

Prof plays role in Northern Ireland peace process

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A new book on power-sharing and the Northern Ireland conflict gives substantial credit to Queen's Political Studies professor John McGarry and University of Pennsylvania colleague Brendan O'Leary for helping to engineer the success of that country's peace process.

In *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland conflict*, 19 internationally known scholars debate professors McGarry and O'Leary's contribution. The book examines the theory behind the concept of consociational power-sharing, and how it is gaining ground as a way to resolve political conflict in divided countries. The goals of consociationalism are governmental stability, the survival of the power-sharing arrangements, the survival of democracy and the avoidance of violence. Editor Rupert Taylor of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg describes the work of professors McGarry and O'Leary as having "gained hegemonic status" in the study of Northern Ireland. In particular, Shane O'Neill, head of the Political Science Department, Queen's University, Belfast, credits the duo for several years of relative calm in Northern Ireland, since the signing of the historic Belfast Agreement in 1998.

"McGarry and O'Leary's work has been hugely significant," says Professor O'Neill. "Northern Ireland's transition has required a core political vision as to how the future might be better than the past, along with a road map as to how we might get there. No one did more than McGarry and O'Leary to provide these essential ingredients."

Power-sharing can also be modified to work in other countries where opposing groups look for solutions on how to co-exist, says Professor McGarry, who is currently serving as Senior Advisor on Power Sharing to the United Nations. Over the past several months, he has traveled to Cyprus several times to participate in meetings between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders who are working towards reuniting the divided island country, located in the eastern Mediterranean.

"In our contribution to the book, we give a robust defence of power-sharing, and argue that it is responsible for the virtual absence of violence in Northern Ireland," says Professor McGarry, Canada Research Chair in Democracy and Nationalism, who is a member of the Queen's-led Ethnicity and Democratic Governance project.

"It is not that the people there have come together as one community; it's more that they agree to disagree, and that they argue for their cases politically instead of violently," he says. "They see a constitutional way to achieve their aspirations and political goals."

"It can't be that Northern Ireland is part of the Irish Republic or the United Kingdom; it has to be linked to both," says Professor McGarry. "Any government in Northern Ireland has to include all the major parties, both Protestant and Catholic – and not just the majority – on a power-sharing basis."

Professors McGarry and O'Leary, who met at high school in Northern Ireland, began working together in the mid-1980s and have collaborated ever since. They have co-authored several books, including *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements*, *Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start* and *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland*.

"People who live in Northern Ireland were very interested in finding a way to stop the violence and conflict, and that's what started both of us studying politics and political science," says Professor McGarry. "It's been the research of a lifetime."

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