

Consociational Democracy in Post-War Lebanon: Maintaining Negative Peace and Stability Amidst Sectarian Divisions

Kasidech Somboonkittichai¹

ABSTRACT—: Is consociational democracy the only viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in contemporary Lebanon? This paper argues in favour of consociational democracy as the most effective approach to preserving direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. The rationale behind this claim stems from the impracticality and unsuitability of alternative solutions, particularly transformative liberal approaches, within Lebanon's specific context. Implementing such alternatives would jeopardise cooperation among elites representing different sectarian groups, leading to a perilous power vacuum and the potential for civil war reoccurrence. To contribute to the academic discourse, this paper systematically examines Lebanon's post-war regime and sectarian cleavages, identifying it as a consociational democracy through primary resources like the Lebanese constitution and the Taif Accord. Additionally, it critically analyses pertinent literature encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research, enriching the scholarly debate on this topic.

Keywords : Consociational Democracy, Post-war Lebanon, Cleavages, Sectarianism, Negative Peace

1 The author is currently a postgraduate student in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul National University, with research interests in conflict and peacekeeping, democratisation, and comparative politics in the Middle East. He previously acquired a master's degree in Conflict, Governance and International Development at the University of East Anglia.

Introduction

Consociational democracy has traditionally been seen as the default solution for preserving direct negative peace. This negative peace, in a narrow sense, refers to an absence of large-scale conflicts such as when a ceasefire agreement is enforced. In a broader sense, it encompasses not just the absence of war (direct violence) but also the nonexistence of other forms of violence, such as structural violence (such as inequality, injustice and personal dissatisfaction) and cultural violence (such as racism and nationalism) as outlined by Galtung (1969, 2007). Therefore, it is appropriate to use the term ‘direct’ negative peace to articulate the limited objective of consociational democracy, which specifically targets the absence of direct violence without necessarily delving into the realms of addressing structural or cultural violence.

Consociational democracy is also seen as instrumental in fostering stability within nations characterised by profound sectarian divisions (Jabbara and Jabbara 2001; Saouli 2019; Dixon 2011). This political system, however, has come under intense criticism for its romanticisation of the elite role and grand coalition (Andeweg 2000; Hudson 1976; Aboultaif 2019; Horowitz 1985) and for its ineffectiveness in resolving the conflict (Selway and Templeman 2012; Gate et al. 2016). An illustrative case study is post-war Lebanon from 1989 to 2022. Lebanon had previously experienced consociational democracy before the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, with this system being identified as a key factor contributing to the conflict. Surprisingly, even after the civil war ended, Lebanon continued to be governed by the same political regime characterised by a grand coalition consisting of major sects, including Maronite Christians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, and certain cultural autonomy (Lijphart 1977; Aboultaif 2019). Each sect possessed veto power in crucial government decisions and proportionally represented their own sect in the parliament. This situation raises the research question of whether consociational democracy remains the only viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in con-

temporary Lebanon.

This paper argues that consociational democracy remains the only solution to maintain direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. The rationale behind this claim is that alternative solutions, particularly transformative liberal approaches, are impractical and ill-suited to the specific context of Lebanon. Implementing such alternatives would disrupt the cooperation among elites representing different sectarian groups, leading to a dangerous power vacuum and potential civil war. Contributing to the existing academic debate, this paper systematically examines the post-war regime and sectarian cleavages in Lebanon, characterising it as a consociational democracy using primary resources such as the Lebanese constitution and the Ta'if Accord. Additionally, it critically engages with relevant literature, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research, to enrich the scholarly debate on this topic.

This paper will be structured as follows: In part one, I will delve into the sectarian cleavages present in Lebanon. Subsequently, in part two, I will define consociational democracy and offer an overview of the system development in post-war Lebanon. Part three will also address and respond to the criticisms of consociational democracy, including both idea-based and power-based critiques, as well as exploring liberalist alternatives. Moreover, I will draw a conclusion, to sum up the argument.

1.) Sectarian Cleavages in Lebanon

Lebanon demonstrates a clear manifestation of sectarian cleavage, reflected in the representation of 11 major sectarian groups in parliament (Democracy Reporting International, 2017). This division has its origins in the historical reinforcement of confessionalism and sectarianism, dating back to the 19th century under Ottoman rule. The conflict between feudal lords (Muslim Druze) and peasants (Christian Maronites) resulted in several Maronite revolts during the 1820s and 1840s, resulting in the civil

war in 1860 (Richani 1998, 20). In response to these tensions, the Concert of Europe (France, Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia) established the “Mutasarrifate” in the 19th century, a central administrative council comprising proportional representatives from diverse sectarian groups. However, this system was dissolved in 1915 as a result of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, giving way to the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920. Under the League of Nations Mandate, France assisted in the drafting and adoption of the 1926 constitution, explicitly implementing the concept of sectarianism. The constitution specifically mandated confessionalism as the primary basis for political representation. Notably, Article 24 ensured an equal distribution of parliamentary seats between Muslims and Christians, with proportional representation among various sects on both sides (ConstituteProject 2022, 6).

After the mandate period ended, Lebanon achieved independence and introduced the “1943 National Pact,” an unwritten agreement. This pact aimed to strengthen Lebanon’s autonomy, self-governance and freedom from external interference by Western and Arab powers. The National Pact encompassed crucial principles, including the presidency being exclusively held by a Maronite Christian, the prime minister position reserved for a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of the House designated for a Shiite Muslim (Najem 2012, 13). Additionally, the Council of Ministers, comprising 99 members, adhered to a specific ratio, with 6 seats allocated to Christians and 5 to Muslims. The National Pact remained in effect until 1989 when the signing of the Taif Accord signified the conclusion of the civil war (1975-1990) and the dawn of contemporary Lebanon.

Despite internal dynamics, external factors such as the political situation in Palestine and Syria played a significant role in exacerbating sectarian divisions within Lebanon. Geographically entangled in the Arab-Israeli conflicts of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006, Lebanon was compelled to accommodate Palestinian refugees, impacting the country’s demographic composition and, consequently, the sectarian power distribu-

tion, particularly between Muslims and Christians (Aboultaif 2019, 124). Furthermore, these refugees, not devoid of political agency, organised themselves militarily after 1967 and utilised Lebanon as a launching pad for challenging Israel.

Syrian involvement also had a substantial influence in intensifying sectarian divisions as it used pre-war Lebanon as a buffer zone in its conflict with Israel. The Assad regime, which was predominantly Shi'ite, strategically supported Lebanese Shi'ites through political parties and militias like Hezbollah (Najem 2012, 35). This support aimed to project Syria's power beyond its borders and shape Lebanon's political landscape in its favour. Additionally, by indirectly confronting Israel through Hezbollah support, the Assad regime sought to position itself as a defender of Arab and Muslim interests, further solidifying its regional influence. Post-war, Syria assumed an increased role, assisting Lebanon in the Taif Accord and positioning itself as a security guarantor by stationing military forces on semi-permanent bases. This allowed Syria to intervene in Lebanese politics, exemplified by extending President Elias Hrawi's and Michel Aoun's terms despite constitutional limitations (Aboultaif 2019, 177). Thus, sectarianism, combined with external factors such as Palestine and Syria, heightened sectarian cleavages in Lebanon, leading to the development of a consociational democracy aimed at preserving direct negative peace and stability.

2.) Consociational Democracy and its Development in Post-war Lebanon

Consociational democracy is a political system aiming to build a fragmented but stable democracy in the form of direct negative peace- the absence of large-scale conflicts- and stability (Aboultaif 2019, 214) and lay a foundation for a proper transition to liberal democracy (Wilson 2020, 703). To reach these goals, it is required to achieve compromise and accommodation among leaders or elites from different sects in deep sectarian

cleavages (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001; Saouli 2019; Dixon 2011; Richani 1998; Lijphart 1968, 1969, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1999).

Lijphart (1968) proposed four requisites for leaders and six conditions for consociationalism to flourish. Those leaders must be able to acknowledge possible instabilities, be committed to maintaining the systems, reach a mutual understanding through communication, and come up with solutions satisfying the demands of major sects (Lijphart 1977, 53-54). Six structural conditions include the presence of distinct sectarian lines, multiple balances of power, a grand coalition of government, external threats, a prosperous economy and manageable small countries. Nevertheless, those requisites and conditions were quite ideal and ambiguous; as a result, they were compressed to be four core features of consociationalism: grand coalitions, veto power, proportionality and segmental autonomy (Lijphart 1977; Aboultaif 2019).

Before examining the relevance of consociational democracy to Lebanon, it is important clearly to define the main characteristics of its four core features. First, a grand coalition government includes representatives from all major sects in the executive body. This accounts for minority concerns and ensures that the minority do not permanently hold the opposition position (Lijphart 1977, 25). Second, veto power can be regarded as a tool for minority communities to safeguard their vital interests and block threats against them (Lijphart 1977, 36-37). The veto power can be utilised in different ways, including the implementation of double majorities. This means that certain laws require both an overall majority in the parliament and government, as well as the support of a majority of representatives from all specific ethnic groups (Aboultaif 2019, 110). Furthermore, the principle of proportionality is to guarantee that every sect in the country acquires specific shares in the political system, including the public sector, government, parliament, and armed forces, corresponding to their respective shares within the overall population (Lijphart 1977, 38-39). This principle is crucial in ensuring that the composition of representatives in

both the executive and legislative branches accurately reflects the state's deeply divided demography. Lastly, segmental autonomy is defined as a distinct realm of sects' governance that partially or fully independently manages their own affairs, whether cultural or territorial, without interference from central authorities. With these key aspects of consociational democracy defined, this paper argues that post-war Lebanon has been governed by consociational democracy.

Grand Coalition

In Lebanon, the principle of a grand coalition is based on the division of the top three executive positions along sectarian lines since the 1943 National Pact. After the civil war, the Taif Accord also maintained this kind of tradition; however, the previous president's power - such as unilaterally dissolving the Chamber, postponing the convention of the Chamber for a month, vetoing bills passed by the Chamber, or even sacking the PM and the cabinet (Richani 1998, 24) - was undermined. For example, the president is required to request the Council of Ministers to dissolve the Parliament and hold new elections (UN Peacemaker 1989, 5). Moreover, the Taif Accord favoured the PM in a way that this position is the actual head of the executive branch and can counter-sign most decrees signed by the President. Despite the power adjustment, the PM must still go through the process of nomination. This involves mandatory consultations between the president and speaker and the president's consultations with parliamentary blocs.

Veto Power

In Lebanon, the National Pact of 1943 first introduced the concept of the minority veto, which aimed to ensure that no sect within the country could impose its will upon another one. Subsequently, the Taif Accord stipulates that significant government

decisions encompassing actions such as constitutional amendments, declaration and revocation of a state of emergency, decisions regarding war and peace, public mobilisation, international agreements and treaties, the state budget, and comprehensive development plans, require the support of a two-thirds majority within the cabinet (Carnegie, 2016). This implicitly provided veto power for one of the three major blocs of ministers, namely those representing the president, the speaker of parliament, and the PM. More importantly, the Doha agreement was specifically signed in May 2008 in order to end the series of protests led by Hezbollah supporters. These protests called for increased power and a response to the Siniora government's actions, which included conducting surveillance and shutting down the telecommunication system (Najem 2012, 81). This agreement allowed Hezbollah to acquire veto power to block any decisions on the question of disarmament and especially the international tribunal on the assassination of former PM Rafic Hariri in 2005.

Proportionality

Proportionality was first implemented in the 1926 constitution and the National Pact; the Taif Accord first increased the seats in the Lebanese Parliament to 108 in 1989 and to 128 in 1992, equally divided between the Christians and Muslims. Out of the total allocation of 64 seats for Christian representation, the Maronite community held the majority with 34 seats, followed by the Greek Orthodox community with 14 seats. The Melkites (Greek Catholics) accounted for 8 seats, while the Armenian Orthodox community held 5 seats. In addition, the Armenian Catholics, Protestants, and other Christian minorities each held 1 seat. Turning to the Muslim seats, the Sunni and Shiite communities held an equal share of 27 seats. The Druze community was represented by 8 seats, while the Alawite community held 2 seats. The electoral system in 2017 also reflected this principle and applied a proportional list-voting system. Under this system, seats are allocated to party lists in the first phase and

to individual candidates in the second phase using an electoral quotient and the largest remainder method. Furthermore, voters are given the opportunity to cast two votes: one for a list or party of candidates and another for individual candidates (Democracy Reporting International 2017, 19).

Segmental Autonomy

This paper argues that sects in post-war Lebanon possess only cultural autonomy. There is no formal recognition of the land or territory belonging to one particular sect, as stated in Article 1 of the constitution “Lebanon is an independent state, with indivisible unity, and complete sovereignty” (Constitute Project 2022, 3). Nevertheless, major sects were roughly concentrated in particular areas; the Shiites are in the South, the Sunni are in the North, and the Maronite Christians are in the West (Tran 2018). Rather than territorial autonomy, each sect independently administers its socio-cultural concerns, such as education and the judicial system. Regarding education, most elementary students were driven to attend sectarian private institutions, typically founded by and intended to serve one of Lebanon’s sects (Najem and Amore 2021, 112). Lebanon’s constitution recognises the importance of sectarian identity and prerogatives within private life. This encompasses marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance regulations. For instance, if a couple from different religious backgrounds intends to marry, it can be a complex or challenging process within the country itself if their respective religious traditions do not permit such unions. Additionally, various religious traditions have differing stances on divorce, with some allowing it and others prohibiting it. To accommodate this system, Lebanon has established 15 separate personal status courts, including 12 Christian denominations, 4 Muslim groups, and courts for adherents of the Druze and Jewish traditions (Human Rights Watch 2015).

The post-war regime in Lebanon can be characterised as

a consociational democracy, marked by a grand coalition that includes the major sects of Maronite Christians, Shiite Muslims, and Sunni Muslims. Under this system, each sect has cultural autonomy, holds the power to veto significant government decisions and is proportionally represented in the parliament through elections. However, despite the potential benefits of consociationalism, the post-war regime in Lebanon has faced substantial criticism for its ideological stance and its effectiveness in addressing its profound sectarian cleavages.

3.) Replies to Criticisms of Consociationalism in Lebanon

It is argued here that consociational democracy remains the only solution to maintain negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. To do so, this paper aims to defend consociationalism by replying to criticisms and alternative proposals put forth by liberal political thinkers. Criticism can be broadly divided into two categories: idea-based and power-based critiques.

Idea-based Critiques

Critiques have been raised regarding the underlying assumption of consociational democracy, specifically regarding elite and coalition government. One concern is that the consociational model is too elitist and romanticises the cooperation among elites from different sects, suggesting that such cooperation in the form of a grand coalition would automatically result in direct negative peace and stability (Andeweg 2000, 519; Hudson 1976, 111). However, this assumption overlooks the fact that this kind of cooperation can turn into intense competition among sectarian groups; elites may use their power to obstruct and veto the political process, prioritising personal interests over national ones, causing political stalemate and tensions between groups (Aboultaif 2019, 195; Horowitz 1985, 575).

Two noteworthy examples of post-war Lebanon illustrate these points. Hezbollah accused President Siniora's government (2005-2009) of colluding with the Americans against the resistance and demanded his resignation (El-Husseini 2009, 240). In November 2006, Shiite ministers resigned from the government, but Siniora rejected their move. Consequently, under pressure from Hezbollah, Berri, the Shiite Speaker of the Parliament, decided to prevent the parliament from convening until a new government was formed, effectively shutting it down for two years until May 2008 when a new President was elected after the Doha Accord (Salamey and Payne 2008, 470). Therefore, cooperation does not always bring peace, and not all elites prioritise the national interests as this example uses veto rights leading to a deadlock or even jeopardising the entire system.

Alternatively, Michel Smaha, a former MP and minister, was arrested by the Lebanese Information Bureau for his involvement in a Syrian plan to smuggle TNT into Lebanon (Shaheen 2015). The intention was to use the explosives to target cars in different parts of the country and assassinate Sunni politicians. Smaha confessed to smuggling 25 kg of TNT and 170,000 dollars from Syria, with the aim of carrying out attacks during religious festivals and attempting the assassination of Sheikh Malek al-Sha'ar (Mufti of Tripoli) and Sunni MP Khaled ad-Daher. This collaboration between a member of the political elite and Syria, intending to disrupt peace and communal coexistence in Lebanon, highlights that elites within a deeply divided consociational democracy may not always cooperate with other sects and may resort to undemocratic violent means to harm others.

This set of critiques presents an idealised view of democracy, suggesting that it solely revolves around the will of the people or the majority, while portraying the role of elites as inherently antagonistic to democracy. However, in reality, elite plays a crucial role in shaping political policies by sponsoring political parties and exerting influence over decision-makers and public opinion through various means, including media platforms, campaign events, and press releases. Therefore, it is natural for

any democratic system to involve the participation of the elite. Moreover, there is no consensus on the extent to which elites should be politically involved in a democratic regime. Hence, the role of elites in post-war Lebanon is both justified and necessary to maintain a delicate balance for peace and stability. Hezbollah's use of veto power to demand Siniora's resignation can be viewed as a positive step taken by Lebanese elites to resolve conflicts through non-violent means. The author realised that this event resulted in a political deadlock for approximately two years; however, the model is not perfect, as no political regime can claim to be flawless due to each country's unique characteristics. Consociationalism particularly suits the post-war context of Lebanon as consociationalism effectively managed the conflict, preventing it from escalating into a civil war. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that even within a political system that aims to promote peace and coexistence, not all political elites consistently adhere to rational behaviour and seek non-violent means to resolve conflicts. However, it is important to note that the Lebanese system was able to effectively respond to the case by prosecuting Michel Smaha. This successful prosecution showcases the system's commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring accountability for those who engage in illegal activities or attempt to undermine peace and communal harmony.

Power-Based Critiques

This set of critiques pertains to the implementation of consociational democracy. The focus of this paper is on the critiques derived from quantitative studies as they can assess the implementation empirically. Based on statistical evidence, several empirical studies argue that consociationalism is likely to increase political violence (Selway and Templeman 2012) and trigger armed intrastate conflicts (Gate et al. 2016). Selway and Templeman (2012) put forth a relevant hypothesis suggesting that when there is high ethnic fractionalisation, proportional representation (PR) and parliamentarianism, two key elements

of consociationalism, tend to exacerbate political violence in the form of riots and deaths. Their theoretical framework posits that PR accommodates extremist parties, reinforces ethnic divisions, and hampers important government decisions due to the inclusion of numerous actors. However, these studies have certain limitations. Firstly, there is a mismatch between the concept of consociationalism and the measures used; the ability of ethnic groups to veto should be also measured empirically. Secondly, their framework lacks logical coherence in explaining how PR intensifies violence when there is high fractionalization. Extremist parties and distinct ethnic/sectarian lines are common features of countries with a consociational democracy. Therefore, the correlation between PR and these features may not necessarily exist, or it could be the case that these features drive countries to adopt the PR system. Lastly, the correlation's statistical significance is inconclusive, as only model 6 demonstrates significant results (Selway and Templeman 2012, 1557).

Gate et al. (2016) categorised power-sharing into constraining, dispersive, and inclusive models. The constraining model limits elite power and safeguards minority rights, while the dispersive model distributes authority, such as through federalism. The inclusive model involves designated groups in decision-making. The authors hypothesised that only countries with constraining power-sharing are less likely to experience civil war. This is because the constraining model increases the costs of repression and violence, making commitments to civil peace more credible. However, inclusive power-sharing often fails to safeguard the rights of ordinary citizens, leaving them vulnerable to government repression, including torture and forced disappearance. This not only jeopardizes the stability of peace but also exacerbates social divisions by solidifying entrenched positions within the government and incentivising elite challenges to state authority for personal gain.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Firstly, different types of power-sharing were vaguely defined, as the constraining model overlaps with inclusive power-sharing. The

article primarily bases the inclusive model on consociationalism, which should encompass limiting elite power through veto mechanisms and protecting minorities through proportionality. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks employed by the authors were undermined by ambiguous definitions of the different power-sharing types. The logic connecting the inclusive model to the lack of protection for ordinary citizens is insufficiently supported. Thirdly, there is a mismatch between concepts and measures. The measurement of constraining power-sharing solely focuses on the ability to protect minorities, rather than evaluating the capacity of the check-balance system. Similarly, the measurement of the inclusive model solely relies on grand coalitions and veto power, which does not capture the entire concept. Lastly, although constraining power-sharing shows statistical significance, confounding variables such as population and GDP also exhibit statistical significance, potentially influencing the model and the onset of civil war (Gate et al. 2016, 522).

Despite the criticism of consociationalism, Wilson (2020) discovered that PR and parliamentarianism may decrease the risk of conflict in deeply divided contexts. The author's framework focuses on highly fractionalised settings where ethnic groups are numerous but smaller in size. In such situations, alternative strategies like coalition building become more appealing for mobilising support. When constituent groups have distinct preferences represented by diverse ethnic identities, they are more likely to perceive the government as legitimate. This leads to greater support for peaceful dispute resolution, as their interests are represented through participation in coalitions and the existence of local autonomy. Political institutions that facilitate this, such as PR, parliamentary democracy, and federalism, enable groups to engage in negotiations and advocate for their interests, reducing the likelihood of conflict arising from their differences. While the author overlooked the measurement of veto power as a part of consociationalism, this article offers several strengths. Wilson (2020) developed a sound theoretical framework, utilised a reliable dataset like the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, employed multiple data sources to capture the complex concept

of ethnic and ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, and conducted various robustness tests to validate the findings.

Liberalist Alternatives

In post-war Lebanon, various transformative liberalist alternatives to consociational democracy have been proposed, some including the promotion of a single national identity, secularisation, and reform (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001, 85). The concept of a single national identity entails the idea of an independent Arab state in which shared language, culture, historical roots, and genealogy unite the citizens together. Lebanese individuals are seen as having the potential to contribute positively to the broader Arab world through cultural, political, and economic leadership. Secularisation, on the other hand, involves the complete elimination of sectarianism from all state institutions, ensuring the separation of religion and the state. Simultaneously, individuals should have complete freedom to practice their religious beliefs without any constraints. The reform agenda consists of establishing a monopoly of force for the state, implementing electoral reform, undertaking bureaucratic reform, initiating economic and social reform, protecting minority rights, and promoting political socialisation.

However, this paper argues that transformative liberal solutions are impractical and not suitable for the specific context of Lebanon. Implementing such solutions would completely undermine cooperation among elites from different sectarian groups, leading to a political vacuum and chaotic power struggle, which could ultimately result in the risk of civil war. Firstly, imposing a single national identity in a country with 18 sectarian groups is not a viable or reasonable idea. It would trigger serious debates over which ethnicity should dominate, considering Lebanon's distinct sectarian divide. Each sect has developed its own unique cultural practices and languages since the implementation of the 1926 constitution. Therefore, attempting to unite them based

on shared languages and cultures would be extremely challenging, if not impossible.

Secondly, a complete elimination of sectarianism from post-war Lebanon would be disastrous. No sect would willingly allow such an eradication as sectarianism is deeply ingrained in their identity. There would undoubtedly be massive resistance against such a proposition. Even if sectarianism were to be eliminated, the everyday practices of living within the same sect would persist. Finally, all the proposed reforms, although ideal, are impractical in the post-war Lebanese context. While monopolising force may seem like a reasonable plan, Lebanon's complex history includes a long-standing rivalry with Israel. Hezbollah has been the primary force dealing with Israel and is unlikely to agree to disarmament. This is evident from their mobilisation efforts against Siniora and the STL, which resulted in the Doha Agreement granting Hezbollah formal veto power. Even if Hezbollah agreed to disarm and join the weakened national army, Lebanon would lose an experienced and well-equipped military capable of defending against external threats. Other reform projects, ranging from electoral reform to political socialisation, would face significant challenges, provoke massive protests, and directly challenge the existing status quo that has maintained direct negative peace and stability in Lebanon since the civil war.

Conclusion

This study argues for the continued relevance of consociational democracy as the most viable solution for maintaining direct negative peace and stability in post-war Lebanon. Throughout this paper, this study highlights that direct negative peace is the type of peace that post-war Lebanon's consociationalism aims to achieve, as it specifically targets the absence of direct violence (war or large-scale conflict) rather than addressing structural or cultural violence. This assertion is drawn from a comprehensive analysis of the Lebanese context, its historical sectarian cleavages, and the development of consociational democracy as a political

system.

The examination of sectarian cleavages in Lebanon revealed deep-rooted historical divisions dating back to the 19th century, with the imposition of confessionalism under Ottoman rule and subsequent developments such as the 1943 National Pact. External factors, including the political situation in Palestine and Syria, further intensified these sectarian divisions, leading to the emergence of consociational democracy as a response to the need for a governance system that accommodates both pre-war and post-war Lebanon's diverse sectarian landscape.

Consociational democracy, characterised by a grand coalition, veto power, proportionality, and segmental autonomy, provides Lebanon with a valuable system to maintain sustained direct negative peace. This form of governance has proven effective in preventing large-scale conflicts in Lebanon's profoundly divided society since the end of the civil war in 1990. A grand coalition fosters cooperation and compromise among elite representatives from diverse sectarian communities within formal political structures. This reduces tensions and distrust by ensuring all groups have a voice in decision-making and cannot be marginalised. Mutual veto rights guarantee that no single sect can unilaterally impose policies severely detrimental to other sects' interests. This safeguard prevents aggressive majoritarianism that could trigger grievances and violent backlashes from minorities. Additionally, proportional representation and allocated government positions provide communities with tangible assurances that they will not be excluded from political power. This creates a sense of investment and participation in the political system, discouraging any inclination toward extra-legal challenges. Finally, segmental autonomy in religious and cultural affairs allows Lebanon's diverse sectarian mosaic to preserve its unique identities and practices without state interference. This reduces fears of assimilation that could otherwise produce instability.

In addressing criticisms, both idea-based and power-based, it is acknowledged that consociationalism is not without

flaws. Instances of political deadlock and competition among elites were highlighted as potential drawbacks. However, these challenges were contextualised within the specific conditions of Lebanon and compared to the potential risks of alternative liberalist approaches (a single national identity, secularization, and reform). Those liberal practices were deemed impractical and ill-suited to the country's unique circumstances, as implementing such alternatives would risk disrupting cooperation among elites representing diverse sectarian groups, potentially leading to a dangerous power vacuum and the reemergence of civil conflict.

Through a systematic examination of the post-war regime in Lebanon, utilising primary resources such as the Lebanese constitution and the Taif Accord, and engaging with relevant qualitative and quantitative research, this study contributes to the scholarly debate on consociational democracy. This research enhances our understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with maintaining peace and stability in Lebanon, which provides valuable guidance for policymakers and stakeholders invested in the peacebuilding efforts in Lebanon.

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