

The effect of power-sharing on government performance

Power-sharing has a small positive effect on government performance, although the effect depends on the nature of the power-sharing arrangement.

Geographical Region: Global

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.086$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (2 studies with 13 effect sizes)

Short summary

Power-sharing can increase the likelihood of sustained democratic stability. But effects depend on the nature of the power-sharing arrangements. Rigid corporate systems often stabilize governance in the short term but risk elite entrenchment, whereas liberal systems, emphasizing flexibility and proportional representation, tend to support longer-term stability and inclusivity.

Long summary

The intervention

Power-sharing mechanisms seek to accommodate diverse groups in governance, particularly in divided or post-conflict settings. Interventions include inclusive governance, equal representation, and institutionalized veto rights. Corporate approaches rely on rigid, group-based quotas (e.g., Lebanon), whereas liberal approaches use flexible, electorally determined inclusivity (e.g., Nigeria). These systems aim to balance ethnic or political representation, ensure minority participation in decision-making, and contribute to governance stability.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Power-sharing is theorized to improve government performance by reducing political instability, mitigating ethnic or factional conflict, and fostering accountability through proportional representation and executive coalitions. Corporate approaches may stabilize governance but risk limiting competition and reinforcing elite dominance. Liberal approaches generally balance inclusivity and governance efficiency and are better able to adapt to emerging political dynamics.

The evidence base

The cell includes 2 impact evaluation studies. The analysis utilized global datasets, and consequently focused the analysis on multi-ethnic societies worldwide and diverse political contexts.

Evidence findings

The effects of power-sharing on government performance are small and highly context-dependent. Corporate systems often stabilize governance in the short term but may entrench elite control, limiting democratic growth. Liberal systems generally show stronger long-term inclusivity and adaptability. Trade-offs between stability and democratic competition remain

context-specific, highlighting the importance of tailoring power-sharing mechanisms to local conditions.

Included studies

Graham (2017) To protect emerging democracies, political powersharing institutions are recommended, which aim to safeguard minority group interests. Yet there is little empirical research on whether powersharing promotes democratic survival, and some concern that it limits electoral accountability. To fill this gap, we differentiate between inclusive, dispersive, and constraining powersharing institutions and analyze their effects on democratic survival. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. The study differentiate between inclusive, dispersive, and constraining powersharing institutions and analyze their effects on democratic survival from 1975 to 2015 using a global dataset. There is a positive effect of constraining powersharing, which is strongly positive for democratic survival both substantively and statistically ($p < 0.0001$). For the Model 1 sample, the 5-year likelihood of democratic survival is 95.1%. If we increase constraining powersharing by one standard deviation, that probability rises to 97.5%—the risk of democratic failure is cut in half. Remarkably, the effect remains significant controlling for Freedom House, Polity, and Horizontal Constraints. In contrast, neither inclusive nor dispersive powersharing has a significant effect. These results strongly support Hypotheses i.e., constraining powersharing positively promotes democratic survival. The study is rated as low confidence due to no mention of power calculations

Juon (2022) The democratic effect of power-sharing, arguing that it has two antagonist faces. On the positive side, it provides guarantees of inclusion to political elites, allowing them to commit to democratic rules. On the negative side, it also has an illiberal face, entailing limits on competition and individual rights. In this article, these contrary characteristics are traced back to two institutional types of power-sharing: a more flexible and open, liberal, type and a more rigid, corporate one. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. Using a novel dataset on power-sharing rules for 138 multi-ethnic countries and the period from 1945 to 2016, their respective democratic merits are tested. The analysis shows that only liberal forms of power-sharing exhibit strong positive effects on democracy while corporate forms exert mixed or even negative ones. Over-time increases of our normalized power-sharing index are associated with changes in our similarly normalized dependent variables measuring democracy of around half that magnitude. The study is rated as low confidence due to no mention of power calculations.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: Confidence is low due to the limited number of studies. Both included studies are individually rated as low confidence.

Other outcomes in the study:

None