe conflict and this leads them to more pessimistic conclusions about how far divided societies may be transformed.[55] Consociationalism was constructed on a primordialist view of ethnic identity and this is the foundation on which the theory is constructed. Primordial identities are conceived of as very difficult if not impossible to change and highly antagonistic to one another. Particularly where this pluralism has led to violence, such as Northern Ireland, then segregation of the ethnic groups is prescribed. They favour ' … a kind of *voluntary apartheid*' so that contact and, therefore, conflict between ethnic groups is minimised.[56] Consociationalists are ambiguous over whether segregation is a reluctant conclusion based on their realistic and pessimistic understanding of the world as it is, or whether they embrace this conservative nationalist vision as an ideal.[57]

Consociationalists are highly sceptical of democracy because they argue this will empower people with primordial identities and, therefore, lead to conflict. The choice in 'ethnic conflicts' is between a highly limited 'Consociational Democracy and no democracy at all'. Although Consociationalism is, apparently, also possible without democracy or even powersharing.[58] In contrast to Cosmopolitanism's bottom-up approach to conflict resolution, Consociationalism is top-down, emphasising the role of the political elites. The role of the political leaders of each 'ethnic group' is to dominate their political activists (the masses were assumed to be deferential to their leaders) in order that they can run the state by elite cartel.[59]

Consociationalists, like Cosmopolitans, are criticised for focusing on constitutional architecture and failing to substantially address security issues or the complexities of politics. There is also a logical contradiction between the pessimistic primordialism of Consociationalism's structuralism and its optimism that political actors have the agency or power to manage conflict. Primordialism emphasises the power of communal identity and this should place strong limits on the ability of political actors to manage conflict. The theory makes highly generalised and questionable assumptions that universally benign political elites will reach agreement and then be able to sustain that agreement over time by maintaining control of their primordial

communal blocs.[60] Consociationalism's primordialist and constitutional emphasis means that they place little weight on the range of factors that influenced the peace process, such as the role of security, external powers, materialism and a realistic understanding of the dynamics of politics.

Consociationalists could not account for the peace process and accommodation. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary adapted Lijphart's theory for Northern Ireland. In the early nineties because of their primordial assumptions, they believed that the conflict was getting worse. The problem with Consociationalism was that 'it has not worked'.[61] After the IRA ceasefire 1994, leading Consociationalists decided that the peace process was a triumph for Consociationalism.[62] Cosmopolitans reinforced these claims by arguing that the GFA reinforced sectarianism and was, therefore, Consociational. Both Consociationalists and Cosmopolitans overlooked the explicitly democratic and integrationist intentions of most of the negotiators of the deal. The GFA states:

> … An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.[63]

The memoirs and diaries of all the leading actors who negotiated the peace process do not claim to have knowledge of or to have been inspired by Consociationalism. Consociationalists have, therefore, had to argue that while the negotiators of the peace process and the GFA did not consciously design the GFA to a Consociational blueprint they were compelled by the powerful logic of Consociationalism to *unconsciously* arrive at Consociational conclusions. A 'Wonderland' definition allows Consociationalists to simply redefine their theory to claim the GFA. Problematically, McGarry and O'Leary have argued that the GFA is 'unarguably Consociational' but also that it was more complex than Consociationalism. If the GFA had been limited to Consociational institutions 'there would have been no settlement'.[64] After the GFA, 'Revisionist Consociationalism' was invented so that Consociationalists could more convincingly claim the Northern Ireland case which is central to the credibility of their theory.[65] But this constant revision of the theory took it further into the Wonderland of contradictory claims making the theory more incoherent but, ironically, successful in winning academic support.

Since the GFA was Consociational, they insisted that the Agreement was implemented in an inflexible and segregationist way. This went against the pragmatic realist approach taken by negotiators of the peace process which required flexibility and political skills (or lying and manipulation) so that various political actors could sustain their involvement in the process. The GFA, for example, emerged from precedent and difficult negotiations rather than following a Consociational blueprint. The Agreement was also deliberately

designed so that it had flexibility to adjust to the still ongoing negotiations of the peace process after the GFA and so that the deal could be presented as a victory for both nationalists and unionists. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, recalled,

> ... That the Good Friday Agreement was open to multiple interpretations proved to be both a strength and a weakness – but it was the only way to get an agreement between all the different parties.[66]

The GFA was 'creatively ambiguous' 'so that participants in the peace process had 'wriggle room' to manage their key audiences and bring them to accommodation. Both Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, argued that this creative ambiguity later became counterproductive.[67]

Constructivist realism: theatrical politics

Although Realism has tended to be associated with the right of the political spectrum there is also a Left Realism that tries to combine an accurate analysis of 'real politics' with Idealism. E. H. Carr is prominent among Left Realists: 'All healthy human action, and therefore all healthy thought, must establish a balance between utopia and reality, between free will and determinism'.[68] Constructivism and Realism tend not to be seen as compatible because Realism accepts as unchanging certain assumptions about the world whereas Constructivism is often used to challenge such assumptions. Constructivism is associated with Idealism because it is used to undermine the status quo to bring about radical change.[69] By demonstrating the social construction of reality and interests, the aspiration is to transform that reality to achieve more ideal outcomes. 'Thick' Constructivists tend to be Idealists because they are idea and agency-oriented and share the assumption that rapid, radical change is both possible and desirable. Since the world is imagined then it can be re-imagined in radically different ways through acts of will and agency in order to bring about Utopia. A 'Thin' Constructivism may be compatible with a 'Thin' Realism because this argues both that the world is a social construct but recognises that there is an objective material 'reality' that constrains these constructions.[70] Constructivists may, therefore, share with Realists important assumptions: the ineradicable nature of power, value pluralism and conflict.

Advantages over generalised and reductionist theories

A Constructivist approach provides a *framework* in which a more realistic understanding of politics and the peace process is possible because it is more complex and nuanced. Political accommodations tend to arise from context, political conflict and negotiations rather than being designed to an ideal model.[71] The management of conflict should, therefore, start from an analysis of the particular conflict and its complexities, including a realistic

understanding of the political process, in order to understand pragmatically what the opportunities are for change that would secure a more just and peaceful society.[72] Realists use the concepts of structure/agency to suggest that people do make their own history but that they do so within constraints.

Constructivism is an approach to analysing politics rather than a theory of politics and makes inferences rather than firm predictions. Neoconservative and Cosmopolitan Idealists and Consociationalism are abstract and reductionist theories that tell you how to manage conflict in any country without regard to context. Arguably more violence is done to the world in the name of imposing over-generalised, universal and technocratic models of war and peace that confidently fail to predict the future, than those that would respect the diversity and complexity of human society and conflict. The parsimony and reductionism of these theories is at the cost of accuracy: '…parsimony is a dubious virtue indeed – a synonym for the irrelevance that invariably accompanies high theoretical abstraction'.[73]

Constructivists seek a middle way between 'pure description', which captures complexity but explains nothing, and abstract theoretical reflection which 'inflicts violence' 'on the nuance and complexity of the reality it purports to explain'.[74] As a handbook on *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict* argues, ' … It would be ludicrous to prescribe one overall single design for use across a variety of situations, each in many ways unique. … Anyone can suggest *ideal* solutions; but only those involved can, through negotiation, discover and create the shape of a *practical* solution'.[75] Realists emphasise the importance of having a firm grasp of 'reality', however unpalatable or tragic, in order to have a realistic understanding of how positive political change might be achieved.

A more accurate analysis of the peace process shows that accommodation arose from negotiations, rather than to academic blueprints, and out of what was thought to be politically possible (taking into account security constraints). From this perspective, accommodations, such as that achieved in Northern Ireland, arise from politics and tough negotiations and the outcome relates to perceptions of what is possible.

'Real' politics

Constructivist Realism's emphasis on politics allows a more comprehensive approach to conflict management which considers both the constitutional and security measures that are necessary to manage a particular conflict. The context, the real, constrains what is possible, so the ideal (whatever that is) might not be political achievable. Neoconservatives and Cosmopolitans over-moralise politics whereas the tendency of Conservative Realists is towards justifying sectarian authoritarianism. Cosmopolitans make the simplistic assumption that the people are good whereas the Conservative Realists claim the elites are good. None of these perspectives attempts to understand the complexities of politics. Neoconservatives over-emphasise the role of force whereas Cosmopolitans and

Conservative Realists are overly focused on unlocking violent conflict with the right constitutional key. In Northern Ireland the most intractable issues were those of security and democracy, such as decommissioning, prisoner releases and police reform rather than constitutional design.

Since communal divisions are real the politicians are constrained and cannot simply impose an accommodation on their parties and voters. The limits on political leadership could be demonstrated through the history of the Northern Ireland conflict when a range of politicians (and paramilitaries) moved towards accommodation and then rowed back or lost their political position. These include: Prime Ministers Terence O'Neill (1963–69) and Robin Chichester-Clark (1969–1971); Chief Executive Brian Faulkner, 1974; Paddy Devlin (1977) and Gerry Fitt (1979); William Craig (1975); Ian Paisley (1986); David Trimble (2003); John Hume (2003) and Ian Paisley (2008).[76]

The GFA was a landmark in the, on-going negotiations of the peace process and largely shaped by what the governments and parties believed was politically possible. This involved difficult judgements about who should and who could move towards accommodation: who morally should move did not necessarily coincide with judgements about who could move. Political morality is messy and political actors have to make difficult and even tragic choices.[77] Tony Blair conceded, ' … I accept that this is–and has to be–an imperfect process and an imperfect peace. However, it is better than no process and no peace at all'.[78]

Idealism, judgement and 'messy morality'

Constructivist Realists argue (against conservative Realists) that analysts bring their values and norms to their analysis and interpretation of conflict. It is not possible to explain what is and what ought to be without using moral concepts. There is an acknowledgement that reality is constructed and that different stories can be told about politics with different implications for actions and norms. Nonetheless some stories have more evidence to support them and are more convincing than others. For Constructivists ethical reasoning must combine the empirical with principles of action.[79]

Constructivist Realists seek to explain and understand structure/agency and the constraints/opportunities for change in a particular context in order to understand the prospects for bringing about more 'desirable' outcomes. They take into account both the legitimacy of the action and the likely consequences, whereas moral absolutists urge 'right action' regardless of the consequences. Judgement is, therefore, a difficult but inevitable aspect of politics. Realists face up to the reality that deception and manipulation is ubiquitous in social, political and organisational life and that moral dilemmas are a regular and ineradicable feature of political life that cannot be ignored or wished away. Realists oppose 'moralistic inflexibility' and accept that compromise may be practical and also respectful of ' … the conscientiously held values and the dignity of those who disagree with

you'.[80] There is, however, a tension in Constructivist Realism between the manipulation used by political actors to achieve accommodation and the need in a democracy for transparency so that those actors can be held to account.

Realists have been sympathetic to the craft of politics. Some have used a theatrical metaphor in order to explain the political drama, the constraints on political actors and to unmask power. This metaphor focuses on the *interaction* between actors and various audiences and the way political actors use their theatrical skills to overcome constraints.[81] Political pressure for peaceful change can, as Cosmopolitans argue, come from 'below' but political elites can, as Consociationalists argue, also play an important role. Political actors can face difficult (sometimes tragic) moral decisions about their willingness to compromise their ideals to bring about some political change. Paradoxically, there is an attempt to provide detailed, or 'thick', descriptions of 'real politics', yet simultaneously to use a theatrical metaphor and theatricality to denaturalise, dramatize and enchant politics in order to understand and explain its dynamics.

The theatrical metaphor draws attention to the possibilities of managing conflict even in situations where that conflict appears to be escalating. During the early 1990s, on the front stage of politics the British government and republicans appeared to be intransigent and hostile enemies. Yet these performances belied the reality that behind the scenes they were cooperating to their mutual advantage. During the early nineties and after, the British government and Sinn Féin secretly exchanged speeches and even drafted them for each other in order that they could choreograph their responses. Remarkably, both during the IRA ceasefire in 1975 and during the backstage contacts in 1993 the British government offered Sinn Féin advice on how best to manage public opinion and criticize the British government. The extent of backstage cooperation between actors who were hostile front stage is also apparent in accounts by Dean Godson and Jonathan Powell.[82]

Constructivist Realism can also be sensitive to the political-security relationship and the tensions this produces within a democracy. The emphasis of Neoconservatives on moral absolutism and hard power leads to a hostility to the messy moralities and ambiguities of negotiated solutions to violence. Cosmopolitanism's moral absolutism leads them also to an impatience with representative democracy, while failing to provide a credible alternative. The primordialism of Conservative Realists leaves them hostile to any meaningful democracy and provides a justification for sectarian authoritarianism that is likely to undermine any meaningful accommodation. Understanding the interrelationship and impact of political-security issues was vital in order to judge how to maximise the chances of successful ongoing negotiations. Political actors have to make judgements about security-political issues, such as demilitarisation, that those involved in security might expect to be theirs alone. Constructivist Realists argue that they provide a framework for understanding the political dynamics of conflict management and, therefore,

the potential for policymakers to more sensitively and effectively intervene in the management of conflict.

The Northern Ireland peace process was relatively successful because of the pragmatic theatrical skills or manipulation and deception of key political actors. Such theatrical skills are ubiquitous in politics but there were some prominent deceptions during the peace process. Arguably, important republican and unionist political actors concealed from key audiences that they were going to negotiate an accommodation, partly because this could undermine their negotiating position. The Conservative government was deceived about its back-channel contacts with the IRA, because neither party could explore the possibility of peace front stage. Gerry Adams claimed that he had never been in the IRA. Prime Minister John Major denied the talks shortly before these were revealed publicly. He later justified his lies, 'When I was certain that someone was genuinely seeking a peace I'd have spoken to Beelzebub, if it would have delivered peace, because that was my objective.'[83] The GFA was creatively ambiguous so that it could be presented in contrasting ways to unionist and nationalist audiences. During the subsequent Referendum Campaign, the people of Northern Ireland were deceived about what the GFA meant.[84] The Labour government claimed that the IRA's ceasefire had not been breached when they knew that it had. The 'On The Runs' controversy about what to do with republicans who had left Northern Ireland because they believed they would be arrested was also dealt with by manipulation and deception.[85] On 12 July 2006, Ian Paisley, leader of the hardline, loyalist Democratic Unionist Party, told Orangemen that 'No unionist who is a unionist will go into partnership with IRA-Sinn Féin'. In less than a year he was First Minister of Northern Ireland sharing power with Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin, who had been a leading member of the IRA.[86]

Conclusion

Three influential and universal theories on conflict management and the Northern Ireland peace process have been critiqued for their simplistic descriptions and prescriptions for conflict management (see Table 1 for a summary of the key differences between the perspectives). Their crude understanding of politics (top-down or bottom-up) leaves them unable to account for and explain the relative success of the peace process. In addition, because they fail to recognise the inevitability of pluralism and its legitimacy they are antagonistic towards democracy. They make 'heroic' suppositions that assume away the messy reality, morality and complexity of politics. Neoconservatives over-emphasise the importance of security and fail to recognise the importance of the tortuous negotiations of the peace process and their often-messy moral compromises. Cosmopolitans and Conservative Realists over-emphasise the importance of constitutional

Table 1. Comparing four perspectives on the Northern Ireland peace process.

	Neoconservatives	Cosmopolitans	Conservative Realists (Consociational)	Constructivist Realists
Generalised Theory	Highly general	Highly general	Highly general	Contextual
Emphasis	Security	Constitutions	Constitutions	Politics/ Constitutions/ Security
Morality	Moral Clarity Absolutism	Moral Clarity Absolutism	Realpolitik Sectarian morality	Messy Morality
Peace/ Negotiating Process	Unimportant, security victory/defeat	Sectarian authoritarianism	Elite negotiations important	Emphasis on negotiating process
Democracy	Authoritarian	Direct democracy, Antagonistic to representative democracy	Antagonistic to popular influence, Authoritarianism important	Representative democracy can be effective
Politics	Moralistic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian	Unity of people, civil society, Deliberation produces consensus	Elite politics insulated from democratic influences	Theatrical politics, sensitivity to political craft and messiness
Belfast/St Andrews Agreement	From defeat to victory	Antagonistic, sectarian authoritarianism	A Consociational blueprint, Segregationist	Support, Pragmatic, Realism/ Idealism, Integrationist

architecture. In spite of their flaws, the powerful interests behind these theories ensures their influence.[87]

Constructivist Realists do not offer a universal theory but a framework that encourages a more holistic and accurate analysis of real politics. This is the starting point for judging the possibilities for achieving more ideal political change. The success of the Northern Ireland peace process represents a vindication of the political craft and a triumph for democratic politics. But, arguably, in an anti-political, Idealist political culture the legitimacy of the political craft and compromise is undervalued. The theatrical political skills that secured the peace are either unrecognised or where they are recognised roundly condemned. This constrains further compromise and the stronger consolidation of the peace process.

Notes

1. Ross and Makovsky, *Myths, Illusions and Peace*, use similar categories on the Middle East.
2. Bew et al, *Talking to Terrorists*.

3. Wilson, *Northern Ireland Experience*; Dodge, *Iraq*.
4. O'Leary, "The Nature of the British-Irish Agreement".
5. Vaisse, *Neoconservatism*, 278–79.
6. Drolet, *American Neoconservatism*, 7, 11.
7. Hess, *Vietnam*; and Dumbrell, *Rethinking the Vietnam War*.
8. Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 2.
9. Hazelton, "The 'Hearts and Minds' Fallacy".
10. Gat and Merom, "Why Counterinsurgency Fails," 130–31, 137, 149.
11. See note 7 above.
12. Dixon, "Guns First, Talks Later".
13. Gove, *The Price of Peace*; Godson, *Himself Alone*.
14. See note 12 above.
15. Gove, *The Price of Peace*, 4.
16. Gove, *The Price of Peace*, 5.
17. Gove, *The Price of Peace*, 5, 9.
18. Gove, *The Price of Peace*, 12–14, 55)
19. Gove, *The Price of Peace*, 56.
20. Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, 220, 174–80; and Seldon, *John Major*.
21. Gove, *Celsius 7/7*, 46–7.
22. Bew et al, *Talking to Terrorists*, 247, 110; and Dixon, "Guns First," 662; confusingly Frampton was also arguing in 2009 that the IRA had not been defeated, Frampton, *The Long March*, 36.
23. See note 2 above.
24. Drolet, *American Neoconservatism*; Vaisse, *Neoconservatism*.
25. Dixon, "Guns First"; Dixon, "Was the IRA defeated?".
26. Ibid.
27. Godson, *Himself Alone*, 397, 398, 517–8; Dixon, *Performing*, Chapter 8.
28. Powell, *Great Hatred*, 192–93.
29. Dixon, "Guns First"; Dixon, "Was the IRA defeated?"
30. Kaldor, *New Wars*; Shaw, *New Western Way of Warfare*.
31. Dixon, "Endless Wars".
32. Dixon, "Paths to Peace".
33. Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*.
34. Kaldor, *New Wars*; Irwin, *The People's Peace Process*.
35. Pollak, *A Citizen's Inquiry*, 27.
36. Kaldor, *New Wars*, 151; Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*, 196–97.
37. Dixon, "Paths to Peace," 9–11.
38. Boyle and Hadden, *Northern Ireland*, 65.
39. Wilson, "From Consociationalism to Interculturalism," 228.
40. Darby and MacGinty, "Conclusion," 268.
41. Wilson, *Northern Ireland Experience*, 171.
42. Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*; Wilson, "Blair's Flawed Approach"; Wilson, "The left should think".
43. Cox et al, "The Cost of Doing Nothing"; Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*, 156. For a critique see Dixon "Endless Wars of Altruism".
44. Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*, 141, 142, 156.
45. Ibid., 157–8.
46. Curtice and Dowds, "Has Northern Ireland Really Changed?"; and Dixon, *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, 170–79.
47. Boyle and Hadden, *Northern Ireland*, 240.

48. Wilson, *The Northern Ireland Experience*, 153–4.
49. Dixon, *Performing*, 50.
50. Irwin, People's Peace Process, 115; Curtice and Dowds, "Has Northern Ireland Really Changed?".
51. Godson, Himself Alone, 517–18, 542, 580–81, 593; Dixon, *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, Chapter 8.
52. Lustick, "Lijphart, Lakatos and Consociationalism".
53. Dixon, "Power-sharing".
54. Bogaards et al, "The Importance of Consociationalism".
55. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.
56. Lijphart, "Cultural Diversity," 11.
57. McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 338.
58. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 238.
59. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 53; and Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," 216.
60. Barry, "The Consociational Model".
61. McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 338.
62. O"Leary, "The British-Irish Agreement".
63. *The Good Friday Agreement*, 18, para. 13.
64. McGarry and O'Leary, *Consociational Engagements*, 348.
65. Bogaards et al, "The Importance of Consociationalism," 5.
66. Mowlam, *Momentum*, 231.
67. Blair, *A Journey*, 190; Powell, *Great Hatred*, 3; Dixon, "What Politicians Can Teach Academics," 76–77.
68. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis*, 12. See Sleat, *Politics Recovered* for a useful overview of the revival of realism and Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions* for a realist critique of Neoconservatism and Cosmopolitanism.
69. Barkin, *Realist Constructivism*.
70. Hay, *Political Analysis*.
71. Horowitz, "Constitutional Design".
72. Brubaker, "Myths and misconceptions".
73. Hay, *Political Analysis*, 35.
74. Hay, *Political Analysis*, 35.
75. Harris and Reilly, *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict*, 2, 3.
76. Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, emphasises the politics of the conflict.
77. Coady, *Messy Morality*.
78. *Hansard* vol. 324, col. 335, 27 January 1999.
79. Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 54.
80. Coady, *Messy Morality*, 45.
81. Dixon, *Performing*.
82. Sinn Féin, *Setting the Record Straight*, 41; Powell, *Great Hatred*; and Godson, *Himself Alone*.
83. *Belfast Telegraph* 14 October 1997.
84. Dixon, *Performing*, Chapter 6.
85. Dixon, *Performing*, 283–88.
86. *Irish Times* 13 July 2006.
87. See note 52 above.

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Notes on contributor

Professor Paul Dixon is Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck College, University of London. He has taught at the universities of Bedfordshire, Leeds, Ulster and Kingston. He is author of: *The Authoritarian Temptation: The Iraq and Afghan Wars and the Militarisation of British Democracy* (Policy Press 2021); *Warrior Nation: The Iraq and Afghan Wars and the Militarisation of British Democracy* (Forceswatch 2018) and editor of *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan* (Palgrave 2012). He has published critiques of the British military's role in Afghanistan for *Capital and Class* and *Parliamentary Affairs*. Dixon has also written extensively about the Northern Ireland conflict, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* (2nd edition 2008) and *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (2018).

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Power-Sharing in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Sectarian Authoritarianism

Paul Dixon*
Birkbeck College, University of London

Abstract

Consociationalists have traditionally embraced sectarian authoritarianism combined with a very limited form of democracy as the only democratic way of managing plural conflicts. New Generation consociationalists, by contrast, believe their theory is compatible with opposing sectarian authoritarianism in places like Iraq and the Lebanon. Traditional consociationalists have tended to claim that all power-sharing is consociational, whereas revisionist and liberal consociationalists claim that consociationalism does not require power-sharing and that the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 is therefore a consociational success. This paper argues that 'classic' consociationalism has constantly been revised to deflect criticism and capture apparently successful cases of conflict management. Consociationalists have deployed a 'Wonderland' definition which allows them to make such contradictory claims. Paradoxically, this definitional ambiguity and incoherence allows consociationalism to be 'all things to all people', resulting in its successful domination of the academic debate.

Consociationalism in Wonderland

The protests taking place in Lebanon and Iraq in 2019 and 2020 are protests against what Toby Dodge has appropriately called 'sectarian authoritarianism' (Dodge 2012). Yet the 'New Generation' of consociationalists, including Allison McCulloch and John Nagle, claim to support the revolutionary struggle against the sectarian ruling elites of Lebanon and Iraq (McCulloch 2014; but contrast Nagle and Clancy 2012 with Nagle 2020 in this issue and the critique of Nagle and Clancy in Dixon 2011). This is puzzling, because

* Paul Dixon is Professor in Politics and an Honorary Researcher at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process: In Defence of Politics* (Palgrave, 2018); *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Pea*ce (Palgrave, 2008, 2nd edition); and *The Authoritarian Temptation: The Iraq and Afghan Wars and the Militarisation of British Democracy* (Policy Press, 2021). He is currently working on *Choreographing the Good Friday Agreement: Deception and the 'Real' Politics of Peace* (Manchester University Press, 2022).

it is consociationalism's radical critics, the 'Cosmopolitans' (or 'Transformationalists'), who have opposed consociationalism precisely because of its justification of sectarian authoritarianism and disdain for non-sectarianism and popular struggles (Dixon 1997; Taylor 2009; see Halawi 2020 in this issue).

So, is consociationalism in favour of the establishment of sectarian authoritarianism in Lebanon and Iraq to manage conflict? Or is it opposed to it? Is all power-sharing consociational, or does consociationalism mean no power-sharing and the establishment of a sectarian authoritarian state? This is not an irrelevant academic issue, because consociationalists have been advising policy-makers in the United Nations, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, South Africa, and Iraq.

This paper argues that consociationalists have adopted an Alice-in-Wonderland definition of their theory. This means that consociationalism is whatever consociationalists currently choose it to mean. Hence they choose it to mean a theory that claims responsibility for success (in nearly 50 countries) but which is silent on any failures (Bogaards *et al*. 2019). Since consociationalism can be whatever the consociationalists want it to be, it can be redefined to deflect criticism and incorporate its critics within the theory. It is 'all things to all people': both for and against sectarian authoritarianism, synonymous with power-sharing and requiring no power-sharing at all. Paradoxically, the growing ambiguity of consociational theory has become a highly successful rhetorical strategy within academia. This academic success has given consociationalists the credibility to promote their theory to policy-makers and, therefore, to have an impact in the 'real world'.

The paper begins by providing an interpretation of 'classic' consociationalism which it contrasts with the 'cosmopolitan' approach to conflict management. It goes on to argue that the revision of consociationalism has made the theory contradictory and incoherent. Finally, it shows that this 'Wonderland' definition of consociationalism means that it is now difficult to know what it is, where it has been implemented, and whether it has been successful.

Classic Consociationalism: 'A Kind of Voluntary Apartheid'

Arend Lijphart's *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977) provides the classic exposition of consociationalism. It argues that the 'Dutch model' (1917–67) offers the answer to global conflict. The theory consists of 1) a primordial diagnosis of conflict (Lijphart 1977, 2001). This tribal interpretation leads logically to 2) a prescription of segregation alongside reinforcement of the pillars of the plural society and rule by elite cartel. This is because while 'good social fences may make good political neighbours, a kind of voluntary apartheid policy may be the most appropriate solution for a divided society' (Lijphart 1971:11; see also Kelly 2019).

Consociationalism represents 'a one size fits all' approach to the management of almost 50 cases of plural conflict (Bogaards *et al*. 2019; Dixon 1997; Table 1). The implication is that there is only one possible interpretation of conflict and that all conflict is essentially deeply rooted and primordial. Consequently there is a need for segregation to reduce conflict and allow rule

Table 1. Contrasting positions between classic consociationalism and its cosmopolitan critics.

	Classic consociationalism	**Cosmopolitanism**
Analysis	Primordial (later 'ethnonationalist')	Instrumentalist
	People: sectarian	People: non-sectarian
	Elites: benign	Elites: malign
Prescriptions	Segregation	Integration
	Empowers the elite	Empowers the people
	Limited democracy and/or authoritarianism	Extensive democracy
	Power-sharing: elite cartel	Power-sharing: popular control of elites
	Power-sharing: extremes included	Power-sharing: centre excluded, based on moderates
	Four institutional prescriptions to achieve segregation and sectarian authoritarianism	Institutional prescriptions and reformism to achieve power-sharing, non-sectarianism and societal transformation

by a sectarian authoritarian elite. Context is unimportant to consociationalists because their solution is always the same. This is because the choice in deeply divided societies is framed as being one between a highly restricted consociational democracy or no democracy at all.

Consociationalism makes four institutional prescriptions: 1) a grand coalition in the executive (often called power-sharing, and the primary instrument of consociationalism); 2) a method of proportional representation via a List PR electoral system; 3) a mutual veto for all governing parties; and 4) segmental autonomy within the polity. Critics argue that consociationalism is based on discredited primordial – or essentialist – assumptions, which lead logically to the prescription of sectarian authoritarianism (Taylor 2009). This pessimistic, primordialist analysis has led consociationalists to see intensifying civil war as inevitable. They failed to anticipate or appreciate the opportunities for more reformist, liberal, and integrationist peace processes as occurred in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

Consociationalists originally argued that their theory was 'realist', and that they made their pessimistic prescriptions reluctantly on the basis that this was the best that could be achieved in plural societies. Since 1977, 'classic' consociationalism has been seen not as a regrettable necessity but as an ethnonationalist ideal (Bogaards 2000:408). On this view, then, once established, consociationalism

should not 'biodegrade' but continue to exist as the democratic embodiment of the desires of the people. Therefore, it is not just descriptive but also normative.

The peak of classic consociationalism was probably in the mid-1990s. Classic consociationalists defined themselves against the 'liabilities of liberalism'. They criticized the liberal idea that conflict arose from extremist elites, economic and material conditions, archaic cultures, segregation, and discrimination (McGarry and O'Leary 1995). John McGarry stated that 'The problem with integrationist solutions is that they require a willingness to be integrated, and no such willingness exists in deeply divided societies' (McGarry 1995b:133–4).

Critics of Consociationalism

'Cosmopolitans' oppose consociationalism precisely because it justifies and reinforces sectarian authoritarian approaches to conflict management (Dixon 1997; Taylor 2009; Table 1). First, they criticized consociationalism's discredited primordialist assumptions. Second, consociationalism was criticized for entrenching rather than undermining the sectarianism that produced conflict in deeply divided societies. Third, the Cosmopolitans argued for initiatives that promoted integration rather than reinforcing sectarianism. Fourth, they opposed consociationalism's support for sectarian authoritarian elites and instead favoured democratization as a means for undermining sectarian rule and creating a non-sectarian society. Fifth, such critics also argued that consociationalism was incoherent because the strong structuralism of its primordial analysis of conflict was not compatible with the strong agency orientation of its prescriptions. Finally, they objected that while consociationalists specified the means by which sectarian authoritarianism would be engineered, they were either silent on how (or conveniently assumed that, somehow) these divisions would 'naturally biodegrade'. This in turn reinforced the perception that for leading consociationalists sectarian authoritarianism is desirable.

The debate over the future of South Africa clarified the strongly contrasting positions of consociationalists and their critics. Cosmopolitans argued that Lijphart's statements on South Africa appeared to offer a defence of the National Party's apartheid policy. This was because consociationalists assumed that ethnic distinctions were 'an unalterable fact' and that the apartheid government's policies had succeeded not in manufacturing differences but in counteracting and softening them (Taylor 1994:166). The transition to majority rule in South Africa was opposed by consociationalists. Lijphart argued that although South Africa had transitioned to majority rule it still counted as a consociational success. By contrast, John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary regretted that consociationalism was present only during the transition to majority rule (see Table 2).

Revisionist Consociationalism: All Power-Sharing or No Power-Sharing at All?

The invention of 'revisionist consociationalism' was initially a response to devastating critiques of 'classic consociationalism'. 'Liberal consociationalism'

Table 2. Cases of consociational success as claimed by leading consociationalists.

Country	1977 Lijphart	1985 Lijphart	1995 McGarry & O'Leary	1996 Lijphart	2002 Lijphart	2005 O'Leary	2007 Lijphart	2019 Bogaards *et al.* further cases also identified
Afghanistan							✓	
Antilles (NL)	✓					✓	✓	
Austria		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Belgium	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Bosnia					✓	✓	✓	
Burundi							✓	
Canada	✓?	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Chile		✓						
Colombia		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cyprus	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Czechoslovakia				✓		✓	✓	
Ethiopia								✓
European Union (EU)								
Fiji		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Gabon		✓		✓				
Gambia		✓						
Guyana		✓						
India				✓	✓		✓	

(Continues)

Table 2 *(Continued)*

Country	1977 Lijphart	1985 Lijphart	1995 McGarry & O'Leary	1996 Lijphart	2002 Lijphart	2005 O'Leary	2007 Lijphart	2019 Bogaards *et al.* further cases also identified
Indonesia	✓?	✓						
Iraq								
Israel	✓?	✓					✓	
Italy		✓		✓				
Ivory Coast		✓		✓				
Kenya		✓						
Kosovo								
Lebanon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Liechtenstein		✓					✓	
Luxembourg							✓	
Macedonia					✓	✓	✓	
Madagascar								✓
Malaysia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Netherlands	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nigeria	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Northern Ireland		✓			✓		✓	
Portugal		✓		✓				

(Continues)

Table 2   *(Continued)*

Country	1977 Lijphart	1985 Lijphart	1995 McGarry& O'Leary	1996 Lijphart	2002 Lijphart	2005 O'Leary	2007 Lijphart	2019 Bogaards *et al.* further cases also identified
Soviet Union (USSR)								
South Africa				✓	✓		✓	
South Tyrol								✓
Spain		✓				✓		
Sri Lanka		✓		✓				
Sudan		✓		✓				
Surinam	✓	✓		✓				
Switzerland	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Tanzania		✓			✓	✓		
United States		✓					✓	✓
Uruguay	✓	✓						
Venezuela		✓		✓				
Yugoslavia		✓		✓				
Total 48 cases	13 (or 10)	31	4	21	15	11	25	4

– a sub-division of 'revisionist consociationalism' – was in turn created to incorporate 'cosmopolitanism', 'liberalism', and 'integration' within consociationalism. Consequently, with this sleight of hand, the debate over power-sharing was no longer a debate *between* consociationalism and its critics but rather one *within* consociational theory, with leading consociational theorists adjudicating on what consociationalism 'really' is.

Revisionist consociationalism also came about because consociationalists were 'chasing the case'. They were revising their theory to try to more credibly claim real-world successes, most notably in the key case of Northern Ireland (Lijphart 1996), but also in Iraq (O'Leary 2005).

Numerous contradictions exist within consociational theory, but the most remarkable is the attitude of consociationalists towards power-sharing. Consociationalists cannot decide whether their theory incorporates all forms of power-sharing or whether it does not require any power-sharing at all. This attitude has developed over three phases.

First, classic consociationalists argued that consociationalism was a distinctive, 'sectarian authoritarian' form of power-sharing, given that the grand coalition is the primary instrument of consociationalism and lies at the core of the theory and its institutional prescriptions (Lijphart 1977:25; McCulloch 2014:5, 11). The choice in deeply divided societies, they claimed, was a binary one between a limited form of consociational democracy and no democracy at all. They therefore defined themselves against the cosmopolitan advocates of integrationist and more democratic forms of power-sharing.

Next, consociationalists claimed that all power-sharing is consociational (Lijphart 2001; McCulloch 2014; McCulloch and McGarry 2017). Other consociationalists reject this claim because (implausibly) it denies the existence of alternative non-consociational forms of power-sharing against which consociationalism had defined itself in the past (Bogaards *et al.* 2019:1).

In the third phase, two prominent consociationalists – John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (henceforth McGarry&O'Leary) – decided that grand coalitions and power-sharing were not necessary for consociationalism. O'Leary was an adviser to the Kurds during the negotiation of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. This constitution did not set up power-sharing and provided for the exclusion and domination of the Sunni Arab minority, accounting for about 20% of the population (McGarry and O'Leary 2007:24–5). Consociationalism was therefore 'revised' in order to chase and 'capture' the Iraqi case.

In 2005, McGarry&O'Leary argued that 'consociational practices may also prevail without the participation of one or more ethnic segment that is demographically, electorally, or politically significant' (O'Leary 2005:14, 12–15). In 2008 they declared that consociation required only 'some element of jointness' and 'does not require every community to be represented in government' (McGarry *et al.* 2008:58). Consociationalists legitimized the Iraqi regime after 2005 by describing it as a 'liberal consociation' – even though, as the ongoing protests in Iraq illustrate and as Toby Dodge (2020) describes in this special feature, it can be regarded as a corrupt sectarian authoritarian regime that has excluded and persecuted Sunni Arabs (Dodge 2012).

Is Consociationalism a Success?

The contradictions evident within revisionist consociationalism and the Wonderland definition mean that it is impossible to know 1) what a consociational approach to managing conflict looks like, because it is defined in ways that are ambiguous, contradictory, and constantly changing; 2) whether or not 'consociationalism' has ever been truly implemented; and 3) whether or not it has been a success.

Leading consociationalists Lijphart and McGarry&O'Leary disagree with each other on the definition of consociationalism and therefore provide wildly varying claims for the theory's success. McGarry&O'Leary claimed just 4 cases in 1995. By 2019, consociationalists had identified 48 successful cases (Bogaards *et al*. 2019; Table 2). The claim of 48 cases requires a very 'thin' definition if it is to include cases as diverse as the Soviet Union, Switzerland, Lebanon, Iraq, and the European Union. The ambiguity of definition is apparent if we compare the cases identified by McGarry&O'Leary (O'Leary 2005) and Lijphart (2007). Out of 26 cases in total (i.e. all 25 cases claimed by Lijphart along with Sri Lanka claimed by O'Leary), they only actually agree that 10 of these cases (38%) are consociational. In addition, they disagree on two major cases: those of apparently majoritarian India, and South Africa (Lustick 1997).

Moreover, there are substantial differences between Lijphart and McGarry&O'Leary over the success of consociationalism. If we take the 48 cases of consociational 'success' – and, apparently, zero failure – then Lijphart claims (roughly) between 13 and 31 successful cases, which approximates to a 27%–65% success rate. By contrast, McGarry&O'Leary claim between 5 and 11 out of 48 cases, which approximates to a 10%-23% success rate. Why don't the other cases (17 for Lijphart, 37 for McGarry&O'Leary) count as consociational? These are substantial differences.

In order to assess the success of consociationalism we need to know in how many cases it was applied *and failed*. Consociationalists use the Wonderland definition to claim success in Lebanon when it appeared to be more peaceful, and then to distance the theory of consociationalism from responsibility for the subsequent civil war. Iraq was claimed as a consociational success at first, but the descent into civil war in 2006, the exclusion of Sunni Muslims, and the rise of Daesh (Islamic State) might suggest that consociationalism was responsible for the entrenchment of a corrupt, sectarian authoritarian state. Nor do consociationalists claim Rwanda as a successful case, even though the Arusha Accords in 1993 reached a power-sharing deal. This could be because of the genocide that followed in April/May 1994 (Lemarchand 2007).

The Wonderland definition of consociationalism simply allows its advocates to claim success when they wish, but to distance themselves from failure by asserting that this settlement was not consociational enough, or that one was technically not quite right. Neither are Lijphart and McGarry&O'Leary troubled by their substantial differences regarding the interpretation of consociationalism. Similarly, the New Generation of consociationalists do not seem concerned at the provenance of the theory, its incoherence, or its contradictions. There is a

diplomatic silence about these contradictory interpretations among consociationalism's leading authorities (Kelly 2019; McCulloch 2014: 5, 18).

Conclusion

Consociationalists use a Wonderland definition for their theory so that it means whatever they choose it to mean. Consociationalism means both the *reinforcement* of sectarian authoritarianism and *opposition* to sectarian authoritarianism. It means *all power-sharing* and *no power-sharing*. It means the recognition of critics and the denial of their existence. Consociationalism is not successful (5 cases) and spectacularly successful (48 cases). This confusion means that although classic consociationalists supported sectarian authoritarianism as a way to manage conflict, the New Generation of consociationalists believe that consociationalism *opposes* sectarian authoritarianism.

If consociationalism is so flawed, why then has it been so 'successful'? More than twenty years ago, even before the invention of 'revisionist consociationalism', Ian Lustick argued that the theory's success was not attributable to its coherence but to the power and rhetorical skills of its advocates. Consociationalism was a degenerate research programme and he expected to see its demise (Lustick 1997). Paradoxically, however, the power of consociationalism has increased precisely *because* it has become more ambiguous and contradictory. Cosmopolitan and other critics are either incorporated as 'liberal consociationalists' or marginalized leaving consociationalism unchallenged (see the lack of critical perspectives in Bogaards *et al*. 2019). As Humpty Dumpty put it, words mean what the consociational masters choose them to mean, neither more nor less.

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