

ACCESSING POLITICAL
POWER: WOMEN AND
POLITICAL POWER-SHARING
IN PEACE PROCESSES



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THE PURPOSE OF THE GENDER BRIEFING SERIES

This brief is part of a Gender Briefing Series to support women's meaningful participation and the integration of gender perspectives in peace processes that aim to end violent intra-state conflict.

The key target audience is women, gender equality advocates and others engaged in peace processes, who wish to influence negotiations with a view to: (a) addressing the particular experiences of women during conflict, and (b) achieving lasting peace process outcomes that will improve women's lives and the lives of those around them.

Using a comparative approach, the briefs:

- Establish the importance of the issue from a gender equality perspective and the importance of women's meaningful engagement for effectively addressing it.
- Identify key issues with reference to the inclusion of women and their gender-related and gender-specific dimensions.
- Suggest ways of influencing change in peace processes, including identifying possible entry points and overcoming tensions with competing strategies.
- Highlight through examples how integrating gender perspectives in peace agreements not only benefits women, but also helps diversify perspectives and proposed solutions, thereby contributing more generally to progress in peace processes for all.
- Provide quantitative and qualitative data from peace agreements, using examples from across the world as evidence and inspiration for action.

- Offer analysis that provides for principled approaches to inclusion – grounded in international legal standards – with an indication of how these can be linked to pragmatic political arguments.

Too often, formal peace negotiations approach women's meaningful participation and gender equality as a secondary and apolitical concern to 'stopping the war'. Arguments are often made that the need for political pragmatism to end the conflict must singularly prevail. Yet both concerns are inextricably linked to one another for sustainable peace. The approach of these briefs supports engagement in peace processes rooted in the principle of gender equality, while recognizing that provisions designed to achieve equality in any context will be negotiated politically in practice. To influence change, women will need to influence a range of actors, including those who may not see gender equality as central. Women themselves will also have diverse political views and perspectives. The briefs therefore offer comparative analysis, examples and framing questions to support women and others to develop proposals suitable to their own context, rather than prescribing any one approach.

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INTRODUCTION

Peace processes often centrally focus on how to share or split power between the political and military groups at the heart of the conflict, in search of a compromise that will end violent conflict.

Arrangements for sharing or splitting power often contain complex mixes of some or all of the following power-sharing types:¹

- Political power-sharing: mechanisms for joint involvement of key protagonists of conflict in political institutions.
- Territorial power-sharing: ways of using territorial sub-division of the state to split power between different groups.
- Economic power-sharing: arrangements which split resources between groups.
- Military power-sharing: arrangements of joint participation in armies and their leaderships.

(See further, Hartzell and Hoddie, 2003 and 2007)

Political power-sharing is central to peace processes and its shape is often highly contested. It restructures how power will be held and exercised in political institutions in ways that present both challenges and opportunities for women's engagement. While often a key way of achieving compromise between warring groups and political opponents, it aims for an elite pact, which can frequently be exclusionary of wider constituencies and interests, including those of women.

Placing conflict actors at the centre of new political institutions – whether temporary or permanent – gives them a privileged place in the future power-structure of the country, and shapes the entire political settlement

and its opportunities for stability and transformation. Power-sharing is also a highly technical issue whose design involves engaging in voting arithmetic, understanding different options for electoral system design, and understanding a range of techniques of splitting power within state institutions such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, and even banking system.

All these factors make power-sharing controversial and difficult to influence for those outside of the immediate negotiation process – something this brief tries to redress. In addition, while considerable attention has been given to how to support women to engage with constitutional reform, transitional justice, and security sector reform, there has been much less academic and policy attention given to how women can engage with power-sharing mechanisms (for a recent exception, see Special Issue, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, 2018). **Yet, because agreement over how power is to be held and exercised by those at the heart of the conflict tends to affect all other issues on the negotiating table, it is vital for women to engage with power-sharing proposals.**

This brief sets out the various contexts in which different forms of political power-sharing are established in peace agreements. It indicates the challenges for women but also for other groups who are not at the centre of conflict, who may be useful allies in any struggle for greater inclusion.

PART I: OVERVIEW

What is political power-sharing?

The term ‘power-sharing’ covers a wide variety of political arrangements, each of which have different potential impacts on gender equality. At its most basic level, power-sharing² refers to political arrangements that aim to produce joint government between groups, as well as move beyond straightforward majoritarian government towards some form of group accommodation. In peace and transition processes, power-sharing tends to involve more developed technical options. Outlined below are the types of arrangement that can be labelled political power-sharing (see further, Bell, 2018).

Most frequently associated with the term, is a form of power-sharing with four classic elements called ‘consociationalism’ – because it forces opposed parties to act in ‘consociation’ with each other. Power-sharing arrangements often use these elements to provide for political accommodation for group identities and allegiances, rather than having governments formed by those who win the majority in elections. Examples of this type of power-sharing can be found in the peace settlements in Northern Ireland, Burundi, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.³

The four elements are:

Coalition government with grand coalition executives:

Parties representing different groups within society are put into an executive coalition by agreement that different groups will have different ministries, or by a formula that ensures that major groups in society have representation in the executive based on their proportion within the electorate.

Proportionality in the voting system and legislature, and other public institutions:

Votes are translated into a proportional formula for representation in the legislature, to ensure balance among groups, sometimes also with forms of ‘set-aside’ places for smaller groups. Proportional representation (specific provision for different groups to have specific numbers of representatives, in accordance with their percentage in the population) is also used in key public institutions such

as: the police, judiciary, civil service, and other public-sector institutions.

Minority veto in areas of vital interest: Key blocs are given a veto which they can use to protect their ‘vital interests’, such as language rights, from unilateral change by the majority. For example, in Northern Ireland, politicians must designate themselves as ‘unionist’ or ‘nationalist’ or ‘other’. A majority of either the Unionist or Nationalist blocs voting, can result in an area being designated as one of ‘vital interest’ to that community. Triggering the ‘vital interest’ mechanism then requires the measure to be approved by a majority of both blocs (a ‘weighted vote’), rather than an overall simple majority of those voting.

Segmental autonomy: Groups are given forms of self-government, which can be granted in two ways: first, through territorial devolution of power; and second, through devolution of power relating to spheres of life, which are particularly related to identity, such as areas relating to culture, education, language and sport.

Power-sharing arrangements can also use more ‘integrative’ approaches whereby the system is designed to try to encourage divided groups to work across their divisions. In Burundi, for example, the power-sharing arrangement required political parties to ‘reflect the national character’, implying that it would have both Hutu and Tutsi members.

[Burundi, Burundian Constitution of 18 March 2005.](#)

TITLE III: Of the System of Political Parties, Article 78:

In their organization and their functioning the political parties must respond to democratic principles. They must be opened to all Burundians, and their national character must also be reflected at the level of their leadership [direction]. They may not advocate violence, exclusion, and hatred in any of their forms, notably those based on ethnic, regional, religious or gender affiliation.

Complex power-sharing

It is important to note that power-sharing arrangements in practice rarely equate with 'pure' typologies or models. **Contemporary peace settlements often produce 'complex power-sharing' arrangements, which draw eclectically from the elements set out above to create new permutations.** These cut across political, territorial, military and economic power-sharing models (Weller and Wolff, 2005; Wolff, 2011). Moreover, some arrangements include provision for members of civil society or even international actors, to be involved in the political and legal institutions of the country, alongside the more general ethnic proportionality provided for. For example, arrangements in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) through the Dayton Peace Agreement 1995, provided for joint ethnic and international participation in institutions such as the courts, human rights bodies, and Central Bank mechanisms.

Why is political power-sharing important for women to engage

they are often alleged to exclude women as a group. In fact, women are often wary of power-sharing arrangements because of how these **entrench ethno-national identity claims at the heart of the conflict, in ways that exclude, or risk excluding, equality for women** (see United Nations, 2017, pages 34-35).

Obstacles to women's engagement with power-sharing proposals include that:

- Women will often be underrepresented in the political-military hierarchies at the centre of both peace negotiations and the power-sharing institutions which result from them.
- Women are found in all the different ethno-national groups associated with the conflict, and their identity as women will connect in complex ways with the identity divisions at the heart of the conflict (often understood as 'intersectionality'). This can make it difficult for broad-based women's groups to form common positions on power-sharing arrangements – including different and even opposing views on whether the power-sharing arrangements deliver equality or negate it. Yet, failure to produce clear proposals with broad-based support relating to the protection and advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment, can lead to marginalization of women's voices.
- How different power-sharing design options will affect women's participation will not always be easily apparent from a description of arrangements alone. The outcome for women's participation in political institutions can depend on matters such as the make-up of the electorate in gender terms; the particular type of electoral system chosen; the mathematical formula used to determine group participation in ministries; the order in which the parties chose ministries (which will affect women if different parties have different commitments to

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