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# Majoritarian Democracy and Political Philosophy in Governance System of Northern Ireland

## Introduction

Democracy remains a strong aspect in the determination of efficient governing systems all over the world. Democracy is defined as a governance system where the decisions made are an agreement of the people and passed by the people. This normally means that the election of representatives of the government, the local leaders, and even the passing of laws is considerate of the intentions and input of the society. However, even with the concept of democracy, two subsystems have to be considered in evaluating the way people take control of governance systems. The majoritarian and consensus democracies are systems that many countries are using in deciding on the policies to be passed and the people representing the people. An analysis of Northern Ireland helps provide an overview of these two subsystems of democracy and possible areas where the government system is failing.

## Part I:

The majoritarian democracy refers to a political philosophy considers that the majority in terms of religion, race, social class, and even dialect assumes the larger influence over the others/ minorities and take the huge role of making decisions to shape the society (Garoupa & Grembi, 2015). It also focuses on the empowerment of a single group at the expense of the others based on the numbers to influence changes within society. The majoritarian democracy focuses on reducing the number of people involved in the decision making process. It assumes that the majority have a higher benefit to attain from their involvement in the decision-making process. At the same time, it considers that the interest of the majority overshadows that of the minority and the implementation of decisions based on the majority helps solve the biggest issues within the society.

On the other hand, consensus democracy is a political philosophy that considers equal participation and involvement in the decision-making process (Hendriks, 2017). The representation of the members is based on a consensus where all the stakeholders have a say in the decisions made. The involvement of the society in the decision-making process focuses on offering the benefit of all the members to be part of the decisions being made and the outcomes. In a consensus democracy, the input of the minorities and the majorities are taken as equally influential in the attainment of the projected governance system (Lijphart, 2012).

The adoption of a majoritarian democracy offers the benefit of attaining a unification element for the rule and power of governance. The majority have a similar interest that is implemented with the intention of promoting the larger share of the society (Garoupa & Grembi, 2015). The philosophy is also simple to set up and maintain the stability of governance since all operations are a decision passed by many. However, even with the advantage of the governance system, it also increases the possibilities of tyranny, which might also affect the majority in their ability to make decisions. At the same time, basing the system on the majority would not assure the maximum application of resources in the society since the decisions will be one-sided leading to

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the elimination of the input that the minority could also provide.

A consensus democracy has the benefit of integrating the opinions and perceptions of minorities in the decision-making process, which helps enhance efficiency in the decisions made. It also has the benefit of increasing the opportunities to find solutions to issues since the approach to making a decision is from a collective standpoint. Lastly, a consensus democracy promotes political stability as the people involved in the decision-making process focuses on all the people involved and not only a certain group. The downside of a consensus democracy is the lack of accountability, as measurements cannot be done to evaluate the progress of growth (Risse & Babayan, 2015). Lastly, changes cannot be easily made considering that the process of attaining change has to take into consideration the variation in the population involved and logistics to collect collective decision from all those involved.

## **Part II:**

The executive is the devolved government and takes the administration roles of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The actions of the executive are evaluated and measured by the Assembly. The executive is composed of the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, and various ministers who have individual remits/ portfolios. The membership is allocated to the parties that have the majority representation in the Assembly. The selection is done using the D'Hondt system, which picks the number of ministers to be included in the Assembly (McGarry & O'Leary, 2016). The inclusion of the parties is inclusive of the majorities that are included in the government and power-sharing enforcement system with the involvement made mandatory.

Northern Ireland uses the STV (Single Transferable Vote) systems in electing the members of the Assembly, the European Parliament, and the local councils (Mitchell, 2014). The functioning of the STV system is based on the share of the votes that a candidate received from his or her supporters. At the same time, factors such as the size of the electorate and the number of seats to be filled are also taken into consideration. The candidates are rated in preference and assigned numbers before a quota system is calculated using the Droop Quota formula. Candidates who have more than the quota attained are elected directly. The additional votes that are above the quota are transferred to other candidates (Lijphart, 2012). In a case where there are additional sets to be filled, the lowest-ranked candidates are eliminated and the preferences based on the second and lower preferences are used to distribute the seats among the candidates that are still available.

Decentralization is depicted with the application and functionality of the Good Friday Act, which necessitates for a democratically elected assembly that includes executives and legislatives who are capable of offering efficient governance and policies (Walsh, 2016). At the same time, the elected members of the assembly are to represent the interests of the public/ society.

The operations of the different political institutions in Northern Ireland are based on the promotion of a system that seeks to include all the parties with a stake in the growth and even sustenance of the community. The political institutions push for the representation of both majorities and minorities, which is a form of consensus form of democracy.

## **Part III:**

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According to McCrudden et al. (2016), the signing of the Good Friday Agreement Act formed the beginning for the revision and amendment in most of the political institutions in Ireland leading to the implementation of standards that brought in power sharing institutions, which have been stable for a while. However, even in the ability of the institutions to change from unstable to stable, they are now inefficient (Lijphart, 2012). One of the main concerns in the evaluation of the performance of the system, it is considered as an obstacle to the emergence of a post-conflict society that supports 'normal' politics that offers a solution to some of the main issues affecting the ability of the region to remain stable. At the same time, with the changes instituted with the signing of the agreement, the institutions have failed to find a permanent solution to issues of social segregation. One of the issues that continue to emerge is the inability of the institutions to put a stop to the influence of the major parties to maximize the introduction and passing of their agendas. This is escalated by the high number of members from the large parties.

One of the largely criticized processes is the application of the D'Hondt system in the selection of the executives to take the seats. Among the issues in the system is the consideration given to the largest party to make the first pick of the ministers available before the party that is ranked second gets the opportunity to make its pick. The system and its operational approaches make it undemocratic considering that precludes an opposition or alteration in the government (O'Leary & McGarry, 2017). Ministers have a guaranteed position in the parties despite their preparedness and ability to be part of the party. As a result, the system favors largely the extremists.

The political institutions of Northern Ireland are based on various regulations, insight, and input based on current and past issues and even successes in the development of a stable system to enhance governance in the region. The adoption of the Good Friday Agreement has helped Northern Ireland achieve great efforts in enhancing the rights and benefits to the public. However, there are weaknesses within the system that is making it fragile and unable to provide an equal platform for the stability of the region as a whole. One area that seems to be of huge impact on the performance of the system and its stability is the selection of the members for the parties. The current D'Hondt system is structured to allow for the election and selection of leaders based on the numbers. However, changing the system to base the selection on the affiliations could be more efficient. Giving the majority the priority reduces the efficiency of the system and allowing the Assembly to be efficient in terms of integrating the right people with the right intentions and prepared towards the promotion of the interest of the society.

## **Conclusion**

The current governance system of Northern Ireland still has some flaws that are seen as positive among some critics and a threat to the growth of the region to others. The analysis of the different political institutions in Northern Ireland points out the favoritism in the selection of the members of parliament, which in part is affecting the performance of selected leaders. Making a change in the system could be a huge step towards the change in the progress of the regions political system and its ability to grow.