Negotiation democracy versus consensus democracy:  
Parallel conclusions and recommendations

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Abstract. In spite of a large number of disagreements concerning methodological and classificatory questions between Klaus Armingeon and myself, our substantive conclusions are very similar. Armingeon concludes that all three aspects of his negotiation democracy (consociationalism, corporatism, and counter-majoritarian institutions) result in superior government performance in selected areas – a finding that I interpret as supportive of my similar claims for the executives-parties dimension of consensus democracy (which consists of consociationalism plus corporatism) as well as for the federal-unitary dimension (which is the same as Armingeon’s counter-majoritarian institutions). We are therefore also in broad agreement on the advice we can give to democratic constitutional engineers.

Klaus Armingeon’s critical re-analysis and further analysis of the performance of different types of democracy is precisely the kind of work that I hoped my book Patterns of Democracy would stimulate, and that I tried to encourage by including many of my basic data in an appendix to my book, as well as by offering to make my entire data set available to other scholars at their request. I was also pleased to read his article because, while we disagree on quite a few details of both substance and methods – I shall respond to Armingeon’s list of seven criticisms point by point below – I believe that our main substantive conclusions do not diverge a great deal; they may not coincide completely, but they run largely parallel to each other. This is particularly true of the policy implications and the practical recommendations that flow from his and my findings – a point to which I shall return at the end of my remarks.

How does my consensus democracy differ from Armingeon’s ‘negotiation’ democracy? Negotiation democracy consists of three types, which Armingeon calls ‘consociational democracy’, ‘corporatism’, and ‘regimes with strong veto players’ (counter-majoritarian institutions); for simplicity’s sake, I shall follow his terminology in the remainder of this discussion. Consensus democracy has two separate and distinct dimensions that I have called the ‘executives-parties’ and ‘federal-unitary’ dimensions. Armingeon’s veto player type and my federal-unitary dimension coincide completely. Therefore, the only difference between us is that Armingeon prefers to divide my executives-parties dimension into two separate types.
I certainly agree with Armingeon that there are important differences between the two. First of all, consociationalism is defined in terms of the more purely political actors and actions (types of cabinets, executive-legislative relations, and party and electoral systems), while corporatism has to do with macro-economic actors and policy. Second, the characteristics of consociationalism are linked by a structural cause-and-effect chain: proportional election systems tend to produce multi-party systems, which in turn tend to produce multi-party coalition cabinets and an executive-legislative balance of power (in contrast with plurality systems that tend to yield two-party systems, one-party majority cabinets, and executive dominance). There is no such direct structural link with corporatism; instead the connection is via political culture. For instance, Peter J. Katzenstein (1985: 32, 157) writes that ‘an ideology of social partnership’ and the absence of ‘a winner-take-all mentality’ are distinctive traits of corporatism; these cultural characteristics are shared by corporatism and the other, more political, characteristics of consociationalism alike.

Third, I readily concede that some of the desirable consequences of consensus democracy may be attributed to particular components of it which operate as the specific causal agents. For instance, I credit their good performance with regard to voter participation and women’s representation to one of their usual characteristics: proportional representation (Lijphart 1999: 286). Similarly, some favourable consequences associated with consensus democracy may be specifically caused by the fact that consensus democracies tend to have corporatist institutions. The overall good fit between the consociational and corporatist characteristics was confirmed by my factor analysis. In fact, the correlation (factor loading) between corporatism and the factor representing the executives-parties dimension is 0.78, slightly stronger than the correlations of electoral proportionality and executive-legislative balance with this factor (Lijphart 1999: 246). While acknowledging the differences between consociationalism and corporatism, I think that it is still reasonable to see them as a syndrome of closely related traits.

Let me now turn to Armingeon’s list of seven criticisms. First, Armingeon prefers to analyze the 22 OECD countries instead of my 36 countries which, as he correctly points out, represent very different levels of socio-economic development. I have been a strong advocate myself of the comparative method which entails the selection of ‘comparable cases’ for analysis in order to mitigate the small N/large number of variables problem (Lijphart 1970, 1975). This approach is especially advisable if a large number of variables can simultaneously be held constant and if the number of cases does not have to be reduced too drastically. But Armingeon gains the advantage of having one less (albeit undoubtedly important) variable to worry about, at the cost of
having 14 fewer cases – which strikes me as a questionable sacrifice of a lot of
degrees of freedom.

What I should also point out is that I often report results for the OECD
countries only – by necessity rather than as a conscious choice – for all those
dependent variables on which no reliable data were available for non-OECD
countries (e.g., unemployment, budget deficits, differential satisfaction with
democracy, and government-voter proximity) or on which more reliable
information could be used for the OECD countries rather than for my full
set of countries. In the latter situation, I presented the results for both the
full set and the OECD subset (e.g., economic growth, inflation, and income
inequality).³

What I easily could have done in addition and what, in retrospect, I believe
I should have done, is to systematically present the correlations for both the
full set and the OECD subset even when the same data were used. Let me
take advantage of this response to Armingeon’s article to quickly make up for
this omission with regard to six key dependent variables for which I originally
reported the correlations only for the full (or almost full) set of 36 countries
(see the tables in Lijphart 1999: 278–279, 296). For the 22 OECD countries,
the effect of consensus democracy (executives-parties dimension) on women’s
parliamentary representation is almost as strong and the effect on women’s
cabinet participation considerably stronger (significant at the one per cent
level and very close to the one per cent level respectively). The effect of con-
sensus democracy on voter turnout, with compulsory voting and frequency of
voting controlled for, is weaker (but still significant at the ten per cent level).
The correlations with the democratic-quality indicators of popular cabinet
support and the John Stuart Mill Criterion are very much stronger among the
OECD countries (both significant at the five per cent level). Finally, the cor-
relation with energy efficiency is almost as strong and highly significant at the
one per cent level. In short, the overall picture does not change much when
the focus is exclusively on the OECD countries.

Second, why were Central and East European countries like the Czech
Republic and Poland not included in my study? The formal answer to this
question is that they failed my criterion of continuous democracy from 1977
to 1996, but let me also point out the two important reasons for my use of
this criterion. The substantive reason is that I wanted to make sure that all of
the democracies analyzed could all be considered stable and consolidated
democratic systems.⁴ Equally important was the methodological necessity of
having a sufficient time span for my measurements. Large numbers of years
are needed, in particular, to measure average cabinet durability, but for
key variables like types of cabinets and effective numbers of parties it is also
highly desirable to have more than just six years (1990–1996) with only two
or three election cycles. The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 presents another problem. Finally, I assume that Armingeon, too, would ultimately have decided against including these new democracies on the basis of his own criterion of high economic development: they are clearly well below the OECD level.

Armingeon’s third criticism concerns the merger of consociationalism and corporatism, particularly as far as the Scandinavian countries are concerned. I have already responded to the general point above by saying that, while they are clearly not the same, they are sufficiently similar conceptually and empirically to be regarded as part of the same syndrome of characteristics. With regard to specific countries, Norway and Sweden are indeed outliers with stronger corporatism than could have been expected from their consociational traits, and so is Italy with weak corporatism and strong consociationalism. However, the relationships among the different consociational traits are by no means perfect either. For instance, Mauritius is a deviant case in having a much lower percentage of minimal-winning, one-party cabinets than could have been expected on the basis of its low effective number of parties; and Austria, France, the United States, and Costa Rica are outliers as far as the relationship between executive dominance and type of cabinet is concerned (see the scatterplots in Lijphart 1999: 112, 138, 182–183).

Fourth, why should the five components of the executives-parties dimension be weighted equally? Armingeon is right that combining several variables into a summary measure ‘without’ weighting them does not actually avoid the problem of weighting: equal weighting is a form of weighting, too. In practice, however, most researchers opt for equal weighting unless there is a very strong and convincing reason to attach special weights to certain components. In fact, that is Armingeon’s own decision, too: his measure of consociationalism consists of the two equally weighted variables of number of parties and type of cabinets. Should the proportionality and executive-dominance be dropped from the index of consociationalism? I am especially reluctant to drop proportionality. It is one of the four basic elements of consociational democracy as I have always defined it (together with grand coalition, cultural autonomy, and minority veto; see Lijphart 1977). Other scholars have also regarded it as one of the key characteristics of consociationalism; in fact, in his first major work on the subject, Gerhard Lehmbruch (1967) called consociational democracy ‘proportional’ democracy (*Proporzdemokratie*). Electoral proportionality is also easy to measure on the basis of votes and seats won in national elections. Executive-dominance is a variable that is difficult to measure, and I am not at all sure that the operational indicator I develop in *Patterns of Democracy* is satisfactory. Nevertheless, I feel that the difference between the patterns of executive-dominance and executive-legislative balance is so impor-
tant in substantive terms that it needs to be included in any index of consensus democracy.

Fifth, Armingeon points out that the number of cases that I analyze varies from policy field to policy field. Ideally, I would have liked to have data on all policy variables for all of my 36 countries, but I decided that it was better to use incomplete data than not use the data at all. Results can obviously be artifacts of country selection, but no systematic bias is introduced by including the largest number of countries on which information is available. And excluding countries can obviously also affect one’s findings. I assume, incidentally, that the results reported in Armingeon’s Table 3 are not all based on complete data for all 22 OECD countries.

Sixth, Armingeon is right that I did not systematically test for the existence of non-linear relationships. However, in my visual inspection of all scatterplots for potential outliers I was also alert to the possibility of other than linear relationships and I did not find any clear evidence of the latter. Moreover, if there were any non-linear relationships that I missed, my linear tests would have understated rather than overstated the strength of the effect of type of democracy on policies and outcomes.

Armingeon’s final criticism concerns my control variables. I did try to control for the most important and plausible alternative explanatory variables; for instance, because my 36 countries have especially large differences with regard to level of development and population size, I always controlled for these two variables. In testing the relationship between type of democracy and some other specific variables, my controls varied; for instance, in testing the effect of consensus democracy on voter turnout, I controlled for compulsory voting and frequency of voting, which are not relevant variables in other contexts. Armingeon proposes some other useful controls that I endorse. Economic openness and the proportion of elderly are excellent controls to use when testing for the effect of democratic institutions on macro-economic policies and characteristics of the welfare state. Catholicism is also a relevant variable, although it may be difficult to use when countries with large non-Christian populations are included. Could the strength of left-wing parties rather than consensus democracy be the explanation for some of the desirable consequences of consensus democracy that I find? Here I think that one can argue that these variables are closely connected instead of alternatives to each other: the stronger community orientation and social altruism that characterize the political culture of consensus democracy tend to lead to stronger left-wing parties. If this view is correct, type of democracy is the independent variable with dominant parties being an intervening variable.

Armingeon presents the main results of his analysis in Tables 3 and 4. I was pleased to see that he does not limit himself to a re-analysis of some of the
same basic variables and the same operational indicators that I use (such as satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout), but that he also analyzes several new indicators for these variables (such as frequent political discussion and year of last execution) as well as entirely new variables and indicators (such as inter-personal trust and public debt). What also struck me, however, is that he completely ignores some of the key dependent variables for which I find strong connections with consensus democracy. I obviously cannot blame him for not covering each and every point in his re-analysis – his article is admirably succinct and to the point – but I should point out that the neglected variables provide some of the key evidence of the superior quality of consensus democracy. In particular, government-voter proximity is perhaps the most crucial test of democratic quality (see also Powell 2000). And the better environmental record, lower imprisonment rates, and greater generosity with foreign aid of the consensus democracies show that in three of the four areas of ‘kindness and gentleness’ the consensus democracies do perform exceptionally well.

On the whole, Armingeon’s findings concerning the effects of counter-majoritarian institutions are somewhat stronger than my own findings. His findings about the consequences of consociationalism are somewhat weaker than what I found the results of consensus democracy to be, but this is partly compensated by his findings about the effects of corporatism, which forms part of my consensus democracy. The main conclusion that stands out is that he shows that all three aspects of his negotiation democracy (corporatism, consociationalism, and counter-majoritarian institutions) have a large number of highly desirable qualities – by and large the same superior qualities that I claim for consensus democracy. That means that he can recommend all three types of institutions to countries designing their first democratic constitutions or contemplating democratic reform. In slightly different terminology, I can give exactly the same advice. We could hardly be more mutually supportive!

Notes

1. I repeat this offer here. I can send my data either in hard-copy form or as an e-mail attachment to any researcher who would like to use them. Please write to alijphart@ucsd.edu or to Arend Lijphart, Department of Political Science (0521), University of California-San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla CA 92093, USA.
2. Armingeon excludes OECD-member Iceland from his set of OECD countries. For the sake of comparability, I shall do the same in all of my references to the OECD countries below.
3. Of course, I still faced the problem of missing data, and consequently there were often fewer than 36 cases available for analysis in the full set and fewer than 22 in the OECD subset.
4. I may still have been too lenient; in retrospect, Colombia and Venezuela now seem very dubious cases.

5. In the only review of *Patterns of Democracy* that (so far) has taken a serious look at how I operationalize my ten basic variables, Henk van der Kolk rightly criticizes my operationalization of executive dominance. I now think that a better and, in particular, less complex operational indicator could be based on ‘cabinet life I’ only (logged, in order to diminish the impact of the few extremely high values). Van der Kolk is also critical of my operational measure for cabinet types and offers an alternative. I would like to point out that his ‘alternative’ is actually identical to my own original measure – which I obviously did not explain clearly enough.

References


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