Consociational democracy: what was driving Lebanon's sectarian strife between 2006 and early 2016?

Master's Thesis

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Introduction

The current Lebanese political system is based on confessionalism, a form of consociationalism, which refers to power-sharing arrangements between various confessional sects within a state (Salamey, 2009:83). Such power-sharing arrangements are to guarantee political representation of all segmented groups and democratic practises, as well as to prevent internal conflicts and establish political stability in deeply divided societies. However since the end of the Lebanese civil war and the signing of the 1990 Ta'if agreement Lebanon has not established a stable fully-functioning consociational democracy but instead had many sectarian conflicts, made worse by the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war and intensified by the Syrian crisis in 2011 and Hezbollah's official involvement in 2013 (Bahout, 2016:14). Similarly, after president Michel Suleiman finished his presidential term in 2014, parliament has been unable to elect a new president and has continually failed to address various political and societal problems (Samaha, 2015). These failings have exacerbated sectarian tensions within the country, which have triggered waves of protests. From 2006 to early 2016 Lebanon was suffering from sectarian conflicts that led to deep Sunni-Shi'a-Christian polarisation as well as creating a paralysed political system and domestic instability (Majed, 2010:9).

Given the context above, the central question of this thesis is *"what was driving Lebanon's sectarian strife between 2006 and early 2016 in consociational democracy"?* The main purpose of this thesis is to discover the key factors that have led to the sectarian strife among the main ethno-religious groups and how their disagreements on political decisions have driven Lebanon into political deadlock in a consociational democracy, which contrary to this is supposed to maintain stability and sectarian cohesion. We can initially conclude and argue that consociationalism failed to prevent and, on the contrary, actually caused sectarian strife in Lebanon mainly because a consociational model was poorly implemented because conditions of the theory have not been met and for this reason it could not be sustained in the Lebanese political system. The key factors that triggered such sectarian strife were firstly unequal representation of the sectarian sects, most notably growing Shi'a confession, in the political system; secondly, there was a lack of elite cooperation to maintain stability of the political system in order to sustain social cohesion and thirdly – external actors backing up their respective domestic Lebanese allies and meddling in Lebanese political system sought to advance their national interests and further their domination in the

region rather than maintain sectarian stability in Lebanon. All these interlinked factors caused and exacerbated sectarian strife. This thesis will mainly focus on these causal factors in relation to the theory of consociationalism but it will also address the outcome of such sectarian disagreements in Lebanon in a broader political context.

Moreover, a case study of Lebanon can show substantive social importance and scientific relevance. From a substantive point of view, Lebanon is considered to be one of the most democratic countries in the Arabic world (UNDP, 2014) and is sometimes called the *"Switzerland of the Middle East"* for its abundance of commerce, banking and education and its multi-religious society (Kerr,2009:8). Lebanon has been a strategically and geopolitically important country in the Middle East, which has resisted the Arab Spring and regional turmoil in the vicinity, survived spillover from the Syrian conflict and coped with a great influx of Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Lebanon is now considered a country with the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide, and has set a great example for many countries (Blanford, 2015:1; Kenner, 2013). In terms of scientific relevance, Lebanon represents a model of consociational democracy, which has been broadly analysed and discussed by many academics and scholars from a historical context, especially in the timeframe between Lebanon's independence from France in 1943 and the aftermath of the civil war in the 1990s (Fakhoury 2014; Salamey 2014;Geukjian, 2016). However very few scholars have analysed a more recent consociational democracy model applied to Lebanon and the outcome of political sectarian strife in the country. Thus, this thesis aims to analyse the Lebanese sectarian strife from 2006 onwards and offers fresh insights into key factors that triggered sectarian strife.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Consociationalism is a model of consociational democracy, which is employed in countries that have a variety of different segmental groups broken down along social, political, ethnic, linguistic and racial lines as well as by religion or by region/nationality (Lijphart, 1977:1-4). In other words, it is a form of power-sharing among various segmental groups in order to maintain political stability, civil order and to avoid the outbreak of civil violence (Lijphart, 1977:1-4). The key elements of consociational democracy are: a *"grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the society"; "mutual veto"* for the protection of minority groups and their interests;

"proportionality" regarding political representation, allocation of civil service and public funds; and a high degree of *"autonomy"* for each segment to manage its own internal politics (Lijphart, 1997:25). However, according to Lijphart, the crucial characteristic of such a democracy is *"not so much any particular institutional arrangements as overarching cooperation at the elite level with the deliberate aim of counteracting disintegrative tendencies in the system"* (Lijphart, 1968:21). In order to build and preserve consociational democracy, political leaders must satisfy four key prerequisites. Firstly, they must be able to recognise the dangers inherent in the fragmented system caused by subcultural cleavages at the initial stage of establishment and in later critical periods (Lijphart, 1968:22). Secondly, the elite must be committed to the maintenance of the system and have a certain level of willingness *"to make an effort to halt and reverse the disintegrative tendencies of the system"* (Lijphart, 1968:23). Thirdly, leaders must have an ability to reach mutual understanding between the different segments at the elite level and overcome the barriers triggered by rival segments' differences and set effective communication across these cleavages (Lijphart, 1968:23). Lastly, leaders must be able to find appropriate solutions for the demands of these different segments and generate institutional arrangements (Lijphart, 1968:23). These initial attributes must be followed by the six favourable conditions required for consociational democracy to flourish, as further detailed below.

The first condition is to have distinct lines of cleavage between different segments, the second – to have *"a multiple balance of power"* among these different segmental groups so that it would lead to a willingness to cooperate with other groups (Lijphart, 1968:27). The third condition is to have a prevalence of *"popular attitudes favourable to government by grand coalition"* in order to make all segmental groups participate in the system and the fourth – to have external threats which can act as a favourable condition to the state's consociational democracy that could lead to strengthening the system (Lijphart, 1968:28). The fifth – a level of moderate nationalism is needed to enable the elite to maintain the system and the sixth – "*a relatively low total load on the system"*, which means the total burden on the system to maintain stability of the consociational democracy should be relatively low (Lijphart, 1968:29). If these conditions are satisfied, consociational democracy is likely to flourish in divided societies and maintain political stability.

Moreover, Pippa Norris offers an analysis of the power-sharing regime theory, which further develops the theory and focuses on the formal institutional rules (namely *"the basic type of the electoral system, the horizontal concentration of executive type powers, the vertical centralization of power in unitary or federal states and the structure of independence of the mass media")* seen as constitutional arrangements, which grant political elites a share in the decision-making process in multi-ethnic societies (Norris, 2008:23). Consociational democracies are believed to be able to contain *"ethnical tensions, armed conflicts and intercommunal violence",* and maintain political stability and a peace settlement *"through inclusive processes in representative bodies"* in divided societies (Norris, 2008:210). As a result rebel fractions become gradually integrated in the political process and are therefore more willing *"to contest their power and seek compromise"* (Norris, 2008:210).

Similarly, advocates McGarry & O'Leary and Kerr claim that consociational democracy is achievable in deeply divided societies. However how successful and effective such consociationalism is depends on external players seen as exogenous forces (Kerr, 2009). External powers can facilitate consociationalism by mediating or benignly using incentives to stimulate conflicting parties to attain mutual agreement and to abide with power-sharing institutional arrangements (McGarry and O'Leary, 2006:47; Kerr, 2009). This can be illustrated with several successful examples such as the UK and the US government breaking the political deadlock in Northern Ireland and helping with the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement between conflicting parties in 1998; the US, UN and NATO using their benign incentives to assist in establishing and maintaining power-sharing arrangements in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Iraq and Afghanistan (McGarry et al., 2006:48-53). Kerr also added that the Lebanese consociationalism was not sustainable due to conflicting external actors, more specifically, after Syria's departure, external actors did not have an interest in maintaining long-term stability (Kerr, 2009:4-9).

On the other hand, Donald Horowitz argues that consociational democracy is hardly possible in ethnically divided societies because ethnic divisions lead to the creation of ethnic parties and ethnic voting. Ethnic parties with a majority of votes can overrule minority groups and establish their own domination in the system (Horowitz, 2014:5). Although consociationalism is predicted upon proportional power-sharing among ethnic groups, their participation in politics, minority vetoes of ethnically delicate policies, and

a foundation of a grand coalition, Horowitz raises his key concerns regardless (Horowitz, 2014:6). He is mostly concerned about the problem of adoptability of these principals and asymmetric preferences of majority and minority groups, which leads to a question of under which conditions the consociational regime can be adopted and remain sustainable. Similarly, when such a regime, including the provision for minority vetoes, is adopted (usually when majorities are momentarily weak), it could lead to a difficulty in modifying the system further, which in turn results in stagnation or stalemates because either group participating in the decision-making process could block any decisions made by other groups (Horowitz, 2014:12). Moreover, for consociational regime arrangements to exist it is necessary that external powers support them; however, Horowitz argues that it often depends on which groups are supported and which are not by these external players (Horowitz, 2014:14). Horowitz's arguments show that consociational democracy might guarantee a peace settlement in post-conflict countries, however ethnic tensions are unavoidable in the long-term (Horowitz, 2014). Many problematic states, which are willing to adopt a model of consociational democracy, are likely to end up with a system where there is a majority rule with minority rights (Horowitz, 2014:17). Without an effective electoral stimulus for conciliatory attitudes, majority rule would be ethnic majority and minority rights would be inadequately imposed (Horowitz, 2014:17). In such a scenario, proportional representation will result in ethnic tension, potential conflict and overall political instability (Horowitz, 2014:17).

Similarly, Val R. Lorwin argues that "segmented pluralism" cannot be applied in the same way to Asian or African countries as Lijphart's given examples of democracies in European countries (such as Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands) as these segmental cleavages of casts, class and race are much more rigid in Asia and Africa (Horowitz, 2000:571). Also, political parties are arranged along ethnic lines, thus tensions could be much more intense among different ethnic groups (Horowitz, 2000:571-572). With regard to the cooperation between members of the elite in deeply divided societies, it is a mistake to assume that leaders from different political parties are likely to freely enter a consociational system and cooperate with each other without there being any motivating forces or initiatives (Norris, 2008:28). The absence of such incentives will only lead to competition between the members of the elite and politics of fear (Horowitz, 2000:573). Moreover, Roeder and Rothschild and Mansfield and Snyder argue that power-sharing are likely to occur in states which are at the early stage of

regime-change from autocracy to a more democratic system, where political institutions remain fragile and the state is weak and prone to vulnerabilities, however, this might not be feasible in states with already established divisions (Norris, 2008:31).

Furthermore, Salamey claims that the Lebanese form of corporate consociationalism, is prone to sectarian elite conflicts and national fragmentation due to predetermined power-sharing roles of the sectarian groups rather than democratic practises and international efforts which do not support a sustainable governing system (Salamey, 2009:83). Similarly, Jabbras argues that the Lebanese consociational democracy could never be sustained because such a system is designed to bring conflict rather than peace in a fragmented society and "*[...] results in converting minority rights into minority privileges, and in hardening and deepening the lines of cleavages among the communities*"(Jabbra and Jabbra, 2001:85). Summing up the discussion above, this thesis aims to test and indicate why consociationalism, which should ensure power-sharing among all segmented groups and political stability, causes sectarian strife rather than solves it.

In this way, we set three key hypotheses, which are going to be tested. As mentioned earlier, one of the essential conditions in power-sharing arrangements is a proportional representation of all confessional groups in the government. In the case of Lebanon, when the Ta'if Agreement was signed and the constitution was modified, it aimed to maintain equal political representation between Christian and Muslim religious groups, in which the Shi'a population was granted a greater participation in the political system (previously this group did not have any rights). However, due to the absence of a clear distinction between the confessional groups of the Sunni, Druze and Shi'a Muslims in the parliamentarian structure, Shi'a were not proportionately represented in relation to their population, which leads to the first hypothesis below (CANVAS, 2015:3).

H_1: Disproportionate sect representation in the institutional arrangements drives sectarian strife.

Secondly, to maintain power-sharing arrangements in a consociational democracy, political elites are expected to cooperate within the diverse political culture to ensure political stability. However, two major opposing alliances – the March 8 and March 14 Alliances – have been driven by different interests and motivations. The March 8

Alliance, made up of Shi'a Hezbollah and a Christian leader, General Michel Aoun from the Free Patriotic Movement (including the Amal movement, pro-Damascus forces and several Sunni, Shi'a and Christian factions), aimed to ban sectarian politics, improve political, social and economic conditions for Shi'a communities and gain political influence in the government (CANVAS, 2015:11). The March 14 Alliance, which consists of Sunni (Saad Hariri, the son of Rafiq Hariri and Future Current Party), Druze (Walid Jumblatt and the Progressive Socialist Party) and Christian-Maronite (Pierre Gemayel and Phalangist Party) leaders, is an anti-Syrian coalition that aims to contain Hezbollah's and Syria's influence in the political Lebanese system (Salamey, 2009:88-89; Majed, 2010:9). In this context, the second hypothesis is set out as follows.

H_2: *The lack of cooperation and commitment to maintain political stability between the elite vying for political power causes sectarian strife.*

Thirdly, the role of external third parties is very important to ensure the functionality of a consociational democracy and to reduce sectarian conflicts. In terms of Lebanon's political structure, external actors have not been motivated to initiate reforms and strengthen Lebanon's political stability but rather are driven by their own strategic selfish interests and fulfil them through supporting their respective sect groups to advance their position in the regional and global political arena (Salamey, 2009:92). The external states' interference in domestic Lebanese politics degrades the situation further and triggers sectarian strife. For instance, Hezbollah has been supported by Iranian financial aid to fight Israelis in southern Lebanon and mobilise against the West, which has led to the weakening of the executive body of the state and the dividing of the society (Canvas, 2015:21; Bahout, 2016:12). It is believed that Lebanon's crisis and sectarian tensions are present due to the absence of an external regulator like Syria after its withdrawal as mediator in 2005 (Bahout, 2016:19). Similarly, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1559 and 1701 called for building security, stability and peace in Lebanon and in the region; however, it did not create essential means to build political stability and solve ongoing sectarian strife (Salem, 2006:22). Lebanon has become a struggle between external actors: on the one hand – the U.S., Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia; and on the other – Iran, Syria and their supported allies Hezbollah and Hamas (Geukjian, 2014:536), which leads to the last hypothesis below.

H₃: The external power game, in which states are aiming to advance their own position both in Lebanon and in the region, and external actors' unwillingness to solve political instability in Lebanon drive sectarian strife.

These hypotheses will be tested and supported by direct evidence which can be found in the main arguments posited in the analysis section below.

Methodology

This thesis uses the qualitative research method based on a single case study of Lebanon. Single-case design allows in-depth content analysis of a small-n case that is built on rich data (Toshkov, 2016:286). The qualitative approach allows greater insights into a phenomenon (in this case – Lebanon's sectarian strife in a system of consociational democracy) and enables the development of conceptual and empirical knowledge while testing, analysing and applying a theory of consociationalism (Manheim et al., 2012:97). Similarly, a case-study method demonstrates how independent variables may cause the dependent variable and it allows the analysis of causal mechanisms between them; this is sometimes referred to as process tracing, which is understood as *"the use of evidence from within a case to make inferences about causal explanations of that case"* (Van Evera, 1997:54,64). This research analysis will be built on secondary and primary data sources. For secondary data, it will include academic and scientific literature, textbooks, publications, e-journals, articles, reports and analyses of various think-tanks and NGOs. For primary data, it will focus on speeches, government reports and agreements, interviews, interviews accessible online and autobiographies.

The key independent variables are laid out as follows:
- x_1: Institutional arrangements (*identified such as a grand coalition, veto rights and proportional representation of different sects in power-sharing institutions),* which will be measured by observing the level of consociation arrangements and implementation in the political system of Lebanon;
- x_2: The political elite (*seen as major political parties and their representatives)*, which will be determined by looking at percentage of vote share, extended or shortened presidential term, the number of attempts and agreements of cooperation in the decision-making process;

- x_3: External actors (*such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel, the U.S., Egypt)*, which will be addressed by the level of involvement and influence on opposition Lebanese parties in decision-making and financing.

Dependent variable (y_1) refers to sectarian strife, which could be elaborated as sectarian disagreements, confrontations, tensions, clashes and conflicts in political system between conflicting coalitions. It will be measured by observing the frequency and duration of the occurrence of protests, conflicts, clashes in parliament, non-violent/violent, armed/non-armed, political/non-political demonstrations, bomb attacks, assassinations and the number of casualties and presumed deaths.

The expectations of the hypotheses are to show that the more unequal power-sharing and under-representation within different sects in a consociational democratic system is, the more likely the eruption of sectarian potentially leading to political instability. Similarly, the less cooperation there is between the members of the elite combined with a leadership vacuum within different political parties, the more likely it is that sectarian strife will emerge. Also, the more external forces are engaged in domestic politics of Lebanon to advance their strategies by siding with their respective allies, the more it leads to chances of sectarian disagreements. Despite that, this thesis will not consider alternative explanations beyond institutional arrangements that fall under the theoretical framework due to the scope of constraints. However other factors that could contribute to explaining the sectarian strife but are not discussed in this thesis could be a massive influx of refugees from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict of 1967, the Syrian conflict in 2011 and Iraq; corruption among political leaders and broader economic and social factors (Blanchard, 2014:3).

Analysis

A theoretical outline

As previously noted, an essential foundation of the theory of consociationalism is elite cooperation in a grand coalition cabinet, in which political leaders from all segmented/sectarian/confessional groups come together to govern the country and in this way, ensure political stability in an ethnically and religiously divided society, as set out in my second hypothesis (Lijphart, 1977:25). Similarly, in order to achieve such cooperation and stability it is necessary to have proportional representation of all segmented groups; this leads to their equal participation in political system and their contribution in influencing the decision-making process, as my first hypothesis noted. Last but not least, external powers are important actors in managing ethno-sectarian conflicts by using benign pressure and incentives to stimulate conflicting parties to reach an agreement and maintain power-sharing arrangements (McGarry et al., 2006:48), as laid out in my third hypothesis. As these hypotheses based on theoretical approach are outlined, I am going to examine these statements and how my independent variables, which are closely interlinked with each other, influence the dependent variable (sectarian strife), firstly by overviewing the Lebanese consociational system and secondly by sequentially following major events which took place mainly between 2006 and 2016, both in Lebanon and in the region. This thesis will present major findings by tracing these events which were either a cause or a consequence but which nevertheless led to sectarian strife, political instability and domestic chaos.

Lebanese consociationalism

The Lebanese consociational system is fragmented among eighteen[1] different ethno-religious groups (sometimes referred to as sectarian) and the major constituent groups that hold political office which consist of the Maronite Christian, Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities (Fakhoury, 2014:248). These major groups are state-recognised sectarian communities that hold power in the political system, which operate through proportional power sharing institutional arrangements to ensure political representation for their followers in order to avoid internal conflicts among them (Fakhoury, 2014:230,248). This was first established in the Constitution of Lebanon of

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[1] Christian Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Protestants, Alawites, Isma'ilis, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Copts, Roman Catholics, Syriac Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Jews, Sunni, Shi'a, Druze (Fakhoury, 2014:248).

1926 and later reflected in two pacts, the 1943 National Pact and the 1989 Ta'if Accords, which are based on the provision to control Lebanon's multi-sectarian balance of power (Fakhoury, 2014:230). Article 24a. of the Constitution states *"equal representation between Christians and Muslims"* and b. – *"proportional representation among the confessional groups within each of the two religious communities"* (LB Const.:8). It did not however address the allocation of the ratio for these groups in the system. Similarly, the National Pact signed after Independence in 1943, was based on the principle of shared political power by all sectarian groups, which led to the creation of a grand coalition, in which a Maronite Christian would be president, a Sunni prime minister and a Shi'a speaker of parliament (Daher, 2010:43). These communities are proportionally represented in the cabinet with a six-to-five ratio of Christians-Muslim, parliament and civil service institutions (Lijphart, 1977:148). However many considered the primary dominance to be a Christian Maronite-Sunni Alliance, which had supremacy in the legislature and executive branch (Moaddel et al., 2012:6), with very limited cooperation with other confessions, especially growing Shi'a group (which we mostly focus on in the thesis), which, as a result, led to sectarian tensions and strife.

After the civil war in 1989, these power-sharing arrangements were altered in the Ta'if Accords, which later were integrated into the constitution, in which parity between Christian-Muslim was established by limiting some of Maronite president's prerogatives and granting a larger representation to the Council of Ministers, which represented various sectarian and political groups (Fakhoury, 2014:248). Although Shi'a leaders were granted more political positions in administrative and public sectors, Shi'a was lacking proportional representation in regard to their increasing population compared to their counterparts (ICG, 2006:1), which triggered Shi'a to pursue proportional representation and more equal political rights. This was one of the key reasons that caused a series of sectarian conflicts from 2006 onwards. Despite that, Shi'a were not able to influence strategically important decisions on national security, economic development or foreign policy (Maddel et. al., 2012:4). Therefore they sought cooperation with dominating elite opposition and to influence them on the decision making process, which would be based on mutual benefit and prosperity. However this was hardly possible because Lebanon's political elite is arranged on a sectarian basis and each group aim to enlarge their political power through forming favourable electoral law that would enhance their opportunities to dominate the parliament (Assi and Worrall, 2015:1944). In this way, they seek to maximise support from their

sectarian followers and gain advantage for their constituencies because sectarian loyalties and capabilities lead into the political decision making process on a national level (van Veen, 2015:4). However this intensified political competition leads to groups vying for power rather than seeking political cooperation. Similarly, elite cooperation was also difficult because they had neither incentives nor any commitment, as the theory outlines, to engage with opposition from other confessions. It was also due to their diverging vision on the main issues and threats, differing core interests and fear of possible Shi'a's and their allies' penetration into political system that the dominating coalition felt could undermine their domination. Such sectarian polarisation between different political parties and confessions, most notably Sunni-Shi'a, led to sectarian strife, which was also incited by the influence of external players as discussed below.

Pre-2006: Shi'a under-representation and a game of external actors

Shi'a group under-representation can be seen during the Mamluks, the Ottoman Empire and the French mandate periods and up until today, in which Shi'a has been the most marginalised and underprivileged community (Abdo, 2013:34). They have had a lack of political and civil rights, integration and representation in the Lebanese governmental institutions despite their achievements and attempts to seek political rights throughout history (Siklawi, 2014:278-280). Since the 20th century, the Shi'a community has increasingly become the most populous ethnic-religious group[2], outnumbering the Maronites (Majed, 2010)**.** However there has been no official census of population since 1932, since this would reflect their political majority and lead to a fear of a failing of Maronite-Sunni dominance and the outbreak of political instability among sectarian groups (Maktabi, 1999:219).

Nevertheless, until the mid-1970s Shi'a had neither political rights nor access to national political posts in governmental institutions (Moaddel et al., 2012:7), which meant that they were unable to become a part of the ruling elite and get proportional representation in the Lebanese political consociational system. The main reason for this was that the Shi'a community was very politically fragmented internally among the Baathists, the Communists, the Nasserites and various leaderships (Siklawi, 2014:284).

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[2] In the 1932 last official census, Christian Maronite contained 28,7% of the total population, while Shi'a – 19.6%, while in 2009, it was believed Christians were represented – 21.93%, Sunnis – 27.16%, while Shi'a – 26.32% of all population of 4 million (Majed, 2010:15).

Also because of the large geographical distance between the two main Shi'a groups (Jabal Amil and the Beqa) and their regional deprivation (a lack of connected public services, economic development), especially in Southern Lebanon, made them marginalised in the Lebanese political system (Siklawi, 2014:284). However, the rise of the prominent political Shi'a leader Moussa Sadr (throughout 1959 and 1978), who aimed to actively unite the Shi'a community, enhance their political status and demanded better representation in national Lebanese politics, which was known as the Amal movement (Siklawi, 2014:287). Sadr sought to improve the political, social and economic status of Shi'a by establishing the Supreme Islamic Shi'a Council (SISC) in 1967, which primarily aimed to promote Shi'a interests (Siklawi, 2014:287). Although the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 followed by the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1978 and Beirut in 1982 scattered Sadr's achievements for Shi'a and did not result in better representation (Majed, 2010:3), Sadr's merits as an initial driving force to make Shi'a become more united, demanding equal political rights were seen in later years.

A relative military rise of Shi'a confession began after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, when a new Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini supported the Shi'a in armament, financial and ideological means for the purpose of establishing a new revolutionary Islamic party in Lebanon (later known as the Islamic Resistance) (Majed, 2010:4). Shi'a activists with the newly born Hezbollah group adopted a military strategy to defend the Shi'a community from foreign intrusion, especially Israel, during the civil war, when Israel occupied Southern Lebanon and ensure more political rights in the Lebanese confessional system (Maddel et al., 2012:8). Nevertheless after the end of the civil war when the Ta'if Accords were reached, loopholes of inequality for political rights and political representation were not improved (ICG, 2006:1). However Shi'a activists together with Hezbollah did not give up seeking better political representation, which was seen during the guerrilla warfare against Israeli troops, when they forced the government of Israel to withdraw from Lebanon and ended the military occupation in 2000 (Hazran, 2009:4). This was the first success for the military when Israel was forced to leave the occupied Arab land without reaching a peace treaty (Hazran, 2009:4). Hezbollah's achievement was seen as heroic and liberated Lebanon from Israel, which increased Shi'a's popularity beyond their community and enforced their demand for a larger share of political power and representation (Majed, 2010:4). However more political rights and proportional representation in the decision-making process were

not granted, which increased the prospects of sectarian tensions seen in later years, especially when Shi'a group gained strong military capabilities.

Similarly, external players pursuing selfish national interests in Lebanon and in the region were contributing to the stirring up of domestic sectarian strife and were not interested in a stable Lebanon. Iran and Syria backed Shi'a groups and Hezbollah, which was a proxy army since 1990s, to counter the Israel and the Western influence in the region and the domestic Sunni-led coalition (Salamey, 2009:92). Iran provided Hezbollah with financial, military and other assistance, making Hezbollah the most successful coalition to counter Israeli-U.S. influence over the Arab world (Geukjian, 2014:530). Meanwhile the Sunni Muslims (in 2005 formed as the March 14 Alliance) were supported by France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the U.S., whilst Christians were divided in between Shi'a and Sunni groups (Salamey, 2009:92). Sectarian strife and domestic conflicts in Lebanon have been driven by conflicts among external players: *"Syria against Israel, the U.S. against the Syrian regime; pro-Western Sunni Arab regimes led by Saudi Arabia against ascendant Iran and Shi'a militancy; and, hovering above it all, Washington against Tehran"* (ICG, 2006:1). Therefore external players seeking to advance their national interest in the region certainly caused domestic sectarian strife in Lebanon.

The turning point was reached in 2005 when sectarian frictions began unfolding and led to sectarian conflicts in following years. The assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and other politicians[3] in February 2005 caused political instability and a series of non-violent anti-Syrian protests called the Cedar Revolution, that took place demanding Syria withdraw from Lebanon because it was believed that Hezbollah and the Syrian government were behind the killings (Majed, 2010:9). Protests were supported by U.S. and its allies but mainly initiated by the multi-sectarian, anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance that contained Sunni, Druze and Christian-Maronite leaders and followers as well as non-sectarian Lebanese Forces, who were dominating in the government (Fakhoury, 2014a:253). Although massive international pressure from the U.S. forced Syria's military withdrawal, it did not help to stabilise Lebanon. After Syria's military withdrawal in 2005, Lebanon experienced increasing Lebanese sectarian strife and

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[3] Jibran Twaini (a Christian PM), Bassel Fleihan (Lebanese legislator), Georges Hawi and Gebran Tueini (Christian PMs) etc.; they were all anti-Syrian regime and the March 8 coalition (Abdallah, 2016; van Veen, 2015:21).

domestic political instability that led to on-going mass protests (Bahout, 2016:19). One of the key reasons as outlined in hypotheses was because Lebanon lost its proactive external player, who benevolently controlled sectarian clashes and maintained political stability in domestic politics of Lebanon without supporting one of the conflicting sides. An external power game took place where foreign players started meddling in the domestic politics of Lebanon by backing their allies in the region; this struggle gradually replaced what had been the domestic political situation up to then. These different Lebanese sectarian groups supported by their external allies aimed to suppress their rival sects causing sectarian tensions and strife among them, mainly because they were unwilling to cooperate and maintain the stability of the political system, contrary to expectations of the theory.

Similarly, the dominating March 14 Alliance in the government remained united for the purpose of reducing the Syrian regime interference in Lebanese domestic politics, establishing the international tribunal for suspects of the Hariri assassination and preventing Hezbollah's domination in politics because it was believed that it would destabilise Lebanon due to their affiliation with Iran and Iranian military support in weaponry (El-Machnouk, 2006). Meanwhile Hezbollah and its allies formed the March 8 Alliance and partnered with the Syrian regime which aimed to increase its role in politics and stood against the political stance of the March 14 Alliance (El-Machnouk, 2006). Since its emergence, the March 8 Alliance sought to be more included in power-sharing arrangements and ban political sectarianism, which fundamentally differed from the March 14 vision (Mansour, 2010). As a result, differences between these major coalitions led to increasing elite competition for power, where both had diverging visions of the future state, each aiming to dominate parliament and implement decisions favouring their sectarian group, which led to sectarian strife, political crisis and domestic instability (Geukjian, 2014:529-534). Although the political leaders tried to resolve the problems by peaceful means by employing constitutional measures, the political instability deepened further with sectarian contention among parties and public protests accelerating after the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war (Rowayhed, 2011:414).

The period after the Israeli-Hezbollah war and the pre-Doha agreement
After the Israeli-Hezbollah war, sectarian strife between two major coalitions came to a peak in Lebanon marked by further sectarian clashes, violence, political assassinations (including the deaths of PM Walid Eido, Pierre Gemayel and others, who were associated

with the March 14 Alliance) and the paralysis of institutional functioning (Abdallah, 2016).

After Hezbollah's victory over Israel, Shi'a sectarian political leaders gained respect in the country and increased their military significance because Hezbollah was the only party in Lebanon which had strong military capabilities to defend the country and had an advantage over the Lebanese Forces (ICG, 2006:13). This victory led Shi'a to seek proportional representation for Shi'a political leaders and more political rights in the government, as they had military forces and as a result sought to gain more political power. As evidence, after the war, the Secretary General of Hezbollah Hassan Nashrallah expressed his desire for greater political participation and cooperation in the government, it was clear that both coalitions (March 8 and March 14 Alliances) had diverging political visions of the state and different commitments to external allies: *"The March 14 forces want to remain in power. Today, that presents us with a real problem they don't want power for the sake of exercising power. They want power to fulfil their political and economic commitments [to the U.S. and France] [...] all we are asking for is to broaden the government [the cabinet]"[4]* (ICG, 2006:13). However since Hezbollah's stance was opposed to disarmament which was a condition of the Ta'if Accords, their weapons were seen as a threat to the Lebanese ruling elite's dominance (ICG, 2006:5). Therefore the government did not seek any compromise to grant Hezbollah more political powers in parliament and did not seek cooperation with them, which contradicts with the theory. Hezbollah believed that disarming could make them weak and feared losing their military importance and the relative political authority they had gained. Therefore since March 8 Alliance had an uncompromising and undermining role in the legislature, this started sectarian strife and tensions in 2006, in which the Christian-Muslim faultline was replaced by Sunni-Shi'a cleavages (Blanford, 2006:174). In line with the theory, it is obvious that the longer proportional political representation is not ensured for different sects, in this case for Shi'a group, the more likely sectarian strife is to recur.

The major instances of sectarian strife between two major March 8 and March 14 Alliances occurred over core domestic and foreign policy issues that led to their antagonistic elite culture entangled by external allies. For instance, a leader of March 14 Alliance, Walid Jumblatt (Druze), frequently stated his support for the UN-backed

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[4] Hassan Nashrallah's interview with Al Jazeera on the 12 of September, 2006 (ICG, 2006:13).

tribunal set up to investigate the political assassinations (Geukjian, 2014:529). He also advocated the dismantling of Hezbollah's weaponry which was perceived as a threat to March 14 Alliance domination and he blamed the March 8 Alliance for serving the interests of Iran and Syria (Geukjian, 2014:529). While the March 8 aimed to unravel Lebanon from Western meddling, including the external tribunal for Hariri's assassination, and sought closer strategic relations with Syria, Iran and Hamas, therefore Hezbollah's weapons were non-negotiable and essential to defend fragile Lebanon from external intrusions (including Israel) (Fakhoury, 2014a:510). Similarly, a leader of March 8 Alliance, Nasrallah, blamed the opposition of colluding with the U.S. and Israel for the purpose of diminishing their influence and seeking dominance in domestic politics (Geukjian, 2014:529).

It is also worth mentioning that these repercussions were valid because external powers played a great role in interfering in the Israeli-Hezbollah war and creating conditions for sectarian strife. It was a proxy war between the U.S. and Iran, in which the U.S. supported Israel blocking a ceasefire for the purpose of encouraging Israel to destroy Hezbollah and its so called terrorist networks supported by Iran (Norton, 2007:484). Even though Israel was not able to dismantle Hezbollah (Norton, 2007:484), the U.S. could not reconcile itself to defeat and instead allocated more than $1 billion, mainly to help Lebanese security and armed forces to expand their control over the country and weaken Hezbollah and Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon (Hazbun, 2016:1062). On the other hand, Iran equipped Hezbollah with weaponry and other material assistance worth $200 million every year, which after the war Hezbollah became a militarily powerful actor in Lebanon and in the region (Sullivan, 2014:9). Similarly, the UN passed resolution 1701, a goal of which was to disarm "all non-state armed groups", and although it did not explicitly refer to Hezbollah, it was clear that the international community, especially the U.S., were pushing the pro-Western Sanyoura government to force Hezbollah to disarm, which was causing clashes with opposition and driving Lebanon into sectarian strife (Geukjian, 2016:133). In this way, the U.S. could advance its role in the region by destroying Hezbollah and the networks of its allies. As a result, in line with the theory, external powers interfering in Lebanese political system did not aim to contain sectarian strife and ensure political stability in Lebanon as this theory predicts but on the contrary they sought to advance their own national interest by becoming involved with one of the fighting sides.

Consequently sectarian tensions escalated into conflict between the two coalitions, when Nabih Berri, the speaker of parliament, initiated a national dialogue, which failed to bring national unity to solve all conflicting issues such as the international tribunal, electoral law and the election of a new president (Geukijan, 2016:149). The Hezbollah-led coalition disagreed with the March 14 Alliance (which had a majority in the 2005 parliament elections: 70 seats of 128); the two coalitions did not share a common perspective on threats, especially on the UN interference in investigating political assassinations, which Hezbollah believed was politicised and manipulated by the March 14 Alliance in order to dominate government institutions (Geukjian, 2016:109). As a result, Hezbollah's Alliance withdrew from the government by resigning six ministers from the governmental institutions and gave up governmental positions (Norton, 2007:487). This led to the collapse of the government as it did not reflect the consociational formula. This was the method adopted by Hezbollah and its allies for overthrowing the Sanyoura-led parliament, which was supported by Western allies (Salamey, 2009:94,137). In doing this Hezbollah expected early re-election as the government was not legitimate after their coalition's resignation and possibly gaining more seats in the parliament and cabinet ensuring their proportional representation. However, Sanyoura and Saad al-Hariri did not resign and dominated the government because they were firmly supported by the U.S. (Geukjian,2016:144). For the U.S., the removal of the regime would have been their first foreign policy failure beyond the Iraq and Palestine issue (Geukjian, 2016:138,144). This shows that Lebanon's political confessional groups were tools "acting as proxies for a wider global conflict" (Geukjian, 2016:138,144) that led to the escalation of domestic sectarian strife after 2006. This led to the mobilization of a mass rally (involving around 800,000 protesters), which resulted in political deadlock, institutional paralysis and sit-in public protests and violent demonstrations, which lasted for almost two years discussed below(Rowayheb, 2011:414; CNN,2006).

The 2008 political crisis and the Doha agreement

A critical situation of sectarian strife was reached in 2008 when the Lebanese government tried to dismantle the telecommunication networks of Hezbollah and removed security top officers, including security chief Brigadier General Wafiq Shugayr, who were linked to the Amal party (Geukjian,2014:534). This led to Hezbollah's armed

violent military offensive and the outbreak of crisis[5]. Backed by Iran and Syria they brought down the government and sought to alter electoral law in which the party could gain a greater share of political influence in the new cabinet prior to the upcoming 2009 parliamentary election results (Majed, 2010:13). Sectarian conflict was ultimately halted by reaching an agreement mediated by the neutral State of Qatar and the signing of an agreement in Doha in 2008 (Salamey, 2009:94). The Doha Agreement determined to grant Hezbollah veto rights over the government's decision-making process, agreed on a division of cabinet seats between two main coalitions and modification of the electoral law (Rowayheb, 2011:427). In line with the theory, the signed agreement was seen as a great achievement, which was supposed to solve the sectarian strife which had been initiated by a neutral external state. The State of Qatar was benignly involved in managing sectarian conflict and was instrumental in reaching an agreement between the conflicting parties and granted veto rights to Shi'a leaders, giving them a larger political influence. Although external state temporarily calmed sectarian conflict and ensured political stability for both conflicting sides, the roots of the problem of power-sharing, in terms of proportional representation, and the Sunni-Shi'a divide were not addressed (Hazran, 2009:4). This meant that sectarian stability could not last for a long time and as a result, led to further sectarian confrontation. The Doha agreement was also short-lived because external powers were not fully committed to ending sectarian strife and maintaining the peaceful negotiations between conflicting camps. This was mainly because it was not in their interests. For instance, the U.S. kept training Lebanese armed forces to counter Syria's influence, advance its own domination in the region and eventually disarm Hezbollah, which shows a failure in understanding of the key axis relationship of Hezbollah-Iran-Syria and in seeking to solve sectarian strife (Geukjian, 2016:156). On the other hand, because Hezbollah's weapons were not surrendered in Doha, this allowed Iran to keep on supporting Hezbollah and strengthening its capabilities (Sullivan, 2014:9). This demonstrates that both camps were armed by their allies for future sectarian clashes which contradicts expectations of the theory of consociationalism.

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[5] Hezbollah's military offensive resulted in provoking violent street clashes killing over 100 people (Schenker, 2016:2).

From the 2009 parliament elections to investigations at the International Tribunal

Sectarian tensions escalated once more into sectarian conflict when the March 14 Alliance once again won a majority and became ruling elite in the 2009 parliamentary elections. As shown in the table of results below, the March Alliance 14 got 70 seats in the parliament, which meant they were forming a cabinet, while the March 8 Alliance got 57, but parties affiliated to Shi'a confession (Amal movement and Hezbollah) were only awarded 26 seats in the parliament based on a Lebanese system of confessionalism. The new cabinet (called national unity government)

March 14	seats	Non Affiliated		March 8	seats
Future Movement	28	Non Affiliated	1	FPM	19
PSP	11			Amal Movement	13
Lebanese Forces	8			Hizballah	13
Lebanese Kata'ib Party	5			Marada Current	3
Armenian Entente Bloc	3			SSNP	2
National Entente Bloc	2			Ba'th Party	2
National Liberal Party	1			Tashnaq Party	2
Democratic Left Movement	1			Lebanese Democratic Party	2
Lebanon Islamic Group	1			Solidarity Party	1
Independent	8				
Tripoli Solidarity Bloc	2				
	70		1		57

Kota, S., 2010. *Distribution of the Parliamentary Seats 2009*

formed by Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri consisted of 15 members from the March 14 Alliance, 10 from the March 8 Alliance and other 5 were selectively appointed by the President Michel Suleiman (Berti, 2010:92). However based on confessional system Shi'a group gained only 3 seats in the new cabinet[6] (Berti, 2010:92), in which we can see that they were appointed in ministries of secondary importance. This resulted in growing dissatisfaction of Shi'a confession that led to prospective sectarian strife. In Hezbollah's new published political platform in 2009 called "Manifesto" secretary general Nasrallah noted that cabinet member appointment should be based on the election results and not on the sectarian power-sharing arrangements laid out in the constitution (Kota, 2010:114), which evidently were outdated, did not guarantee equal power share and did not address Sunni-Shi'a divide and overall triggered sectarian strife. This document laid out their key principles and vision for the Lebanese political system (which differed to the March 14 Alliance) based on proportional representation and elite cooperation to ensure political stability. "*Our vision for the State […] that guarantees a correct and right parliamentary representation based on a modern election law that allows the voters of choosing their representative away from pressures regardless of their religious beliefs […]*". (Majed, 2010:23). They urged for elite cooperation by stating "*the Lebanese will to live together in dignity and equal rights and duties requires a*

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[6] In the ministry of agriculture, the ministry of administrative reforms, and the ministry of youth and sports (Berti, 2010:92).

constructive cooperation in order to consolidate the principle of true partnership, which constitutes the most appropriate formula to protect the full diversity and stability" (Majed, 2010:22-24; Berti, 2010:91). However publication was not considered by the March 14 Alliance, which meant that it did not have a substantial impact for change in a post-election period. Sectarian confrontations continued as the March 8 Alliance kept on demanding a fair share of the executive office which the leading elite refused to grant (Geukjian, 2016:158). In line with the theory, we can see that ruling elite was not willing to cooperate with the opposition due to the lack of incentives to do so. Cooperation would only be possible if the elite compromise Shi'a proportional representation, which on the other hand was perceived to be threatening their domination in governmental institutions. Thus elite cooperation was replaced by elite competition which led to further sectarian strife.

In addition, as the third hypothesis predicts, these sectarian tensions were also intensified when external actors blamed each other over meddling into the elections thus creating political instability and turmoil. Syria blamed the U.S. for interference during the election and trying to propel voters to support the March 14 Alliance, while the Obama's Administration claimed that domestic politics had to be conducted *"through consent, not coercion"* (Geukijian, 2016:191). In this way Obama referred to Hezbollah's military power trying to take over government by force, supported by the Syrian regime. Non-violent protests escalated which led to a political stalemate in the following years when Hezbollah and its allies sought to participate in investigating the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2011 at the International Tribunal (Rowayhed, 2011:429). Since the Saad Hariri-led government rejected Hezbollah's request for representation, ministers related to the March 8 Alliance resigned and left the governmental offices in January 2011; false witnesses and allegedly flawed investigations supported by Western allies were noted (Rowayhed, 2011:429); all this led to political paralysis. Hezbollah and its allies accused the Tribunal of being *"an American and Israeli tool to end [Hezbollah's] resistance"*, which led to sectarian strife and the collapse of the government resulting in political deadlock (Geukjian, 2016:221). This shows that contrary to the theory, external power interference on one of the sides, in this case the U.S. supporting the March 14 Alliance, in domestic affairs contributed to sectarian conflicts and led to political instability rather than maintaining sectarian stability and cohesion.

From the Syrian war to Lebanese institutional paralysis up to early 2016

After the collapse of the government in early 2011, the pro-Hezbollah supporter Prime Minister Najib Miqati was appointed in June as Prime Minister to form a new government, which became the first time the March 8 Alliance had dominated the cabinet (Salem, 2011). In the theory, this seemed to be a great success that could finally end sectarian conflicts between two main coalitions, in which the Hezbollah-led group was on an equal footing with the opposition and were in charge of leading the government. However since there was a lack of elite cooperation and any incentive to do otherwise, the March 14 Alliance refused to participate (mainly due to their perceived Syrian influence) in the newly formed government, which meant that the government was one-sided, did not reflect the power-sharing arrangement formula and could not sustain its functioning due to the March 14 Alliance absence (Geukjian, 2014:541). Regarding Lebanese consociationalism, this proves once again that there was a lack of elite cooperation and commitment to maintain political stability. Instead opposing elite groups sought to serve the interests of their own sects over national ones in order to maintain their privileges rather than seeking unity (Fakhoury, 2014:242) and being supported by different external allies they could fulfil their aspirations. As evidence, there followed another political deadlock, escalations in political sectarian strife and protests between the Shi'a-Sunni divide intensified when the Syrian uprising broke through in 2011 (Abdo, 2013:38).

Although the Lebanese coalition adapted a policy of dissociation as encapsulated in "the Ba'abda Declaration" of 2012 during the Syrian uprising (which prohibited military support for either of the fighting sides in order to prevent a spillover of turmoil into Lebanon (Hazbun, 2016:1063)), political friction was nevertheless seen between the two major coalitions, which expressed their different positions vis-à-vis the Syrian regime (Fakhoury, 2014a:516) and in this way inflamed sectarian tensions. It is worth pointing out that external actors also contributed in shaping both coalitions' attitudes regarding the Syrian conflict. Leaders of the March 14 advocated for the democratic values of rebel groups complying with the U.S. perspective and supported rebels resisting the authoritarian regimes and oppression across Arab countries (Geukjian, 2016:231). The March 8 Alliance took the opposing view portraying it as a dangerous rebellion initiated and backed up by the West pressuring Syria so as to isolate its relations with Iran, divide Syria's civil society in order to weaken the regime and overall entrench U.S. influence by destroying the Hezbollah group (Fakhoury, 2014a:515).

However the current government led by Miqaiti and backed by the March 8 Alliance stated that close historical-political ties with Syria could not be ignored in the current situation and resulted in dismantlement of the policy (van Veen, 2015:24). This led to the start of military support in Syria by both coalitions, in which they smuggled both weapons and fighters and provided funds to opposing sides (van Veen, 2015:24). As the second hypothesis predicts, since the elite had fundamentally different visions and perspectives on threats, and because of this could not cooperate, the result was political non-violent sectarian strife and a dire security situation followed by major clashes between Shi'a, Alawites and some Christians, who supported the Syrian regime and Sunnis, who were on the side of the rebels in the city of Tripoli, Lebanon, however it did not escalated into a larger conflict (Fakhoury, 2014a:514). According to Lihphart, consociational democracy strengthens cooperation when external threats are present (Lijphart, 1968:28), however this was not the case when the Syrian crisis erupted, because it caused sectarian strife and violence in domestic politics of Lebanon fuelled by external allies.

Sectarian clashes in Lebanon intensified after Hezbollah's official statement of involvement in supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime in 2013, which led to insecurity, instability and political violence – suicide and car bombings, deadly attacks[7] made by Sunni extremists mainly targeting Hezbollah's fighters, Shi'a and Alawite neighbourhoods and assets linked to Iran, who in this way were expressing their dissatisfaction against the Syrian regime and countering Hezbollah's influence in the conflict and within domestic affairs of Lebanon (ICG, 2015:7). Armed and violent sectarian tensions increased between Sunni-Shi'a confessional groups due to the disagreement over the involvement and a threat of spillover from the conflict (Sullivan, 2014:5,25). However Hezbollah justified its involvement in the conflict on the basis that all Lebanese needed to be protected because currently they were threatened by growing extreme militant groups ('Takfiri groups'), which were supported by the U.S. and Israel (Assi and Worrall, 2015:1953). Events unfolded following Miqaiti's resignation from the government due to his inability to address domestic (a consensus on electoral law) and security (a compromise over Syrian crisis) challenges in Lebanon (Geukjian, 2014:545). It caused the parliament to re-schedule the 2013 parliament elections until 2014 and they were later deferred until 2017 (Assi and Worrall, 2015:1944). Elections were

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[7] It resulted in wounding over 479 people and killing 24 alone in Lebanon between 2013 and 2014 (Sullivan, 2014:25).

delayed because both domestic camps tended to confront each other by blocking the formation of a new government, looking for external allies to strengthen their own positions, which led to precious political situation for elections due to Lebanon's involvement in the Syrian conflict (Geukjian, 2016:279). As a result, such acts impeded the formation of national government, caused sectarian strife and political deadlock as both camps could not find a compromise.

Similarly, at the end of president Michel Suleiman's tenure in 2014, the Lebanese government was not able to elect a new president and the parliament extended its mandate twice from 2009 up to 2017 (Fakhoury, 2014a:510). Although the required quorum of 2/3 was achieved, none of candidates for the presidency received the required 86 votes, which left Lebanon without a president for almost two years (Canvas, 2015:4). In 2014 Prime Minister Tammam Salam attempted to manage both roles as a prime minister and president, however the work of government remained paralysed by the current political crisis as well as the March 8 Alliance claiming that decisions made by a prime minister in the absence of a president are invalid unless agreed unanimously by ministers, which was hardly possible with the cabinet fragmented as it was (Blanford, 2015:3). The government's inability to guarantee basic needs (garbage disposal) and solve political and security problems for the civil society sparked a series of critical mass non-violent protests in 2015[8], involving over 100,000 people in the streets of Beirut, in which citizens demanded government to make reforms and solve these issues (Fanack, 2015). Domestic chaos forced Hezbollah and the Future Movement to initiate political dialogue, resulting in both parties signing a "Security Plan" agreement (ICG, 2015:9,14). Initially it was seen as a great cooperation between the elite. However it only served to quench increasing security tensions, but failed to solve long-term domestic socio-economic and political problems. It left Lebanon with intense prolonged sectarian polarisation, increased domestic instability and without a functioning government and a head of state from 2014 up to early 2016.

Also it is worth noting that in the past Lebanese presidential elections were conducted with external participation and supervision (since the 1970s) and sectarian political gridlock has been broken by the intervention of external allies including key players such as Iran or Saudi Arabia (Blanford, 2015:4). However the interest of influential

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[8] It started as social movement-demonstrations known as 'You Stink', which escalated into a series of protests, which resulted in over 400 injuries and 1 death (Fanack, 2015).

external powers in domestic Lebanon shifted away. The 2014 elections were the first time when Lebanon's parliament tried to elect a president without an external facilitator, however this attempt failed (Geukjian, 2016:289). Similarly, in 2015 Saudi Arabia (under a new leadership of King Salman and experiencing regional turmoil in Yemen and Syria) was diverted from interest in Lebanon's political affairs (Blanford, 2015:4). This was exacerbated when the Saudi government felt insulted after its Embassy was attacked in Tehran and Lebanon's political leaders did not condemn the attack; for this reason Saudi withdrew $4 billion worth of aid support from the Lebanese military and internal security, which aggravated the dire Lebanese domestic situation (Goodenough, 2016). As our theory confirms, when external powers benignly got involved in Lebanese political system to help reach a consensus between opposite coalitions, it did not cause domestic sectarian strife (e.g. the Doha agreement). However when external allies got involved in Lebanon to expand and advance their own national interest in the region by influencing Lebanese elite and their decision making process and supporting them in military/financial aid, it results in domestic sectarian strife (as the third hypothesis predicts). This also proves that external powers only were able to reach an agreement that held for a short time but since prolonged problems were not addressed (e.g. disproportional sectarian representation) it led to recurring sectarian strife. All in all, as our hypotheses predict, a number of Lebanese sectarian conflicts were mainly caused by strongly interlinked key factors such as Shi'a confession under-representation, a lack of elite cooperation and the external power game in Lebanese consociationalism between 2006 and early 2016.

Conclusions

Drawing the conclusion of the analysis above and reviewing the theoretical approach of consociationalism, we can claim that the Lebanese consociationalism failed to prevent sectarian strife between 2006 and early 2016 and ensure political stability contrary to expectations of the theory. This is mainly due to three strongly interlinked major factors as follows. Firstly, sectarian strife occurred due to unequal representation of the sectarian sects, most notably the populous Shi'a confession, in the political system, which was outdated and did not reflect realities in the population change since 1932. Secondly, the sectarian nature of the elite prevented their cooperation due to a lack of willingness and incentives to do so, which leads to competition and causes their inability to initiate new governmental reforms, especially after Syria's departure in 2005. The Lebanese political elite was divided into two opposing camps, and therefore this caused a broken multiple balance of power, which is essential in consociational democracy to ensure cooperation and stability according to Lijphart. Similarly, while the elite tended to cooperate due to external threats that endangered the nation's existence, in this case – the Syrian crisis, this only resulted in further political instability and deadlock. Thirdly, external actors that backed their respective Lebanese allies in the domestic political system, sought to satisfy their own national interest and advance their domination in the region rather than maintain sectarian coherence and prevent sectarian strife in the country. When Syria, acting as an external regulator for sectarian clashes departed, the country experienced multiple interferences in domestic affairs by foreign actors, who aimed to ensure their domination in the region by backing opposing Lebanese coalitions. Thus today we can imply that Lebanon's consociationalism not only failed to prevent sectarian strife and ensure long-lasting political stability but also caused it because consociationalism was not well implemented as required by the theory supposes. Therefore it could not be sustained and preserved, which confirms Horowitz's key statements above. This means that a consociational democracy might not be the best form of government to ensure political stability and social cohesion in deeply divided countries.

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