

# BAK10: Comparative Democratic Politics

Week 2 - Patterns of Democracy

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# The Plan for Today

- Models of democracy in Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy*.
- Democratic institutions and government performance.
- New Institutionalism: Lijphart's friends and critics.

# Questions for you

- Have you encountered Lijphart's work in previous courses?
- What are the main claims in the chapters of the book assigned?
- Thinking back to last session, what understanding of democracy do you think Lijphart is adopting?
- Some would say that Lijphart and *Patterns of Democracy* are quite 'dated' material. Did you have the same impression? Did you find parts of the readings especially (un)interesting or (un)convincing?



# Arend Lijphart

- Early interest: democracy in divided societies.
- **Consociationalism:** “government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.”  
(1969): grand coalitions, mutual veto, proportionality, segmental autonomy.

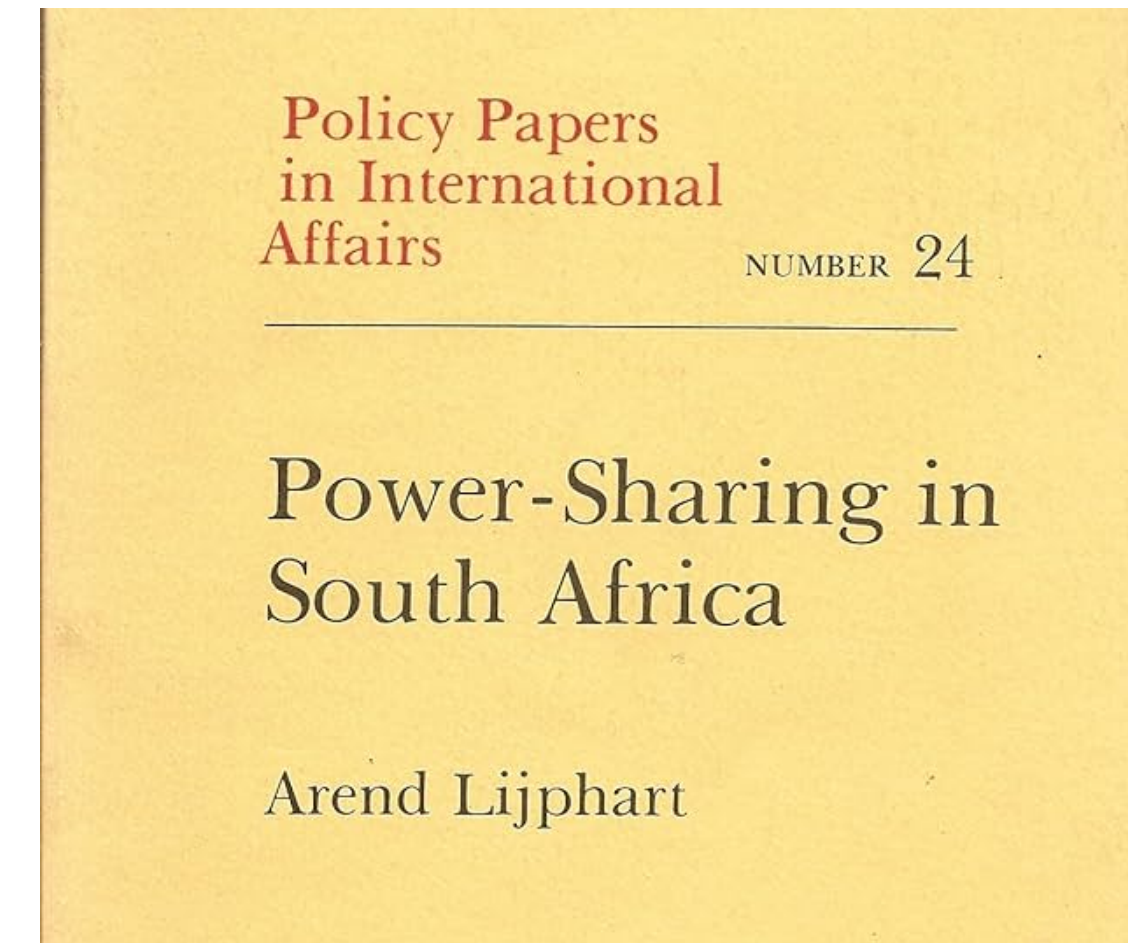


- Expanded into the idea of a ‘consensus’ model in *Democracies* (1984) and *Patterns* (1999, 2012).
- Real-world interest and influence: Fiji, Iraq, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Bosnia.



# Intellectual and Political Context

- “The first modern scholar to identify the power-sharing model of democracy was not a political scientist but an economist: Sir Arthur Lewis. [...] His diagnosis of this failure was that the West African ethnically divided countries had not been given the right kind of democracy. What they needed, he argued, was broad inter-ethnic coalitions, elections by proportional representation, and ethnic group autonomy. [...] In contrast to political scientists like [...] myself who discovered power-sharing a few years later, Lewis invented power-sharing by trying to think what would be the logical solution to the problems in West Africa.” (Lijphart, 1998)





# Patterns of Democracy

- Starting point: Westminster democracy.
- Concentration of power in one-party and bare-majority cabinets, with the executive dominant over parliament.
- Few institutional checks.
- Single-member district plurality electoral system, sustaining a two-party system.
- Democracies with institutions that deviate from the model are called ‘consensus’.



# Patterns of Democracy

- *Inductively* looks at real-world deviations from the Westminster model, and identifies two ‘patterns’ of variation:
- **Power-sharing:** proportional representation, over-sized coalition cabinets, multi-party systems, strong parliaments, corporatist interest groups. → ‘executive-parties’ dimension.
- **Power separation:** federalism, ‘strong’ bicameralism, rigid constitutions, strong judicial review, independent central banks. → ‘federal-unitary’ dimension.

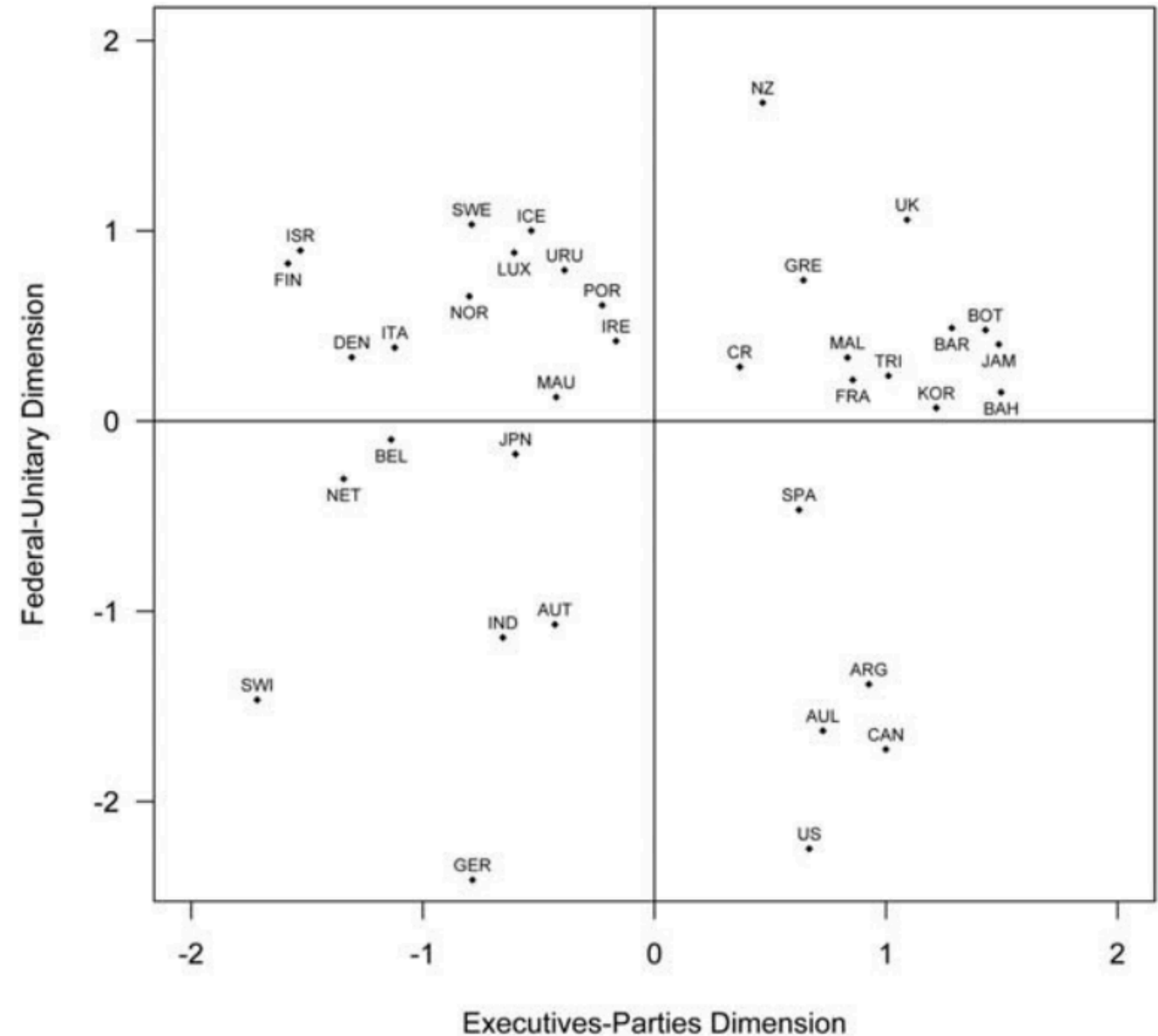


# Patterns of Democracy

**TABLE 14.2**

Varimax orthogonal rotated matrix of the ten variables distinguishing majoritarian from consensus democracy in 36 democracies, 1945–2010

Variable	Factor I	Factor II
Effective number of parliamentary parties	-0.91	0.09
Minimal winning one-party cabinets	0.92	-0.09
Executive dominance	0.84	0.08
Electoral disproportionality	0.66	-0.03
Interest group pluralism	0.72	-0.10
Federalism-decentralization	-0.19	0.98
Bicameralism	0.03	0.72
Constitutional rigidity	0.10	0.60
Judicial review	0.28	0.53
Central bank independence	-0.03	0.61





# Patterns of Democracy

## **‘executive-parties’ dimension:**

1. Single-party majority cabinets vs multiparty coalitions.
2. Executive dominance vs executive-legislative balance.
3. Two- vs multi-party systems.
4. Majoritarian and disproportional electoral systems vs PR.
5. Pluralist vs corporatist interest group systems.

## **‘federal-unitary’ dimension:**

1. Unitary/centralised vs federal/decentralised
2. Unicameralism/weak bicameralism vs strong Upper Houses.
3. Flexible vs rigid constitutions
4. Legislatures have the final word on the constitutionality of their own legislation vs strong judicial review
5. Executive control vs independence of central banks.

Why do these things ‘go together’? Are some institutions causally prior to others? What’s missing?

# Democratic Performance

1. Consensus democracies *on the ‘executive-parties’ dimension* perform better on ‘soft’ indicators of performance (a “kinder, gentler democracy”)...

Turnout, civil liberties, gender equality, socio-economic equality, satisfaction with democracy, incarceration rates, social spending.

2. ...while doing no worse (\*in fact, ‘a bit better’, in 2012) on ‘hard’ indicators.

Government effectiveness\*, security\*, inflation\*, unemployment\*, control of corruption\*, GDP growth, budget balance.

3. What truly matters is ‘power-sharing’ institutions (‘*executive-parties’ dimension*), not separation of powers (‘*federal-unitary’ dimension*).

- What are the causal mechanisms?



# ‘New Institutionalism’

- Bingham Powell’s *Elections as Instruments of Democracy* (2000)
  - Electoral system as core of consensus-majoritarian distinction, which maps on different ‘visions’ of representation (mandate accountability) vs proportional influence.
- Edeltraud Roller’s *The Performance of Democracies* (2005)
  - Informal vs formal negotiation institutions have different effects.
- George Tsebelis’s *Veto Players* (1995)
  - What matters for policy stability is the number of ‘veto players’ (and their preference distance), not the specific type of institutions.

# How sound is the framework?

- **Concept definition:** ‘bare majority’ vs ‘broad power-sharing’ or *different* forms of majority rule? (Nagel, 2000; Ganghof, 2016)
- **Measurement:** selection, substitutability, aggregation (e.g. of formal and informal institutions). (Roller, 2005; Bormann, 2010)
- **Endogeneity:** institutions are themselves the product of political culture, historical legacies. (Bernauer and Vatter, 2016)
- **External validity** beyond Western countries. (van Cranenburgh and Kopecky, 2004; Fortin, 2008)



# How relevant?

- Are we underplaying the importance of effective, rapid government responsiveness?
- Are ‘consensus’ democracies truly more inclusive when it comes to groups without representation? (Manatschal and Bernauer, 2016)
- Is a ‘permanent grand coalition’ a long-term drag on performance?
- Is accommodation of illiberal parties good or bad for democracy?



As of January 31, 2025, Belgium has concluded the formation of a new federal government after nearly eight months of negotiations following the June 2024 elections. The government formation process lasted 236 days, which is notably shorter than Belgium's record of 541 days in 2010-2011.





# Thank you for your kind attention!