

Cezary Gołędziowski

Warsaw University

cgoledzinowski@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9366-1638>

Matt Qvortrup

Referendums and Ethnic Conflict

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For many years, the problem of referendum has been explored as a subject of interest in political sciences, law, history and other social sciences, especially in the light of the ethnic conflicts. In the contemporary world, including the European Union, the processes of regionalization, ethnisation and democratization are dominant and occur simultaneously. Necessity to solve the ethnic problems through the democratic procedures has become a challenge. Referendum as an instrument used to solve those problems constitutes the subject of the monograph authored by Matt Qvortrup and titled *Referendums and Ethnic Conflict* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, 200 pages). Author is a professor of applied political science and international relations at the Coventry University and a recognized expert in the field of referendum as well as in the comparative analysis of political institutions.

As the Author points out, despite the significance or even popularity of the reference to the popular vote in the literature, there is a lack of theories dedicated to the measuring of the effectiveness of this instrument in the process of the state and society management. This is the reason for the Author to create the referendum typologies based on the various theories used in the political sciences and on the descriptive studies of referendums occurring in the last 300 years. The aims of the referendums include: support for the secession of the region, renewed delimitation or modification of the borders existing within one state, legitimization of the homogenization policies in the multinational state or administrative management of the ethnic diversities. All the examples of the types of referendums are reflected in the course of history. As a result, the main aim of the monograph was to conduct

comparative analysis of the ethnic conflicts resulting from the application of the most important representative institution – referendum.

In the introduction the Author focuses on the comprehensiveness of the problem which concerns not only the normative and philosophical issues but also and most of all – the questions when and why do such referendums happen.

The monograph consists of the introduction, eight chapters and summary.

The first chapter is of the historical analysis nature and as such mostly deals with systematics and the history of referendums, starting with the French Revolution times through referendums organized in the United States of America and Italy up to the period between the wars and the second world war. As the Author rightfully notices, first referendums – carried by the ideas of the French revolution – were strongly focused on the solution of the acute ethnic and national problems.

The second chapter is dedicated to the specifics of the differentiating referendum. The most important goal of such referendum is turning to the popular vote to provide the favor in the devolution process – division of powers between the units of the federal state and its central government. However, the management of differences refers not only to the territory of the state but also to the ethnic problems. The aim of this chapter is to design a general pattern when the referendum occurs in the scope of differences and to apply this model to the competitive approach model. Within this area, the Author emphasizes that the referendums on the management differences occur more frequently in the states along with the development of democratization since the 1980s.

Another, third chapter deals with secession and division, so it is dedicated to the type of referendum which aims to disconnect parts of the territory. At the same time such type of referendum (taking into consideration the examples of Schleswig in 1920, Faroe Islands in 1946 and South Sudan in 2011) leads to the deepening of the diversities and progress of the conflict.

Following is the chapter on the legality of referendum in the constitutional law of contemporary states. It is commonly believed that the central or local government is simply entitled to conduct referendum on independence but from a legal perspective, it happens quite rarely. In this area the fourth chapter shows broad diversified doubts of legal nature concerning the admissibility of the referendum that are formulated by the courts of selected states.

Chapter six focuses on the referenda promoting homogenization. In the divided societies referenda are organized often to eliminate the differences and assimilation. The aim of this chapter is to establish a general scheme of differences elimination in the referendum.

Another chapter is a comparative analysis of referendums dealing with European integration, decisions of the political decision-makers on the referendums on the accession to the European Union. Here, the Author points out to the significant element of referring to political calculation of gains and losses rather than relying

solely on the idealistic goals often resulting from uncritical prepossession of the European Union. It happens frequently that the accession referendum is a form of popularity plebiscite for the government of the state and it does not provide for the proof of the affection of the citizens to the European values.

The last chapter constitutes a practical review of the referendum-connected issues concerning the voters' registration, media campaign expenses or the role of the election commissions. The chapter then does not discuss the previously presented problems but it is a specific summary of the most important legal regulations on referendum. One of the most significant problems is the properly balanced time of the television and radio auditions so both sides (pro and against the issue in the referendum) are able to speak up in the discussion.

In the summary the Author goes back to the hypothesis noting the fact that homogenous referendums occur very frequently in the non-democratic societies, where the democratic factor developed by the Freedom House reaches more than 4. When it comes to the secession referendum (party referendum), it occurs usually after the abolition of the long international hegemony of a state (empire) but only when there is a wide social obligation for the existence of the poliarchy government in the country. Examples include referendums in the former Soviet republics after the fall of the Soviet Union: in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Additionally in the summary the Author indicates general accurateness's connected with referendums which in their primary conception were motivated by strategic factors. In the majority of cases, both the democratic and authoritarian leaders reached for the institution of referendum when faced by the election battle and when they possessed majority of votes on their side.

To conclude, the monograph should be particularly recommended for all persons dealing with democratic processes, analytics of the direct participation process as well as the role of the citizen factor in the governing. The monograph represents an important cognitive instrument and, on the other hand, it aims to fulfill a kind of research gap indicating the significance of the problem in the modern world.