

**Scott Gates**, *Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)*  
**Kaare Strøm**, *University of California, San Diego (UCSD)*

The map shows countries with post-conflict power-sharing agreements

## Power-sharing and Peacebuilding

Peace agreements and peacebuilding efforts depend on the coordination, capabilities of parties in conflict and the credibility of third-party guarantors of these bargains. However, as Stedman (1997) points out, the greatest risk to peacebuilding in post-conflict situations comes from ‘spoilers’ – leaders and parties that have the capacity and will to resort to violence to subvert peace processes through the use of force.

Among the remedies most commonly prescribed for societies threatened by civil conflict are power-sharing arrangements. The main premise of power-sharing is to guarantee each of the critical players – that is, those capable of acting as spoilers – a significant payoff from cooperation and peaceful behaviour. The hope is that, *ex ante*, each player will see the payoff from peaceful cooperation as being superior to the expected returns from violence, and that, *ex post*, the rewards from cooperative behaviour will sustain this expectation. Power-sharing thus helps reduce the threat of conflict by giving all potential parties to a conflict a stake in peaceful cooperation, together with a set of mutual guarantees of security and the protection of basic interests. Both features are likely to lessen the probability that any group will perceive significant threats to its interests. Given that such governance solutions thus promise to minimize the risk of a recurrence of conflict, it is no surprise that power-sharing arrangements have found widespread favour among analysts and peacemakers.

Power-sharing arrangements have been implemented in a wide variety of forms. Typically, these include institutions that mandate joint control of the executive, minority veto power, group autonomy and special forms of legislative representation. The most prominent model of power-sharing is Lijphart’s (1977) consociational democracy, which has four components: (1) a grand coalition, (2) a system of mutual veto power, (3) proportional representation, and (4) segmental autonomy, such as federalism. Jointly, these features help alleviate the grievances of potential spoilers, ensure the representation of a broad range of social interests, and guarantee that no group has to suffer policies that are considered seriously detrimental to its own interests.

### Is Power-Sharing Democratic?

The claim commonly made for power-sharing institutions is that they promote not only civil peace but also democracy. Consensus democracy, which



War destruction in Sierra Leone  
Photo:: Helga Malmin Binningsbø

is associated with power-sharing, according to its advocates, is not only more peaceful, but also more democratic in its design and benign in its effects, than majoritarian democracy. This is, at least in major part, because of not only the security guarantees, but also the egalitarian effects, of this kind of power-sharing. The concern here is that no significant group should receive a payoff that falls below a certain level of acceptability, the focus lying with the *ex post* fairness of rewards.

Yet, the democratic credentials of power-sharing institutions are not self-evident. Democracy means that citizens are sovereign and that their electoral decisions matter. However, under a pure form of power-sharing, elections do NOT matter, as the government will consist of a broad coalition of groups regardless. Also, if those in power cannot effectively be ousted by the voters, it makes little sense to say that the latter are sovereign. Indeed, a situation of rigid power-sharing minimizes the accountability of the rulers to the citizens, with a host of potentially troubling implications.

Power-sharing institutions clearly run counter to the spirit of competition and uncertain outcomes, as it is in power-sharing’s very nature to reduce *ex ante* uncertainty about feasible political outcomes. In the same way, power-sharing essentially works to reduce competitiveness by reducing the volatility of political outcomes – effectively blunting the impact of democratic competition. Thus, power-sharing gives priority to some aspects of democracy, such as *ex post* fairness and sustainability, over such virtues as uncertainty and procedural competitiveness.

## Peacebuilding and Power-Sharing

Analytically, power-sharing can be treated as a division of the political pie, whereby all parties are guaranteed a piece of that pie. Drawing on game-theoretic analysis, we compare the payoffs obtained from continuing to fight or joining the power-sharing arrangement. We also make a comparison with what a belligerent party would gain in a majoritarian, winner-takes-all (losers-take-nothing) system, where political parties compete with a certain probability of winning an election and thereby gaining control of government.

Our analysis focuses on the behaviour of the different parties after the election has taken place. Their choice is either to accept their rewards from the democratic process or to renege and instead engage in armed conflict. In order to understand when contestants will accept the democratic outcome and when they will not, we consider three aspects of the situation: (1) each player's capacity for armed conflict, (2) the costs of conflict relative to democratic cooperation, and (3) whether the political institutions are of a power-sharing or a winner-takes-all type.

Our results show that power-sharing is more likely to induce peace when the parties are evenly matched and the costs of war high; when the parties are imbalanced, however, power-sharing arrangements are less likely to succeed. Specifically, when the parties to a potential conflict are not balanced, yet each party still retains a credible military threat, power-sharing may favour and at the same time radicalize the weaker party and encourage spoilers. Groups relatively less well endowed have nothing left to lose by fighting; in fact, they often have much more to gain by fighting than by abiding by an unfavourable peace. To induce such parties to quit fighting, a disproportionate share of the pie must be granted to them. Such an allocation encourages spoilers. In cases of extreme asymmetry, power-sharing arrangements are an attractive option for the weaker party. These findings have implications where a third-party intervening force can ensure security through preponderant military capacity.

We have sought to assess these results against the real world by analyzing all 24 power-sharing agreements that have been signed since 1989. (This list of agreements is from Jarstad, 2008. See Figure 1, where these agreements are sorted according to the relative strengths of the fighting parties, classified in terms of parity, asymmetry and

extreme disparity. For each of these categories, we determined whether the peace agreement was durable or eventually led back to war. When the belligerents were evenly matched, the tendency was towards peace (3 of 6). When they were imbalanced, power-sharing agreements generally failed. Under conditions of extreme asymmetry, especially when an external security guarantor was present (such as UN peacekeeping forces), the preponderant number of agreements resulted in peace.

	Stable peace	Return to war
Parity	Comoros Nepal South Africa  (3)	Afghanistan Angola Guinea Bissau  (3)
Asymmetry	Mexico Sudan  (2)	Bangladesh Burundi Cambodia Chad Colombia Côte d'Ivoire DRC Mali Rwanda  (9)
Extreme Asymmetry	Bosnia-Herzegovina Liberia Kosovo Uganda Sierra Leone  (5)	Lebanon Tajikistan  (2)



## Lessons Learned

- Power-sharing will always lessen the incentives of at least one democratic loser to resort to violence
- Power-sharing is most likely to succeed in securing the peace in cases where the fighting parties are relatively evenly matched
- Power-sharing arrangements are likely not to succeed when the fighting forces are not evenly matched (but where the stronger party is not capable of defeating the other). Compensating parties with a higher marginal utility for fighting by giving them a bigger share of the political pie only encourages spoilers.
- Power-sharing may be particularly hazardous when the parties are not evenly matched and when the weaker parties cannot prevent factions from breaking off and engaging in violent conflict on their own.
- Outside intervention with forces that can guarantee security through preponderant capability is often successful, as the power-sharing arrangement constitutes a good deal for the much weaker party– as, for example, in the UK's intervention in Sierra Leone.

## References

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## About the Authors:

**Scott Gates** is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) and Professor II of political science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). His research interests includes civil wars, post-conflict peacebuilding, child soldiers and governance

**Kaare Strøm** is Professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego. His research interests includes political parties, coalition theory, institutions of parliamentary democracy and power-sharing

## About the project

This policy brief forms part of a project entitled 'Power-Sharing Arrangements, Negotiations and Peace Processes', which has produced a series of policy briefs and reports on Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kenya and Nepal.

The full report and policy briefs can be downloaded at:

<http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Research-and-Publications/Project/?oid=65122>

## About CSCW

CSCW aims to clarify the ways in which actors respond to civil war, in all its phases from onset to post conflict, whether as primary participants, general citizenry or intervening powers. The staff of CSCW includes PRIO researchers and eminent scholars from other institutions in several countries, including countries with a record of recent conflict. Together with doctoral candidates and selected MA students, they bring the insights and complementary strengths of economics, history, political science, philosophy, demography, geography, and sociology to bear on a set of related research questions.

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The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) is an independent and multidisciplinary research institute located in Oslo, Norway. The Institute is also involved in the promotion of peace through conflict resolution, dialogue and public information activities. PRIO owns and edits *Journal of Peace Research* and *Security Dialogue*.



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International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)  
Hausmanns gate 7  
NO 0186 Oslo  
Norway  
E-mail: [info@prio.no](mailto:info@prio.no)  
[www.prio.no](http://www.prio.no)