

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Power-sharing and the external governance of self-determination disputes

By Allison McCulloch, Ph.D. & Joanne McEvoy, Ph.D.



Why this research is important

In conflict zones around the world, from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo to Cyprus, Iraq and Syria, international third-party conflict mediators increasingly recommend power-sharing pacts whereby ethnic representatives agree to end the violence and govern the country together. Despite its burgeoning popularity, power-sharing can be an unstable approach to statebuilding and conflict transformation. While it has proven effective in the short to medium term, over time it is prone to destabilizing political crises arising from the legacy of the conflict, crises that often entail the prolonged engagement of external actors in order to restabilize the agreement. External actors are motivated to find resolutions to conflict that provide them with quick exit strategies and the ability to disengage

What you need to know

As the world witnesses an increasing number of armed conflicts, international actors continue to grapple with the question of how to end war and build peace in deeply divided, war-torn territories. We seek to understand why international organizations recommend power-sharing—a form of governance which provides groups guaranteed inclusion in government—when the maintenance of such arrangements may prolong their engagement. The project's focus on international conflict mediation and the promotion of power-sharing arrangements is particularly timely given the search for lasting, peaceful solutions in divided societies such as Syria, Iraq, and Cyprus.

from protracted conflicts; it is thus curious that they continue to recommend arrangements that prolong their involvement. By articulating critical knowledge on the external governance of self-determination disputes, the project has the potential to inform constitutional design in peace processes for conflict zones around the world.

How the research will be conducted

To explore the role of external actors in promoting and upholding power-sharing, the project adopts a multi-methods approach. Our focus will be to develop case studies of three conflict mediating organizations: the United Nations

Department of Political Affairs and its Standby Mediation Team, the European Union's Mediation Support Unit, and the London-based non-governmental organization (NGO), Inter-Mediate. We will travel to New York City, Brussels and London to conduct around 20 semi-structured interviews with conflict mediators and other representatives of these organizations. We will also conduct content analysis of official mediation documents, the published memoirs of conflict negotiators, and peace agreements in order to understand trends, themes and patterns in the external governance of power-sharing arrangement.

How this research can be used

The findings from this project will contribute to the ongoing lively debates on power-sharing, conflict mediation, and external governance arrangements. Third-party mediators will benefit from our focus on the normative and instrumental rationale for adopting power-sharing arrangements. Our findings can also be used by policymakers, community organizations and political parties in conflict and post-conflict zones dedicated to peace and to ethnic and national accommodation, as well as by the general public. As citizens become more knowledgeable about power-sharing practices and the role of external actors in their governance, they can use this information to encourage their political elites to negotiate political settlements that ensure locally-driven peacebuilding and power-sharing practices. We will present our findings at national and international conferences and plan to publish three peer-reviewed journal articles and a policy brief.

About the researchers

Dr. Allison McCulloch is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Brandon University. She specializes in the study of security and stability in deeply divided and/or war-torn societies. Specifically her research explores the structure of peace negotiations, the role of international actors in facilitating agreement, and the role of power-sharing in facilitating stability.

mccullocha@brandonu.ca

Dr. Joanne McEvoy is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen, UK. Her primary research interests focus on the potential of power-sharing democracy to promote sustainable peace in deeply divided societies. She is particularly interested in the role of international organizations as conflict mediators and the impact of their interventions in peacebuilding more broadly.

j.mcevoy@abdn.ac.uk

Keywords

power-sharing; self-determination disputes; conflict mediation; international intervention; statebuilding

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University's academic research, creative activities and expertise. This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services and by the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, Faculty of Education.

<http://www.brandonu.ca/research-connection>

This research project has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee.