

Preface and acknowledgments

Worldwide there are more electoral democracies today than at any time in history. Almost half of all governments can be considered democratic, according to one of the most widely used comparisons developed by Freedom House. Nevertheless most of the surge in democratization occurred during the late-1980s and early-1990s, following the fall of the Berlin wall. During the early 21st Century, global progress has stagnated and there are also signs of an incipient backlash in some parts of the world, threatening fragile gains. It is therefore time to look anew at the capacity of institutional reforms to facilitate sustainable democratic regimes and to generate lasting peace-settlements in multiethnic states, especially those emerging from deep-rooted civil wars.

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

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