

Introduction to Power Sharing

Power sharing means the distribution of power among the organs of the government such as the [legislature](#), executive, and [judiciary](#). Power sharing helps in achieving the stability of political order. In power-sharing, power might even be shared at distinct levels such as union, state and local.

Forms of Power Sharing

In a modern democracy, power-sharing arrangements can take many forms.

- **Horizontal distribution of power:** In this, the power is shared among different organs of government such as the [legislature](#), executive, and judiciary. This type of power sharing is prevalent in India.
- **Federal government (vertical distribution of power):** In this, the power can be shared among governments at different levels. This type of power sharing is prevalent in the USA.
- **Power sharing among different social groups:** Power can be shared among social groups such as linguistic and religious groups. For instance, Community government' in Belgium.
- **Other types of power-sharing:** Power sharing is also seen in [political parties](#), pressure groups and movements control or influence those in power.

Terms you need to know

- **Majoritarian:** It is a belief that the majority community should be able to rule a country in whichever way it wants.
- **Community Government:** A type of Government which is elected by people belonging to one language community is called community government.
- **Prudential:** It involves decision making based on prudence, or on a careful calculation of gains and losses.
- **Checks and Balances:** In this system, each organ of the government checks the others which results in a balance of power among various institutions
- **Reserved Constituencies:** In this, the constituencies are reserved in the Assemblies and the **Parliament** for minorities in order to give them a fair share in power.
- **Coalition government:** When the alliance of two or more parties gets elected and forms a government it is known as the Coalition Government.

Story of Belgium

Belgium is a European country with a **population** of a little over one crore. In this country, the ethnic composition is complex. Of the total population, 59 percent lives in the Flemish region and speaks the Dutch language. Another 40 percent people live in the Wallonia region and speak **French**. Remaining one percent of the Belgians speak German.

In the capital city, Brussels, 80 percent people speak French while 20 percent are Dutch speaking. The French-speaking minority community was relatively rich and powerful. This made the Dutch-speaking community angry. From the 1950s to 1960s, there were tensions between the two communities because of these differences.

The Story of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is located south of India. This island nation has a diverse population of two crore people. In Sri Lanka, the major social groups are the Sinhala-speakers (74 percent) and the Tamil-speakers (18 percent).

Tamils in Sri Lanka were divided into two groups:

- Sri Lankan Tamils (13 percent) – Tamil natives of the country
- Indian Tamils (5 percent) – came from India during the colonial period as plantation workers

Sinhala-speaking people are mainly **Buddhists** while the Tamil speaking people were either Hindus or **Muslims**. There was even 7 percent **Christians**, who are both Tamil and Sinhala.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the democratically elected government opted for a series of Majoritarian policy measures because they desired Sinhala supremacy. Some of the measures taken were:

- Sinhala was the only official language.
- The governments followed preferential policies and Sinhala applicants.

This made the Sri Lankan Tamils feel alienated. As a result of this, the Sri Lankan Tamils launched parties and began struggles for the recognition of Tamil as an official language. By the 1980s several political organisations were formed. They demanded for an independent Tamil Eelam (state) in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. All this soon turned into a Civil War, thereby, causing distress in the nation.

Accommodation in Belgium

From 1970 to 1993, the constitution of Belgium was amended four times. The idea was to work out an arrangement that would make everyone to live together. Key elements of the Belgian model are:

- The number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the central government.
- Certain powers of the central government were given to state governments of the two regions of the country.
- There was a separate government for Brussels in which both the communities had equal representation.
- There was a provision of ‘community government’ that was elected by people belonging to one language.

Hence, it was a fairly better alternative than the majoritarian policy of Sri Lanka.

Question and answer:

1. Describe any three ‘majoritarian measures’ taken by the Sri Lankan Government to establish Sinhala supremacy.

Answer:

The following are the majoritarian measures adopted by the Sri Lankan government to establish Sinhala supremacy.

- In the year 1956, an act was passed, which established Sinhala as the official language to be used in Sri Lanka disregarding the minority group of Tamils. The passing of this act created a feeling of alienation among the minority group, i.e. Sri Lankan Tamils and they started to feel left-out from the society.
- The government then started adopting and formulating government policies that favoured the Sinhala people in government jobs and

for university positions, which made the Sri Lankan Tamils feel ousted.

- The Sri Lankan Government further proclaimed that they shall foster and protect only Buddhism as their State religion and refused to cater to any other religion disregarding the religion of Sri Lankan Tamils.

2. Explain the three ways by which Belgium has accommodated the existing regional differences and cultural diversities.

Answer:

When the Belgian leaders recognized the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities, they amended their constitution four times in order to accommodate these differences.

The following are the ways in which Belgium has accommodated the existing regional differences and cultural diversities.

- **Equal number of ministers:** The Government of Belgium has equal number of Dutch- and French-speaking ministers. This has been done to give equal power to the majority and the minority language speaking groups.
- **Setting up of Community Government:** A third kind of government, named the community government, is introduced in addition to the Central and the State Government. This government has the power regarding cultural, educational and lingual issues. This government comprises members from all the three communities—Dutch-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking.
- **Fair share of power:** Many powers of the Central government have been given to the state governments of the two regions of the country. The state governments are not subordinate to the Central government but are independent.

- **Equal representation:** In the State Government of Brussels—the capital city—both the French- and Dutch-speaking communities have equal representation.

3. Sharing of powers makes a country more powerful and united. Do you agree with the statement? Why?

Answer:

Yes, I agree with the statement. Power sharing makes a country more united.

- Power sharing helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups.
- It is a good way to ensure the stability of political order as social conflict often leads to violence and political instability.
- Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy. The concept of democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people and for the people, which emphasizes on distribution of power among people.
- It involves sharing powers with those affected by its exercise and who have to live with its effects, so that the people would be consulted on how they are to be governed.

4. Highlight the measures adopted by the Belgium Constitution for the prevention of conflicts in Belgium.

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5. Describe any three provisions of the act which was passed in Sri Lanka in 1956 to establish Sinhala supremacy.

Answer:

The following are the majoritarian measures adopted by the Sri Lankan government to establish Sinhala supremacy.

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- The government then started adopting and formulating government policies that favoured the Sinhala people in government jobs and for university positions, which made the Sri Lankan Tamils feel ousted.
- The Sri Lankan Government further proclaimed that they shall foster and protect only Buddhism as their State religion and refused to cater to any other religion disregarding the religion of Sri Lankan Tamils.

6. How have Belgium and Sri Lanka dealt with the question of power sharing differently?

Answer:

Sri Lanka and Belgium are both democratic countries yet have a very diverse social set-up. Both the countries have adopted very different approaches when it comes to power sharing.

- Belgium produced an ideal example of democratic system. It adopted the policy of accommodation of social and ethnic divisions. On the other hand, Sri Lanka also adopted democratic system but followed majoritarian policies.
- Under the Belgium model of democracy, power was shared among two ethnic groups. Sri Lanka favoured the interests of the majority Sinhala community.
- In Belgium, both the groups had equal share in working of government but in Sri Lanka the minority community was isolated.
- To maintain political stability and unity, equal representation was provided to both the groups. Apart from that, community government of both the ethnic groups also existed at the local level. Sri Lanka, however, had no such arrangement.
- Belgium constitution was amended four times before arriving at a final draft to prevent civil strife. In Sri Lanka, majoritarianism led to civil war for twenty long years.

7. Explain two reasons as to why power sharing is desirable.

Answer:

There are many reason as to why power sharing is important in a democracy. The following are the two main sets in which the reasons can be broadly divided.

Prudential reason:

- Power sharing helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups.
- It is a good way to ensure the stability of political order as social conflict often leads to violence and political stability.

Moral Reason:

- Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy. The concept of democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people and for the people, which emphasizes on distribution of power among people.
- It involves sharing powers with those affected by its exercise and who have to live its effects, so that the people would be consulted on how they are to be governed.

8. Explain how Belgium was able to solve her ethnic problems.

Answer:

When the Belgian leaders recognized the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities, they amended their constitution four times in order to accommodate these differences.

The following are the ways in which Belgium has accommodated the existing regional differences and cultural diversities.

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9. What is majoritarianism? How has it increased the feelings of alienation among Sri Lankan Tamils? Explain with examples.

Answer:

Majoritarianism is a concept which signifies a belief that the majority community should be able to rule a country in whichever way it wants. In this type of rule, the majority community disregards the wishes and needs of the minority community.

The majoritarian concept has increased the strong feelings of alienation among Sri Lankan Tamils after a series of majoritarian measures adopted by the democratically-elected government in Sri Lanka after its independence in 1948 to establish Sinhala Supremacy.

- In 1956, an act was passed to recognise Sinhala as the only official language, thus disregarding Tamil.
- The Government followed preferential policies that favoured Sinhala applicants for university positions and government jobs.
- A new constitution advocated that the state shall protect and foster Buddhism.