

# A critical review essay politics essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Arend dAngremond Lijphart born in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands is a world renowned political scientist specializing in comparative politics, elections and voting systems, democratic institutions and ethnicity and politics

Politics is the process by which groups of people make decisions. The term is generally applied to behaviour within civil governments, but politics has been observed in all human group interactions, including corporation, academia, and religion institutions. He is currently Research Professor Emeritus of Political Science

Political science is a social science concerned with the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of political systems and political behavior. at the University of California, San Diego

The University of California, San Diego is a public research university in San Diego, California, California. The school's campus contains 694 buildings and is located in the La Jolla, San Diego, California community. His work has focused on the broader contrasts between majoritarian and consensus democracies.

The origin of this article under review was an invitation Lipjhart received to deliver at the Stein Rokkan Lecture, Joint Sessions of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research in Leiden on April 3rd, 1993 (Lipjhart 1994a). He uses this opportunity to present a report at that time on the latest phase of his work-in-progress - a large-scale project, on which he has been working since the early 1980s, that attempts the systematic 'mapping' of the world's democracies in terms of their principal institutional characteristics.

My purpose is to demonstrate if there is one best model of democracy while evaluating the approach Lipjhart has taken. Part of the argument has already been offered by Lipjhart (1994a), and this paper builds on his work. I will demonstrate his strengths while explaining the various forms of democratic methods proportional representation, consensus and majoritarian including implications of his weaknesses. Sartori (1968: 273) adequately summarises the electoral system as " the most specific manipulative instrument of politics".

'Democracies: Forms, Performance and Constitutional Engineering' Lipjhart (1994a) argues that the choice between majoritarian electoral systems and proportional representation (PR) systems, there exists an exchange, as both are good forms of democracy but there is better minority representation in proportional representation systems and with the majoritarian system it leads to effective government. While Lijphart advocated consociationalism primarily for societies deeply divided along ethnic, religious, ideological, or other divisions, he sees consensus democracy as appropriate for any society.

Lipjhart (1994a) strongly suggested that the government by the people or, democracy, as stated by Abraham Lincoln, is an ideal rather than a precise form of governmental procedures and goals. Lijphart's (1994a) article compares the two basic models of democracy: majoritarian or Westminster as used in the United Kingdom and New Zealand and consensus which is used in major Western European nations such as Switzerland. He goes on to state that each of these models use a different approach of an electoral model at how to best represent the citizens. In consequence one may ask, is

it more democratic to delegate policy-making power to the majority only or is it better to include minorities, as well? (Lipjhart, 1994a: 2)

Lipjhart (1994a: 2) defines " the majoritarian model is characterized by a one party majority executive; an executive that predominates over the legislature; a two party system; a one dimensional party system (in which the two main parties differ primarily on socio-economic issues); a disproportional electoral system; and a pluralist interest group system". This maintains that majority rule comes closer to the democratic ideal than a government responsive to a minority.

Furthermore, Lipjhart (1994a: 2) states that the other type of electoral system, " the consensus democracy has the opposite six characteristics: multiparty coalition executives; executive legislative balance; a multi party system; a multi-dimensional party system (in which the parties differ on issues in addition to socio-economic issues, for example, on religious, rural-urban and foreign policy issues); more or less proportional electoral outcomes; and a corporatists interest group system". He contends that majoritarian system when compared to the consensus form of government is a result of " the more divided a country is, the more it is a plural society- the more consensual its form of democracy tends to be" (Lipjhart 1994a: 2) while countries with a British political colonial past adopted the majoritarian model.

Lipjhart (2000: 4) then extends his comparative analysis to plurality versus proportional representational systems. Here he analyses 13 advanced industrial democracies with parliamentary systems of government,

contrasting four that use majoritarian election methods and nine that use proportional representational methods. He argued three main points:

He then goes on to use the same performance variables comparing consensus versus majoritarian democracy where he concludes that Western European democracies with their consensus democracies have "superior political representation" while arguing that the majoritarian democracies are not performing better economically and that "concentrating political power in the hands of a narrow majority can promote unified, decisive leadership and fast decision making" (Lipjhart 1994a: 11-12).

Lipjhart's findings are in a particular time period and he argues (1994a: 12) "the special advantage because of the 1990s are not only the decade of democratization but also the decade of renewed ethnic conflict, and because ethnic divisions are generally deeper and more severe in the democratizing world than in the world of established democracies". In the end his evidence points to "consensus oriented political cultures are a strong counterforce to the majoritarian institutional conservatism and they provide fertile soil for the consensus model of democracy" (Lipjhart 1994a: 15).

There are many good arguments that Lipjhart (1994a) makes using his methods of analysis and illustrated evidence. The first benefit of Lipjhart's paper, Schmidt (1997) agrees with Lipjhart and what he addresses to be a truly significant topic of political science, comparative politics and that the article focuses the attention with a precisely stated and highly relevant research question - Lipjhart (1994a: 1) "what can the new democracies of and democratizing countries of Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and

Africa learn from Western Europe?". Schmidt (1997) supports Lipjhart's claims, which centres on the concentration of the relationship between constitutional structures and forms of democracy while Lipjhart measures political performance. Schmidt (1997: 194) comments that this question is related to a recurrent topic in political science: which political system is more advanced than others in coping with social, economic and political problems and why?

Lipjhart (1994a: 1) answers " this indispensable task in representative democracies is performed by the electoral system- the set of methods for translating the citizens' votes into representatives' seats. Thus the electoral system is the most fundamental element of representative democracy".

Lipjhart (1994a: 3) further states " the conventional wisdom is that there is a trade off" between consensus and majoritarian democracy where he goes on to comment " consensus democracy provides more accurate representation and in particular, better minority representation and protection of minority interests" while " majority governments produced by majoritarian election methods are more decisive, and are more effective policy-makers".

Similarly, Sartori (1997: 8) states that " the major factor establishing the proportionality or disproportionality of the proportional representation (PR) is the size of the constituency, where size is measured by the number of members that each district elects. So and regardless of the mathematical fine points, the larger the constituency, the greater the proportionality".

Hence allowing for better representation. While Schmidt (2002: 148) agrees " however, the view that the English-speaking democracies (regardless of

whether the Westminster model or the checks-and-balances model is concerned) are superior is no longer regarded as tenable".

The second argument in favour of this (1994a) article, Schmidt (1997: 195) applauds Lijphart on the quality of the research design, the methodology and the empirical results. Schmidt (1997: 195) argues in contrast to more traditional case-oriented theories of the 'ideal state', Lijphart (1994a) addresses the research question within the framework of an empirical comparative analysis of 21 constitutional democracies. Moreover, the work builds on extensive research, such as his 1984 book, *Democracies*, not to mention numerous articles on related topics. In substantive terms, Lijphart demonstrates significant commonalities as well as differences between various democracies, such as those between consensus democracies and majoritarian democracy.

The third merit of the article By Schmidt (1997: 195) is due to the successful effort on the part of Lijphart to bring work on more formal institutions - 'state structures' and 'constitutional structures' - back into the investigation of public policy and policy outcomes. Following his own impressive research in comparative politics, Lijphart does this within the context of a comparative framework. Lijphart's article inspires other scholars in the field to follow more closely the avenue of a more fully integrated comparative analysis of the relationships between institutions and public policy choices.

Finally, Schmidt (1997: 195) states that the author derives relevant recommendations for purposes of constitutional engineering from his analysis. Pointing to the weaknesses and strengths of the various forms of

democracies, the author has lessons to offer not only for constitution building in established democracies, but also for new political systems such as the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. This demonstrates in a particularly convincing manner that high quality political science can generate high quality policy advice.

However, this discussion is not without flaws and by careful examination and review of perspectives which might have been neglected by Schmidt (1997) support for Lipjhart (1994a), the following will include theoretical perspectives ignored and exaggerated claims not fully supported by argument or evidence. As Geddes (1990: 132) states " the effort here is not to discredit arguments or belittle authors, who are, after all, working within accepted conventions-but to demonstrate the deficiencies of the conventions".

### **Discussion**

First, Schmidt (2002: 148) states " majoritarian democracies were long regarded as more stable, fitter for survival even under adverse circumstances such as during the interwar period and World War II, and better at problem solving. That belief largely mirrored the survival of the English speaking democracies in the 1920s and 1930s as opposed to the breakdown of a wide variety of democratic states and the rise of Fascism in Italy and of National Socialism in Germany and Austria in this period". Questioning this statement, according to consociationalist empirical democratic theory, such as that put forward by Lijphart (1999) and Lehmbruch (1975), negotiation democracies are often of equal strength and sometimes stronger than their majoritarian counterparts. There is little



evidence and inaccuracy to state one is better than other from the evidence that is put forward by Lipjhart (1994a). Infact Sartori (1997: 69) states " the necessary condition for the successful working of a consociational democracy is an 'elite cooperation' whose intent counters the disintegrative tendencies of their society; but this necessary and most crucial condition disappears in the definition of consensus democracy".

Second, Sartori (1997: 69) argues there is a false belief "... that proportional systems are inherently superior to majoritarian systems and therefore that they are always to be preferred". He (Sartori 1997: 73) also states that " in the pure form of PR generally backfires; and in the extremist package recommended by Lipjhart its defects boomerang and PR may turn out to be the kiss of death". Sartori (1997: 28) thus as a result states " once an electoral arrangement is in place, its beneficiaries protect their vested interests and struggle to go on playing the game by the rules they know".

Third, another unproven claim by Lipjhart's (1994a) article about the two types of electoral systems, he does not go into detail on the discussion of Duverger's laws and is very uncritical of those laws. Maurice Duverger was the first author to address the effects of electoral systems. Duverger as stated by Sartori (1997: 29) formulated two laws, " the first one states that plurality (majoritarian) systems tend to party dualism" while the second law " asserts that PR tends to mutlipartism, i. e., that it has a multiplying effect". Saroti was setting up his evidence to show the weakness of Duverger's laws in relation to Lipjhart's views in the (1994a) article under review.

Sartori (1997: 30) goes on to demonstrate that weakness by stating " Duverger assumes that a causal relation can be deduced from a correlation; that is to say, he misses the difference between 'cause of' and 'associated with'" while in the second law, he states " a causal generalization is verifiable if and only if, the cause and the effect are clearly specified, whereas the effect of Duverger's first law (party dualism) defies underpinning, and the effect of his second law (multipartism) also suffers from excessive imprecision". Sartori comments that Duverger's laws are not consistent and that he can be easily use his evidence to fit his purpose. Sartori (1997: 31) states " the bottom line is, then, that a law is required to declare more than a regularity and cannot consist of a mere generalization. Furthermore, since a law stands so long as it is not falsified, it must be formulated so as to permit empirical confirmation or refutation".

Fourth, consensus democracies are not necessarily better at policy formulation and implementation. Schmidt (2002: 150) argues " they are also faced with certain problems such as challenges requiring swift response, the rapid development of political alternatives and rapid decision making tend to overburden the consensus democracies. And so, too, do challenges which require the capacity to design and implement significant policy changes. Due to the large number of participants in policy deliberation and decision making, consensus democracies usually need longer periods of time to reach a consensus or initiatives may even get stuck in a blocked decision-making process".

Schmidt (2002: 150) adds " a further weakness of consensus democracies lies in the lower transparency of the process of deliberation and decision

making as well as the indistinct accountabilities of the participants in the negotiations. These deficits often are overlooked in the comparison of political performance levels of majoritarian and consensus democracies".

Sartori (1997: 72) argues " if you reward divisions and divisiveness (and this is precisely what proporz and veto power do), you increase and eventually heighten divisions and divisiveness. In the end, then, Lijphart's machinery may well engender more consensus-breaking than consensus-making".

Fifth, in contrast to majoritarian democracies there is incomplete arguments made, Lijphart (1994: 11) argues that " consensus democracy with regard to minority representation and democratic quality is not surprising because consensus democracy may be said to be designed so as to achieve more accurate representation of interests and broad participation in decision-making". While Powell (2000: 234) comments that " concentrated power is valued by majoritarians for enabling elected governments to carry out their promises (mandates) and for giving voters clear information about responsibility for government actions (accountability). Unless public opinion is very homogenous, however, concentrating power in the hands of the government will be detrimental to the normative principle of giving proportional influence to agents of all the electorate, which is the process most valued by the alternative vision".

Sixth, another factor against consensus democracy is that some perform better than others. Schmidt (2002: 149) argues " other blind spots also include the asymmetric availability of performance data, with less systematic coverage of democracies in economically less-advanced states as a major gap, as well as the tendency to overlook both the imperfections of all

consensus democracies and the wide range of variation in policy performance among consensus democracies". Powell (2000: 52) argues "clarity of responsibility is greatest when a single, unified political party controls both the national legislature and chief executive. If control of these critical policy-making points is dispersed among various parties or among individuals not firmly connected by political parties, then it will be much harder for citizens to determine who should bear the responsibility for policy success or failure and to use their electoral resources effectively as instruments for reward or retribution".

Seventh, another weakness of Lijphart, is that he uses different concepts of democracy. Van Schendelen (1981: 8) states "in his first book, he refers to the election process, in the second (Democracies of Plurality) to Dahl's concept of polyarchy. Between the two there exist, of course, important differences: for Dahl elections are only one element of polyarchy among many". Van Schendelen (1981: 8) further states "in his first conceptualization Lijphart leaves open the possibilities that political parties fully control the recruitment of candidates for an election; that in the interelection period the relationships between electors and elected are almost non-existent or antagonistic; that elites' opinions and behaviour are non-representative of the people's demands; and that elite-politics is full of secrecy and immune to popular control".

Eighth, while Lijphart focuses on certain countries for his research, Barbara Geddes (1990: 131) states that there is a problem with selecting cases for study when the dependent variable originates from the logic of explanation. She (1990: 131) further states "when one sets out to explain why countries

A and B have, say, developed more rapidly than countries C through G, one is implicitly looking for some antecedent factors X through Z that countries A and B possess, but that countries C through G do not." Geddes (1990) argues that the crux of the difficulty that arises when cases are selected on the dependent variable is that if one studies only countries A and B, one can collect only half the information needed, namely what A and B have in common which is what Lijphart (1994a) does. She (1990: 131) goes on to state " unless one also studies countries C through G (or a sample of them) to make sure they lack factors X through Z, one cannot know whether or not the factors identified are crucial antecedents of the outcome under investigation. Countries A and B may be the only countries that have X through Z, in which case the hypothesis seems plausible. But many other countries may also have them, in which case the hypothesis would seem dubious".

Schmidt (2002: 148) clearly states " one result of comparative studies of the behaviour, output and outcome of democracies has been that simple generalizations do not fit". According to Lijphart (1994a), no significant difference exists between the two types of democracies with respect to macro-economic policy outcomes and law-and-order-management. However, when it comes to 'softer' political issues, consensus democracy turns out to be the winner. As a group, consensus democracies, Lijphart (1994a) argues, they perform better than majoritarian democracies in the protection of minorities, voter turnout, income equality and ratings of 'democratic quality'.

Schmidt (2002: 151) continues with his discussion stating " this finding is undoubtedly preliminary, and future work will require more detailed analysis

of the impact of alternative explanations and control variables. However, the major point in this context is that Lijphart (1994a) has asked the right questions, such as 'do forms of democracy make a difference to policy outputs and policy outcomes and, if so, to what extent?' Moreover, Schmidt (2002: 151) continues his discussion " the research published from many academics thus far has already produced fresh evidence on the costs and benefits of governmental systems with different political arrangements and different forms of democracy in particular". In contrast to this, policy deliberation in a non-majoritarian democracy is frequently characterized by extended bargaining, time-consuming searches for compromises and circuitous attempts to develop a political consensus - such features are not at all suitable to 'politics as a spectacle' (Edelman 1988).

Finally, Schmidt (2002: 151) says " the higher level of transparency and accountability of majoritarian democracies also weighs in their favour. Political leaders in a majoritarian democracy are more exposed and accountable to the general public, while responsibility and accountability in non-majoritarian systems often tends to evaporate in the countless networks typical of a negotiation democracy". Satori (1997: 72) adds " consociational democracy is a cross-pressured system held together by countervailing, solidaristic elites bent upon neutralizing the centrifugal pulls of their societies; consensus democracy is, instead, a one way slope that leads to a self-reinforcing system of minority appetites".

## **CONCLUSION**

The catalogue of collected criticisms raised against Lijphart's views demonstrates at least one thing: his views are widely and fundamentally

contested. But it also demonstrates that Lijphart's views have been taken seriously and that they have at least provoked critical debate and analysis among scholars. This critical inquiry attests to the substance and importance of Lijphart's efforts.

I agree with Sartori (1997) where he states Lijphart seems to be more concerned about the applicability or the engineering potential of his theory than about its political science validity. If, along the basic lines of his essential views, democratic stability could be realized in highly unstable countries, then the theory may be weak, but not wrong. In consequence, Edelman (1985: 2) states " in their obsession with the state, men are of course obsessed with themselves. If politics is as complicated and ambivalent as the men who create it, it is to be expected that its institutions and forms should take on strong meanings: meanings that men cue and teach each other to expect and that are vital for the acquiescence of the general public in the actions of elites and therefore for social harmony".

I support Lijphart's consociational democracy as it presents us with a challenging and provocative point of view. But, at the present time, it provides less than is needed for solid prescriptions for deeply divided societies anxiously searching for stable democracy. Perhaps, after rigorous analysis and evaluation, it might lead us to answers for problems confronting such societies. Any answers it might provide would certainly be highly valued by those who seek a stable, democratic political system.