

Making Representative Politics Work: Cross-Segmental Parties in Consociations

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Abstract

Cross-segmental parties are outliers in consociations dominated by ethnic parties. While they often receive comparatively limited electoral support, they have the ability to make representative politics work. Cross-segmental parties can successfully represent cross-communal interests and encourage governments to focus on non-segmental issues by bringing their ‘second policy dimension’ to the attention of segmental parties and encouraging ‘issue seepage’. To demonstrate this, we draw on evidence from these parties in cases including Northern Ireland, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon and South Tyrol, and argue that we need to look beyond election results to gauge their ‘success’. We identify three key areas – electoral dynamics, interactions in legislatures and contribution to government – where cross-segmental, not segmental, parties can make representation work in consociations. This is true not only in liberal consociations that (can) explicitly accommodate cross-segmental interests in legislative and executive arrangements but also in corporate consociations where formal accommodation does not exist.

KEYWORDS

Consociationalism, Cross-segmental parties, Issue seepage, Representative politics, Second policy dimension

Zusammenfassung

Inter-ethnische Parteien sind Ausnahmereischeinungen in Konkordanzdemokratien. Trotz häufig geringer Wahlunterstützung, können sie einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Funktionieren der repräsentativen Politik leisten. Inter-ethnische Parteien können übergreifende Interessen erfolgreich vertreten und Regierungen dazu ermutigen, sich auf nicht-segmentale Themen zu konzentrieren, indem sie die Aufmerksamkeit der ethnischen Parteien auf ihre “zweite

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politische Dimension” lenken und das “Durchsickern von Themen” (*issue seepage*) fördern. Um dies zu belegen, stützen wir uns auf die Erfahrungen solcher Parteien in Nordirland, Belgien, Bosnien-Herzegowina, Libanon und Südtirol und zeigen, dass man zur Bewertung ihres Erfolgs über die Wahlergebnisse hinausblicken muss. Wir identifizieren drei Schlüsselbereiche - Wahldynamik, Interaktion in der Legislative und Beitrag zur Regierung -, in denen inter-ethnische und nicht ethnische Parteien das Funktionieren der Repräsentation in Konkordanzdemokratien fördern können. Dies gilt nicht nur für liberale Konsoziationen, die explizit ethnienübergreifende Interessen in Legislativen und Exekutiven berücksichtigen (können), sondern auch für korporative Systeme, in denen eine formale Berücksichtigung nicht möglich ist.

Résumé

Les partis inter-communautaires sont des exceptions dans les démocraties de concordance. Bien qu'ils bénéficient souvent d'un soutien électoral limité, les partis inter-communautaires peuvent représenter avec succès des intérêts inter-communautaires et encourager les gouvernements à se concentrer sur la «deuxième dimension politique» des partis ethniques et en encourageant «l'infiltration d'enjeux» (*issue seepage*). Pour évaluer le «succès» de ces partis, il faut donc regarder au-delà de leurs résultats électoraux. Nous identifions trois domaines centraux - la dynamique électorale, les interactions au sein des assemblées législatives et la contribution au gouvernement - dans lesquels les partis inter-communautaires, et non-communautaires, peuvent aider le fonctionnement de la représentation dans les démocraties de concordance (Irlande du Nord, Belgique, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Liban, Tyrol du Sud). C'est le cas non seulement dans les démocraties consociationnelles libérales qui (peuvent) explicitement accommoder les intérêts inter-communautaires dans les accords législatifs et exécutifs, mais aussi dans les systèmes corporatifs où il n'y a pas d'accommodement formel.

Riassunto

I partiti inter-comunitari sono un'eccezione nelle democrazie consociative dominate da partiti etnici. Anche se spesso godono di un sostegno elettorale relativamente limitato, hanno la capacità di far funzionare la politica rappresentativa. Possono infatti difendere con successo gli interessi inter-comunitari e stimolare i governi a concentrarsi sulle questioni non-etniche portando all'attenzione dei partiti la “seconda dimensione politica” e incentivando la cosiddetta “issue seepage”. Per dimostrarlo, ci basiamo sui risultati ottenuti

da questi partiti in Irlanda del Nord, Belgio, Bosnia-Erzegovina, Libano e Alto Adige / Sudtirolo. Il nostro argomento è che per valutare il “successo” dei partiti inter-comunitari dobbiamo guardare oltre i loro risultati elettorali. Individuiamo tre aree centrali - dinamiche elettorali, interazioni nel parlamento e contributo al governo - in cui i partiti inter-comunitari, possono aiutare il funzionamento della rappresentanza nelle democrazie consociative. Ciò avviene non solo nelle consociazioni liberali che (possono) accogliere esplicitamente gli interessi inter-comunitari negli accordi a livello del legislativo e dell'esecutivo, ma anche nelle consociazioni corporative in cui accomodamenti formali non esistono.

With 13.5% of first preference votes and 17 seats, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) became the third largest party in the regional Assembly following the election in 2022 (Tonge, 2022). For most parties in liberal democracies, coming third in an election would not be considered a victory but in consociational systems the opposite is true, as a cross-segmental party being recognised as a valid political force is extremely rare. However, APNI's success is reflected not only in electoral results but also in its impact on politics in Northern Ireland. By taking up executive posts, APNI plays the role of a facilitator that makes political parties representing politically significant groups – unionists and nationalists – work better together.

Cross-segmental parties – political organisations claiming to primarily represent groups that do not enjoy the right to veto decisions that challenge a community's autonomy – face considerable difficulties when operating in consociational societies dominated by ethno-national parties. But while parties foregrounding interests that do not map neatly onto major politically relevant ethnic electoral segments are not unfamiliar in most power-sharing places, their contributions to the political process only became of interest to scholars recently. It is perhaps unsurprising that most previous work specifically on cross-segmental political mobilisation in consociations has focused on APNI operating in liberal consociational Northern Ireland (Agarin et al., 2018; Deets & Skulte-Ouais, 2020; Jarrett, 2016; D. Mitchell, 2018; Murtagh, 2020; Tonge, 2020).

Consociational powersharing arrangements guarantee representatives of (some, usually the largest) societal segments a seat in government and implicitly encourage them to focus on voter preferences within their electoral bloc. This is understood to undermine – rather than encourage – diversity of interests represented by segmental parties and the rationale for cross-segmental political organisations altogether. This view of the scholarship reflects the real-world perception that unless cross-segmental parties in power-sharing places are essential to maintaining the balance of power between a society's ‘significant’ elements, or are perceived to have a realistic chance to challenge policy lines of government, they can be conveniently overlooked and their focal concerns marginalised (Hulsey & Keil, 2019; D. Mitchell, 2018; Murtagh, 2015). The politics of divided places, however, offers sufficient evidence that inclusion of concerns relevant to more than one politically salient community enhances party appeal and may help their electoral quest. Specifically, it can normalise cross-segmental parties' ascendancy into the political arena, their electoral gains and government participation, which are all but granted.

However, assessment of what constitutes ‘success’ of cross-segmental parties beyond the measure of electoral support they receive is contentious. Cross-segmental parties are said to reflect the choices of voters who believe that their vote will not be ‘lost’ if they do not elect a representative of their societal segment to protect their vital and, potentially, other interests

(see for example, Tonge, 2020). Cross-segmental parties therefore need not appeal to several communities (i.e. unionist, nationalist, and others in Northern Ireland), nor to the whole community of citizens affected (such as residents of the region, i.e. South Tyroleans, or of the country, i.e. Belgians). As political organisations operating in divided societies, cross-segmental parties may appease voters from some segments more than from others, yet what makes them different is their programme that is not aimed at descriptive representation of any single predetermined electoral bloc. While descriptive representation is undoubtedly relevant for divided (and other) societies, in this article we argue that it is necessary to look beyond this metric to gauge party success more broadly.

In consensual democracies, parties coalescing electorates around non-ethnic positions are the norm. Party positionality on the so-called GAL-TAN dimension (Green—Alternative—Libertarian versus Traditional—Authoritarian—Nationalist) is increasingly used as an indicator of overlap in voter preference for economic policies and other prominent issues such as environmental protection, concerns for equality and attitudes towards immigration (Jolly et al., 2022; Marks et al., 2006). Since the relationships between these indicators of party success is complex, the effect of parties on politics is assessed across a range of criteria, only one of which is a party's numerical strength in legislatures. In consociational democracies, however, the 'success' of political organisations tends to be assumed to be their ability to protect the interests of 'their' electoral segment as their most relevant contribution to the political process (McGlinchey, 2019). On this measure, cross-segmental parties are legitimately viewed as residual political forces in a system created for, and primarily operated by, parties of dominant groups. But since cross-segmental parties are present in all consociational democratic systems, such political organisations' contribution to the political process in cooperation with other parties is relevant for societies and politics alike. Thus, parties that do not primarily identify with the core ethnopolitical cleavages warrant more systematic assessment because they have the potential to consolidate the stability of a divided society and improve the quality of the democratic process.

We focus on parties that seek to champion the interests of most – if not all – significant ethno-social segments, appeal to a wide base of supporters, and divest from ethnic-specific demands. The scholarship has variously referred to these as 'Other', 'multi-ethnic', 'non-ethnic', 'civic' and 'non-nationalist' parties (Bieber, 2020; Chandra, 2011; Horowitz, 2014; Hulse, 2016; Murtagh, 2020). To gauge the breadth of the categorically important – yet factually comparable – positions these parties occupy in consociational politics, we refer to them as 'cross-segmental parties' and examine their effect on interparty competition in consociational politics to determine the measure of their success. We suggest that while rarely acknowledged to be doing so, it is these parties that encourage segmental parties to engage with issues of democratic representation underpinning the political process and impacting all in a divided society. It should, however, be emphasised that we do not analyse the ability of cross-segmental parties to facilitate executive *formation* as in some consociations such as Northern Ireland participation in government is determined by a set criterion instead of negotiation. Consequently, we do not assess their ability to prevent government collapse. Instead, we reflect on the role of cross-segmental parties in the electoral run-off, leading up to the formation of, and their participation in, government.

The commitment of cross-segmental parties to represent the individual preferences of voters, rather than pursuing the ethno-national claims of segmental parties, adds substance to political agendas concerned with the protection of segmental interests. In contrast, we define cross-segmental interests as those (potentially) impacting across, even if not all within, society, rather than only one ethnic segment. Since the protection of core segments' interests is ingrained in interparty competition by the design of consociational systems, they are the most salient, dominant dimension of party policy focus and thus cross-segmental issues largely constitute a 'second policy dimension'. We conclude that it is the pursuit of these by

cross-segmental parties that lead ethnopolitical parties dominating governments to revise their policy agendas, in a process we refer to as ‘issue seepage’. Presence of cross-segmental parties in political competition can therefore contribute directly to conflict transformation and make representation work better in consociations. However, it should be noted that we do not guarantee that these parties can *always* make representative politics work as this may be influenced by their numerical strength in legislatures and/or executives and internal party dynamics such as leadership cooperation, the studies of which in this context are beyond the scope of our research.

This article is not designed to be a systematic review of the specific role played by cross-segmental parties in different consociations, as both the parties and consociations are too distinct to make stringent comparisons feasible. We draw on evidence from a range of consociations that feature parties that meet our definition above, including the aforementioned APNI (Northern Ireland), Naša Stranka and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (both Bosnia-Herzegovina), Beirut Madinati (Lebanon), Parti du Travail de Belgique/Partij van de Arbeid van België (PTB/PvdA) (Belgium) and Verdi–Grüne–Vërc (South Tyrol). We identify three key areas – electoral dynamics, interactions in legislatures and contribution to government – as the primary ways in which these parties can make an impact on interparty competition in consociations by pursuing cross-segmental interests.

Who represents in consociational politics?

Consociational powersharing regimes are crafted to formally bring contextually relevant, dominant groups into decision-making forums. Their representatives follow established rules to stand in for their electoral blocs and mobilise around conflict-generated group-centred identities (Horowitz, 2000; see for example, Lijphart, 1977), irrespective of implicit inequalities that ‘discriminate against [other members of society]’ insofar as ‘[t]here is an incentive for voters to choose nationalists or unionists, because members from these groups will, *ceteris paribus*, be more pivotal than others’ (McGarry & O’Leary, 2009, p. 34).

Luther (1999) identifies the political organisation of societal segments as crucial in consociational democracies in noting that ‘parties are much more than political organizations: they represent an entire societal segment and support their demands, pacify the subcultures and accommodate divisions at the elite level’. Parties in consociations ensure the interest aggregation of predominantly their electoral segments by mobilising via a network of incentives: they contribute to ‘organisational incorporation’ of respective segments by defining the content of political identities and, by ensuring the coherence of electoral segments, channel and control inter-segmental competition into party-centred democratic processes. So, in sum, to understand whether cross-segmental parties can encourage segmental parties to cooperate and to deliver better governance to their voters we must appreciate that *who is representing* in consociations is defining *what is representable*. This has a critical downstream impact on what is being represented.

First, parties across all types of democratic systems contest elections to amplify their voters’ voices once elected. Parties in consociations are more focused on their own electoral segment in that they need to maximise their electoral returns to ensure not only their role as representatives, but also as custodians, of their electorate’s vital interests by accessing opportunities to veto community relevant legislation (P. Mitchell et al., 2009). It is thus of little surprise that in consociational democracies the vast majority of votes are won by parties declaring their representation of distinct identity groups, before considering their appeal to wider society.

All consociational democracies encourage universal suffrage and do not require voters to designate as part of a certain group – or indeed as ‘Other’ if such option is permitted – when

casting their vote. Instead, it is the voter who identifies candidates running on party or electoral lists as representatives of any one politically significant identity group (on the basis of public records, as in Lebanon, South Tyrol and Bosnia-Herzegovina). Also, those running in elections can choose to self-identify before (as in Belgium) or once elected (as in Northern Ireland). However, across consociations it is parties that determine which of the many identities are deemed politically beneficial for them to coalesce around and encourage their candidates to identify as representatives of a specific segment either before or after the elections. As such, political parties play a key role in translating communal divisions into political ones when encouraging their members to choose one of many socially relevant identities as the attribute to be represented in a consociation's political process.

In fact, consociational power-sharing rules encourage voters to believe that only descriptive representation is genuine (Beyer & Hänni, 2018). This may result in elected political elites profiling themselves as representatives of constituents similar to themselves and galvanise intra-ethnic outbidding between 'ethnic tribunes' – parties that assert their role of 'genuine' community representatives (P. Mitchell et al., 2009). By voting for cross-segmental parties, voters thus rescind this opportunity to protect their notional vital interests, foreclosing their representatives' access to seats in government and veto opportunities that are accrued to representatives of significant societal segments. In other words, by opting for a cross-segmental party voters primarily cast a ballot *against* representation by a segmental party and, potentially, for issue- rather than identity-based representation in formal politics (Friedman, 2005; Garry, 2014; Hänni, 2018).

There is no doubt that some voters vote for parties from 'their' electoral segment following the appeal of group-sensitive representation, for example to reap the potential benefits from proportional representation or community veto. But in all consociational democracies voters have an opportunity to challenge the principle that representatives should be similar to the represented and all individuals *may* participate in formal politics by voting for parties foregrounding alternatives to the major ethnopolitical cleavage (Stojanović, 2018). Despite institutional incentives to background issues which might not be core to political competition but cannot be ignored completely (Rovny, 2015), all consociations feature parties – segmental and cross-segmental alike – with a strong commitment to the 'second policy dimension.' This offers evidence from across consociational cases that political organisations with a cross-segmental policy profile can move 'from a catch-all to a positional tactic and even [leapfrog] between issues' (Alonso, 2012, p. 42).

Second, all parties formulate their policy agendas by reflecting on their constituents' preferences and focus on some political outputs over others once elected. Parties therefore funnel diverse voter concerns into practical policy suggestions, determine party political profiles and ensure voters can identify a set of 'their' potential representatives. While parties in all political systems are expected to aide coherence of representation, segmental parties in consociations additionally promise voters to protect both their group autonomy and vital interests from counterbidding by other parties. Thus, across all consociations, parties contesting elections are expected to be identifiable or to identify with one of the ethnopolitical segments to ensure they can enact that segment's right to group autonomy. As a result, and despite the fact that all *voters* can choose political representatives who they believe will make consociational politics work better for themselves, the equality of different identity *groups* in decision-making is undermined by the design of consociational democracies (Agarin, 2020). While the position of parties that (suggests that they) represent a salient identity group will certainly count after elections, the vote of those foregrounding different criteria of representation *might* count if their preferences align with those of dominant ethnopolitical segments (Hodžić & Stojanović, 2011).

Once elected, the representatives of politically salient *groups* are more equal than representatives of politically salient *issues*, as the former can block the passage of legislation using veto

powers, torpedo effective functioning of government, and even impede government formation if their participation is required (McCulloch, 2018; McCulloch & Zdeb, 2022). Conversely, increased representation of citizens' interests in the political process by either cross-segmental parties or individual members standing on segmental party lists but advocating for greater attention to the 'second dimension' at the very minimum encourages attention to concerns of individual voters rather than to tenuous vital interests of a group to which they happen to belong (Bogaards, 2000; D. Mitchell, 2018; Piacentini, 2019). The nature of individual-level concerns is empirically significant for the divided society as a whole since party choices of their segment's priorities can have a substantial impact on stability and social cohesion (Agarin & McCulloch, 2020).

In practice, politics of divided societies tends to crowd out or, worse, stigmatise cross-segmental concerns as the potentially fragile political consensus is maintained only if politically significant societal segments are accommodated. Since there is no consecrated societal community that coalesces around cross-segmental concerns, none of the interests represented by political organisations elected across the ethnopolitical divide would require recognition as 'vital interests' that need protection (McCulloch & Zdeb, 2022). In effect, cross-segmental parties may well represent a significant part of the electorate but they participate in the system not to protect, but (merely) to represent, interests that in themselves are contextually negligible. Regardless of their electoral returns or their numerical strength in the legislature, cross-segmental parties therefore can do just that: represent interests that segmental parties have pre-determined to be secondary to the vital concerns of groups they protect.

Finally, the interests foregrounded by parties in their election campaigns are pivotal for inter-party interactions since these may predetermine opportunities for post-electoral cooperation between representatives of diverse segments. Consociational systems require coalition governments and thus make parties representing competing societal segments responsible for making governments work, but it is cross-segmental parties' participation that can make representation work. Parties that collect support from a clearly defined electoral segment are spared pressure to respond to voter demands and can easily mobilise their ethnopolitical electorate around the notion of vital interest protection. Segmental parties therefore consolidate their claim to represent their segment's interests not because they will deliver policy solutions for their own but because they are able to thwart policies brought forward by their competitors if required to do so in order to protect their voters' interests. In contrast, cross-segmental parties are by design unable to supply their electorate with comparable guarantees and need to mobilise voter preferences around issues that ought to change, taking into account that the effects of change would positively affect those across segments, rather than privileging service to one of many intersectional identities of their voters (Caramani, 2017).

Previous research demonstrates that in consociations there are parties that represent the interests of variously positioned groups not aligned to any ethnic segment (Murtagh, 2020; Tonge, 2022), environmentalists (Deschouwer, 2006) and the 'left' (Pickering, 2009). What eludes attention in the scholarship to date is that cross-segmental interests are often already represented in elected bodies by either individuals platformed by dominant parties, those assembled in cross-party groups such as issue specific working groups or even those advocated for by a dedicated list/party. Thus, some cross-segmental interests are already 'uploaded' into political processes depending on the modalities for representation in each individual consociation.

Notably, since inclusion of non-segmental parties is not prohibited in any consociational setting, there exists ample space for cross-segmental parties to join consociational governments as junior coalition partners if they end up with a sufficiently large number of seats in the legislature. The inclusion of cross-segmental coalition partners could therefore reassure supporters of segmental parties that their preference for protection of their vital concerns, as well as representation of their secondary interests, have been well served by the vote. But whether representation of cross-segmental concerns by segmental parties is feasible depends on

a large degree on the selection of, and the importance attributed to, group-relevant identities by parties representing politically significant electoral segments. Pragmatically, the participation of cross-segmental parties in coalition governments should be seen by segmental parties as an opportunity to outsource responsibility for delivering on the 'second policy dimension' to others while focusing their own resources on the protection of the interests these parties identify as core to their own voters.

At the same time, parties with cross-segmental appeal may or may not have a distinct following from across all (politically salient) societal segments since the notion of the median voter is problematic in societies with an entrenched ethnopolitical division. As a consequence, cross-segmental parties can hardly claim to own any issue because their preferences are easily overruled by segmental parties dominating political agendas with concerns over protection of vital interests. This requires cross-segmental parties to focus on profiling themselves around the 'second policy dimension' of segmental parties, which serves to highlight the importance of interest representation, rather than protection, to help make representation work in consociational systems.

In this section, we have discussed that in consociational democracies votes mainly count in respect of political parties concerned with protection of the vital interests of politically significant groups. Though some vote seepage towards the centre might occur, the ability of cross-segmental parties to retain their voters is undermined by their systemically disadvantageous position to act as agenda setters even when voters share cross-segmental concerns: how parties contribute to politics in divided societies is implicitly limited by incentives linked to a segment's autonomy, discouraging alignment of cross-segmental agendas all the way down to voter choice at the ballot box. But, for all their oddities, consociations are democracies in that every individual citizen has the opportunity to elect representatives who will contribute to interest representation, if not to decision-making, on equal terms. Thus, even the relatively limited visibility of representatives elected on cross-segmental agendas indicates not limited support for such platforms in divided societies but rather the limited opportunities for cross-segmental agendas to attain a presence in legislatures and the disadvantageous modalities of converting parliamentary seats into ministerial portfolios.

We now consider the constraints faced by non-segmental parties in converting votes (and, by extension, seats in the legislature) into political agendas either alone or in cooperation with other parties.

What is represented in consociational governments?

The fact that across consociations several cross-segmental political organisations have been able to consolidate their electoral base and return members to legislatures over several electoral cycles suggests that they are taken seriously by voters. Regardless of the number of seats they could claim, their participation in government or, indeed, their electoral promise being reflected in policy outputs, cross-segmental parties are not always viewed by (some) voters as important players in consociational systems that encourage protection of someone's vital interests but discourage representation of cross-segmental concerns of all. In short, the existence of cross-segmental parties signals the rising electoral pressure of changing preferences in voters regarding the substance of political representation, in that 'the likes' no longer need to vote for 'the likes' to feel represented (Agarin & Jarrett, 2022). Thus, the zero-sum choice between the two modalities of representation in consociations – *descriptive* (of their group's vital interest, if voting for a representative of their politically relevant segment) or *substantive* (of their specific concerns, if voting for a candidate or a party with a cross-segmental appeal) – no longer stands uncontested. Scholars, however, have been largely silent on the reasons for cross-segmental parties' access and contribution to government, in part due to their limited visibility, but have nevertheless reflected on the experience of APNI (see, Agarin & Jarrett, 2022; McCulloch & Zdeb, 2022; Murtagh, 2020).

However, Northern Ireland is somewhat peculiar among consociational polities with its distinct regulation of how representation ought to work. Here voters express their preference at the ballot box for candidates running on lists of segmental and – if available in their constituency – cross-segmental parties. Multi-ethnic lists in 18 multimember constituencies permit both inter-party and inter-ethnic voting, as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system allows for vote transfers to cross-segmental (and, indeed, segmental) parties, facilitating inter-party as well as inter-ethnic transfers. While not guaranteed, STV at least provides parties identifying as ‘other’ with the opportunity to acquire transfer votes from first preference voters of ethnopolitical parties, which may in turn have facilitated APNI's continuous presence in the Northern Ireland Assembly since its establishment in 1998. However, although all those elected have honoured their promise to the voter to designate as ‘other’ rather than ‘unionist’ or ‘nationalist’, and represent neither community, the choice of whose interests will be represented ultimately rests with those elected upon assuming their seat in the Assembly (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009, p. 34). The post-electoral designation of elected candidates that translates into party designation as representing Northern Ireland's third community, the Others, is best viewed as an opportunity for cross-segmental parties to respond to the electorate's demand for a non-segmental party platform.

Though some commentators view APNI's electoral success to be the result of Northern Ireland's liberal consociation design, it appears that the principles underlying voter choices, candidate designation and inclusion of the party into government coalitions are made possible first and foremost by electoral rules. First, all voters can choose candidates of any political parties standing in legislative elections, permitting – if not encouraging – voter mobility within, across and outside the ethnopolitical segment and incentivising parties to pool as many votes as they can. Since the method of translating votes into legislative seats is calculated following the STV system, the potential of Northern Ireland's cross-segmental parties is largely determined by the number of transfers they attract from across all societal segments. Second, should any party win a certain number of legislative seats, the d'Hondt formula qualifies them for government participation based on their strength in the Assembly, rather than reflecting a fixed number of executive posts assigned to individual community designations (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009). Finally, the absence of a fixed number of portfolio allocations ensures that cross-segmental parties may be drawn upon to support segmental parties in government by assuming posts in the executive, setting government agendas, and promulgating legislation.

Existing research on what is being represented in consociational electoral processes draws attention to interests present across the segmental divide which may gain salience over time despite consociational arrangements encouraging centrifugal identities (Reilly, 2012). There is evidence of this across consociations, corporate and liberal alike, where seats are allocated to community representatives but votes can be cast across the divide. As a result, in Bosnia-Herzegovina representatives of different community backgrounds can be elected on lists of segmental and cross-segmental parties (Pepić & Kasapović, 2023), in Lebanon voters can support candidates best suited to contest a seat allocated to a specific sect (Deets & Skulte-Ouais, 2020) and in Kosovo cross-ethnic voting (until recently) allowed minority parties the opportunity for a ministerial position (Hodžić, 2020). In all these cases, the literature has been overdetermined by explanations grounded in the corporate/liberal designs of the system to explain which interests will be represented and by whom: while liberal consociations acknowledge (albeit implicitly) that individuals have layered and multiple identities which can be variously important at the ballot box, corporate consociations do not (McCulloch, 2014). There may be evidence to illustrate that liberal consociations are more likely to tolerate the emergence of cross-segmental political parties but the size of the cross-segmental fraction in the legislature or the proportion of votes they have received cannot change the fact that cross-segmental parties do not have any say on ‘non-cross-segmental’ concerns in neither liberal nor corporate consociations.

The factor defining the outcome of representation can be found in the system level commitment to democracy guaranteeing *individual* members' ability to pivot their interests and elect representatives that in their best view champion voter interests. Therefore, cross-segmental parties' 'success' can still be measured in terms of their potential steer on the political process, regardless of their vote share. While they cannot appeal to the four consociational principles identified by Lijphart (1977) to secure voter support – guaranteed government participation, proportional representation, mutual veto and guarantees of segmental autonomy – and are bound to remain systemically redundant in the political process of consociations, it does not follow that segmental parties cannot consider them relevant.

Similarly to parties in liberal democracies, consociations' cross-segmental parties impact the political process through direct interaction with partners in government and also through articulated policy agendas on issues that are and can be represented by segmental, alongside cross-segmental, parties (Bogaards, 2003; Coakley, 2008). In corporate consociations, protection of segmental concerns in the formal political process is of paramount importance and any dilution of group boundaries is akin to challenging the nature of this in serving distinct societal segments rather than society as a whole (Luther, 1992). Therefore, the presence of cross-segmental parties in such systems would indicate at minimum a growing consensus in the electorate that parties' commitment to protect vital interests is not all there is to representation in consociational politics. On the other hand, in liberal consociations where accommodation of any identities that might evolve in the electoral process is possible, the presence of cross-segmental parties is a clear indication that segmental parties' agendas do not (fully) map onto individual members' preferences. In both systems, cross-segmental parties highlight that there is a gap between what is represented and what is representable. Whether (and, if so, how) representation of cross-segmental interests in political parties and party politics matters for innovation of policy agendas should be considered closely to identify potential for improvement of how representation in consociational democracies works.

How cross-segmental parties reflect voter perceptions about issues under-represented in consociational politics can be determined from these parties' election results but perceptions on what is representable – i.e. not deemed politically expedient – across societal segments is clearest when we consider 'issue seepage' from cross-segmental parties into the platforms of segmental parties. As we have outlined above, political parties in consociations not only aggregate the preferences of their electorate into policy relevant agendas but also shape expectations of their voters about policy outcomes. Crucially, segmental parties can interpret their role in a minimalist way by defining and protecting the vital interests of their segment while 'outsourcing' representational functions to cross-segmental parties and then capitalising on cross-segmental concerns as their own (declared) 'second dimension' (Elias et al., 2015). Thus, since voters elect individuals to represent their cross-segmental concerns to run on segmental party lists, we must focus not on those who represent but on what is represented.

We therefore turn to discuss how the presence of cross-segmental alternatives contributes to better representation of all voters' interests as mapping this process allows us to assess how some political contexts can help exploit electoral (i.e. political) rules rather than consociational ones (i.e. systemic prescriptions to gain seats in legislatures), encouraging alternatives to group-bound political representation, regardless of how situational and context-dependent these may be.

'Second policy dimension' in consociations

The presence of cross-segmental parties on the ballot is an important gateway for interests that are not clearly attributable to one group or another to be mainstreamed and eventually gain salience in the political process. For voters whose concerns and policy preferences might not

be deemed politically relevant – though their interests overlap with those that are – inclusion of individuals and parties with cross-segmental appeal is thus less about having representatives elected and more about what these representatives can do when elected. Representatives voicing concerns about the impact of policy on all members of society and pursuing policy change to account for interests affecting all citizens contribute more than just registering their disagreement with unequal autonomy afforded to interests aggregated in group-based representation.

The set of incentives in consociational systems for the voter to choose a party that is able to protect their interests predetermines sets of issues representable in, rather than those already represented by, segmental political organisations. The presence of cross-segmental parties in the electoral run-off compels representatives of all – including those of politically significant societal groups – to consider broader sets of related interests. For segmental parties this means occasionally foregrounding interests that are not group-related, allowing for a compromise on navigating the interests of society's residual citizens. Despite frequent accusations by segmental parties that cross-segmental parties are 'really' from one side (see, for example, Tonge, 2020, p. 463), the agendas of these parties tend to highlight interests that supersede ethno-political identities. In other words, by running in elections cross-segmental parties encourage the political leadership of significant segments to acknowledge (some) multidimensional interests in the divided society and do so by drawing attention to the 'second policy dimension' in interparty competition. For example, in Northern Ireland the issue of reproductive rights has been included in the campaigns of all 'other' parties, even when segmental parties maintained ambiguous positions in the Assembly elections of 2011, 2016 and 2017.

Similarly, despite its oblique political ideology Belgium's only bilingual and country-wide party, PTB/PvdA, has acted as a sounding board for multiple society-wide concerns, such as management of ethno-cultural diversity, the role of the state in steering economic development (and, later, management of the Covid pandemic), free public transport, and animal rights and welfare since the party's revamp in 2012. All these have been launched into public debate as issues pertinent to municipalities and eventually picked up in parliamentary debates, inviting dominant, segmental parties to finesse their policy positions in response to PTB/PvdA's growing popularity.

Although difficulties to ensuring representation of cross-cutting interests in consociational systems have been well established in the past (Fontana, 2021; Kennedy et al., 2016), it is clear that the inclusion of cross-segmental interests does not end – but only begins – when individuals and parties backgrounding their segment's concerns pass the electoral threshold and join legislatures. As Taylor (2006) notes in relation to Northern Ireland, the requirement that elected representatives 'must accept communal registration as 'nationalist, unionist or other... locks individual politicians into group thinking and unequal rights' (p. 218). As a result, and incentivised by the zero-sum nature of the consociational political process, segmental parties tend to propagate a more static and hence more homogenous view of their electorate's preferences to maintain access to power. However, since cross-segmental interests are co-constituted by exclusion from consociational principles, the shared political identity of voters for a party foregrounding such interests may – but by no means necessarily does – crystallise around individually perceived, socio-political marginalisation in representative bodies.

Scholarly efforts to view representatives running for cross-segmental parties as stand-ins for the interests of diverse individual voters sharing a sense of groupness is therefore highly problematic. It is not necessary to identify (potential) voters of a cross-segmental party to establish politically relevant interests or to have a coherent cross-segmental community of interests to speak of issues that would encourage voters to not vote for the segmental party. Therefore, the interests to be included under 'cross-segmental' cannot be positively defined. Rather, these are strictly situational to each consociation and determined by their marginal position in political contests. We thus posit that any concern salient enough to attract voter

support that has not (yet) been framed as vital for any one societal segment can become a mobilising issue across segments. In this context we can speak of ‘new issues’ added to the repertoire of what is considered political and electorally viable. In both Belgium and South Tyrol, environmental policies are now firmly on the agendas of segmental parties after years of being reserved to the domain of green parties (Lucardie & Frankland, 2016; Wisthaler, 2016). Conversely, in South Tyrol, Verdi–Grüne–Vërc has recently re-focused from environmental concerns to the inclusion of migrants as their primary rallying point, maintaining its cross-segmental appeal (Wisthaler, 2016).

As a result, we observe that even when cross-segmental preferences dominate societal discussions, on election day voters are likely to gravitate to parties promising to protect ‘their’ segment even in the absence of a strong commitment to the ‘second policy dimension’ (Murtagh, 2020). On the other hand, voters who approve of cross-segmental representation often need to be sure that representatives running on segmental tickets are more concerned with the ‘first dimension’ underpinning party competition than those on cross-segmental ones. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the persistent electoral success of the SDP can in part be explained by the party alternating nominations of Bosniak and Croat candidates in the 1996, 1998 and 2002 elections, ensuring continuous vote returns (Pepić & Kasapović, 2023). At the same time, since its establishment in 2008 Naša Stranka has validated its position as an actor of municipal politics in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, fielding a (Serb) mayor of the (predominantly Bosniak) municipality Sarajevo Centar and, since January 2021, the prime minister of the Sarajevo Canton, in addition to holding one ministerial post at the federal level and two seats in the House of Representatives.

Both Naša Stranka and the SDP participate fully in the ethnic quota regime, taking up positions reserved for Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs at different levels of government and in the legislature despite being multi-ethnic parties, as segmental designation is required under the state’s corporate consociational arrangements. In doing so, both parties can, if inclined, make a political point with regard to their multi-ethnic credentials to differentiate themselves from ‘ethnic’ parties and profile themselves as serving a range of societal interests that go beyond the mere protection of Serb/Bosniak/Croat community concerns (Cf. Becker, 2022). Alternatively, cross-segmental parties can contribute to government programmes on a relatively narrow set of issues within their ministerial portfolios, as demonstrated by Ecolo/Groen, the environment-focused parties in the Belgian federal government from 2019 to present (Reuchamps et al., 2020).

In short, the supply of alternative content to the segmental political machinery is key to making cross-segmental interests part of the political process. It is ultimately voters who can de-select representatives concerned mostly with the vital concerns – and not the interests – of their group, encouraging segmental parties to either dedicate more attention to their ‘second dimension’ or bring cross-segmental parties into the governing coalition.

This points to the importance of who is representing. Cross-segmental interests can be represented by those elected on lists of cross-segmental parties but also by decision-makers at different levels of government (also) representing significant electoral blocs. In falling outside the domain of vital interests, nearly all socio-economic issues raised for discussion in legislatures across consociations draw comments from representatives of segmental as well as cross-segmental parties. Whether their formal vote aligns with the party position or not is thus mainly a result of internal party discipline rather than their individual dissenting opinion. In so doing, it is political representatives from across political organisations themselves who can challenge the carefully crafted perception that the power balance hangs on protection of communal, vital interests and under-representation of secondary issues.

Importantly, cross-segmental interests are diverse and cannot be represented by any one representative or party. In consociations, voters can either opt for their catch-all system-relevant identity by voting for segmental parties or determine the hierarchy of their individual

preferences when casting a vote for multidimensional policy actors. Individual cross-segmental parties would thus align with the views of only part of the electorate whose preference of representation on the basis of ethnopolitical identity is superseded by concerns for accommodation of the ‘second policy dimension’.

‘Seepage’ of cross-segmental concerns

As discussed above, although governing in coalitions is not limited to consociational democracies, the reason for it – protection of a segment's vital interests – poses significantly greater constraints on the ability of all parties to represent their voters' concerns and to influence policymaking outside their core agendas than in liberal democracies.

In consociations, the representation of interests falling outside the ethnic optic (cross-segmental appeals and cross-communal concerns) are often said to be the purview of cross-segmental parties. However, these have also been assumed by their segmental competitors to encourage wider support and, by extension, ensure that a range of issues decided upon in legislatures have de facto consent and an impact across society. Nagle (2018) notes that in the past there has been ‘ethnic seepage’ in that issues unrelated to inter-ethnic competition are incorporated into portfolios of political claims by segmental parties. We note that the reverse is also true: ‘seepage’ of interests successfully platformed by cross-segmental parties are included in segmental party platforms. In this context, the electoral success of political parties foregrounding issues from the ‘second policy dimension’ of segmental competitors in political competition is likely to determine the timing of inclusion of such issues on segmental parties' agendas.

The performance of the cross-segmental party Beirut Madinati in the 2016 municipal election in the Lebanese capital provides a useful insight. Against the background of a failing Lebanese government, the elections (postponed since 2013) took place following the mobilisation of Beirut citizens in the YouStink movement in response to the refuse crisis. Despite the widely shared feeling of the inefficiency of sectarian representation to deliver solutions at the local level, Beirut Madinati won 30% of the vote, broadly in line with representatives of Shias and the majority of Christian sects in the city (Deets & Skulte-Ouais, 2020). This is remarkable due to concerted competition from major Maronite and Sunni parties supporting the competitor, Beirutis List. As Deets (2018) notes, ‘this reflects the ways in which Beirut's large, middle class Christian population largely operates outside the confines of the sectarian system’ (p. 148). Following the local elections, the major sectarian parties revised their public relations approach and focused on the significant concerns of the city's population. However, the cross-community appeal of Beirut Madinati has been clearly demonstrated by its share of the vote in the 2016 Beirut municipal elections (Deets, 2018). Their presence in, and response to, decision-making by and for dominant groups at the state level has reflected the eroding view that segmental interests are homogenous, clear cut and stable.

In articulating cross-segmental interests, cross-segmental parties often challenge the consensus that consociational democracy should primarily positively reflect segmental identities and guaranteed access to veto mechanisms for segmental representatives. Since issues of common concern are as relevant for segmental parties and consociational legislatures as they are for executives catering to electorates in all segments, avoiding the view of cross-segmental parties as a suboptimal alternative to the previously tried segmental representation is key to effective analysis of their success beyond the electoral metric. Naturally, their vote-share rarely matches the demographic composition of the electorate dejected from ethnopolitical mobilisation, whether significantly surpassing the numbers of others in society, as in Bosnia (Zdeb, 2022); rising and falling during periods of political crises, as in North Macedonia (McEvoy, 2014); or remaining significantly lower than the percentage of the population

declaring their dissociation from ethnopolitical segments in surveys, as in Northern Ireland (Cooley, 2020; Pow et al., 2020).

The voter base of cross-segmental parties cannot include all citizens sharing cross-segmental concerns and can hardly be identified with the view encouraged by the system of representation and promoted by representatives of politically significant segments that inclusion is only about 'having people like oneself sitting in the legislature' (Potter, 2019, p. 8). Therefore, despite legislative representation, 'substantive or collective equality of Others in elected legislatures cannot be ensured within the arrangement for collective representation, participation and decision-making [that are] currently core to consociational principles' (Hodžić, 2020).

Consociational rules allow elites of dominant parties not to appeal beyond the core of their own electoral segment to be re-elected. Some parties representing politically relevant segments of society are concerned about their continuous participation in government: to minimise the threat of non-election some present themselves as 'ethnic tribunes' of their electoral segment (P. Mitchell, et al., 2009). These parties can often even get away with backgrounding issues that are relevant for their electorate but insignificant for the outcome of their domination of the political process and, by extension, guarantee a place in government. This is demonstrated by, for example, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland often running staunchly pro-unionist campaigns at the expense of 'second dimension' issues impacting all in society (Jarrett, 2018, pp. 110–117; Murphy & Evershed, 2020). In effect, the ability of cross-segmental parties to contribute to political outputs in consociations can run the spectrum from idealist (Tonge, 2020) to cautiously optimistic (Kapidžić, 2015), without adding clarity to how such parties benefit from (often) temporary inclusion in government.

Thus, the ability of cross-segmental parties to ensure their cross-segmental appeal is credible is probably less dependent on the form in which it is communicated to the segmented society and the unsatisfactory performance of representatives of politically significant groups. Rather, the domineering grip of entrenched representatives of politically salient groups in the decision-making process might be a more effective criterion for mobilising electoral support. It has been determined that cross-segmental parties need to demonstrate how their agendas complement those of segmental parties in order to be 'coalitionable' in Northern Ireland (Agarin & Jarrett, 2022). We therefore envisage that focusing on bipartisan concerns could also aide cross-segmental parties' access to consociational governments, ensuring their re-election and long-term relevance for consociational systems.

Ensuring that consociational governments are representative is the core promise of power-sharing institutional reform, yet the 'exclusion amid inclusion' dilemma is likely to pertain to such outcomes (Agarin et al., 2018). Because voters might only identify with a salient ethnopolitical cleavage, are sceptical about sharing the political spoils with those on the other side, do not trust their representatives to achieve desired policy outcomes in coalition with ethnopolitical foes, or all of the above, voters tend to stay loyal to 'their' representatives (Murtagh & McCulloch, 2021).

Since segmental parties with experience of government participation are in a strong position to benefit from their role as protectors of their voters' interests, they are also better positioned to capitalise on cross-segmental valence issues once these gain electoral significance. For example, being open to strategic trade-offs with dominant groups may result in individual representatives identifying as LGBT being included on lists of parties known for their anti-LGBT platforms. This has been observed in Northern Ireland after the endorsement by the DUP in 2019 of an openly gay candidate for the runoff in a municipal election to capitalise on the issue valence despite the party not changing its overall stance on the rights of the LGBT community and its opposition to legislation to legalise same-sex marriage (Moriarty, 2019).

The commitment of segmental parties in consociations to protect the core concerns of their median voter allows significant room for cross-segmental political organisations to define

their own contribution to representation aside from issues dominating in the ethnopolitical silos. While in government, they highlight that it is consociational principles that discourage segmental parties from tackling cross-segmental concerns because these issues are not deemed system-relevant. Cross-segmental parties' limited ability to obstruct the process of decision-making thus demonstrates that it is representation via segmental parties that leaves (at least some) non-ethnic, yet core, concerns of the electorate marginalised.

Since participation in government of parties representing ethnopolitical identity groups, and the interests affiliated with them, is a process of aggregation of multiple interests, only some of which are considered vital, some cross-segmental interests will be represented in governments. This of course implies that while individuals primarily identifying with categories other than the major ethnopolitical cleavage might not be represented in governments, their interests are reflected in government decisions. Thus, focusing on cross-segmental interests in order to enhance their visibility within – and the stability of – the system need not lead to policy immobilism, for example if a veto was afforded to representatives of issues, rather than of groups, to ring-fence their interests as is the case in North Macedonia where the veto applies only in the narrow domain of cultural rights.

In the absence of guaranteed representation of their voters' concerns in policy-making, cross-segmental parties anticipate that identity-based activism in legislatures and executives is likely to result in the (continuous) neglect of initiatives that would serve voters across society. As a result, their contribution to government ought to mobilise around the ideologically narrow programme that they will work hard to deliver. For example, a party's ideology beyond its cross-segmental appeal may be primarily defined by its position on the GAL-TAN dimension (i.e. People Before Profit versus APNI in Northern Ireland) or by a specific issue, such as the environment or migrant inclusion (i.e. PTB/PvdA and Ecolo/Groen in Belgium or Verdi-Grüne-Vörc in South Tyrol). In other words, cross-segmental parties can play by the institutional logic of their (segmental) competitors – namely, they appeal to the core concerns of their voters and in doing so pivot their core policy concerns to segmental parties who share similar interests as their own 'second policy dimension'.

Alternatively, cross-segmental parties can emphasise the irrelevance of ethnopolitical considerations for substantive policy preferences. It is these policy proposals that the electorate votes for and that are reflected in the overall legislative process by representatives elected from communal blocs, as well as across segments. Following this route has been the preference of political parties running on civic platforms, promoting intergroup equality, standing against identity-based discrimination or calling for wider social redistributive policies, and can be seen across all consociations, both liberal and corporate, with some developing a recognisable profile with voters (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2020; Milan, 2022; Murtagh, 2020).

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Naša Stranka was founded comparatively late (in 2008) after many political parties had already gained experience of responding to their voters' vital interests, having consolidated their position on the political spectrum or having emerged after the fragmentation of previously dominant parties. The party has unsuccessfully sought to mobilise voters in municipal elections by offering them an ideologically robust, neoliberal platform that favours economic development, deregulation, public-private partnerships and support for small and medium size businesses as the answers to most societal ills. This strategy, however, depleted scarce party resources and after a poor electoral performance in 2010 led it to concentrate its work in economically stable, urban municipalities by responding to citizens' demands, rather than supplying voters with issues in the hope of attracting their electoral support. However, Naša Stranka performed well first in municipal, then cantonal and later entity-level elections over the past decade, establishing itself as an important, multi-ethnic, liberal party with a stronghold in Sarajevo and the ability to engage with country-wide cross-segmental concerns, ignoring where possible engagement with ethno-cultural dimensions in politics.

Government formation in consociational Belgium offers a useful illustration of the impact of these conundrums on cross-segmental agendas. In Belgium, arrangements strongly favour parties representing either francophone or Flemish electoral segments, leaving little room for German-speaking or migrant communities, and this explains the ‘gradual extinction’ of cross-segmental parties (Deschouwer, 2009). At the same time, (ethno-)federal reform and ethno-linguistic polarisation of the party-political spectrum result in all agendas being represented by ethnic parties. Even though Ecolo/Groen officially coordinate their activities, they form separate parties in the federal parliament: Ecolo represents francophone voters and Groen Flemish voters, and their cooperation has been the only stable cross-segmental political alliance since its inception in the early 1970s (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009). Both parties have had representation in federal and regional parliaments but only after a particularly contentious electoral runoff in 2007 did either of them negotiate government formation (Lucardie & Frankland, 2016).

At the same time, PTB/PvdA has explored few avenues to accede to government posts at the federal level, instead prioritising ground-up mobilisation of its electorate at the level of provincial councils and acting from the opposition benches in national parliaments. In effect, the party is thus unable to count any shifts in public policy as its own achievement, nor can it persuasively claim ownership of salient political issues outside its core concern for more social policy and redistribution of national resources. Failing this, PTB/PvdA can hardly act as a go-between of the francophone and Flemish parties and despite visibility in public cannot break into positions of power in federal or regional governments. This allows the party to remain in opposition to most governmental decisions but opens discussion on policy content in parties that are (more) likely to access ministerial posts. The principles of majoritarian decision-making and cross-segmental accommodation under the complex ethno-federal system have become opportunities for cross-segmental interests and parties representing *de facto* residual voter interests in Belgium.

Recognising that interests aggregated by cross-segmental parties allow for individual members of system-relevant groups to identify with interests of voters disidentifying from the dominant political cleavage is also key to acknowledging the contribution of non-segmental political actors in consociational governments. Despite the system-inherent logic that discourages aggregation of such interests outside segmental parties, cross-segmental parties participating in the consociational political process can improve how consociational democracies perform. By making the ‘second policy dimensions’ of segmental parties their priority when running for office, in the legislature and in government, cross-segmental parties encourage moderation in – and facilitate cooperation between – segmental parties and decrease polarisation of the party system overall.

Conclusion

While election results matter in gauging the success of cross-segmental parties, we argue that other factors are equally, if not more, important. In analysing their contribution to cross-segmental interest representation, encouragement of inter-party cooperation and facilitation of government openness to non-segmental issues, this article demonstrates that it is cross-segmental parties that can make representative politics work. By developing a successful strategy in appealing to the voter and cooperating with other parties on what are usually ‘second policy dimensions’, cross-segmental – and not segmental – parties work best to represent voter concerns in consolidated consociational societies. Some research has already pointed out that prioritising socio-economic policies, concerns over equality and issues around progressive societal culture (potentially) affecting the whole population does not only provide a voting opportunity for those who do not identify with a particular

ethnic community; it also encourages governments to be more inclusive of the wider electorate's concerns, even if only by focusing on 'bread and butter' issues in contrast to narrative framing of narrow agendas as responding to groups' vital interests which the successful segmental parties are likely to pursue.

We claim that across consociations, specific cooperation and input mechanisms available for all parties in case-specific political institutions can play a role in making representation deliver. Beyond electoral metrics, a party may be deemed successful not because it crosses the electoral threshold and gains seats in the legislature or when it is invited to join government alongside segmental parties. Rather, cross-segmental parties' relevance should be more effectively measured when its core electoral promises 'seep' into the programmes of other parties, into legislative activism on the parliamentary floor and into government policy-making. As a result, the effect of cross-segmental parties' presence in the political process should be clear from the visibility of preferences that are not covered by the 'vital interests' of societal segments in party politics, the evolution of policy and government agendas.

We have examined three key areas where cross-segmental interest representation by parties yields better representation of different societal interests. On electoral appeal, we have demonstrated that cross-segmental parties can translate their 'interests' into categories compatible with the 'second policy dimension' of parties of dominant groups to gain political relevance. In terms of inter-party cooperation, cross-segmental parties can play a role by foregrounding interest representation, rather than group protection, enabling them to represent the preferences of citizens as not out of sync with those of segmental parties' voters. Finally, on their role in government, cross-segmental parties offer segmental parties a set of issues to innovate policy agendas and to better serve their own voters, without requiring them to invest additional resources into delivery on these promises. As such, cross-segmental parties demonstrate success by remaining relevant and encouraging 'issue seepage' into government agendas. We therefore conclude that it is cross-segmental – not segmental – parties that can make representation work in consociations. This is true not only in liberal consociations that (can) explicitly accommodate cross-segmental interests in legislative and executive arrangements but also, and more importantly, in corporate consociations where formal accommodation does not exist.

While further research into the individual contributions of cross-segmental parties for better representation in consociations will need to address 'issue seepage' from their platforms and agendas into those of segmental parties, we are satisfied to observe that this often involves cross-segmental parties making better use of segmental parties' 'second dimension' to advance electoral gains. Interests that are not clearly attributable to groups in the electorate that map onto politically significant segments are residual to segmental parties' grip on political dominance and power over their own electorate. Yet the opportunities for representatives running on cross-segmental party platforms and representing, rather than protecting, their electorate's interests should not be perceived as a weakness of non-segmental parties in a polarised political climate. Thus, we can conclude that since the criteria for party success applied to their segmental competitors (percentage of overall votes received) has little bearing on the relevance of cross-segmental parties for the voter, other parties and the consociational system overall, the message to the voter should be clear: a vote for cross-segmental parties is never a lost vote.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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