



CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL CRISIS
MANAGEMENT & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Gaps Breached and Gaps Bridged

The Theory and Practice of
Managing Ethnonational Conflict

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What is ethnonational conflict?

- A 'clash' of competing self-determination claims with at least two actors (groups and/or state), one of whom sees causes, consequences, and management in terms of an ethnic divide
 - Inter-group conflicts: Cyprus, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo, etc.
 - Group-state conflicts: Sri Lanka, South Ossetia, Chechnya, Burma, etc.
 - Overlapping inter-group/group-state conflicts: Darfur, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, etc.

What is conflict management?

- In a broad sense: the whole range of policy responses by governments and third-party actors faced with ethnonational conflict
- In a narrower sense: finding an *institutional arrangement* in which the demands of conflict parties can be accommodated to such an extent that political engagement is preferable to the continued use of violence

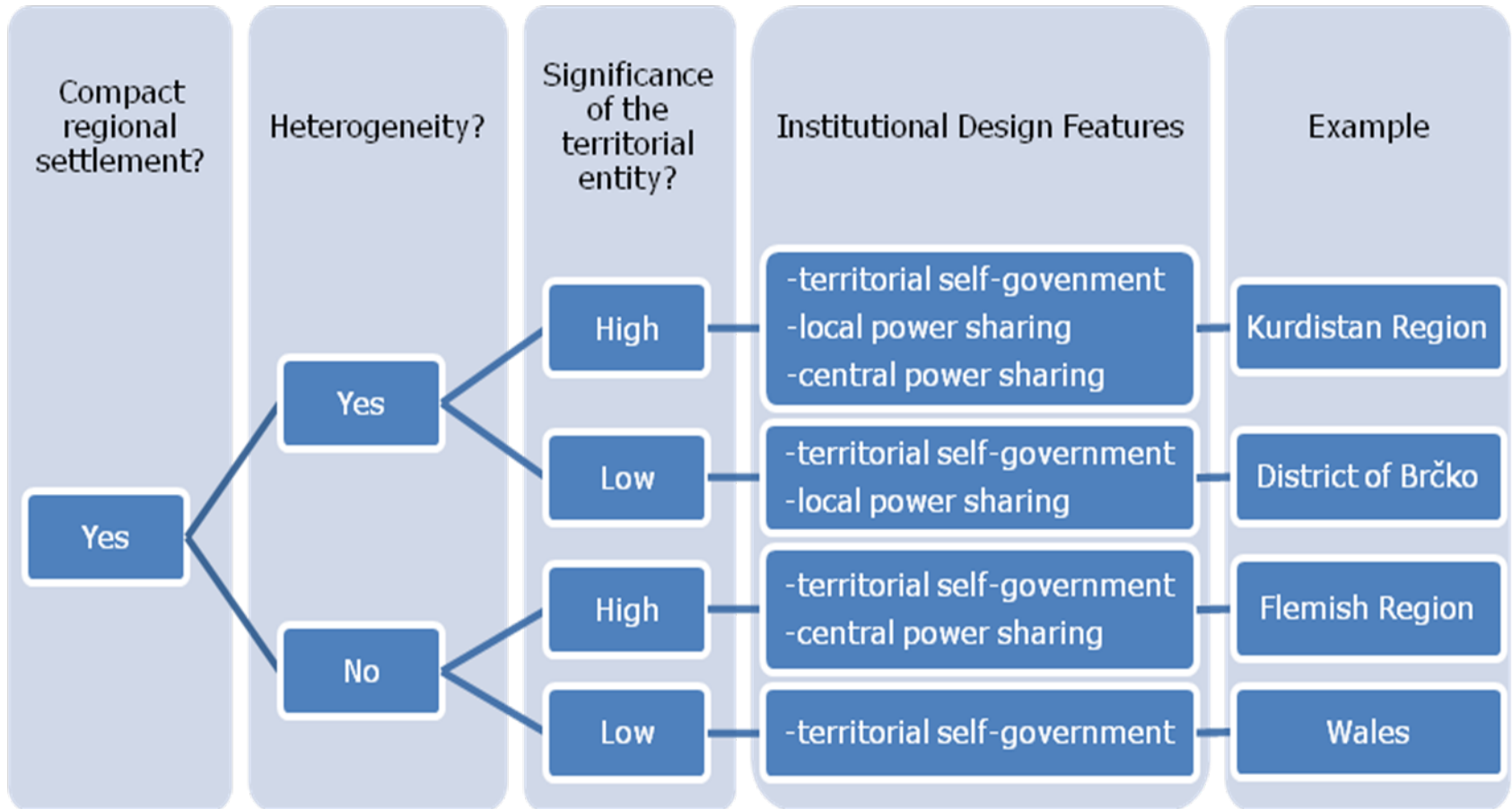
A model of conflict management: **Context, content, and stability**

- Structure:
 - Demography
 - Geography
 - Formal and informal institutions of social, economic and political life
- Agency: who is involved?
 - With what demands?
 - With what skills?
 - With what vision?

A model of conflict management: Context, **content**, and stability

- Structure and agency are dynamically linked:
 - Structures constrain agents
 - Agents can change structures
- Context shapes the content of the institutional arrangement adopted to manage conflict

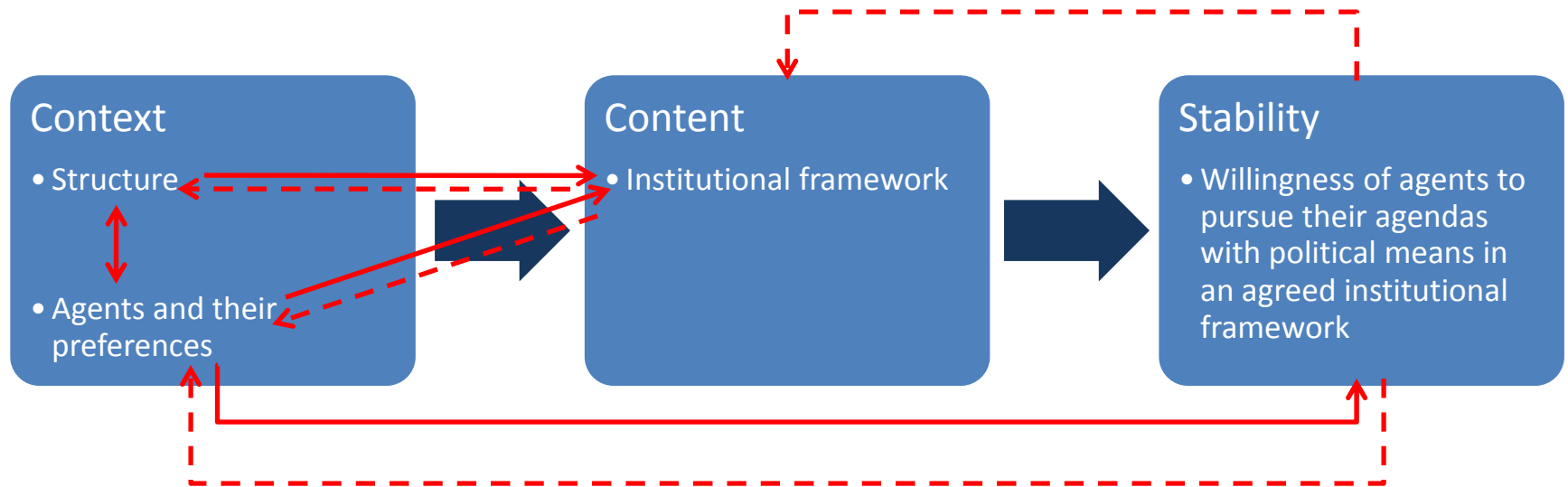
Content as a function of context



A model of conflict management: Context, content, and **stability**

- Examining context offers one set of insights:
 - Why do particular institutions emerge from a conflict settlement process?
- An equally, important question, however, can only be answered by considering context and content together:
 - Why are some settlements stable while others are not?

A model of conflict management: Context, content, and stability



Theories of conflict management

- Most existing theories recognise the pivotal nature of institutions: consociationalism, centripetalism, power dividing
- Disagreement exists about
 - The extent to which **content** is dependent upon, or should shape, **context** (reflecting an underlying debate about the nature of ethnic identity and stability of agents' preferences)
 - The kind of institutions best suited to manage conflict, i.e., to achieve **stable settlements**

Theories of conflict management

- What relationships need to/can be regulated qua institutional arrangements?
 - Between the centre and sub-state entities: territorial state construction
 - Between groups at the centre and in sub-state entities: government institutions
 - Between individuals, groups, and the state: rights and identities

Theories of conflict management

- Territorial state construction
 - Spectrum between unitary and (con-)federal designs
 - Centralisation vs. decentralisation of powers
- Government institutions
 - Presidential/parliamentary systems, separation of powers
 - Participation and representation rules
- Rights and identities
 - Individual vs. group rights
 - Recognition of distinct identities

From theory to practice?

- Centripetalists and power dividers:
 - Few cases to study
 - Critique and failures of (corporate) consociations leads to rejection of consociational techniques as long-term arrangements
- Consociationalists
 - Most cases of conflict management rely on consociational techniques
 - Trend towards liberal, rather than corporate consociations

From theory to practice?

- All schools equally acknowledge the significance of power sharing, at least in a transitional phase
- The key question—in conflict management theory and practice—today therefore is:
 - How do we design (transitional) power-sharing institutions?

From theory to practice?

- Power dividers:
 - Emphasise the importance of assuring weaker parties that they can influence decisions during the transition phase, including determining (some) rules of the game after the transition phase
 - ‘Sunset clauses’ as main mechanism for ending the transition phase
- Centripetalists
 - Rely on electoral systems to induce moderation and thus gradually de-ethnicise politics

From theory to practice?

- Liberal consociationalists:
 - Emphasise the importance of giving institutional expression to self-determined identity groups qua power-sharing institutions and self-governance arrangements
 - Reject the ‘pre-determined’ institutionalisation of ethnic identities
 - Reject ‘sunset clauses’ as destabilising, but accept the need for in-built flexibility, review and change

From theory to practice?

- Conflict management in practice:
 - Meaningful (territorial) self-governance, including autonomy and federacy arrangements
 - Flexible power-sharing arrangements: qualified majority voting (triggered or in pre-determined policy areas); non-protracted executive formation; visible, 'symbolic' group representation
 - Electoral systems inducing inclusion (and moderation)
 - Enforceable, constitutionally safeguarded human and minority rights legislation protecting individuals and groups
 - Interim settlements with options for future constitutional change

From theory to practice?

- Conflict management in practice:
 - Reflects balances of power at, and away from, the negotiation table
 - Negotiators' and mediators' skills, knowledge, preferences, and resources
 - Is inherently imperfect and accident-prone
 - May be better told as a history of resounding failures and few, often only partial or temporary successes

From theory to practice?

- Conflict management in practice is about
 - Acknowledging competing self-determination claims and giving them institutional expression
 - Translating agents' preferences under given structural constraints into sustainable negotiated outcomes
- In doing so, however imperfectly, conflict management practice may well have bridged still existing theoretical gaps



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