

Book Review: Politics in Deeply Divided Societies

by blog admin

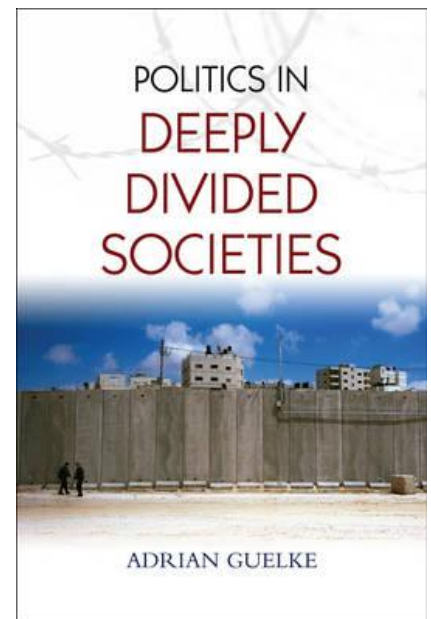
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*This book provides an authoritative and systematic analysis of the politics of so-called 'deeply divided societies' in the post Cold War era. From Bosnia to South Africa, Northern Ireland to Iraq, it explains why such places are so prone to political violence, and demonstrates why – even in times of peace – the fear of violence continues to shape attitudes, entrenching divisions in societies that already lack consensus on their political institutions. **Stacy Edgar** believes for students of comparative politics, Adrian Guelke's volume provides a valuable starting point in understanding political institutions in conflict-societies.*



Politics in Deeply Divided Societies. Adrian Guelke. Polity Press. April 2012.

(<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Politics-Deeply-Divided-Societies-Adrian/dp/0745648509>) (<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-TsTwPqrXT4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Politics+in+Deeply+Divided+Societies.+Adrian+Guelke.&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1kumUMvDJ4ap0AXz0IDwBw&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA>)



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A “deeply divided society,” as defined by Adrian Guelke, is one where violence or the threat of violence keeps it divided. What distinguishes deeply divided societies from fragmented ones is their inability to agree on a common process for decision-making, making peace and reconciliation difficult, if not impossible to achieve. A native of Northern Ireland, Guelke's close encounters with his home country's violent political past shines throughout this volume. He provides a rich study of Northern Ireland, as well as a wide range of contemporary examples including post-apartheid era South Africa, the break-up of Yugoslavia, communal violence in India, the 2011 referendum creating South Sudan, among others. He compares the experience of his home country's violent conflict to other “deeply divided societies,” highlighting trends common to deeply divided societies worldwide. Summarising commonalities, he describes the institutional structures encountered in deeply divided societies, integrating his typologies into well-known discussions of democracy and political legitimacy.

First examining the history of the term deeply divided society, he examines fundamental assumptions about nation building and how democratic governance takes root. He looks at how democratic institutions and processes can facilitate peace, reconciliation, and in some cases — nation-building, rather than focus on whether democracy take hold in conflict-ridden societies where the state either does not hold a monopoly on violence or its monopoly is not accepted as legitimate. Chapter Seven, for example, discusses Arend Lijphart's consociational model of liberal democracy, whose electoral structure facilitates a multi-party system where coalition-building becomes as important to governing; an example of the extra institutional

glue that has been employed in Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burundi, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kenya to facilitate power-sharing among these countries' divided parts in hope of facilitating peaceful cooperation and democratic processes.

This is an important contrast to Westminster-model of democracy, which seems to require a level of national political legitimacy and stability lacking in deeply divided societies. The first-past-the-post system, which typically results in a two-party system, fosters an "all or nothing" element to political competition that can be downright scary. Elections can easily turn into violent competitions over control of the state and its resources by a particular group to gain power over others. Yet within many older democracies, one group tended to consolidate power and often used violent and repressive means to do so. As the author notes in chapter five, it is only in recent decades that multiculturalism has been embraced and has proven complicated to implement. At least some integration is necessary to reach the compromise necessary for peace, reconciliation, and democracy in deeply divided societies. However, these societies are faced with complex decisions in accomplish this while honoring multiculturalism.

Chapter eight looks at deeply divided societies within the greater international system, discussing the increasing acceptability of external interventions as a means for resolving conflict in these societies. Guelke credits several factors for the emergence of this trend. The end of the Cold War mitigated fears that external mediation would escalate into a proxy war between superpowers. Simultaneously, the international community saw the rise of the "responsibility to protect" doctrine and the belief among many that it is the responsibility of the international community to protect citizens against atrocities committed against them by their governments. From a cost-benefit perspective, new military technology has lowered the cost of intervention- particularly in terms of potential casualties. Lastly, Guelke observes an enduring triumphalism of democracy, human rights, and rule of law, the spread of which are used as justifications for external interventions.

Returning to the example of Northern Ireland, Guelke examines the role of the United States and South Africa's African National Congress in brokering the peace negotiations leading up to the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Whereas a variety of motivations may drive the acceptability of external interventions, the case of Northern Ireland highlights that it was the specific circumstances surrounding preexisting relationships of the United States and South Africa to both sides of the conflict that aided them as external mediators in this conflict. He contrasts the experience of Northern Ireland to the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In what Guelke characterizes as of "coercive diplomacy," external mediation consists of imposed institutional arrangements and international military interventions that force international political parties to co-operate. Through this comparison, Guelke offers a stoic reminder: "external mediation tends to work best in deeply divided societies when it is voluntarily accepted by the parties to the conflict." Without this local buy-in, establishing credible and effective political institutions is unlikely.

Guelke is at his best when in the thick of a case study, detailing the institutional structures, cleavages within the conflict, and political agreements. This is an important reminder to practitioner and academic alike: the complex societies that Guelke seeks to unpack are best understood up close. I read Guelke's book during my summer travels to the Southern Philippines, who last month forged a milestone peace agreement and is experiencing a transition much like those chronicled. Guelke offered many detailed examples that offered interesting points of comparison, but the lack of analytical framework limits the replications of his research.

Of secondary importance, I struggled to derive actionable recommendations as a development practitioner. Still, the individual chapters on justice, policing, partition, power-sharing, and external mediation offer a treasure trove of research hypotheses that could fill volumes of future books. The study of deeply divided societies is valuable both to enriching the understanding of democratic models of governance and to informing institutional arrangements to facilitate peace and reconciliation. For students of comparative politics, Guelke's volume provides a valuable starting point in understanding political institutions in conflict-societies.

Stacy Edgar is currently works at a Washington, DC-based international development consulting firm. She graduated from the LSE with an M.Sc in Global Politics and Civil Society. Read more reviews by Stacy. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/category/book-reviewers/stacy-edgar/>)

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