Proposals for power-sharing constitutions remain controversial, as highlighted by contemporary debates in Iraq, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sudan. This book updates and refines the theory of consociationalism, taking account of the flood of contemporary innovations in power-sharing institutions that has occurred worldwide. The book classifies and compares four types of political institutions: the electoral system, parliamentary or presidential executives, unitary or federal states, and the structure and independence of the mass media. The study tests the potential advantages and disadvantages of each of these arrangements for democratic governance. Trends in democracy are analyzed for all countries worldwide since the early 1970s. Chapters are enriched by comparing detailed case studies. The mixed-method research design illuminates historical developments within particular nations and regions. The Conclusions draw together the practical lessons for policymakers.

Also by Pippa Norris


Passages to Power: Legislative Recruitment in Advanced Democracies (1997)

A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Democracies (2000)

Awarded the 2006 Doris Graber award by APSA’s political communications section


Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism (2002)


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Driving Democracy

Do Power-Sharing Institutions Work?

PIPPA NORRIS

Harvard University
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Preface and Acknowledgments

Worldwide more electoral democracies exist today than at any time in history. Almost half of all governments can be considered democratic, according to one of the most widely used comparisons developed by Freedom House. Nevertheless most of the surge in democratization occurred during the late-1980s and early-1990s, following the fall of the Berlin wall. During the early twenty-first century, global progress has stagnated and there are also signs of an incipient backlash in some parts of the world, threatening fragile gains. It is therefore time to look anew at the capacity of institutional reforms to facilitate sustainable democratic regimes and to generate lasting peace settlements in multiethnic states, especially those emerging from deep-rooted civil wars.

Social scientists and policymakers remain divided about whether constitutional reforms designed to share power can reduce political instability in states experiencing internal conflict, or whether these arrangements may prove counterproductive by unintentionally reinforcing ethnic hatred or even fueling a strong resurgence of intercommunal violence. Despite decades of heated debate, this issue remains unresolved. Cases of both apparent success and failure of power-sharing institutions can be quoted by proponents on both sides. To look afresh at these issues, this book uses global comparisons from 1972 to 2004 and 10 selected case studies to reexamine classic questions about the potential impact of political institutions in fostering sustainable democracy. Building upon ideas that consociational theory first developed many decades ago, the study analyzes a new body of systematic evidence for understanding how the process of democratization is strengthened by proportional electoral systems, federal and decentralized forms of government, parliamentary executives, and freedom of the press. The paired case studies illustrate the divergent historical pathways taken by democracies and autocracies with different institutions, even among neighboring countries sharing a broadly similar cultural history, social structure, and level of economic development. This analysis builds on my previous book *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (2004), which examined the role of electoral systems in explaining
patterns of voting behavior and political representation. I hope that this study will contribute toward informing the debate about the role of power-sharing institutions, and their importance for reformers, in the contemporary world.

This book owes multiple debts to many friends and colleagues. The theme of the book received encouragement in many conversations over the years with colleagues in the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and in the Democratic Governance practice, United Nations Development Programme. The book expresses the personal views of the author, however, and it does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its Member States. I am also most grateful to all of those who went out of their way to provide feedback on initial ideas, or to read through draft chapters and provide detailed comments. The research also received generous financial support with grants received from the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, the Kuwait Program Research Fund Middle East Initiative, and the Women and Public Policy Program, all at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard. The collaboration with Cambridge University Press has been invaluable, particularly the patience and continuous enthusiasm of the editor, Lew Bateman, as well as the comments and encouragement of the reviewers.

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