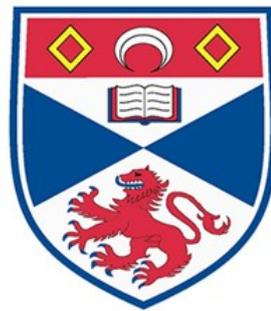


# Lessons from Beirut and Belfast: How Dysfunctional Democracy Undermines Consociational Settlements in Deeply Divided Societies

By: Madalen Beth Reid



University  
of  
St Andrews

## Abstract

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Consociational democracy has become a dominant model for post-conflict democratisation, making an understanding of its dynamics and outcomes important for practitioners and scholars of peacebuilding. This paper explores the quality of consociational governance in the long term in societies transitioning from conflict, and asks whether this imperfect system is viable in the long term despite the absence of adequate transition mechanisms to a more efficient and normatively adequate system. A comparative analysis of Northern Ireland after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, a crucial case of supposed consociational success, and Lebanon after the 1989 Taif Accords, which has failed by all measures except having avoided a return to civil war, provides insights into the functioning of power-sharing in both cases and into consociationalism more generally. The causes, nature, and consequences of the ongoing financial crisis in Lebanon and the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal in Northern Ireland are explored in historical context. It is argued that despite their crucial role in bringing an end to violent conflict, the inefficiency and dysfunctionality of consociational governments damages their fragile and conditional legitimacy and consequently fails to adequately manage the problem of disputed legitimacy that leaves deeply divided societies vulnerable to recurrent violence. The dysfunctional politics often dismissed as insignificant in the face of recent violent conflict is therefore a serious problem that maintains many of the conditions that led to past violence. This paper concludes that while neither case study provides a good model for export, there is much to be learned from their successes and shortcomings that can be applied to current or future consociational settlements when these problematic solutions to conflict are unavoidable.

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## List of Abbreviations

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DUP – Democratic Unionist Party

EU – European Union

IRA – Irish Republican Army

MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly

PLO - Palestine Liberation Organization

RHI – Renewable Heat Incentive

SDLP - Social Democratic and Labour Party

## Introduction

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After years of bloody civil war in Lebanon, the 1989 Taif Accords provided a means of ending violence and bringing together leaders of communities deeply divided by confessional loyalties and civil war to share power in a democratic government. Just under a decade later, on Good Friday 1998, the Belfast Agreement brought to an end the period of violent ethno-national conflict known as the Troubles that had gripped Northern Ireland for three decades, providing the outline of a democratic government that would allow politicians with irreconcilable aspirations for the province's future to share power in the devolved Assembly. Both agreements have been hailed by some as remarkable successes brought about through the implementation of the form of power-sharing known as consociationalism.

Yet while neither society has returned to the levels of violence that existed before these agreements, only decades later is it possible to see the high price paid for imperfect and insecure consociational peace. At the time of writing in March-April 2021, important developments in both case studies are ongoing, and the dynamics of their consociational governments are constantly evolving, but both face significant challenges. While Northern Ireland's Assembly, newly restored after a three-year absence of devolved government, struggles with the repercussions of the UK's vote to leave the EU, and the threat of paramilitary violence remains a reality of life for many communities, Lebanon has faced more serious problems. Economic hardship and the catastrophic explosion in the port of Beirut have drawn international attention to this small state and the failings of its corrupt and dysfunctional

government; “short of war,” writes foreign correspondent Martin Patience, “it's hard to imagine a more horrific year for Lebanon” (BBC 2020b).

Consociational democracy is a term used for a category of political systems that are diverse in their institutional structures, but which share the central feature of power-sharing between groups in an inclusive government based on cooperation and accommodation rather than integration. It is used in societies with a “demographic configuration ill-suited to majoritarian rules” (McCulloch 2017, 420), and has become increasingly prominent as a means of governing such societies democratically in the absence of trust and consensus. The merits and flaws of consociational democracy have been a topic of heated debate since the concept was developed by Arend Lijphart in the late 1960s. Initially envisioned as an empirical explanation of political stability in divided or “plural” societies such as Lijphart’s native Netherlands, consociationalism has become a normative recommendation for the implementation of democracy in post-conflict societies. Yet despite the claims of its advocates that it is the best or only form of democracy suitable for such situations, there are very few cases of consociational democracy in post-conflict societies that have proved sufficiently durable for their success or failure to be assessed from a long-term perspective. Analysis of the theory and practice of consociationalism in the long-term has been severely lacking. While Lijphart (1977) suggests vaguely that successful consociational systems will eventually eliminate their own need to exist, later scholars have focused primarily on consociationalism as conflict management, and have therefore considered the system’s adoptability and short-term stability as the most significant issues, while neglecting long-term outcomes. As consociationalism is frequently suggested as a mechanism for post-conflict democratic transition

around the world, it is imperative that these issues are investigated so that if consociationalism is implemented, the long-term implications of this decision are better understood.

This paper will show that despite the undeniable and important achievements of consociational settlements in ending violence, this is not an adequate measure of their success. The focus on consociationalism as a tool for conflict resolution rather than a long-term constitutional structure has led to a neglect of problems of governance, while the difficulties of reforming consociational institutions often leads to these imperfect institutions remaining in place in the long term. The dysfunctionality of consociational politics not only causes serious social, political and economic problems, but threatens the construction of a stable, sustainable loyalty to the legitimate democratic government as group loyalties and connections to external powers maintain a greater legitimacy than can be upheld by a government that can be insufficiently accountable and corrupt, and that frequently collapses under the weight of its multiple and diverging interest groups. Assessing the success of consociational institutions according to whether they have prevented a return to violent conflict is therefore inadequate, and at least as much attention must be paid to the effectiveness of democratic institutions in providing a legitimate, non-violent basis for political relations and cooperation between groups.

## Methods

The method used in this paper is comparative analysis of two case studies. Gerring (2007, 20) defines a case study as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases”.

This method allows a depth of analysis and exploration of the cases that is impossible in statistical or large-N research designs (Gerring 2007, 49). While some of the depth made possible through focused study of a single case is lost when two are studied for comparison, valuable insights into both cases and increased confidence in the generalisability of any findings are significant advantages of comparative analysis.

Lebanon and Northern Ireland were selected as case studies for a variety of reasons. They are two of the few cases of consociationalism that have been in operation for a sufficient period for it to be possible to assess their success and functioning in the long term, an important requirement for this research. Although there is “no agreement on the boundaries of the consociational universe” (Bogaards 2019a, 520), Lebanon and Northern Ireland are generally accepted as well-known cases of post-conflict consociational government. Both peace agreements followed consociationalism’s “underlying philosophy” identified by Bogaards (2019a, 519) as “one of inclusion, representation and power-sharing”, and both were imposed without any real reconciliation between parties, as has been the case with other post-Cold War consociational systems (Kerr 2005, 192). Most scholars agree that the consociational universe is small, and there is significant variation within this limited class of cases. While this variation makes controlled comparison, where cases “resemble each other in every respect but one” (George and Bennet 2005), impossible, Northern Ireland and Lebanon are similar in many relevant respects. Both are societies in which religious differences have long been the source of deep divisions, and both adopted consociational institutions following protracted violent conflict that deepened existing divisions. Both returned to consociationalism after previous power-sharing settlements failed, and these new settlements were adopted

as part of externally-mediated peace agreements that were constructed and implemented less than a decade apart. While there are significant differences in the regional and geopolitical context of these cases and in the structures of their consociational institutions, this does not prevent comparison from being worthwhile. Comparing two similar cases is therefore used to investigate how an understanding of the dynamics of consociationalism in each case might provide insight into both the functioning of similar political institutions in the other case, and the nature of consociationalism itself.

Recent developments in both cases provide new insight into the functioning of their governments. In Northern Ireland, the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement of January 2020, addressing many of the issues that had previously proved problematic to the functioning of the government, provided a new basis for cooperation after the breakdown of power-sharing in 2017 (Haughey 2020). Although this provides reasons for optimism regarding the prospects for consociational democracy in Northern Ireland's future, the changing relationship between the UK and EU presents serious challenges to the success of this. Lebanon has suffered multiple disasters and crises in recent months which have exposed the serious failings of its government. The suffering of the Lebanese people due to economic crisis, the chemical explosion in Beirut Port on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020, and the inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic provide a strong argument that absence of civil war is an inadequate measure of success for consociational democracy. Comparing an example of consociationalism that has apparently failed in the long term despite not having returned to civil war, with the crucial case of supposed long-term success provides

the opportunity to understand both cases, and consociationalism as whole, more deeply.

This paper will take a positivist, empirically-based perspective, combining a focus on the theory of consociationalism with the use of empirical evidence to gain a better understanding of how institutions constructed in accordance with these theories play out in the long term. A combination of primary and secondary sources are used; news reports and documents such as peace agreements are used to understand recent events and provide evidence to support the arguments made, while analysis of secondary literature provides an understanding of the historical and theoretical context of recent developments. Although it is recognised that the analysis of primary sources is the most thorough method of historical research, comprehensive and detailed archival research into the histories of both cases would be impractical, and it is recognised by many scholars that it is often impossible for political scientists to gain all the information required to test or construct theories through primary historical research (Thies 2002).

## Structure

The first chapter will explore the existing literature on consociational democracy, situating this paper in the current scholarly debate and identifying the contradictions and uncertainties in consociational theory that make investigating long-term outcomes important. The second chapter will assess the democratic institutions constructed in consociational settlements, and explore what insights the recent financial and political crisis in Lebanon, and the Renewable Heating Incentive scandal and its consequences in Northern Ireland can provide into the functioning of these

institutions in the long term. The final chapter will explore how consociational democracy manages the disputed legitimacy of the political system that is at the heart of politics in deeply divided societies, and the ways in which the dysfunctionality of power-sharing governments can complicate and undermine this. A conclusion will draw together these arguments and show that there are serious deficiencies in the ability of consociational systems to provide functional non-violent government in post-conflict societies. It is suggested that while the successes of consociational solutions should not be underestimated, a more serious focus on providing effective and legitimate government is required not only for its own sake, but to contribute to the elimination of violence as a political strategy through the construction of an accountable and legitimate government that is able to address and resolve the important issues faced in societies transitioning from conflict.

## Consociational Theory

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The literature on consociational democracy is extensive, and has important practical relevance, as consociational arrangements have become a preferred method of conflict management and democratisation in divided societies. Much of this literature has focused on institutional design for practical application in such cases, but less attention has been paid to the long-term outcomes of consociational settlements. The ability of consociationalism to bring peace and democracy to divided societies where majoritarian democracy is unlikely to work has been questioned by critics, but it is usually defended in the last instance with the assertion that it is a temporary measure that can end violent conflict in the short term. However, the resistance of consociational systems to reform has been increasingly recognised, making an assessment of its long-term dynamics essential to determining the value and appropriateness of such solutions. This chapter will explore a range of approaches to consociationalism. The empirical and normative theory as formulated and expanded by Lijphart will be examined, followed by a consideration of the adaptations made to this in the 'revisionist consociationalism' championed by McGarry and O'Leary. Criticisms of consociationalism will then be analysed, and the realist defence evaluated. A brief overview will then be given of the debates surrounding Lebanon and Northern Ireland, which having been governed under consociational systems for over two decades, provide an opportunity to examine consociationalism's long-term dynamics. This analysis reveals the central paradox that short-term consociational solutions create long-term problems, while

institutions that are generally intended to be temporary are by their nature almost impossible to reform.

### Democracy in Deeply Divided Societies

Lebanon and Northern have long been seen as prime examples of deeply divided societies fragmented along religious lines. While all societies contain politically salient divisions, deeply divided societies are distinguished by fault lines that are particularly deep and enduring. These divisions possess an overriding importance over other sources of difference in the society and affect a wide range of political, social and cultural issues, undermining the moderating effect of cross-cutting cleavages (Guelke 2012, 27-32). It has long been recognised that sustaining democracy under these circumstances presents serious challenges. Guelke (2012, 113-114) argues that the concept of deeply divided societies is inherently “connected with the thesis that special mechanisms were needed if democracy was to flourish in such societies” as the outcome of elections under a Westminster-style majoritarian system is “to a degree predetermined” as electorates tend to vote along the lines of division. This gives rise to permanent majorities with little incentive to cater to the needs of other groups, and minorities permanently excluded from political power, leading to a system lacking in democratic legitimacy. There are two broad approaches to solving this problem: *eliminating* divisions through assimilation, or *managing* them by constructing a system that accommodates difference (McCrudden and O'Leary 2013, 2).

Based on the premise that eliminating divisions was unlikely, consociationalism was developed by Arend Lijphart as a theory for the management of division through

institutional design. Building on Almond's typology of democracies, Lijphart (1969, 216) developed consociationalism as an empirical model to explain the "fragmented but stable" politics of his native Netherlands and other similar European democracies, defining it as "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy". He later expanded this to include four defining features: government by grand coalition of elites representing all significant segments of society; mutual veto for all significant groups; proportionality in political representation, civil service appointments, and allocation of public funds; and a high degree of group autonomy in internal affairs (Lijphart 1977, 25). Crucially, the aim of such institutions "is not to abolish or weaken segmental cleavages but to recognise them explicitly and to turn the segments into constructive elements of stable democracy" (Lijphart 1977, 42). Lijphart (1977) then developed and promoted his empirical theory as a normative model for implementing democracy in societies which lack favourable conditions for it, thereby overcoming the "self-fulfilling prediction" that democracy would fail in the Global South.

### Consociationalism as Peacebuilding

This normative focus has become central to consociational theory, and consociationalism has become an dominant tool for conflict resolution. Sisk (2008, 239-240) identifies a modern 'formula' for peacebuilding based on "the introduction of democracy as a way to move the theatre of conflict off the battlefield and into institutions and processes of politics", and suggests consociationalism as a means of achieving the dual goals of peace and democracy. Similarly, El Machnouk (2020, 37)

argues that the objective of consociationalism is not the elimination of different identities in divided societies, but “the pacification of the means of expression of such identities”. The aim of post-conflict consociationalism is therefore to allow the potential sources of conflict in divided societies to be negotiated through legitimate political institutions rather than through violence, in order to allow peace and democracy to be constructed together.

This approach has been most influentially advocated by “revisionist consociationalists” McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 24). Based on the assumption that ethno-national identities are “durable” and “not likely to assimilate, fuse, or dissolve into one common identity at any foreseeable point”, McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 26) argue that consociationalism is an imperfect but pragmatic and necessary means of managing politics in post-conflict divided societies. McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 25-29) accept the main features of consociationalism outlined by Lijphart, but have adapted the theory to “pluri-national places” such as Northern Ireland, where there is “more than one mobilized national community” rather than segments within a single society. Where these national communities are split across state borders, external actors are recognised as playing a crucial role (McGarry and O’Leary 2011, 30-31). External actors are also given more consideration due to their role in negotiating and implementing consociational settlements in post-conflict societies. Kerr (2005, 2) places external context at the centre of his comparative study of Northern Ireland and Lebanon, arguing that “relationships between the internal and external elites determined the prospects for successful conflict regulation” in both cases.

## Criticisms and Alternatives

Despite its dominant place in the literature on conflict management, consociationalism has been the subject of much criticism. In the decades since Lijphart developed this theory, alternative institutional solutions for managing difference in post-conflict societies emerged, most importantly the centripetalist or integrative approach pioneered by Horowitz in his seminal book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (2000).<sup>1</sup> This approach is based on measures that incentivise interethnic cooperation and compromise, constructing a system that promotes moderation by forcing politicians to appeal to voters outside their ethnic group, something Horowitz (2002a, 23-24) argues consociationalism fails to do. Crucially, centripetalism aims to “break down the salience of ethnicity” in politics, an approach contrasting starkly with the consociationalist approach of building political institutions around segmental cleavages (Reilly 2012, 263). Despite admiring Lijphart’s “realism about group divisions”, Horowitz (2002a, 19) (2000, 570-572) argues that use of European examples as the basis for advocating the implementation of similar systems elsewhere is unconvincing. However, he acknowledges that the incentives-based approach is difficult to implement (Horowitz 2002a, 25), and centripetal systems remain empirically rare (Reilly 2012, 266).

Like Lijphart, centripetalists focus primarily on stability, which they argue can be achieved through institutional design that consciously deals with ethnicity rather than pretending it doesn’t exist (Reilly 2012, 268). However, there is a growing literature that addresses the long-term price of consociational peace and measures

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published 1985

of success beyond stability. A frequently cited criticism is that by institutionalising identities, consociationalism entrenches the divisions that caused the original conflict (Wilson 2002). Aitken (2010) argues that although consociational settlements can achieve peace, they not only entrench divisions, but freeze ethnic identities in their extreme, post-conflict state. Finlay (2010, 111), using the Foucauldian lens of governmentality and biopolitics, argues that consociationalism's inherent focus on cultural recognition and group rights makes ethnicity normative, with the consequence that "the space for other ways of being in the world and other forms of politics is reduced". Related to this is a developing literature dealing with the way consociationalism institutionally includes the most significant groups in society, but excludes 'others' because, as O'Leary (2001, 62) summarises, "the 'Others' were not at the heart of the conflict so it is not surprising that they were not at the heart of its pacts". This 'exclusion amid inclusion' dilemma raises the question of how democratic a society that privileges the representation of certain groups can be, and shows that even consociational systems in which identity groups are self-defined incentivise ethnic mobilisation, making reform difficult (Agarin, McCulloch and Murtagh 2018, 306-308).

Consociational democracies are also criticised as dysfunctional and lacking in accountability. Horowitz (2014) claims they are susceptible to immobilism and breakdown due to their dependence on compromises between elites, and Wilford and Wilson (2006, 42) argue that power-sharing in Northern Ireland is "cumbersome, inefficient and opaque". Through the case study of Mostar's failed power-sharing local government, Bose (2017) finds that Bosnia's politics remains plagued by "the war's legacy of deep distrust between communities", and the contested legitimacy

of the Bosnian state. Bassuener (2017, 226), also using the case study of Bosnia, argues that the inability of the government to deal with crucial issues in Bosnian society is due not to incompetence, but to the fact that Dayton was constructed around the interests of its signatories, making it unsurprising that “it functions to preserve and further those interests or those of their successors” rather than the interests of the population. Even scholars who argue that consociationalism is necessary in some cases generally accept there are serious flaws in its ability to provide good governance (McEvoy 2017) (Bieber 2013).

### Realist Defence

Responding to these criticisms, McGarry and O’Leary have been consociationalism’s most robust and enthusiastic defenders. In response to claims that consociationalism institutionalises ethnic divisions, McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 36-37) argue that while this may be true of ‘corporate’ systems where groups entitled to share power are constitutionally defined, it is not the case in ‘liberal’ consociations in which groups formed are dependent on electoral results. Liberal consociations, they argue, are also more open to reform. McCulloch (2014) agrees that liberal arrangements are to be preferred for their greater flexibility, but finds that they are less common and more difficult to adopt than corporate settlements. The best long-term solution is therefore less likely to be adopted than the problematic corporate option.

The most important aspect of the revisionist defence, however, has been the realist justification that although it may be imperfect, consociationalism is infinitely preferable to violent conflict. In response to Bieber’s (2020, 97) observation that the bar for success must be very low if Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Lebanon are to be

counted as successes, McGarry (2020) argues that in all three cases, consociational settlements ended conflicts that caused thousands of deaths. Consociationalism is politics built on “a shared vision of catastrophe” rather than any sense of community (O’Leary 2005, xxii). This is a difficult argument to refute, as it is impossible to dispute that despite its faults, consociationalism is infinitely superior to violence. Its dysfunctionality therefore tends to be regarded as an unfortunate side-effect, but not a sufficiently serious issue to necessitate abandoning or seriously revising consociational theory.

However, this argument rests crucially on the hope that stability will allow for future transition to a better form of democracy, while failing to adequately explain how this might take place. Lijphart (1977, 228) argues that in the long term, successful democracy may “create sufficient mutual trust at both elite and mass levels to render itself superfluous”, but there is no detailed consideration of how this might come about in a system that intentionally preserves divisions. Following Lijphart, McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 68) argue that “successful consociation can be biodegradable, as the Dutch example suggests”, neglecting the very different context of this case in comparison with post-conflict societies. The transitional consociationalism implemented in South Africa has been advocated by some scholars, but McGarry and O’Leary (2011, 69) reject time-limited consociationalism, arguing that the people should be allowed to “change consociationalism within their own frames and rules”, while giving little consideration to possible barriers to reform.

The ‘stickiness’ of consociationalism has long been recognised (Horowitz 2014, 12), but the most problematic feature of such systems is that that not only does

consociational theory fail to provide an adequate account of possible transition mechanisms, but the incentive structures inherent to consociationalism actively prevent reform. Elites empowered by consociational systems are able to leverage fear of a return to violence to maintain and strengthen their wealth and power through corrupt practices which a system lacking in accountability fails to prevent, leaving those who hold political power with little motivation to transform the system (Bassuener 2017). The faults that make consociational democracies undesirable in the long term are the same faults that prevent reform, and there are no historical cases of “biodegradable” post-conflict consociations; as McCulloch (2017, 419) demonstrates, “a dominant pathway from power-sharing is simply through the collapse of the arrangement”, and a collapse of the spirit of cooperation that held it together.

A realistic assessment of the suitability of consociationalism for bringing peace and democracy to post-conflict societies must therefore address its long-term dynamics and prospects, an approach that has been generally neglected in the literature in favour of a focus on its adoptability as a conflict-management strategy. There are few cases of consociational institutions that have lasted long enough to be considered in the long term, but in Lebanon and Northern Ireland, consociational systems have been in operation for over two decades and are entering what can reasonably be considered the long term of their constitutional structures.

### Lebanon and Northern Ireland

Lebanon has been central to consociational theory since its 1943 National Pact was “held out by some scholars as a model of governing for other deeply divided

societies” (Najem 2012, 2). Yet by the time Lijphart published *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977), Lebanon was in the midst of a bloody civil war, and although Lijphart praised the system for bringing decades of stability, he criticised the inflexible confessional division of power for contributing to the system’s breakdown, and later used the case in his argument for preferring self-determined to pre-determined consociational systems (corresponding to the liberal/corporate distinction) (Lijphart 1995). While Rosiny (2015) argues that if properly implemented, the Taif Accords could serve as a model for other post-conflict societies, most of the literature on Lebanon’s consociational politics is critical. Saleme (2009) believes Lebanon’s rigid corporate consociationalism lacks accountability and undermines government commitment to the public good, while Salloukh (2019) argues that Lebanon’s corrupt and strongly sectarian political economy is a source of instability. Bassuener (2020), however, argues that criticising Lebanon’s politics as dysfunctional or corrupt is inadequate, as the system is designed and operated around the interests of warlords who continue to benefit from it, making reform almost impossible.

Northern Ireland has been viewed as a “key confirming case for consociational theory”, and much of the academic debate revolves around the issue of whether it can serve as a model for other divided societies (Taylor 2011b). McGarry and O’Leary (2011) are among the Belfast Agreement’s greatest defenders, particularly admiring its liberal nature while criticising its corporate features, and this case is central to their overall defence of consociationalism. While the Belfast Agreement has been criticised throughout its existence on issues such as the “apartheid” thinking behind it (Wilson 2002), the injustice of its failure to address the “systemic sectarianism” at the heart of Northern Irish society (Taylor 2011a), and its failure to resolve the

fundamental disagreements over Northern Ireland's past, present and future that were the original causes of conflict (Dingley 2005), it remains the case most frequently cited as an example of consociationalism's success in constructing a functioning democracy in the aftermath of conflict. The centrality of this case to consociational theory makes it crucial for testing this theory and exploring how a supposedly successful case looks in the long term.

The most significant comparative analysis of power-sharing in Lebanon and Northern Ireland is Kerr's *Imposing Power-Sharing* (2005). This compares these cases with a focus on the roles played by external actors in determining the success of such arrangements, but was published in the year of the Cedar revolution when Syrian troops left Lebanon, and thus does not explore the dynamics of Lebanese politics as it functions without Syria's direct control. The case of Lebanon has also been used in comparative analysis as a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of the case of Northern Ireland, notably by Wright (1987). El Machnouk (2020) uses these cases, along with Bosnia and Iraq, in a comparative exploration of the factors that cause a return to violence in post-conflict states with consociational settlements. A consensus emerges from these comparisons that external and regional factors are key to the success of consociationalism. However, none of these studies focuses on the long-term success of consociational democracy in these cases as measured by criteria other than a return to violence.

## Conclusion

There is general agreement on the overriding importance of bringing peace and democracy to divided societies, but there is no consensus in the literature on

whether consociationalism is a viable means of achieving these goals in the long term. The optimism of consociational theory regarding the possibility of democratic politics in societies where conflicts previously seemed intractable is an important contribution to politics in deeply divided societies, but the quality and stability of consociational democracy has been seriously disputed. The realist defence led by McGarry and O'Leary provides a convincing argument that consociationalism is an imperfect but often necessary means of achieving peace and democracy in the short term. Yet literature critical of consociationalism has shown that there are serious flaws with consociational democracy in the longer term regarding its ability to provide normatively adequate democracy and functional politics that can provide for the public good. The structure of the system and the incentives and interests involved makes it particularly difficult to reform, demonstrating that any justification of consociationalism as a temporary measure that does not provide explicit guidance for reform is inadequate. This reveals the central paradox of consociationalism: it is an imperfect system that is defended, even by its advocates, as a short-term measure that is intended to "render itself superfluous" over time, yet as an arrangement intended to provide hostile groups with incentives to participate in and maintain the system, it is particularly resistant to reform. This paper will contribute to unravelling this issue, and determining whether consociationalism can still be considered a useful tool in managing politics in divided societies in light of these problems.

## Dysfunctional Democracy

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The consociational agreements constructed in the 1989 Taif Accords and the 1998 Belfast Agreement provided the basis for negotiated peace and democratic power-sharing after years of divisive violent conflict. Yet although neither society has returned to the levels of violence seen in the recent conflicts and both can be considered successful cases of consociationalism by this minimal measure, post-conflict consociationalism is also intended to replace violence with democratic government, and in this, the agreements have seen less success. Three decades after Taif, Lebanon is in the grip of a financial and political crisis that has left millions of its citizens living in poverty while its government fails to cooperate adequately to even begin to resolve the situation. In Northern Ireland, the dysfunctionality of the political system was exposed when the poorly-managed Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme cost the small province millions of pounds, and caused a breakdown in the power-sharing executive that left Northern Ireland without devolved government for three years.

Although most scholars acknowledge that there are weaknesses to consociational government, with Lijphart (1977, 50-51) acknowledging that that it was susceptible to indecisiveness, immobilism and inefficiency, the concept of good governance is largely absent from consociational theory (McEvoy 2017, 211); advocates of consociationalism either assume that once a coalition is formed, it will go on to govern to the best of its ability, or use Lijphart's (1977, 52) flawed argument that when the problems outweigh the benefits, transition to a more competitive system would not be difficult. Yet as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, this

transition is difficult, and no cases of organic transition from consociationalism in post-conflict societies exist. It is therefore necessary to explore the quality of consociational governance in the long term. This chapter will assess democratic government in each case separately, outlining the nature of their consociational institutions and the context in which these were agreed and implemented. An analysis of the nature, causes and consequences of the recent political difficulties faced in both cases will be used to understand how the flaws inherent to their power-sharing governments have affected these societies in the long term. These recent problems will be shown to be part of a pattern of inefficiency and dysfunctionality in systems that were intended to be built on accommodation and cooperation, but that have in practice achieved little more than preventing a return to violent conflict.

## Lebanon

Lebanon's fifteen-year civil war killed tens of thousands of people, caused billions of pounds of damage to the state's infrastructure (Najem 2012, 2), and drastically reordered the country's social geography, destroyed shared spaces and further dividing an already divided nation (Khalaf 2002, 234-246).<sup>2</sup> Although it did not immediately end violence, the consociational settlement agreed at Taif by what remained of the Lebanese parliament initiated the transition from civil war to constitutional politics, providing for the disarmament of militias, a defined role for Syria, and a power-sharing settlement between the country's numerous religious sects (Taif Accords 1989). Although there have since been conflicts along Lebanon's borders, and the sectarian clashes of 2008 caused many to fear a return to civil war,

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates of deaths range from around 50,000 (Lebanon Renaissance Foundation 2014) to over 170,000 (Khalaf 2002).

Lebanon has not seen violence on anywhere near the scale of the civil war since the fighting ended in 1990.

The Taif Agreement did not construct a new political system, but aimed to “amend and reinstate” the 1943 National Pact, a consociational arrangement that was itself based on Lebanon’s long tradition of power-sharing between its diverse religious sects (Kerr 2005, 159). Although the informal rules of the 1943 ‘gentleman’s agreement’ were adjusted and formally institutionalized through Taif, and the ratio of Christian to Muslim representatives equalised, the central principles were maintained; multi-member districts elect representatives from particular sects, which form a government led by a Maronite President, Sunni Prime Minister and Shia Speaker of the House (Bogaards 2019b, 32). Seats are divided according to sectarian quotas that are intended to be representative of the balance of confessional groups throughout the state, although due to the sensitivity regarding the balance between groups, the last official census was in 1932, making this allocation of seats very imprecise (National Democratic Institute 2019). The requirement for candidates to gain the votes of members of sects other than their own in common-roll elections has been praised by Horowitz (2003, 118) for providing incentives for inter-ethnic accommodation, but in practice, the boundaries of electoral districts and the distributions of ethnically reserved seats make Christian politicians more dependent on Muslim voters than Muslim politicians are on Christian voters, promoting fears of “majority tyranny” even after electoral reforms in 2017 (El Machnouk 2018).

Although this peculiarly complex and rigid corporate consociationalism formally institutionalized sectarianism in politics, the Taif Agreement stated that “abolishing

political sectarianism is a fundamental national objective”, and provided a phased plan to achieve this (Taif Accords 1989). In practice, however, this plan has not been implemented. Lebanon’s most powerful actors are its sectarian leaders and external actors such as Syria, and neither has sufficient incentive to change a system from which they benefit (Rosiny 2015, 491-495). Hopes for elite trust filtering down to the population were “strangled at birth under Syrian tutelage” (Nagle and Clancy 2019, 5); the elections that took place under Syrian influence occurred under an electoral system that “contradicted both the letter and spirit of the Taif Agreement” and was designed to favour those loyal to the Assad regime (El Machnouk 2018, 4-5). Even following the departure of Syrian troops in 2005, the Syrian regime has remained closely involved in Lebanese politics (Fakhoury 2019, 15). A system framed in the peace agreement as temporary and inadequate for the long term has become permanent.

### Crisis

The inadequacy and dysfunctionality of the Lebanese government has long been recognised by its citizens and by external observers, but the magnitude of its failure has been starkly exposed through the recent financial crisis and the chemical explosion in Beirut that exacerbated it. The economy contracted by 1.9% and 6.7% in 2018 and 2019 due to long-term systemic problems, before the effects of the pandemic and the explosion contributed to a third annual contraction of around 20% (World Bank 2020, 26). The mismanagement of public funds, pervasive corruption, and a disproportionately large public sector led to “skyrocketing public debt” (Baumann 2019, 61) (Salloukh 2019). More than half of Lebanon’s population are now living in poverty as the value of the currency has collapsed (World Bank 2020).

The explosion in Beirut in August 2020 occurred due to government negligence of the administration of the port, and has worsened and exposed these problems. More than 200 people were killed, 6,000 wounded, and 300,000 displaced, and the infrastructure of the port that is “the country’s main gateway for imports and exports” was destroyed (World Bank 2020, 24-52).

This has exposed serious problems in Lebanese politics. Firstly, the crisis has exposed the extent and consequences of the “permanent for-profit politics” of Lebanon’s political elite (Bassuener 2020). Lebanon provides a clear example of the government by “elite cartel” described by Lijphart (1969), but rather than being conducive to stability, this has proved to be a serious weakness of Lebanese government. Sectarian elites have “divided rather than shared power”, and rather than using their power for the benefit of their constituents, it has become a route to financial gain (Nagle and Clancy 2019, 5). The state is kept intentionally weak to enable elites to extract profit and maintain clientelist networks for the delivery of goods and services, leaving Lebanon lacking in public services from schools to clean water (Baumann 2019). While the wealthy cope by purchasing for themselves what the state cannot provide, most of the population are left dependent on patronage, a situation worsened by the current crisis (Baumann 2019, 69). The explosion in Beirut was the result of decades of mismanagement by a government with little interest in providing permanent, adequate oversight of the country’s most important site for international trade (World Bank 2020, 52). Pervasive corruption disrupts efforts to improve the situation, as “any foreign aid would certainly be stolen by those in power” (Bassuener 2020).

Secondly, it has demonstrated the inability of political leaders to cooperate adequately to solve the state's problems. When elites see advantages in refusing to cooperate, there is little to compel them to form a government or agree on policies, as exemplified by the failure of the divided governments to pass a budget between 2005 and 2016, which contributed significantly to the country's current difficulties (World Bank 2020, 9). In the aftermath of the explosion, politicians have been unable to form a cabinet, leaving the state without a government capable of addressing the crisis (The Daily Star 2021). This is part of a broader pattern of failed cooperation and lack of agreement; there has been a complete lack of unified foreign policy on the Syrian conflict, as different parties have followed their own preferences and interests rather than cooperating in the interests of the state (Fakhoury 2019, 16).

Finally, the crisis and the protests it has provoked highlight the inadequacy of the system in producing much-needed change through democratic politics. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with politicians and government, politics remains dominated by the same sectarian parties, which are themselves dominated by political dynasties that have retained their grip on power for decades (Tschunkert and MacGinty 2020, 249). The 2017 electoral reforms and the gains made by non-sectarian parties in the 2016 local elections raised hopes among civic parties and their supporters for further gains in the 2018 general election, but despite growing evidence of identification with a Lebanese over a sectarian identity among the population, only one seat was won by a civic party (Deets and Skulte-Ouais 2020). This disparity between the growing unpopularity of corrupt sectarian elites and their continued electoral success is maintained by the political culture of sectarianism, pervasive clientelism, and elite control of electoral rules and district boundaries,

making change almost impossible (Deets and Skulte-Ouaiss 2020). In the context of the failure of constitutional politics, protests against the government have been a central feature of Lebanese politics in recent years. The failure of the authorities to deal with the 2015 waste crisis caused by the closure of Beirut's landfill site led to months of protests that were deeply critical of political figures and began to call for the fall of the regime (Fakhoury 2019, 18). The anti-government protests that began in 2019 have continued through to 2021, but like previous campaigns, they have been unable to bring real change; Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned only to be reinstated, and other figures who have long held political power remain in office (BBC 2020a).

### Northern Ireland

The Belfast Agreement provided the basis to end three decades of violent conflict that killed over 3,500 people in a region with a history of violence between its two main communities that goes back centuries, and that came into being as a political entity in the context of civil war and intercommunal violence (McKittrick and McVea 2012, 375). Violence had declined significantly in the years before the Agreement, and continued in the years after, but deaths, shootings and bombings have significantly reduced since 1998 (Gray, et al. 2018, 109), and it is likely that this was only possible through the provision of a democratic means of achieving the aims of each community (McEvoy 2017, 216). The consociational settlement provided incentives for politicians with irreconcilable political views to cooperate for the benefit of their communities, with the hope of ensuring their own vision of Northern Ireland's future became a reality (O'Leary 2019, 219). For unionists, the Agreement

consolidated Northern Ireland's position within the UK and provided insurance against their potential future minority status as the demographic balance shifted in favour of Catholics (Horowitz 2002b, 207). For nationalists, it provided protection of equal rights, an 'Irish dimension' to politics, and a potential route to a united Ireland achieved without violence (McEvoy 2017, 213).

In contrast to Lebanon, Northern Ireland lacked traditions of power-sharing, and its previous attempt at power-sharing in 1973 quickly collapsed under pressure from continuing violence from both sides (Wolff 2001, 18-21). In the decades before the Troubles, Catholics were discriminated against and were unable to change this through a political system designed to disadvantage them. The Belfast Agreement remedied this, emphasising the importance of equality in politics, while procedures of cross-community consent and weighted majorities for important decisions ensure that majoritarian dominance is no longer possible (Belfast Agreement 1998). Northern Ireland's consociational system is usually described as liberal, as proportional representation through the single transferable vote allocates seats to candidates without reference to their religious identity (O'Leary 2001, 57-60). McCulloch (2017, 506) classifies Northern Ireland as a "hybrid" consociation with liberal and corporate features due to the requirement for MLAs to self-designate as Unionist, Nationalist, or Other, but without quotas for group representation, it is theoretically possible for the main groups sharing power to change over time, or for all parties to run on civic platforms. Yet although McGarry and O'Leary (2011, 34-74) argue that the largely-liberal system provides sufficient opportunity for non-ethnic parties, politics is dominated by the DUP and Sinn Féin. While both parties have moderated significantly since 1998, there is a disparity between their more extreme

ethno-nationalist politics and the more moderate beliefs and identities of the population as measured in surveys (Murtagh 2015).

Yet although politics currently remains divided with little hope of transformation, the system has seen significant success in difficult circumstances. From 2007, the DUP and Sinn Féin, representing opposite views on Northern Ireland's constitutional position, were able to share power, with global attention being drawn to the amiability between the "fundamentalist demagogue" Ian Paisley and former IRA commander Martin McGuinness (McKittrick and McVea 2012, 282). The Assembly has taken on increasing responsibility for Northern Ireland's internal affairs, and even the contentious issue of policing has been devolved since 2010, made possible because politicians from both communities agreed on the leader of the cross-community Alliance Party as justice minister (Mitchell 2018, 343). Despite criticisms of the inefficiency of the Assembly, Haughey (2019, 706) finds that in the years before its collapse in 2017, its "legislative productivity" compared favourably with that of the UK's other devolved assemblies.

'A project too far'

Despite the Belfast Agreement's important achievements, however, the mishandling of the RHI scheme and the latest breakdown in power-sharing it caused have highlighted serious problems with governance in Northern Ireland. The scheme, modelled on a similar initiative by the Westminster government but with critical differences, was intended to incentivise the use of sustainable sources of heating through government subsidies. However, a lack of cost control and an overly-generous subsidy that was worth more than the fuel itself led to a projected

overspend of up to £700 million (BBC 2021). The scheme was reformed, but Stormont still faced an overspend of £30 million which the UK government would not cover (BBC 2021). This financial burden is a problem in itself, but the findings of the public inquiry held into what went wrong with the scheme revealed deeper problems in Northern Irish politics.

While the inquiry found that “corrupt or malicious activity on the part of officials, Ministers or Special Advisers was not the cause of what went wrong with the NI RHI scheme”, there was evidence that personal interests and party-political loyalties seriously affected the transparency and confidentiality of government departments (Coghlin, O'Brien and MacLean 2020, 201). A lack of trust and cooperation between departments run by different parties delayed the implementation of a solution to the problems, and the legacy of the past was used as an excuse for negligence of official procedures; former DUP First Minister Peter Robinson explained “our abiding priority was to work the new, historic, yet difficult arrangements of forming and operating an Executive with age-old adversaries... we did not live our lives consulting a rule book at every moment” (Coghlin, O'Brien and MacLean 2020, 21,161). Significantly, the inquiry found that the scheme “was a ‘project too far’ for the Northern Ireland Government” (Coghlin, O'Brien and MacLean 2020, 195), emphasising the very low burden faced by Stormont compared with the government of any independent state.

The consequences of this badly mishandled scheme also demonstrated flaws in the Assembly’s accountability procedures when the DUP invoked the Petition of Concern to prevent the passing of a vote of no confidence against Arlene Foster as First Minister due to her role in the scandal (Gray, et al. 2018, 67). The resulting breakdown

of power-sharing highlighted the central problem with Northern Ireland's government: the fragility of the power-sharing executive. Consociationalism is based on the premise that elite cooperation will provide political stability, but in Northern Ireland, divisions at the executive level have often had the opposite effect. The resignation of the Deputy First Minister triggered the collapse of Stormont in 2017, and the inability of leaders to come to an agreement to restore power-sharing for three years meant there was no elite-level model of cooperation, but rather an example of failure to compromise. The failure of the main parties to form a government between 2002-2007 led to a long period of direct rule by Westminster, but the reluctance of the UK government to impose direct rule between 2017-2020 led to three years during which Northern Ireland was governed by its civil service, which was unable to make policy decisions (Gray, et al. 2018, 11). Secretaries of State in Westminster ensured budgets were passed each year, avoiding Lebanon's decade without an agreed budget, but important decisions were impossible in many areas of devolved responsibility (Gray, et al. 2018, 11). Healthcare has been a particularly prominent problem as the lack of an executive prevented the implementation of pay increases for healthcare workers, leading to strikes by nurses (BBC 2018). Significantly, despite being the region most affected by Brexit, Northern Ireland is the least prepared (Haughey 2019, 710), and the restored assembly must now deal with this difficult issue after three years of dispute, blame, and failed cooperation.

The *New Decade, New Approach* agreement addresses many of the problems that threatened power-sharing in the past. Significantly, the procedure for appointing the First and Deputy First Ministers has changed, making a repeat of the events of 2017 less likely, and the rules surrounding the use of the Petition of Concern have been

changed so that it cannot be triggered by a single party, or used “where the question before the Assembly relates to a member’s conduct as a Minister or MLA”, making the abuse of this power less likely (New Decade, New Approach Deal 2020, 12-13,24-25). This can be seen as a successful use of the “constitutional tinkering” approach to reform suggested by McCulloch (2017) that may provide for a more cooperative and functional assembly in the future. However, this is part of a pattern whereby much of Northern Ireland’s relative political success can be attributed to negotiated agreements rather than parliamentary politics, suggesting that the Assembly is unable to function independently and make political bargains without the intervention of external actors (O’Leary 2019, 230-231). The UK and Irish governments have been crucial in allowing reforms to take place following crises; the 2006 St Andrews Agreement allowed for the restoration of power-sharing in 2007, and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement narrowly averted another breakdown (McCulloch 2017, 417). Such agreements, along with the ability of the British government to take over the administration of the province when power-sharing fails, have allowed Northern Ireland’s consociational institutions to function despite being unable to manage divisions within the Assembly. The new measures provide some basis for optimism regarding the future of power-sharing, but Brexit poses a serious threat to future cooperation, and the devolved government has little power over the shape this challenge will take.

## Conclusions

Although consociational governments created through peace agreements can provide a means of ending protracted violent conflict, they are inefficient and

dysfunctional in the long term. Lebanon's political system cannot be seen as anything but a failure except on the very minimal measure that it has not seen a return to civil war. The Lebanese government has proved unable and unwilling to provide the goods and services required by its citizens, as elites prefer to benefit from a system built on corruption and patronage, and the explosion that was the direct result of political mismanagement killed over 200 people, and exacerbated an already dire financial situation. While Northern Ireland has not suffered to the same extent from the effects of poor governance, the mismanagement of the RHI scheme demonstrates that its capability and competence is severely limited, suggesting that its comparative success can be primarily attributed to the constitutional context in which the legislative and executive bodies operate. Although the frequent breakdown of power-sharing in Northern Ireland has had detrimental consequences for health and social policy, the ability of the British government to intervene and pass essential legislation has saved Northern Ireland from Lebanon's experience of the consequences of being unable to pass a budget for a decade. The price Northern Ireland has paid for the lower burden on its government, however, is its powerlessness in determining the province's relationship with the EU.

Significantly, despite the substantial differences between these cases, both demonstrate that despite some efforts for reform, the fairness and functionality of these systems does not necessarily improve with time. Lebanon's recent difficulties demonstrate that rather than mitigating political problems over time, consociationalism can in fact create, perpetuate and worsen faults in the political and financial systems, leading to problems decades after implementation. Reform in Northern Ireland has only been possible outside the elected assembly, and although

there has been some success through negotiated agreements in mitigating problems with power-sharing as they become apparent, the recent three-year absence of devolved government that followed several years of reasonably cooperative power-sharing demonstrates that progress is not linear, and issues may manifest themselves as serious problems only in the longer term.

## Legitimacy, Consociationalism and Violence

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Lebanon and Northern Ireland are both societies transitioning from conflict, and this context of recent violence is often used to dismiss the dysfunctional consociational politics explored in the previous chapter as a peripheral or secondary issue, despite its serious economic, social and political consequences. Yet this chapter will argue that governments that are weak, ineffective and often corrupt corrode the legitimacy of consociational institutions. An exploration of the crucial role disputed legitimacy plays in the instability that plagues deeply divided societies, and of the solutions provided by consociational arrangements, will show that the legitimacy of the power-sharing government is significantly derived from the claim that it is the best means of pursuing the objectives of each community. Yet the problems of dysfunctionality identified in the previous chapter undermine the claim of the government to be serving the public interest, or even the interests of particular groups, and the failures of consociational governments provide actors that lack cross-community legitimacy with significant power, providing a significant source of dispute. The dysfunctionality of consociational governance therefore means that consociational settlements maintain rather than resolve the deficit of legitimacy that lies at the heart of the recurrent violence seen in deeply divided societies and undermines the foundations of consociational solutions to conflict, leaving societies perpetually vulnerable to violence.

### Legitimacy in Deeply Divided Societies

Guelke (2012, 31) argues that the prevalence of political violence and the threat of political violence in deeply divided societies is a symptom of a more fundamental

problem, that “the polity is deficient in legitimacy”. For any peace process to be sustainable, therefore, legitimate political authority is essential. While the concept of political legitimacy is complex and multi-faceted, legitimacy is understood in this context as meaning “an acceptance of authority based mainly on compliance and consent” (Tschunkert and MacGinty 2020, 241). Where the legitimacy of the political process itself is contested by one or more groups in a divided society, its outcomes are difficult to enforce universally without some form of coercion, which is viewed by some as illegitimate violence rather than the state’s legitimate use of force (Guelke 2012, 32-35).

The importance of resolving disputes over political legitimacy in divided societies is demonstrated by the circumstances under which conflict broke out in Northern Ireland and Lebanon. Although the causes of both conflicts are contentiously debated both by academics and by those involved, disputes over the legitimacy of the government and even the polity itself were central in both cases. The central issue in the conflict in Northern Ireland that divided the two communities and made reconciliation and compromise difficult was the disputed legitimacy of the partition of Ireland and of continuing British power over the North (Guelke 2012, 31). The borders of Northern Ireland were drawn to create a Protestant majority wherever this was possible, constructing a gerrymandered polity in which democratic values were “deprived of any sacred quality” (Wright 1987, 48), a process never accepted as legitimate by Irish nationalists; only with the Belfast Agreement did Ireland remove its territorial claim to the North from its constitution. This long-term lack of legitimacy descended into violence in 1968-69 when confrontations between Civil Rights marches and counter-demonstrations, and the police response to this, ignited

latent tensions between Catholics and Protestants (Mulholland 2002, 62-66). This triggered cycles of inter-communal violence in which the disputed legitimacy of the coercive force of the Protestant-dominated Northern Irish government and police force, and of the British state, meant that rather than being able to maintain the monopoly on the use of legitimate force, these authorities became part of the cycles of violence and were unable to end them (Wright 1987, 12).

The drawing of Lebanon's borders was also controversial, as a Christian-majority state was deliberately constructed in a Muslim-dominated region (El Machnouk 2020, 55-57). For three decades, the National Pact between leaders of the newly-independent state's most influential communities, Sunni Muslims and Christian Maronites, resolved this sufficiently for this religiously diverse state to maintain a level of stability in a chronically unstable region. In the years before the civil war, however, this fragile legitimacy was undermined by growing opposition to a political system that was increasingly failing to deal with the challenges of modernisation, demographic change, and the serious socio-economic imbalance within a state that provided only the most minimal of public services (Najem 2012, 28-33) (Kerr 2005, 142-144). At the same time, the weakness of the Lebanese state and its coercive ability was exposed by the challenge to Lebanese sovereignty posed by the presence of the PLO in the South of the country and the growth of other armed groups (Kerr 2005, 142-144) (Byman and Van Evera 1998, 37). Political and military mobilisation and counter-mobilisation took place in an atmosphere of increasing tension between groups, and the weakness of the Lebanese state and the bonds that held together its diverse population allowed external actors to form alliances with internal factions

(Najem 2012, 33). The Lebanese army lost its position as a neutral force, and became part of the growing crisis of illegitimacy and insecurity.

### Consociational Solutions

Consociational agreements do not aim to achieve peace through resolving the disputed legitimacy of the polity definitively, but construct a power-sharing government in which these difficulties can be negotiated without violence, or delayed until relations between groups are less conflictual. The government is intended to represent all significant groups and to allow all to share in its power and benefits, providing it with legitimacy across identity groups. However, without resolving deeper issues of disputed legitimacy, the consociational government's legitimacy relies on providing benefits to all communities, as each side's motivations for pursuing peace are generally driven by "considerations that pertain to what is good for their own society in tangible terms" (Bar-Tal 2013, 338).

Externally-mediated consociational agreements provide significant roles for external actors and internal parties and elites, but opposing groups perceive the legitimacy of these actors differently. The Belfast Agreement provides significant roles for the British and Irish governments, but as nationalists look to Dublin for a source of legitimate authority while unionists look to London, the compromise of the Agreement is based on an Assembly that is intended to represent all the people of Northern Ireland, regardless of identity and community, serving as "the prime source of authority in respect of all devolved responsibilities" (Belfast Agreement 1998). The Taif Accords provide a role for Syria and a degree of administrative decentralism, but many groups reject the legitimacy of Syrian intervention, and the agreement

emphasises that the state will be sovereign and independent, with a strong central authority (Taif Accords 1989). Political leaders and elites in both cases primarily represent distinct communities, and often do not even attempt to pursue cross-community legitimacy (Murtagh 2015) (Deets and Skulte-Ouaiss 2020), leaving the power-sharing government as the main source of legitimate authority across identity groups. Yet this means the consociational method of managing disputed legitimacy relies on a type of government that, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, is often fragile, ineffective and corrupt.

### Dysfunctionality and Distrust

There is a high level of distrust and dissatisfaction with the consociational governments in Northern Ireland and Lebanon that preceded the RHI scandal and the worst of Lebanon's financial crisis. A 2017 survey of Lebanese citizens found that when asked how much they trusted the government to do what is right for Lebanon, 85% of respondents answered either 'not much' or 'not at all' (Pew Research Center 2021). In Northern Ireland, a 2014 survey found high levels of dissatisfaction with the work of MLAs; only 1% of respondents were 'very satisfied' with the way MLAs were doing their job, while 66% were either 'very' or 'fairly dissatisfied' (NILT 2014). Evidence of corruption or self-interested behaviour on the part of political leaders questions their motivation and ability to serve the interests of the population, or even of their own community, making it difficult for the government to maintain trust. Accusations of misuse of public money are particularly damaging in regions where the population is struggling economically. Anger at the corrupt political elite that have benefitted from their positions while providing almost no essential public

services have been at the heart of the protests in Lebanon that began in 2019, protests that were particularly intense in Tripoli, Lebanon's poorest city (BBC 2020b). Northern Ireland is one of the UK's most deprived regions, and areas of rioting correlate with figures for social deprivation (Whiting 2015, 169), a pattern confirmed in the most recent riots (The Guardian 2021). Although the RHI inquiry found that its failure was not due to corruption, it uncovered failures in multiple departments, and public anger at the mismanagement of scarce public funds has been widespread (Belfast Telegraph 2017). Such accusations seriously undermine the claims of politicians to be acting in the interests of their communities.

Frequent breakdown also undermines the legitimacy of the government's authority; a government that is not functioning cannot possess legitimate authority, as an absent government possesses no authority at all. This has been a particular problem in Northern Ireland, where breakdowns in power-sharing have led to controversy regarding the legitimacy of the role of the British and Irish governments in managing devolved issues, and in negotiating a means of restoring power-sharing. The high level of support for the Belfast Agreement demonstrated in the 1998 referendum provided the continuing role of Britain and the significant role of the Irish government with a level of legitimacy despite the long-running disputes about their roles (Guelke 2017, 47), but when Northern Ireland has been run by unelected civil servants or directly by Westminster, the legitimacy of political decision-making is less clear. The suspension of the Assembly in 2000, which was not recognised by the Irish government, showed that the Agreement is vulnerable to Westminster's sovereignty (O'Leary 2019, 205), and although direct rule was not implemented during the most recent breakdown of power-sharing, the SDLP criticised the fact that the setting of

the budget by Westminster effectively represented direct rule (Gray, et al. 2018, 57-60). These situations bring the contentious issue of the legitimacy of political authority in Northern Ireland to the forefront of political debate, drawing attention to the fact that the underlying dispute was never fully resolved.

While the British and Irish governments have generally attempted to mitigate the failures of power-sharing, external actors in Lebanon have frequently destabilised its fragile political system, and the legitimacy of their role is more seriously disputed. Syria's role in Lebanese politics has been a source of dispute since the signing of the Taif Accords. Christian militias initially refused to accept the parts of the agreement that provided for Syrian presence, and continued to fight until they were defeated militarily (Rizkallah 2017, 2066). Syria played a major role in shaping and negotiating the Taif Accords, and Kerr (2005, 159) argues that this "ushered in a new era of internationally legitimised and unfettered Syrian hegemonic control". Despite Taif's promise of independence, the presence of Syrian troops undermined Lebanon's sovereignty until they were expelled in 2005, after which Syria has continued to intervene in Lebanese politics (El Machnouk 2018, 4-5). Disagreement over Syria's role underlies the division between the March 8 and March 14 coalitions that formed in 2005 and continue to shape Lebanese politics, further dividing an already divided state (Nagle and Clancy 2019, 3-4). Many political leaders are known or suspected to have external sponsors (Tschunkert and MacGinty 2020, 247), and some have been accused of being mere puppets of other states; speculation regarding the extent to which Saad Hariri's actions in resigning as Prime Minister in 2017 were controlled by Saudi Arabia began the day of the announcement, and have continued since (The Daily Star 2017). Lebanon's weakness leaves it as open to "external penetration"

(Najem 2012, 3) as it was before the war, and Syria in particular has undermined the government's legitimacy both in terms of its democratic system, and its sovereignty. The ineffectiveness of the Lebanese government in comparison with the parties and individuals of which it is composed can also undermine its legitimacy. The government's failure to provide public services has allowed sectarian parties to act as the main "conduit for resources" and to gain legitimacy as representatives, protectors and providers within their communities (Tschunkert and MacGinty 2020, 247-249). The importance of the threat this poses to stability is demonstrated by the fact this was used as a strategy during the Lebanese civil war, when armed political parties sought legitimacy within their communities through providing the goods and services the state was unable to provide, which "discredited the Lebanese state by comparison" (Baylouny 2014, 332-337). Decades after the end of the war, many of these parties have continued to use this strategy.

### Legitimising Violence?

The continuity in the structures of power and legitimacy in Lebanon illuminates a further significant concern about consociationalism; its failure to fully delegitimise the use of violence as a political strategy. While inclusivity in consociational governments is a key means of achieving peace through providing incentives for violent groups to participate in democratic politics, this unavoidably rewards violence as a means of obtaining a voice in politics (Jarstad 2008, 124). This is of particular concern when the political route to resolving grievances and achieving objectives is ineffective, as has been demonstrated in both case studies; when the legitimacy of

the democratic government is undermined by incompetence, its adequacy as a replacement for violence may be questioned.

The Taif Agreement required militias to disband and disarm, but although this took place to some extent, the parties and leaders holding power in Lebanon are almost all former warlords or their allies, who have not only maintained the networks and structures that allowed them to mobilise for violence, but have actually used them since the end of the war (Rizkallah 2017). When supervising the process of disarmament, Syria accepted Hezbollah's role as a "resistance organization" rather than a militia, and it was not required to disarm (Berti 2011, 952). It now operates as both a powerful political party within democratic institutions, and "a sophisticated quasi-army", using its political power to block decisions harmful to its military interests (Berti 2011, 942,955). In the brief 2008 conflict following a period of political crisis, "militias-turned-parties" such as Hezbollah were able to mobilise their supporters to fight because they had maintained the legitimacy they had gained during the war as protectors of their co-religionists (Rizkallah 2017). Although the Doha Agreement that ended the conflict was nominally a compromise, it was a significant victory for Hezbollah, as they gained the veto power that had been their main demand (Berti 2011, 956). The disputed legitimacy of the state and its political institutions, and the failure to fully delegitimise violence as a political strategy has therefore led in Lebanon to violence being used as an "informal veto" to decisions made by the democratically elected government and as a supplement to parliamentary politics (Bogaards 2019b).

The situation in Northern Ireland is different, as the Mitchell principles of non-violence have succeeded in significantly detaching violence from democratic politics. Violence has not been completely eliminated, but acceptance of its legitimacy as a political strategy is limited to within small groups or organisations. Sinn Féin may once have been the political front for the IRA, but it has now distanced itself from violence, and is committed to change through democratic political methods (Whiting 2016). Dissident Republican violence can be managed through policing, even if it cannot be eliminated entirely (Whiting 2015, 2-3,178). The seeking of power and control through violence still takes place to some extent, where distrust of the state in some working-class communities has led to paramilitary punishment violence being used as a form of community 'policing' (Hogg and Butler 2018, 691). However, this is on a far smaller scale than non-state governance in Lebanon, and rather than having an interest in maintaining this situation as the strongly sectarian Lebanese government does, the government in Northern Ireland has made commitments to tackling this problem. This is therefore an aspect of Northern Ireland's consociational agreement that has seen significant success, and represents a fundamental difference from the situation in Lebanon.

The control exercised by elites over violence in Lebanon also allows sectarian groups to enforce restraint, and is therefore a key aspect of maintaining consociational peace, a situation Rizkallah (2017) calls "the paradox of power-sharing". This undermines the central government's monopoly on legitimate violence, and creates a system based on fear and the permanent threat of violence, but creates a fragile stability through elite control. In Northern Ireland, elites were able to maintain legitimate leadership within their communities through the claim to be working in

their best interests while compromising and cooperating in peace negotiations (Mitchell 2009, 329). If their legitimacy is threatened by the dysfunctionality of the government, however, their determination to pursue their aims solely through non-violent means may be undermined by their failure to deliver tangible benefits to deprived communities. Consociationalism was intended to replace violence with politics, but when politics fails, it leaves insufficient barriers to prevent a return to violence.

## Conclusions

The disputed legitimacy of the polity and the political process is the problem that lies at the heart of deeply divided societies and the political violence that occurs in them. The apparent benefit of consociational solutions to this problem is the construction of a legitimate government based on representation of all significant groups, providing a democratic, non-violent route to achieving the objectives of each community without having to immediately resolve complex, deep-rooted disputes. In practice, however, the weakness and dysfunctionality of consociational governments undermines public trust in these institutions. External actors and sectarian groups, both of which lack cross-community legitimacy, fill the gaps in governance left by the ineffective government and retain more power and influence than was provided for in the peace agreements, providing a potential source of political or even violent conflict.

In Lebanon, dysfunctional politics has left the maintenance of stability in the hands of formerly or even currently violent actors. Peace is secure only while it is in their interests to maintain it, and when democratic politics fails to deliver sufficient

benefits, they have used existing networks to mobilize to use violence or the threat of violence to attain their ends, further undermining the legitimacy of the democratic political process. In Northern Ireland, the effect of dysfunctional politics has been to damage the legitimacy of politicians who have claimed to pursue the interests of their communities and the population as a whole through democratic politics, but have failed to deliver benefits beyond the absence of violent conflict while mismanaging scarce public funds. In both cases, this leaves the legitimacy of the consociational solution of pursuing objectives through democratic politics uncertain, with insufficient barriers to a return to the use of violent strategies in their place. Consociationalism not only fails to solve the problems of legitimacy that threaten peace in divided societies, but can perpetuate and even intensify them, leaving these societies perpetually vulnerable to violence. The quality of consociational governance is therefore of central importance not only in itself, but because of its importance in providing a durable basis for non-violent politics.

## Conclusion

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Peace agreements based on consociational institutions were crucial in ending violent conflict in Lebanon and Northern Ireland, and as neither society has returned to the level of violence that was present before these agreements, both have been counted by some scholars as successes for consociational theory. Yet this paper has shown that the absence of violent conflict is a seriously deficient measure of the success of consociational democracy, while realist arguments that do not seriously address issues of governance beyond the provision of a minimal level of security are inadequate. The price paid for consociational peace has been a permanently insecure government that is unable or unwilling to consistently deliver adequate public services or manage public funds competently or transparently, while politicians benefit from a system constructed around their interests. As has been demonstrated by the crisis in Lebanon three decades after Taif, and the three-year absence of devolved government in Northern Ireland two decades after the Belfast Agreement, these problems of governance do not appear to improve over time.

Despite significant differences in their institutional structures and regional situations, governance in Lebanon and Northern Ireland displays the same critical problem: the dysfunctionality of the power-sharing government corrodes its legitimacy, meaning that consociationalism fails to adequately address the problem of disputed legitimacy that lies at the centre of conflict in deeply divided societies. This leaves these societies permanently vulnerable to future violence and threats of violence. The existence of this problem in these very different governments suggests that it is

a consequence not only of their particular institutions and demographic configuration, but of the nature of consociationalism itself.

The findings of this paper provide reason to urge extreme caution in the advocacy of consociationalism as a solution to conflict in other divided societies. The case of Lebanon, despite having avoided a return to outright civil war, cannot be seen as anything but a failure, and is a poor model for other states in the region, which would share its problems resulting from the instability of its neighbours. The “key confirming case” of Northern Ireland has long been presented as proof of the potential of consociationalism to allow former enemies to share power in a newly peaceful society, but this paper has demonstrated that its consociational institutions display many of the same faults and dangers as Lebanon’s, while its ‘success’ is significantly due to its particular constitutional situation as a province rather than an independent state, with two generally peaceful ‘parent states’ that have an interest in maintaining peace. The significance of the Belfast Agreement in ending the long conflict in this divided society must not be underestimated, and this paper does not claim that it should not have been implemented, but it is a barely adequate solution to a very specific situation, and is therefore a poor model for export.

Yet “a consociation may be built without an explicit theory to guide it” (O’Leary 2019, 178), as power-sharing arrangements may be the only solution on which all parties can agree in peace negotiations. In such cases, the findings of this paper provide an outline of the problems likely to face long-term consociational governments, and suggest the following recommendations: following the consensus view of consociational theorists, settlements should be as liberal as can be agreed upon;

legitimate authority should be clear and belong to the elected government, with clear and legal contingency plans for when the government almost inevitably breaks down or cannot be formed; and political participation should be dependent on the abandonment of violence as a political strategy. The “constitutional tinkering” that Northern Ireland’s favourable regional position has facilitated demonstrates that it is possible to have an opposition, a veto mechanism protected to some extent against abuse, and a more stable executive than was provided for in the 1998 Agreement. These are measures that should be implemented from the beginning in any future power-sharing settlement.

### Research Limitations and Future Inquiry

While the comparative analysis of two case studies has allowed a useful combination of depth and generalisability, it is clearly insufficient to make decisive statements about the viability and appropriateness of consociationalism as a whole. Comparison with further case studies of long-term consociational governance would be a useful means of further exploring the quality of consociational governance in the long term, particularly the case of Bosnia, which would have been used as a third case study in this paper were it not for limitations of space. Comparison with cases where non-consociational democratic institutions were implemented in the aftermath of violent conflict would also provide useful insights into the extent to which the problems faced by Lebanon and Northern Ireland are the consequence of consociationalism, and the extent to which they are characteristic of any post-conflict society.

There are also important aspects of both case studies that could be explored in a level of detail that was impossible in this paper. Exploring the effects on

consociational politics of the difference between Northern Ireland's binary division, and Lebanon's complex religious sub-divisions would be particularly valuable in enhancing understanding of the dynamics of consociationalism in these cases. As the consequences of Brexit become clearer, the impact of this on Northern Ireland will also be an important issue to investigate, particularly in terms of how the changed constitutional and international situation of Northern Ireland affects the acceptance of the legitimacy of the Belfast Agreement and its consociational institutions.

Since this paper was written, a number of dramatic and important developments in the politics of Northern Ireland have taken place, from the riots that were taking place as this paper was being completed, to internal convulsions within the DUP over leadership and policy, to disputes regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol that have seriously threatened power-sharing. While the timing of these events made it impossible for them to be covered in this paper, exploring these in the context of the findings of this paper would be a particularly important contribution to understanding consociationalism in Northern Ireland and its future prospects.

Regardless of the direction and details of future research, the findings of this paper emphasise that any further inquiry into consociationalism must acknowledge that the dysfunctionality, immobilism and instability of consociational politics is not a peripheral issue, or a side effect that must be accepted as part of the consociational cure to violence in divided societies, but a serious problem with far-reaching consequences.

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