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Power Sharing in the Asia-Pacific

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Power Sharing in the Asia-Pacific

Abstract

Executive power sharing has been practiced widely in the Asia-Pacific region, in both formal and informal ways. This paper examines the theory and practice of these various approaches to the sharing or dividing of governing power across the region. I look first at the broad issues of executive structure and the distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems across the region, at the divergent approaches taken to both formal and informal practices of executive inclusion, and at the empirical relationship between these variables and broader goals of political stability. Following this, I construct an “index of power sharing” to compare the horizontal sharing of powers across the region over time. Finally, I look at the experience of vertical power sharing via measures such as federalism, devolution, and autonomy.

Keywords: power sharing, ethnicity, parties, elections, Asia

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1 Introduction

Proposals for the sharing or dividing of political power lie at the heart of many responses to ethnic conflict. Demands for the apportionment of political office between all significant social groups are frequently invoked in countries making the transition to democracy or emerging from periods of violent conflict, as in postwar Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, calls for the devolution or division of power on a territorial basis are often invoked during democratic transitions, especially in large, regionally diverse societies.

As a result, “power sharing” has become an increasingly common prescription for new democracies around the world, particularly those with deep social divisions. Sisk summarizes

the conventional wisdom when he observes that power sharing, “if broadly defined to encompass a wide range of practices that promote meaningful inclusivity and balanced influence for all major groups in a multiethnic society, is a potential answer to ethnic conflict management in many contemporary situations.”¹

While there are multiple interpretations in the scholarly literature, the term “power sharing” is centrally concerned with and understood as the inclusion of political opponents in a joint executive coalition government.² This is today a dominant approach to both preconflict and postconflict peacebuilding, particularly but not exclusively in the aftermath of civil wars or other destructive internal conflicts. For this reason, power sharing is often both recommended by scholars as a political solution to overcome deep divisions, and implemented by policymakers in numerous war-affected countries.

This paper examines the relationship between power sharing and political stability in the Asia-Pacific region. This is important not just as a means of illuminating the institutions of sustainable peace across one of largest regions of the world, but also for examining the broader utility of power sharing as a conflict-management device. Specifically, if we adopt a definition of power sharing that includes informal practices of political inclusion, the Asian experience suggests that power sharing is also relatively popular not just in conflict-prone countries but also a means of engendering greater political stability in transitional democracies. Power sharing in Asia is not just the preserve of those countries that have been through rebellions or civil wars, but also of those countries that are trying to avoid this fate by building inclusive and representative democracies.

The key to my argument lies in the distinction between formal and informal power sharing. At the executive level, for instance, processes of cabinet formation can be based on either mandated or voluntary practices of political inclusion. *Formal* power sharing in this context refers to legally mandated provisions designed to include members of particular political parties or ethnoreligious groups in government, such as constitutional requirements that ministerial positions be allocated in proportion to a party’s overall seat or vote share (as in Fiji’s 1997 constitution), or which reserve key positions for members of specified communities (as in Lebanon).

These kinds of consociational approaches to ethnic representation were once widespread in Asia. For instance, as part of Southeast Asia’s initial postcolonial democratic experiments in the 1950s, Burma’s 1948 constitution provided for a combination of ethnically based states, reserved parliamentary seats for specified groups, and ethnic “councils” to look after the in-

1 Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 9.

2 Helga Binningsbo, “Power Sharing, Peace and Democracy: Any Obvious Relationships?” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 1 (2013): 89–112, 89.

terests of intermixed or dispersed minorities.³ Similarly, Indonesia's short-lived democratic incarnation in the 1950s included reserved seats for specific ethnoreligious communities with parties representing distinct social cleavages. A list PR electoral system was combined with guaranteed representation for specified numbers of Chinese, European, and Arab minorities,⁴ and religious-communal parties were routinely included in (short-lived) grand coalition governments, on the assumption that "ethnic and other demands would be articulated through the party system and conflicts would be settled through negotiation and compromise in the parliament."⁵

Alternately, governments can rely on *informal* power-sharing practices, whereby representatives of different parties or groups are routinely included in cabinet as part of established political practice, but not in response to a legal requirement. The precise application of such informal power sharing also ranges widely, from the inclusion of symbolic ethnic or regional representatives in more-or-less token ministerial positions all the way through to "grand coalition" cabinets in which all parties are simultaneously included in a national unity government. Unlike executive coalitions arising from formal power-sharing rules, however, these kinds of inclusive cabinets are typically the result of political calculation rather than constitutional fiat.

Both in the Asia-Pacific and around the world, informal approaches to executive power sharing are practiced far more widely than formal alternatives. One reason for this is that formal power-sharing provisions are by their nature unusual and exceptional, tending to be applied in times of war or national emergency, or in countries threatened by or emerging from civil conflict. Fiji's 1997 constitution, which was explicitly designed to return the country to stable democracy by promoting the development of "multiethnic politics," contained the most comprehensive example of a formal power-sharing requirement in the Asia-Pacific region: all parties winning at least 10 percent of seats in parliament are entitled to cabinet positions in proportion to their seat share. Another example of formal power sharing was the "supermajority" requirement for government formation adopted in Cambodia's 1993 constitution, which required all new governments to be approved by a two-thirds vote of the National Assembly. As discussed later in this paper, in both Fiji and Cambodia these formal power-sharing rules proved difficult to implement in practice, and were eventually dispensed with in both countries.

3 John Sydenham Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 169.

4 See Allen Hicken and Yuko Kasuya, "A Guide to the Constitutional Structures and Electoral Systems of East, South and Southeast Asia," *Electoral Studies* 22 (2003): 135.

5 William Liddle, "Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia," in: *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management and Democracy*, ed. Andrew Reynolds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 286.

Informal routines of regional, religious, and ethnic inclusion in cabinet governments are, by contrast, relatively common. Of the many examples of such practices, the Malaysian case stands out as perhaps the Asia-Pacific's most enduring example of informal ethnic power sharing. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has been governed by a broad umbrella coalition comprising the major Malay party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), and parties representing the main minority communities, notably the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Along with a range of smaller parties, these parties form the main pillars of the Barisan Nasional (BN) that has ruled Malaysia unchallenged since 1974 (prior to this a similar coalition, the Alliance, held sway). Despite them being dominated by UMNO, the fact that all Malaysian governments have maintained representation of the country's three major ethnic groups via this informal power-sharing deal has provided a form of credible commitment that their interests will be protected.

Despite a more multiethnic stance, the main opposition movement, the Pakatan Rakyat (Justice Coalition) under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, has adopted a similar structure, comprising an alliance between predominantly urban Malay, rural Islamic, and Chinese parties. However, it has so far been unable to surmount the hurdles to open competition that the BN has introduced to maintain its hold on power, including gerrymandering of constituency boundaries, malapportionment in favor of rural areas, suppression of civil society, restrictions on basic freedoms, and intimidation of political opponents.⁶ The 2013 elections saw the opposition win more votes than the BN for the first time since independence but still lose the election due predominantly to the gerrymander in place.

Informal executive power sharing takes place in a less structured way in a number of other Asia-Pacific countries. Many include representatives from different regions of the country in the governing executive in order to provide ethnoregional balance in representation. In the Philippines, for instance, the practice of executive formation requires each new president "to take into consideration the regional, linguistic, ethnic, and religious divisions of the country."⁷ As a result, cabinets habitually consist of representatives drawn from multiple ethnic, regional, and religious communities – if not class ones.⁸ In Papua New Guinea, the combination of social fragmentation and weak political parties makes multiethnic power-sharing coalitions the norm, with ministries allocated at least partly on the basis of regional considerations and the need to strike the right balance of Papuans, New Guineans, Highlanders, and Islanders.⁹

6 See James Ung-Ho Chin, "Malaysia: The Barisan National Supremacy," in: *How Asia Votes*, eds. John Fuhsheng Hsieh and David Newman (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2002), 210–233.

7 Jürgen Rüländ, "Constitutional Debates in the Philippines: From Presidentialism to Parliamentarism?" *Asian Survey* 43, no. 3 (2003): 468.

8 Harold Crouch and James W. Morely, "The Dynamics of Political Change," in *Driven by Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. James W. Morely (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 335.

9 See Sean Dorney, *Papua New Guinea: People, Politics and History Since 1975*, rev. edn (Sydney: ABC Books, 2000), 39–72.

In Thailand, oversized coalitions have been similarly prevalent – although undergirded not by ethnic considerations but rather by defensive tactics which bring additional coalition partners into cabinet to provide a buffer against future defections.¹⁰ Perhaps the most extreme example of this strategy has been in Indonesia, where the “national unity” cabinets of post-Suharto presidents Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and (first-term) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono co-opted nearly all significant parties into expansive governing cartels that essentially swallowed potential political opposition.¹¹ The results of the 2014 legislative elections, which produced another highly fragmented legislature, are likely to cause this to practice continue.

In this paper, I examine the theory and practice of these different approaches to the sharing of governing power in the Asia-Pacific. I look first at the broad issues of executive structure and the distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems across the region, at the divergent approaches taken to both formal and informal practices of executive inclusion, and at the empirical relationship between these variables and broader goals of political stability. Following this, I construct an “Index of Power Sharing” to compare the horizontal sharing of powers across the region over time. Finally, I look at the experience of vertical power sharing via measures such as federalism, devolution, and autonomy.

Overall, the evidence from these cases suggests that while informal executive power-sharing practices have been both widespread and relatively successful in Asia and the Pacific, formal requirements for inclusive cabinets have been rare, temporary, and dogged by problems. In the same vein, while political decentralization has been a common theme, the actual application of federalism and regional autonomy has been limited. I therefore conclude by examining the disparity between political science theory and the evidence gleaned from the Asia-Pacific region.

2 Power Sharing and Political Stability

In order to evaluate the success of executive-formation practices in relation to political power sharing, we need a means of assessing their relative performance. One way of doing this is to examine how *stable* governments have been under different kinds of institutional architecture, as power sharing is often thought to lead to greater “stability” of government and politics in ethnically divided or postconflict cases.

There are several meanings inherent in this oft-stated objective. First, political stability is sometimes used to refer to the maintenance of formal democracy, or the avoidance of civil strife. However, this broad definition tends to muddy the conceptual waters, confusing sta-

10 See James Ockey, “Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System,” *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (2003): 663–680.

11 See Dan Slater, “Indonesia’s Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power After Democratic Transition,” *Indonesia* 78 (October 2004): 61–92.

bility with other analytically distinct phenomena such as regime type or conflict management. A more limited definition of political stability relates to the tenure and composition of executive governments.¹² Under this interpretation, political and policy continuity depends significantly on the durability of cabinets. Thus, politics is more “stable” when governing executives are durable in terms of both longevity and personnel; conversely, executives are “unstable” if their composition alters frequently, particularly if governments change between elections due to no-confidence votes, impeachment, party swaps, or similar events. It is widely presumed that short-lived executives will struggle to develop sound public policies and maintain a consistent policy position; conversely, a high level of executive durability is often taken as a sign of a government’s capacity to maintain power and implement its policy agenda credibly and predictably.¹³

Broader systemic differences between parliamentary and presidential forms of government also have an important influence on political stability. Advocates of presidentialism often point to the durability of office provided by a truly independent executive, and hence the continuity in terms of public policy that a presidential system of government can bring. Unlike parliamentary governments, which can shift and change between elections without recourse to the electorate, the tenure of a president and his or her administration is usually secure, as cabinets are not dependent on the support of the legislature for their continuation in office. This leads, in theory at least, to more decisive decision making, making presidentialism a potentially attractive choice for new democracies, particularly those afflicted by weak parties or shifting parliamentary coalitions.¹⁴

New democracies with weak party systems may find a move to a presidential system an attractive option if cohesive national parties (and hence stable parliamentarism) are lacking.¹⁵ More generally, claims that presidential systems deliver greater executive stability than parliamentary ones remain widespread; for instance, in their survey of East and Southeast Asia, Blondel and Inoguchi claim that presidentialism “has one strongly positive value, which is to ensure the stability of the executive in countries in which parties tend to be ‘naturally’ internally divided, for instance on a geographical basis; or in which the party system is highly

12 Michael Taylor and V. M. Herman, “Party Systems and Government Stability,” *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 1 (1971): 28–37.

13 See Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 129.

14 See, for example, Donald L. Horowitz, “Comparing Democratic Systems,” *Journal of Democracy* 1 (1990): 73–79; John Carey and Matthew Shugart, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart, “Introduction,” in *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, eds. Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

15 Matthew Shugart, “Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and the Provision of Collective Goods in Less-Developed Countries,” *Constitutional Political Economy* 10 (1999): 53–88.

fragmented.”¹⁶ By contrast, critics of presidentialism such as Juan Linz argue that because of its structural rigidity, lack of opposition, and competing bases of legitimacy, “presidentialism seems to invoke greater risk for stable democratic politics than contemporary parliamentarism.”¹⁷

While much of this debate has been focused on Latin America and Southern Europe, these claims invite empirical testing in the Asia-Pacific region. There are today three clearly presidential democracies in the region – Indonesia, Korea, and the Philippines – each of which has also experienced extended periods of nondemocratic government. Of these, the Philippines, which modeled its constitutional arrangements on those of the United States, has the longest experience with presidentialism, having first introduced a presidential constitution in the 1930s. In more recent decades, reforms in formerly authoritarian Korea and Indonesia resulted in their transformation to full presidential democracies, via the direct election of their previously nonelected executive presidents in 1987 and 2004, respectively. In three other newish democracies – Mongolia, Taiwan, and East Timor – “semi-presidential” systems of government see executive power split between a directly elected president and a prime minister, both of whom have their own separate arenas of authority.¹⁸ All the other cases included in this paper are parliamentary systems. This institutional distinction is extremely important for our subsequent discussions of executive power sharing, as a president (unlike a prime minister) does not require the confidence of the legislature to remain in office, and can choose his or her cabinet accordingly.

3 Cabinet Formation

A more encompassing means of assessing political stability refers not just to the duration but also to the breadth of representation of executive governments. Here the main criterion is not just the longevity of cabinets, but also the extent to which they are inclusive of the broader composition of a country’s social and political forces. “Oversized” cabinets that include additional parties beyond those required to secure majority government – and thus maximize the sharing rather than the concentration of executive power – should in theory engender greater representativeness under this criterion than “minimal-winning” cabinets in which only those parties required to secure a governing majority, and no more, are included. “Grand coalition” cabinets, which represent an additional step beyond oversized executives by including

16 Jean Blondel and Takashi Inoguchi, “Parties, Bureaucracies, and the Search for an Equilibrium Between Democracy and Economic Development,” in: *Democracy, Governance and Economic Performance*, eds. Ian Marsh, Jean Blondel, and Takashi Inoguchi (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1999), 101.

17 Juan Linz, “Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does it Make a Difference?,” in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. 1, eds. Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 70.

18 Benjamin Reilly, “Semi-Presidentialism and Democratic Development in East Asia,” in: *Semi-Presidentialism and Democracy*, eds. Robert Elgie, Sophia Moestrup and Yu-shan Wu (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

all significant political actors and groups in cabinet, should provide the strongest guarantee of inclusivity available via the executive-formation process.

These different approaches to executive formation invite empirical testing across the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, one way of analyzing the relationship between executive governance and political stability across the region is to examine the relative impact of minimal-winning, oversized, and grand coalition cabinets, as these effectively represent gradations of power sharing, moving from low to high. This paper seeks to do exactly this, first by constructing an Index of Power Sharing that enables comparison between all country cases, and then by comparing this measure to some basic measures of political stability. We begin by looking at the experience of each of these three cabinet types amongst our universe of cases.

3.1 Oversized Cabinets

Oversized cabinets, in which governments include more parties in cabinet than is strictly required, are by far the most common model of government formation in the Asia-Pacific. Oversized coalition governments have been the rule in contemporary Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands, and have been common in Fiji, Thailand, and Vanuatu during their democratic periods as well. In Malaysia, a multiparty alliance representing the three main ethnic groups has been the foundation of all governments since 1955. With no formal power-sharing requirements, the Barisan Nasional relies on the willingness of its three main constituent ethnic parties – UMNO, the MCA, and the MIC – to “pool votes” across communal lines. The component parties divide up the electoral map so as to avoid competing with one another on a constituency level, and campaign under the Barisan label rather than as separate parties.

Oversized multiparty coalitions have also been common in other Southeast Asian countries. In Thailand, for example, all governments from the resumption of democracy in 1992 until the military coup of 2006 were composed of broad, oversized coalitions designed to ensure cross-regional representation and, more importantly, provide a buffer against possible defections. Thus, following his victory in the 2001 elections, new prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra sought out a range of additional coalition partners in order to insulate his government from defectors and limit the ability of factional players to undermine cabinet stability.¹⁹ Thaksin’s sister Yingluck maintained a similar approach to cabinet formation after Thailand’s return to democracy in 2010, making a strong effort to reach out beyond her Pheu Thai party to find additional coalition partners, until the most recent military coup in 2014 removed her from power.

Oversized cabinets are also common in the island Pacific. In post-independence Papua New Guinea, different constellations of six main parties, plus a host of independents, have formed the core of successive oversized parliamentary coalitions – again, in large part to

¹⁹ Ockey, “Change and Continuity.”

provide a buffer against defections and ensure a degree of cabinet stability. In Vanuatu, single-party cabinets were maintained from independence in 1980 until 1991, when the ruling Vanua'aku Pati split in two; all cabinets since then have been oversized coalitions. In Fiji, despite the failure of the "grand coalition" provisions of the 1997 constitution, all cabinets formed up to the 2006 coup were also slightly oversized in practice, with governments including ministerial representatives of other parties in order to maintain some nominal degree of multiethnic representation. In the Solomon Islands, similarly, almost all post-independence governments have comprised multiparty coalitions, a practice which has become more common in recent years as the party system has atrophied.

A final example of oversized executive formation comes from the Asia-Pacific's newest democracy, East Timor. Following the transitional 2001 elections, which marked the end of United Nations administration there, East Timor's newly elected constituent assembly adopted a semipresidential form of government, with power divided between the president (Xanana Gusmão, elected separately in April 2002) and a prime minister and cabinet chosen from the new legislature. Such a constitutional model effectively makes mandatory some sharing of power between the president and the legislature. In addition, the first government formed under the new constitution comprised 10 Fretilin representatives and four independents. Given that Fretilin alone held a substantial parliamentary majority, this made East Timor's first independent government an oversized coalition also.²⁰ The National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) government, which took over in 2007, has broadened this practice – unsurprisingly given that the CNRT is itself a coalition of several smaller parties.

3.2 *Grand Coalitions*

In forming coalition governments, it is possible to go further than an oversized coalition in terms of executive inclusivity by ensuring the representation of *all* significant political forces in cabinet. The Asia-Pacific region provides three examples of such "grand coalition" governments. The first was the transitional government formed in Cambodia after the 1993 election, in which the incumbent Cambodian People's Party (CPP) gained fewer seats than the royalist opposition, FUNCINPEC, but no party won a working majority. Amid threats of renewed civil war from the CPP if it was excluded from government, a deal brokered by the United Nations saw a power-sharing coalition featuring "co-prime ministers" from the two parties installed, which proved highly unstable in practice. Another example of a grand coalition comes from Indonesia, where Abdurrahman Wahid forged a series of all-party cabinets over the course of his presidency from 1999 to 2001. A third, technical example is the formal power-sharing provisions of Fiji's 1997 constitution – which exist in law but have never been

20 Dennis Shoemith, "Timor-Leste: Divided Leadership in a Semi-Presidential System," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 2 (2003): 231–252.

put into practice. All three cases illustrate the difficulties of the grand coalition model, which while attractive in theory has often proved unworkable in practice.²¹

Cambodia's grand coalition, which came about primarily because of the unwillingness of the CPP to relinquish power after the 1993 elections, demonstrates the difficulties involved in maintaining power-sharing agreements in the absence of an accommodatory political culture. Since it reflected neither the election outcome nor common policy ground between the two parties, the co-prime-ministerial arrangement never functioned well: the CPP remained in effective control of most of the armed forces, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary, while FUNCINPEC's attempt to gain a greater share of real power paralyzed the executive branch and the National Assembly. After a series of political crises, the coalition fell apart completely in 1997 when the CPP forces of the "second Prime Minister," Hun Sen, attacked those of FUNCINPEC and the "first Prime Minister," Prince Ranariddh, and claimed power alone.²²

The shaky CPP-FUNCINPEC coalition was revived again after the 1998 and (after much wrangling) 2004 elections – not through any rapprochement between the party leaders, but solely due to the two-thirds requirement for government formation that had earlier been inscribed, at the CPP's insistence, into the constitution. With observers branding it "a significant obstacle to forming elected government and to political stability,"²³ the two-thirds rule was finally abandoned in 2006 when the CPP dropped FUNCINPEC and joined with a renewed Sam Rainsy Party in order to vote through the lower threshold of a bare majority vote for government formation. This ended Cambodia's pretense of grand coalition power sharing, making it likely that a single party would form future governments and further solidifying Hun Sen's grasp on power.

In Indonesia, the grand coalition experiment was similarly troubled. President Wahid came to power in October 1999 via a complex process of political bargaining within the newly enshrined legislature, following Indonesia's first democratic elections in over 40 years. None of the leading parties had the numbers to govern alone, and Wahid's National Awakening Party was one of many small parties jostling for power. Amidst frantic cross-party negotiations, Wahid's supporters forged a broad but unstable coalition of Islamic and secular parties, resulting in his surprise ascension to the presidency. He proceeded to form a grand coalition government encompassing a broad spectrum of Indonesian society including party, religious, and regional representatives. However, this "National Unity Cabinet" proved highly unstable in practice, with a bewildering array of ministers appointed and then removed over

21 For a detailed discussion see Benjamin Reilly, "Political Reform and the Demise of Consociationalism in Southeast Asia," in: *The Crisis of Democratic Governance in Southeast Asia*, eds. Aurel Croissant and Marco Bünte (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

22 Jeffrey Gallup, "Cambodia's Electoral System: A Window of Opportunity for Reform," in: *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia*, eds. Aurel Croissant, Gabriele Bruns, and Marei John (Singapore: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2002), 33.

23 Robert B. Albritton, "Cambodia in 2003: On the Road to Democratic Consolidation," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 1 (2004): 102.

the 22 months of Wahid's presidency. Following a protracted power struggle, the Indonesian legislature – the only directly elected organ of state in existence at the time – began to assert its growing strength vis-à-vis the president, and in August 2001 Wahid was effectively impeached and replaced by his vice president, Megawati. While she continued the practice of oversized coalitions, she did not attempt to replicate the grand coalition model directly. Instead, harking back to the politics of her father, former president Sukarno, she described her first cabinet as a *Gotong Royong* (mutual cooperation) government – in political science terms, an oversized cabinet but not a grand coalition. This approach was continued by her successor, President Yudhoyono, who formed what he called an “Indonesian unity” oversized cabinet following his election in 2004 and again, but with some opposition parties this time, in 2009.

Finally, in Fiji, the constitutional provision that all parties winning at least 10 percent of seats in parliament be proportionately represented in the cabinet was made unworkable by the unwillingness of some parties to abide by the power-sharing rules of the constitution. Following the election in 1999 of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, the major Fijian opposition party rejected the option of taking up their share of cabinet seats – an option open to them only because the openly worded power-sharing provisions of the constitution made participation in the national unity government optional, not mandatory. Chaudhry's government was overthrown in an ethnic coup a year later.

The power-sharing issue was revisited at the 2001 elections, when the victorious Fijian prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, refused to invite Labour members to take up the cabinet positions due to them. Qarase defended his decision by claiming that a grand coalition would not contribute to a stable and workable government or the promotion of national unity. Following a Supreme Court decision affirming that the power-sharing requirements were mandatory, Qarase responded by offering the Fijian Labour Party a range of minor ministries in an expanded cabinet – an offer that was rejected, precipitating another constitutional crisis that became one of several claimed justifications for Fiji's third coup to remove an elected government by the military's Commodore Frank Bainimarama. At the time of writing he has promised fresh elections for 2015, but with no expectation of a return to any form of power sharing.

3.3 *Minimal-Winning Cabinets*

At the other end of the spectrum from grand coalitions are “minimal-winning” cabinets, in which only those parties needed to ensure a bare legislative majority, and no more, are included in government. In most but not all cases, this means a one-party cabinet. Two models of minimal-winning cabinets are evident in the Asia-Pacific. The first occurs in those countries with dominant single-party systems. Executive government in Singapore, for example, has been almost completely monopolized by the People's Action Party, and hence by minimal-winning one-party cabinets, since independence. The same applies to Samoa, where the Human Rights Protection Party has been in power continuously – and mostly alone – since 1982. In such cases, sharing of power between political elites takes place predominantly *within*

the dominant party. A second example of minimal-winning cabinet-formation practices comes from the region's pure presidential systems, which must be categorized as examples of minimal-winning cabinets almost by definition, as the president wins "all" seats available for election – that is, one – does not require the confidence of the legislature to remain in office except in usual circumstances, and can choose his or her cabinet accordingly.²⁴ Thus presidential systems such as Korea or the Philippines are usually considered to have minimal-winning cabinets, even though their party composition is often opaque.

There are two exceptions to this classification for our cases. One is Indonesia: despite being widely regarded as a presidential system, prior to 2004 the Indonesian president was chosen by the people's assembly rather than being directly elected, and thus had to take much greater account of the balance of forces in the democratically chosen assembly than would usually be the case in a normal presidential system. This fact, along with the exceptional nature of their freely elected governments (the first of the post-Suharto era) and the minority status of their parties, helps to explain the oversized *kabinet pelangi* (rainbow cabinets) which were a feature of both Wahid's and Megawati Sukarnoputri's presidencies.

Another special case is Taiwan. Until May 2000, all Taiwanese elections had delivered majority government to the Kuomintang (KMT) party, and this one-party dominance was reflected in a succession of single-party cabinets. In 1996, however, Taiwan switched to a semi-presidential form of government, and in early 2000 opposition candidate Chen Shui-bian was elected president. The magnitude of this first-ever change of government, the narrow margin of Chen's victory, and the ongoing domination by the KMT of Taiwan's parliament, the Legislative Yuan, all contributed to Chen forming an unusually broad-based cabinet that initially included 13 KMT representatives and only 11 ministers from his own party. Despite ongoing problems with this arrangement (the KMT had threatened to expel any of its members who accepted posts in Chen's cabinet), the co-opting of KMT officials continued, in less dramatic fashion, through to Chen's reelection in 2004. In 2008, Taiwan returned to KMT rule with the election of Ma Ying-jeou as president.

To try to make sense of these different executive-formation practices, Table 1 depicts the long-term record of the three cabinet forms – oversized, grand coalition, and minimal winning – over time. As the table shows, most Asia-Pacific states have employed oversized cabinets. While a number of states have featured different cabinet types during periods of authoritarian rule than has been the practice under democratic regimes (under Suharto in Indonesia or military rule in Fiji, for example), of the region's genuine democracies only Taiwan and Vanuatu have changed significantly over the period of this study – in both cases moving from minimal-winning to oversized cabinets, largely as a result of changes in their party systems in recent years. Most other states have exhibited high degrees of continuity in cabinet formation over time.

24 For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 105, 161.

Table 1: Executive Formation in the Asia-Pacific

<i>Executive Type</i>	<i>Cases</i>
Minimal Winning	Philippines Samoa Singapore South Korea Taiwan, 1992–2000 Vanuatu, 1980–1991
Oversized	Cambodia, 1998–2004 East Timor Fiji* Indonesia, 2001–2004 Malaysia Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands Taiwan, 2000–2004 Thailand Vanuatu, 1991–2004
Grand Coalition	Cambodia, 1993–1997 Indonesia, 1999–2001

* While grand coalition executives are a formal requirement of Fiji's 1997 constitution, at the time of writing no grand coalition government had ever been formed. In practice, cabinets have been moderately oversized coalitions, as detailed in the text.

Source: Author's own compilation.

4 Measuring Power Sharing

Using this broad three-way classification of minimal-winning, oversized and grand coalition cabinet types, we are now in a position to construct an index which aggregates the key components of government formation in order to measure the extent of executive power sharing across the Asia-Pacific region. The two most salient components of executive power sharing are the number of parties included and the extent to which governments comprise single-party majorities or multiparty coalitions. Lijphart has argued that "the difference between one-party majority governments and broad multiparty coalitions epitomizes the contrast between the majoritarian principle of concentrating power in the hands of the majority and the consensus principle of broad powersharing."²⁵ Following this reasoning, my measure of power sharing relies on the number of effective political parties represented in parliament and the extent to which oversized rather than minimal-winning cabinet formations are employed. A combined index of this information provides an (admittedly crude) means of assessing the sharing or concentration of executive power across different countries.

Table 2 presents one such attempt to measure the relative degree of executive power sharing in the Asia-Pacific on a long-term basis. The index captures a combination of two key

²⁵ Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 90.

elements of executive power sharing: *representation*, reflected by the effective number of parliamentary parties, and *inclusion*, reflecting the extent to which oversized cabinet types were employed. The index was created by standardizing the mean scores for each country on both measures over the entire time period of the data collection, in order to provide a common basis of comparison and smooth out any variations caused by outliers. I then averaged the sum of these two standardized variables to arrive at an aggregate “Index of Power Sharing” for every country. The table displays the aggregate ranking of all countries on this power-sharing index, listed in descending order.

Table 2: An Index of Power Sharing for the Asia-Pacific

Country	Mean Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties	Mean Proportion of Oversized Cabinets	Index of Power Sharing (Standardized)
PNG, 1977–2004	9.16	1.00	1.68
Indonesia, 1999–2004	6.85	1.00	1.15
Thailand, 1992–2004	5.03	1.00	0.73
Solomon Is, 1978–2004	4.12	0.82	0.31
Fiji, 1999–2004	3.06	1.00	0.27
East Timor, 2001–2004	2.42	1.00	0.13
Cambodia, 1993–2004	2.36	0.90	0.00
Malaysia, 1957–2004	1.57	1.00	-0.07
Vanuatu, 1979–2004	3.48	0.54	-0.15
Philippines, 1986–2004	4.90	0.00	-0.44
Taiwan, 1992–2004	2.56	0.33	-0.60
Samoa, 1991–2004	3.04	0.09	-0.77
Korea, 1988–2004	2.83	0.00	-0.92
Singapore, 1968–2004	1.03	0.00	-1.33

Source: Aurel Croissant, Gabriele Bruns, and Marei John, eds., *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia* (Singapore: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2002); Hsieh and Newman, *How Asia Votes*; Dieter Nohlen, Florian Grotz, and Christof Hartmann, *Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

As the table shows, the extent of executive power sharing varies widely across the Asia-Pacific. At one end, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Thailand all feature very high levels of power sharing on this measure. By contrast, single-party government has been the norm in Samoa, Korea, and Singapore. How do we explain this discrepancy of outcomes?

One explanation is the influence of social diversity upon political practice. Across the region, greater levels of societal diversity are strongly correlated with higher levels of power sharing. In general, socially fragmented states such as Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Solomon Islands, and Fiji tend also to have above-average levels of power sharing according to our index. Only two of the Asia-Pacific’s ethnically plural societies, the Philippines and Singapore, consistently employ minimal-winning cabinets – although as noted above, both have practiced informal power sharing in other ways (as they need to, given that the Philippines has a presidential system and Singapore is a one-party dominant state). While Philip-

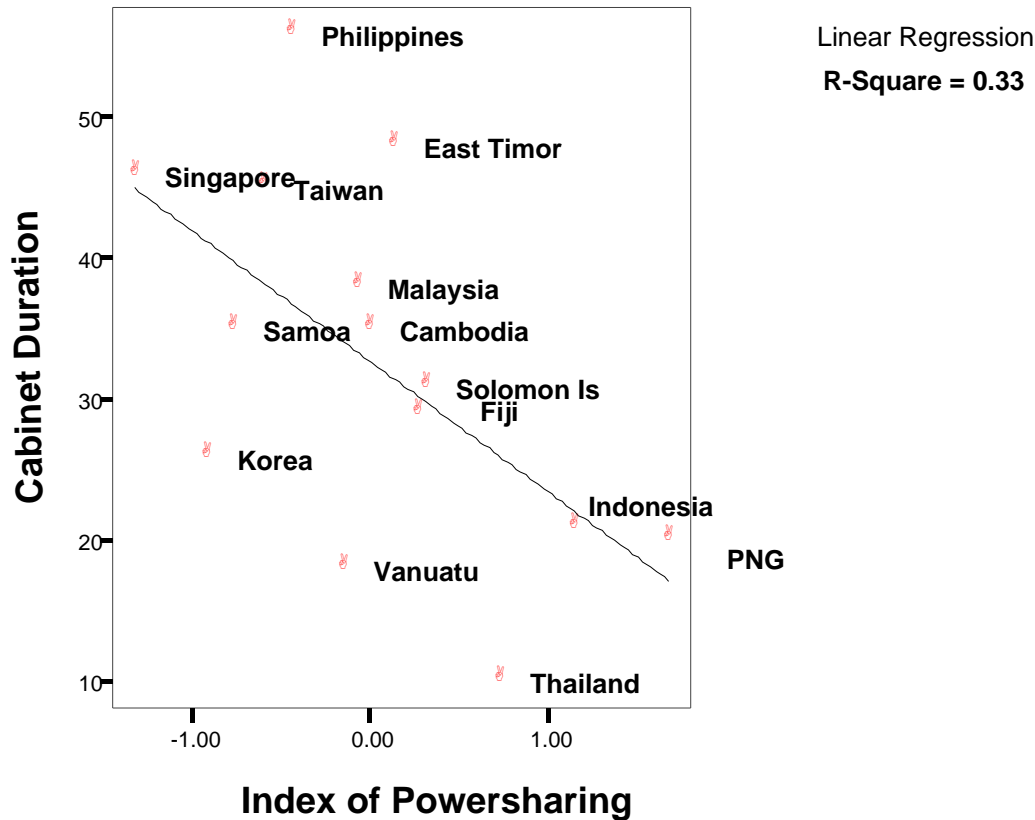
pine cabinets have been minimal winning in formal terms, winning coalitions are built by co-opting independents and representatives from other parties, and cabinets habitually include representatives from Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, as well as non-Catholic representatives of the Protestant and Muslim religious minorities.²⁶ Similarly, in Singapore, governments are keen to project a multiethnic image, and usually ensure Malay and Indian representatives are included in cabinet and in important symbolic positions as well.²⁷

A second, and perhaps more surprising, observation is the negative correlation between power sharing and cabinet longevity. As the scattergram in Figure 1 below shows clearly, countries with high levels of power sharing tend to have *less* stable cabinets, measured by the duration of each cabinet before it is changed or replaced, than the average. This would appear to be something of a rebuff to those who see power sharing as the answer to a country's political ills. However, the data on which these findings are based is somewhat dated, given the rapidly changing political landscape in Asia.

Moreover, the problem of endogeneity cautions against reading too much into these findings. More heterogeneous states that generate ethnic politics tend to have higher levels of power sharing, and countries facing deep social and political conflicts often adopt power-sharing measures in the hope of stabilizing national politics. Power sharing thus tends to be adopted in precisely those cases where political stability is a challenge. On the other hand, actual examples of the most comprehensive forms of power sharing in the region, such as the use of grand coalition governments in Indonesia, co-prime-ministerial arrangements in Cambodia, or mandatory cabinet positions in Fiji, have often been highly unstable in terms of the duration of executive governments. What can be said with confidence is that higher levels of power sharing have not resulted in greater political stability, on aggregate.

26 Rüländ, "Constitutional Debates in the Philippines," 468.

27 See Diane K. Mauzy, "Electoral Innovation and One-Party Dominance in Singapore," in: Hsieh and Newman, *How Asia Votes*, 247.

Figure 1: Power Sharing and Political Stability in the Asia-Pacific

Source: Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

5 Federalism, Devolution, and Autonomy

So far, this paper has focused on the horizontal dimension of power sharing, based around the inclusion of different parties and groups in government. However, as noted in the introduction, power sharing can also take place on a vertical basis, via the division of powers between national, regional, and local levels of government, and the territorial devolution of political authority to subnational jurisdictions such as states, provinces, autonomous units, or local governments. Despite a widespread normative bias in favor of unitary states, most of the plural societies in the Asia-Pacific region make some provision to spread, separate, or share powers on a geographical basis in this way, ranging from full-scale federalism to wide-ranging decentralization to special autonomy arrangements for particular regions.

Territorial devolution enables groups in different regions and at different levels of government to access and exercise governing authority independently of central control. Unfor-

fortunately for comparative purposes, the experience of devolution in the Asia-Pacific is currently rather limited and inconclusive. Of all the countries included in this study, Malaysia is the only unambiguous example of a federal system in which governing power is constitutionally divided between national and state governments – and even there, federalism is weakened by the government's ability to amend the constitution by a two-thirds vote of parliament, as it has done almost annually since independence. Indonesia has embarked on a grand project of political devolution to local regions over the past decade, transferring a range of powers and revenue-raising responsibilities from central authority to provincial and in many cases local governments. Other Asia-Pacific governments such as Thailand, the Philippines, and Solomon Islands have also embarked upon major exercises in regional devolution.²⁸ While these are ambitious and in some cases radical experiments, the impact of both federalism and devolution in the Asia-Pacific remains something of an open question. Indonesia's decentralization, for example, appears to have addressed some problems but created new ones, including new rent-seeking opportunities for local elites.²⁹

There have, however, been special autonomy arrangements for particular regions such as Mindanao and the Cordilleras in the Philippines, Aceh and Papua in Indonesia, and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, as well as complex arrangements for cultural and economic autonomy in nondemocratic environments such as contemporary China.³⁰ These involve the designation of special status and distinctive governing powers for a defined regional entity under the national authority of the state, and have become an increasingly attractive avenue for policymakers attempting to manage secessionist or self-determination struggles in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Examples of peace agreements in which autonomy has been used as a mechanism for conflict management include the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and its successor, the optimistically titled "Final Peace Agreement" of 1996, for Muslim Mindanao, as well as the 1986 peace pact in the Cordilleras (both in the Philippines); the Matignon Accords of 1988 and 1998 in New Caledonia (which remains, for the time being at least, jurisdictionally part of France); the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2001, which led to the formation of an Autonomous Bougainville Government (in Papua New Guinea); and the 2005 peace deal between Jakarta and representatives of the Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh) movement (in Indonesia).

Once again, however, it is simply too early to judge the success or otherwise of most of these experiments for our purposes. Some, such as the Bougainville and New Caledonian

28 See Mark Turner, ed., *Central-Local Relations in Asia-Pacific: Convergence or Divergence?* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 1999).

29 See Henke Schulte Nordholt, "Decentralization and Democracy in Indonesia: Strengthening Citizenship or Regional Elites?" in: *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Politics*, ed. Richard Robison (London: Routledge, 2012), 229–241.

30 See Yash Ghai, ed., *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-ethnic States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

agreements, appear to have been integral to the success of peacemaking negotiations to end actual or potential violent conflicts, while others such as the autonomy arrangements for Mindanao and the Cordilleras in the Philippines failed to gain sufficient voter support when put to referendum and have been mostly ineffectual in bringing an end to the conflict.³¹ In Indonesia, “special autonomy” laws for Aceh and Papua introduced in 2001, offering both provinces more local control over cultural, political, and economic affairs and a greater portion of the revenue from local natural resource projects, have themselves become the subject of contention, bogged down by debates about implementation. One study of autonomy as a means of managing secessionism concluded that these cases

confirm a central theme of the comparative literature on autonomy: the fragility of such arrangements and their vulnerability to reversal. Special autonomy arrangements are exceedingly difficult to entrench as national elites almost always resist demands to devolve political authority and are suspicious of any initiative that may set a precedent for other regions. This is particularly the case in large multiethnic countries such as Indonesia.³²

One clear lesson from these cases is that creating autonomous regions based around ethnically homogeneous component units of the kind recommended by consociational enthusiasts is extremely difficult. Regions such as Aceh, Mindanao, and Papua are all themselves internally multiethnic – a factor that has been exacerbated by official transmigration policies in Indonesia, where residents of overpopulated regions have been encouraged to move to peripheral but underpopulated outer regions such as Papua. Coming on top of successive earlier waves of migration, this has led to the dispersion and intermixture of many different groups: demographic calculations suggest that the Asia-Pacific now has the highest level of ethnic intermixture of any region in the world.³³ This makes it likely that most autonomous regions or federal units in the region will themselves contain significant internal minorities rather than comprising one homogenous “nation.” Even Malaysia’s long-standing federal system, which comprises a combination of former sultanates with colonial administrative units, features state boundaries that cut across, rather than reinforce, preexisting social divisions. As a result, vertical power sharing in most Asia-Pacific countries is likely to feature subnational units that are themselves ethnically intermixed – making them more amenable to centripetal rather than consociational approaches to political engineering.³⁴

31 For an analysis, see “Ethnicity and Public Policy in the Philippines,” in: *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Michael E. Brown and Šumit Ganguly (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1997), 321–350.

32 Rodd McGibbon, “Secessionist Challenges in Aceh and Papua: Is Special Autonomy the Solution?” *Policy Studies* 10 (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2004), viii.

33 See Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191–198.

34 For more on this distinction, see Benjamin Reilly, “Centripetalism,” in: *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, eds. Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff (New York: Routledge, 2011), 288–299.

6 Conclusion

Overall, the results of this comparative enquiry tend to complement the findings of previous research. In previous work I showed that higher levels of social diversity, as measured by the degree of ethnolinguistic fragmentation in each country, had distinctive impacts upon development and democracy across the Asia-Pacific.³⁵ In addition, this same measure of social diversity is one of the strongest correlates of party pluralism across the region. Building on these findings, this paper has shown that increasing societal diversity is also strongly associated with higher levels of executive power sharing across the Asia-Pacific region. However, power sharing in Asia is also associated with a widespread desire to build oversized coalitions that are resilient in the face of party-hopping or political defections.

These results represent something of a challenge to a number of well-entrenched political science theories. For example, probably the best-established model of government formation to be found in the scholarly literature is the “minimal winning coalition” theory formulated by William Riker, which predicts that parties will form cabinets with the smallest number of parties necessary to maintain government wherever possible, and will only include additional parties if and when they are needed to guarantee a legislative majority.³⁶ Most of this formal literature on coalitions is drawn from either Western experience or deductive theory-building, and finds little if any support when the empirical record of government formation in the Asia-Pacific is examined.³⁷ Rather, most of the new democracies of Asia and the Pacific governments comprise broad multiparty coalitions constructed to deliver balanced ethno-regional representation and provide a buffer against party defections. As a result, most countries, most of the time, employ “oversized” rather than “minimal-winning” cabinet formations. And, in contrast to the range of predictors of government formation that can be drawn from the formal literature, underlying levels of societal diversity appear to be the strongest predictor of coalition formation, with the highest levels of power sharing occurring in the most diverse societies.

The other main conclusion of this paper concerns the implications of the Asian approach to power sharing for the broader scholarly debate on political engineering.³⁸ While the experience of federalism, devolution, and autonomy across the region is too limited to reach any firm conclusions at this point, the basic ethnic demography of the Asia-Pacific means that most forms of devolution are likely to result in multiethnic component units, rather than the ethnically homogeneous jurisdictions recommended by the consociational literature. In terms of executive-formation patterns, the trends are much clearer: most Asia-Pacific democracies have rejected both the formal executive-power-sharing and the grand coalition models

35 For more on this, see Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity*.

36 William Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*.

37 See, for example, Michael Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

38 Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity*.

endorsed by consociationalists in favor of more fluid and informal approaches to executive formation. They have tended to eschew rigid rules mandating the composition of cabinets in favor of more flexible practices of inclusion. The limited use to date of explicit power-sharing requirements, the short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful experiments with grand coalition cabinets in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Fiji, and the strong association of such practices with political instability all underscore this aversion towards formal power-sharing rules. By contrast, informal power-sharing approaches, in which political inclusion is a result of dealmaking rather than law, appear to have become successfully institutionalized in a number of cases.

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