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Claremont McKenna College

**Aversive Visions of Unanimity:
Political Sectarianism in Lebanon**

Submitted to
Professor Roderic Camp

By
Loulwa Murtada

For
Senior Thesis
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Abstract

Sectarianism has shaped Lebanese culture since the establishment of the National Pact in 1943, and continues to be a pervasive roadblock to Lebanon's path to development. This thesis explores the role of religion, politics, and Lebanon's illegitimate government institutions in accentuating identity-based divisions, and fostering an environment for sectarianism to emerge. In order to do this, I begin by providing an analysis of Lebanon's history and the rise and fall of major religious confessions as a means to explore the relationship between power-sharing arrangements and sectarianism, and to portray that sectarian identities are subject to change based on shifting power dynamics and political reforms. Next, I present different contexts in which sectarianism has amplified the country's underdevelopment and fostered an environment for political instability, foreign and domestic intervention, lack of government accountability, and clientelism, among other factors, to occur. A case study into Iraq is then utilized to showcase the implications of implementing a Lebanese-style power-sharing arrangement elsewhere, and further evaluate its impact in constructing sectarian identities. Finally, I conclude that it is possible to eliminate sectarianism in Lebanon and move towards a secular state. While there are still many challenges to face in overcoming a long-established system of governance, I highlight the anti-sectarian partisan movements that are advocating for change, and their optimistic path to success.

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I

Introduction

“Are you Sunni or Shia? My father told me that Sunnis are good people, and that Shias are bad. You’re Sunni, right? I couldn’t be friends with a bad person.” Nour appeared distraught as she waited for my answer, praying that my response wouldn’t lead to the termination of our friendship. I said I didn’t know, because I didn’t. Up until that point, I was a fourth-grader who hadn’t really given my religious sect any thought. Initially, I was taken aback - insulted that Nour knew something I didn’t, wondering why my parents failed to mention such a seemingly critical thing before. When I got home, I informed my father what I had learnt from Nour at school that day, and asked him the same question: Am I Sunni or Shia? To my surprise, I witnessed my father’s gentle expression evolve into one dominated by frustration and sadness.

My father said that Nour was wrong. He said that it shouldn’t matter what my religious sect is because at the end of the day to be a Muslim was to be a Muslim. He said that religion is not, and should not be indicative of one’s goodness. He said that I didn’t need to know the answer to the question - and when I asked why, he said: *“because it shouldn’t be a question at all.”*

Fast-forward 12 years. Today, the Sunni-Shia divide has escalated to new extremes, and intergroup violence along sectarian lines is no longer a rarity but a daily occurrence in the Middle East. Religious identities have become more salient now than ever before, and are constantly abused by political actors for political gain. While sectarianism portrays realistic religious distinctions, it has always been associated with

the fight for power, resources, and territory, which is especially the case in Lebanon. As a Lebanese citizen, I've witnessed how one's religious affiliation, such as to be "Sunni" or "Shia" is no longer solely representative of one's religious views, but directly associated with one's political alliance, societal relations, and communal allegiances. With a growing Shia community, dwindling Christian influence, armed political group acting as a state within a state, and a divided Sunni population, tensions in Lebanon are high as interreligious insecurity persists. In Lebanese society, religious identities are representative of basic realities, such as access to education, services, and limited resources. With the presence of such polarized identities in Lebanon, the prevalence of a national identity is diminishing, overridden by one's loyalty to their own sect or community. As American University of Beirut Professor Rima Majed states, in the current Lebanese context "religious sectarian and political identities are used interchangeably."¹

Further, religion is a significant factor in the country's underdevelopment and has become substantial to one's ethnic identity. What appears to be a war between the Sunni and Shia Muslims is seldom ever fought on the basis of religious ideologies. Conflict itself is not 'religious,' but rather the crystallization of religion into tribal identities with biases towards out-groups is a common cause for problem, especially in Third World nations. The deep ethnic antagonisms between Lebanon's different sects have played a significant role in obstructing the country's development and restricting economic advancements. As the cultural antipathies deepen within the community, the

¹ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Global Dialogue* 7, no. 4 (December 2017).

underdevelopment worsens, and as it worsens, the cultural antipathies grow even deeper. This cyclical situation in Lebanon has become so difficult to break that it leaves me wondering what came first – the chicken or the egg.

In attempt to understand the prominence of political sectarianism in Lebanon, and the relationship between religion and politics, this body of work hopes to provide an overarching analysis of the situation. This thesis delves into the role of political governmental institutions in fostering an environment for sectarianism to emerge, explores the impact of sectarianism on Lebanon's underdevelopment, and offers plausible recommendations for overcoming sectarianism in Lebanon. Throughout the course of my thesis, I aim to convey the following points:

First, Lebanon's illegitimate governmental and political institutions accentuate segmental cleavages, such as religion/identity-based divisions, rather than alleviating them, allowing for the politicization of religious identities, also known as sectarian identities. Tribes in Lebanon are divided on the basis of religious orientation, and as each religious sect receives different benefits based on power and representation delegated to that group through the government, tribal identities became synonymous with religious identity. Second, sectarian identities are associated with the relative strength of certain ethnic groups, and thus are subject to change with modified power dynamics and political reforms. This is evident through the historical shifts in power among the major religious confessions in Lebanon, based on their relative power at specific times. Third, the sectarian conflict in Lebanon has amplified the country's underdevelopment due to the constant political gridlock and instability, lack of government accountability, a clientelist system, foreign and domestic intervention, and a neighboring civil war, among many

other factors. Finally, it is possible to eliminate sectarianism and move towards a secular state. This notion is plausible as sectarian identities are not perpetual, but rather fluctuate based on the power dynamics. With modifications to the power dynamics and political reform, a Lebanese state in which the national identity triumphs over religious identity can exist - but it won't be easy.

The Salience of Religion in Multiethnic Societies, A Scholarly View

Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, customs, language, and general way of life of a particular group of people at a particular time. It is through culture that groups, and people within those groups, define themselves and contribute to society as it affects how people think and act. Several theorists believe that cultural elements, such as religion and ethnic unity, are crucial to a nation's development and stability. Author Howard Handelman defines ethnic identity as a "way in which certain groups have come to view themselves as distinct over time," based on shared beliefs, shared experiences, and other cultural traits that distinguish it from other proximate ethnicities.² There are different kinds of ethnic-cultural divisions, such as nationality, tribe, race, and religion.

Religion is a crucial aspect of culture as it is a pervasive force in the third world, inhibiting development in some countries while encouraging it in others. While many modernist theorists view religion to be an impediment to political and economic growth, in many third world countries the move towards secularization has, more often than not, caused religious backlash and political instability.³ Countries that are ethnically

² Howard Handelman, *The Challenge of Third World Development*, Boston, Mass.: Pearson, 2013.

³ Lawrence E. Harrison, and Peter L. Berger, *Developing cultures: case studies*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

pluralistic in the above divisions tend to face conflict due to ethnic antagonisms, impeding social, political, and economic development.⁴

When analyzing international politics religion is a factor often disregarded and has become increasingly important in the third world as a critical source of identification for a significant number of people. While religion serves as a source of comfort through the unification of a community of believers, it simultaneously emphasizes ingroup and outgroup religious differences.⁵ As a result, religion often tends to energize conflict and social divisions in developing countries.⁶

The Social Identity Theory, initially proposed by Psychologists Tajfel and Turner in 1979, best provides insight on how membership to a social group can affect one's self-concept.⁷ A social group is defined loosely as a group of individuals who identify themselves as affiliates of the same social category.⁸ Individuals may choose to identify with a group for multiple distinct reasons, such as shared values, beliefs, or concerns (ex. Religion, culture, political ideologies, ethnicity, nationality, culture, etc.).⁹ One's self-concept is essentially a distinct mix of many identities (religion, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) along with their relative significance depending on time and situation. For instance,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maykel Verkuyten, "Religious Group Identification and Inter-Religious Relations: A Study Among Turkish-Dutch Muslims," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 10, no. 3 (2007): 341-57.

⁶ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1 (March 9, 2009): 52-75.

⁷ Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion From a Social Identity Perspective," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 1 (2010): 60-71.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia."

in some societies gender and class may be most important, while in others political ideologies and religion may be of higher significance.¹⁰

Through this self-categorization of one's self and others that may be similar, an individual subconsciously creates a fundamental linkage between their group membership and their own sense of self.¹¹ Whether it be race, religion, or language, people reside in certain groups that are bound to alter their personal views and responses to several situations. Groups may provide a sense of belonging and support, or largely, individuals may rely on their group to help them attain certain goals that they would not be able to accomplish on their own, such as social change through political involvement.¹²

Religious identification with a group may be deeper than other group memberships for a variety of reasons. This may be explained by the dual function of religiosity as not only a social identity, but also a system of beliefs shared between groups. Religiosity, unlike other elements, involves a system of beliefs that include a shared faith in a higher power and a way in which to give one's life events meaning. As religion may be critical to one's personal identity, establishing a group membership around religious similarities tends to increase the significance of group membership to one's self-concept.¹³ Additionally, the belief that one's religion is the 'truth' may encourage a growing religious identity and deeper bonds with other group members. If one religious group is strongly tied to their sacred worldview, they might feel antagonism

¹⁰ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia."

¹¹ Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion From a Social Identity Perspective."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

towards those that don't, creating an ingroup and outgroup bias. In many real-life cases, this antagonism has resulted in intergroup conflicts, as groups are tied to their belief that their religion is the only correct one.

While religious identification can be crucial, and beneficial to one's well-being, it is also the ground for multiple intractable intergroup conflicts. Religious conviction can cause intolerance between groups, fragmentation of society, and "over-zealous proselytization."¹⁴ Religious exclusivity can also be extremely detrimental to pluralistic countries, or those attempting to host a liberal democracy.¹⁵

Threats to Religious Identity & the Rise of Conflict

It is often under distressing circumstances or threats to one's safety and security that membership in a group may become more salient.¹⁶ An individual's identity can be threatened through ill-treatment, discrimination and, or, political violence, among many other things. The resulting stress fundamentally motivates individuals to identify themselves with supportive communities that may enhance their well-being. If the threats from one group continue to invalidate another group's identity, it may become very difficult to ignore, resulting in conflict.¹⁷ Identity clashes most usually involve polarized groups with distinct identities that believe that the fight is between 'us' and them.'¹⁸ The

¹⁴ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion From a Social Identity Perspective."

¹⁷ Muhammad S. Umar, "Religion and Party Politics," *The Journal of African History* 43, no. 2 (2002): 357-58.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia."

victimized in group then shares a narrative of collective identity that they use to justify their responses.¹⁹

This is especially this case if one's religious identity is threatened. Although intergroup conflict occurs for many reasons other than religious strife, threats to religious identity could result in unparalleled extremely critical repercussions, as a danger to one's beliefs is a danger to one's existence.²⁰ Religion is often the "defining marker of a cohesive and compelling collective identity."²¹ Similarly, an individual cannot change their ethnicity; thus group membership based on any aspect of ethnicity is virtually impermeable.²² Once born a Christian, always a Christian. Hence, the outbreak of ethnic conflict within a context of unchanging ethnicity can result in extreme actions intended to eradicate the outgroup. These conflicts, known as identity clashes, have been visible throughout international relations as groups turn to genocide, civil wars, or other unfortunate forms of retaliation. In many instances, these political or ethnic conflicts are a consequence of religious group differences.

Religion can even be a motivator for groups to respond aggressively and exert violence, as a threat to one's faith holds more immense symbolic value. Thus instead of just triggering one's personal identity and set of beliefs, an individual or group of people may feel that they must retaliate for holy objectives.²³ This logic can be applied to explain the motivation behind religious fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalisms,

¹⁹ Muhammad S. Umar, "Religion and Party Politics."

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion From a Social Identity Perspective."

²² Ibid.

²³ Jeffrey Haynes, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia."

while inherently different based on context, all share the belief that their group is under threat, and thus endorse a set of strategies that will help retain their discrete group identity.²⁴ This ‘defense of religion’ can manifest itself through political or social attacks with consequences. When national identity is under threat, individuals are likely to prioritize their dual, religious identity, and view that to be more representative of themselves.²⁵

As previously stated, religion itself is not necessarily a source of conflict, but similar to race or ethnicity, religion is a way in which people differentiate themselves and their group from others. This evolution of religion into a tribal, sectarian identity forms in group/outgroup biases which may result in large conflict.²⁶ In almost every situation, the inferior group with meager amounts of power, whether it be political or economic, is more conscious of their marginalization, heightening tensions between them and their superiors.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion From a Social Identity Perspective."

²⁶ Muhammad S. Umar, "Religion and Party Politics."

The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon:

A Historical Timeline

The divisions in Lebanon nowadays are 0% religious and 100% political. In Islam we have the five pillars of Islam, whether you are Sunni or Shia, we both follow these five pillars. So logically speaking, the divisions are not religious at all. Maybe there's a slight difference in the way we pray or place our hands, but at the end of the day, we're all Muslim. Some people argue over little things like who was to follow the Prophet Muhammad, but even then, regarding the prophet's predecessor, it was about politics and power and who's going to take over.

- Maya, American University of Beirut (AUB) Graduate

Taifiyya (Arabic) or sectarianism refers to this ancestral inclination among Lebanon's diverse religious communities to prioritize their family and communal religious identity over that of their nation-state, inevitably undermining *Wataniyya* or patriotism.²⁷ Sectarianization is the purposeful exploitation of religious identities for political gain. In modern-day Lebanon, sectarianism and the nation-state are one and the same, the two cannot be isolated due to the governing politics that legitimate certain paths of elitist progress. In a country of 4.5 million citizens of 18 different faiths, religion in Lebanon is viewed as one's most defining attribute - engraved on identification cards and representative of loyalties and political views.²⁸ In this confessional multi-religious state that was established as liberal and democratic, but not secular, the crystallization of religion into a tribal identity is imminent while a national identity is lacking a collective

²⁷Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Middle East Report*, no. 200 (July 1996): 23-30.

²⁸ Doug Bandow, "Squabbling Politicians Push Lebanon to Sectarian Brink," *Huffpost*, October 19, 2015.

struggle.²⁹ There have been several disputations over political influence throughout Lebanese history as a result of the disproportionate distribution of power and representation among the religious communities. Political institutions play a substantial role in the creation and development of sectarian identities and forms of political mobilization in Lebanon.

This history chapter aims to dissect the key events that portray the shifts in political power from Christians versus Muslims to Sunni versus Shia, and what led the sectarian sands to change. While Maronite Christians first rose to power due to their institutionalized superiority following the National Pact, the balance of power shifted afterward. First in favor of the Sunni Muslims after the 1975 Civil War and 1989 Taif Agreement, followed by the more recent re-emergence of Shia political power and influence. The nature of these subsequent shifts in the balance of power allows for the prediction that while many Lebanese view their sectarian identities as rigid and ineradicable, sectarianism in fact is a modern construct produced by political identity – thus, indicating that these antagonisms are not impenetrable but sometimes subject to change.

The events that propagated a shift in power trace back to the establishment of an independent Lebanon and the institutionalization of sectarianism in Lebanon's consociational power-sharing arrangements. This chapter hopes to target how "Lebanon's peculiar corporate power-sharing model hardens sectarian identities, invites systematic

²⁹ Ibid.

deadlock, precludes the emergence of cross-sectarian modes of political mobilization, and, ultimately, leads to cyclical domestic crises that invite external interventions.”³⁰

*Things have drastically changed in Lebanon... Yesterday's enemies became today's allies and vice versa... The Sunni-Shia split is one of those things you really feel have changed... especially after the assassination of Rafic Hariri... This discourse really didn't exist before... For all we knew, we were Muslims and we were fighting against the Christians' political project in the country... Today some Christians are our allies and it is the Sunni's political project that we are fighting.*³¹

- Hassan, a Shia fighter with the Amal party

The Establishment of the Lebanese State

The Lebanese Republic, a once prosperous small country in the Middle East, is recognized for its rich religious and ethnic diversity that evidently shaped its history and cultural identity. The unique multi-confessional climate in Lebanon with 18 officially recognized religions has served as a basis for much of Lebanon's conflicts for centuries past and in the modern day.³² Lebanon's cultural and political identity has been strongly influenced by its preceding colonization from the Ottoman Empire and French Mandate, which held control over the country for a substantial amount of time.

The Ottoman Empire's religious authoritarian rule began in the late 19th century. Due to the diverse religious landscape in Lebanon at the time, several communities opposed the Ottoman's religious rule and shared a universal principle that equality of all political voices was necessary and of the highest importance.³³ Even then, openness to

³⁰ Bassel F. Salloukh, Rabie Barakat, Jinan S. Al-Habbal, Lara W. Khattab, and Shoghig Mikaelian, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

³¹ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

³² Diane Riskedahl, "Graphic Identity in the Scriptorial Landscape of Lebanon," *City & Society* 29, no. 1 (April 10, 2017): 127-47.

³³ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

religious multiplicity in a multiethnic society was crucial to the Lebanese identity. In 1914, the Christian community, 60% of which were of Maronite descent, held the most extensive accumulation of wealth in Mount Lebanon and comprised 80% of the population.³⁴ The Muslim and Druze communities made up the remainder of the population.³⁵ The accumulation of wealth was not sufficient to justify the Christians' claim of political supremacy, yet the political opportunity of ruling an independent Lebanon meant to promote the quality of religious faiths, and Arabism was necessary for Christians to claim their superiority. The affluent Christians who were also the highest educated led the movement towards independence from Ottomans, and viewed themselves as adept to establishing a universal state via "the enlightenment and openness that they have gained by bridging the Western and Eastern worlds."³⁶ At the time of Mount Liban's formation, the Sunnis constituted the largest Muslim community and largely rejected the concept of a Christian-dominant Lebanon, preferring the creation of 'pan-Arab nation,' in specific, a Greater Syria.³⁷

This vision was put aside following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, which was followed by Maronite supremacy accompanied by French authority. In 1920, under French Mandate influence, *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon) was created on 1 September 1920. The French largely expanded Lebanon to include territories that were initially parts of Syria, such as Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre, southern Lebanon, and the eastern Bekaa valley.³⁸ A substantial Muslim population accompanied

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

³⁸ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

this territorial expansion, increasing the proportion of the Muslim community already present and diminishing the demographic superiority once held by the Maronites in Mount Lebanon.³⁹ The expansion of Greater Lebanon also annexed Muslim-dominant rural areas which were economically underdeveloped in comparison to the coastal and mountain regions.⁴⁰ The combination of several distinct landscapes meant that Grand Liban now contained municipalities of different religious, economic, and cultural backgrounds – the majority of which were highly underdeveloped. These religious and economic ‘cleavages’ were described by Albert Hourani as “a condition where different segments of population subscribed to ‘different ideas of what Lebanon is and should be.’ with each adhering to its own definition and ‘vision of Lebanon.’”⁴¹

The clash of identities and backgrounds created two concepts of the ‘national identity’ - Lebanonism and Arabism - producing a debate surrounding what the collective cultural identity should be. ‘Lebanism,’ an extreme form of Phoenicianism, was primarily held by the Maronites who stressed a modern, culturally-accepting and diverse Mediterranean identity of Lebanon. The Lebanese Christians who followed this vision shared the language of French, while “Arabic was an alien language that was imposed coercively.”⁴² Oppositely, the supporters of ‘Arabism’ largely consisted of Sunni Muslims that were skeptical towards the Maronite’s vision for Lebanon, for they believed that since Lebanon had once been part of a Greater Syria, it should uphold this Arab identity and history.⁴³ This first sectarian dynamic that was present in the founding of

³⁹ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

⁴³ Ibid.

Lebanon set the stage for power battles and conflict between the different religious sects and created a clear divide between the Maronite Christians and Muslims, in particular.

Furthermore, the European powers favored the Christian communities of the Ottoman Empire and identified them as the superior sect, one that required special protection from the Muslim communities, better education from the missionaries, and favored by the European merchants for employment.⁴⁴ The Europeans justified their intervention in the Middle East through the affirmation that there were intrinsic distinctions between Christianity and Islam, and that the Christian majority was to be the destined rulers of Lebanon.⁴⁵ The Christians had indulged in their French character and were placed on a pedestal by the French for so long that it only seemed natural to exert their superiority and serve as the leaders of an independent Lebanon, even though for centuries prior, Lebanon had existed as a sanctuary for oppressed minorities. Fundamentally, Lebanon's interaction with European colonization transformed the connotation of religion in a "multi-confessional society because it emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims." (16) This was evident through the Ottoman rule and following French Mandate in which religious identities were deployed for political and social causes.

In other words, the colonizers viewed the Maronite Christian communities as being more capable of running Grand Liban, even though this was a largely unjustifiable claim. The Sunni Muslim extremely disliked this bias and overwhelming preference for the Maronite vision of Greater Lebanon under the French Mandate. This led the Sunni

⁴⁴ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

communities to seek retaliation by heavily boycotting the released drafts of the Lebanese constitution in 1922 and 1925 for they feared the lack of presence of Muslim identity.⁴⁶ At the time, even then among the Muslims, the Shia narrative was widely neglected in the making of an “independent Lebanon,” crystallizing the abandonment of the Shia identity in early independence.⁴⁷ The repercussions of neglecting the Shia majority will be evident, and to be further discussed in following sections. Nonetheless, while the main sects were attempting to establish a collective identity, many minorities were left marginalized and largely unwelcomed.

The Lebanese Republic was created in 1926, and essentially handed the Maronite elites the most extensive share of power, which was further supplemented by the National Pact in 1943.⁴⁸ When Lebanon established its independence from the French on November 22nd 1943, the National Pact of 1943 that followed laid the foundations for the Lebanese confessional political system, based on the 1932 population census.⁴⁹ In Political Science terminology, *confessionalism* is a “system of government that proportionally allocated political power among a country’s communities - whether religious or ethnic- according to their percentage of the population.⁵⁰ This consociational system distributes political positions between communities based on their numerical representation.

⁴⁶ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁴⁹ Diane Riskedahl, "Graphic Identity in the Scriptorial Landscape of Lebanon."

⁵⁰ Imad Harb, "Lebanon's Confessionalism: Problems and Prospects, *United States Institute of Peace*, March 30th, 2006.

The 1932 population census inevitably crippled the government and strengthened the system of patronage because it based the power-sharing political system on the sectarian balance, in which Maronites made up approximately 34% of the population, Sunnis 19%, and Shias 16%, with several other sects filling the remainder.⁵¹ Under the National Pact, the new nation-state and its institutions were divided based on a religious sect's prominence. The Maronite elites were given the Presidency, the Sunnis the prime ministership, and the Shia the speaker of parliament.⁵² Thus, since then, "the relationship between sectarianism and class relations in both pre-war and postwar Lebanon is thus reciprocal rather than linear."⁵³

After Independence, Before War

The **National Pact of 1943** (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*) attempted to diffuse political power inequalities by establishing a 'productive' power-sharing political arrangement that gave all religious communities shared state ownership.⁵⁴ In pursuit of diminished sub-national sectarian identities, the Pact characterized Lebanon as an independent state with a *visage Arab* (Arab face), which was inevitably interpreted differently by the Muslims and the Christians. The Christians believed this to mean that Lebanon was located in the midst of the Arab world, but was not actually an Arab state. To the Muslims, this statement of an 'Arab face' indicated that Arabism was a crucial feature of the Lebanese state.⁵⁵ Contrary to its intentions, The National Pact resulted in the

⁵¹ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁵² Diane Riskedahl, "Graphic Identity in the Scriptorial Landscape of Lebanon."

⁵³ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

⁵⁴ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁵⁵ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

institutionalization of a “hierarchically organized sectarian democracy, whereby political equality was expected within, but not among, confessions.”⁵⁶ As a result of the National Pact’s distributions, the Maronite Christians being the most abundant religious community, making up 34% of the Lebanese population at the time, received disproportionately enormous political powers. These powers included the Presidency, the right to appoint the prime minister, and the right to veto or refuse to enact legislation.⁵⁷

The distribution of the highest public office positions to the proportional distribution of dominant sects (Maronite Christians at the time), resulted in the failure of state officials to involve themselves in the improvement of predominantly Shia areas in southern Lebanon, and northern regions.⁵⁸ Instead, state-affiliated elites focused on the improvement of their own regions through the distribution of jobs, pavement of roads, and presence of sustainable electricity. The unequal distribution of representation based on sect size almost immediately places the less prominent religious sects at a disadvantage. Any given Lebanese could not obtain benefits on the basis of their citizenship rights because “jobs, housing, telephones, and education were guaranteed not by the state, but through appeals to deputies and ministers and presidents who were themselves appointed or elected according to sectarian laws.”⁵⁹ Electoral and personal status laws were regulated by religious affiliation such that to be Lebanese meant to be defined according to religious affiliation. There could be no Lebanese citizen who was not at the same time a member of a particular religious community.⁶⁰ This left many

⁵⁶ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. “Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon.”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Islamic ethnic groups with weak representation to feel as though their relative power was not being translated accordingly, as they struggled to obtain their righteous benefits from the government.⁶¹ Religious identity has manifested itself as an individual's most distinct attribute that can't be neglected as it's even stamped on identification and voter registration cards, meaning that religion is inextricably interlaced with one's Lebanese identity.⁶²

Thus, sectarianism in this context weakens the national identity and establishes disruptive religious loyalties as each government elite channeled their power to improve the living standards of their community, which all ties back to the 1943 National Pact that systemized independent Lebanon. It is quite ironic that although Lebanon was built on a confessional system meant to stabilize it and promote inter-sectarian representation, involvement, and collaboration, it instead institutionalized religious sects as being an official component of the state structure. This system also weakened the power of the central state in promoting a stable nation as this system is consensus-based. Consequently, the Pact had direct ramifications on Lebanon's foreign policy and international relations. It suggested that due to the French tutelage, Lebanon should maintain stable ties with Western countries, but should also back Arab causes due to the country's demographic modification and location.⁶³ In Lebanon's case, the political institutions play a substantial role in the construction and hardening of sectarian

⁶¹ Ronen A. Cohen and Yael Keinan-Cohen, "The rebirth of the Lebanese identity in the philosophy of the Lebanese intellectual Samir Kassir," *Cogent Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2017).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

identities, prevention of cross-sectarian forms of political mobilization, and fundamentally leads to domestic crises that solicit external interventions.⁶⁴

The creation of a political model that had a Christian identity initiated the crystallization of religion into a tribal, sectarian identity in Lebanon. While sectarianism displays religious differences, it has consistently been linked to power, resources, and territory. Since every Lebanese citizen was a member of a particular religious community and could not change their religion of descent, this placed certain communities at odds with those that were favoring better and established disruptive religious loyalties.⁶⁵ People lost hope in statehood and the political system and felt that their loyalty should be focused on their family and sect, rather than to the state, which eventually led to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975.⁶⁶

The Outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (1975 -1990)

The 1948 Palestine/Israel war resulted in an influx of Sunni-Muslim Palestinian refugees to Lebanon. The Palestinian issue, largely the presence of approximately a million refugees and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), was causing turmoil and divisions within Lebanese society since the nation's formation, especially as many Maronites viewed the PLO as a threat to Lebanon because they feared Israeli intervention. Additionally, the presence of the Palestinian refugees was heightening sectarian tensions as many Christian communities were opposed to providing these

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁶⁶ Ronen A. Cohen, and Yael Keinan-Cohen, "The rebirth of the Lebanese identity in the philosophy of the Lebanese intellectual Samir Kassir."

refugees with Lebanese citizenships, chiefly due to the fact that their Sunni Muslim background would tip the demographics in favor of the Muslims. In 1969, several leftist Muslim political organizations in Lebanon were combined into a coalition known as the Lebanese National Movement by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt.⁶⁷ The Lebanese National Movement (LNA) chose to support the Palestinian cause in Lebanon and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.⁶⁸

This chapter aims to portray how the effects of the war, and the foreign intervention it yielded, heightened the sectarian tensions in Lebanon between the Maronite Christian and Muslim communities. The following sections will highlight how the end of the war, which was largely characterized by the redistribution of power between the sects, led to a shift in sectarian tensions from Christians versus Muslims to Sunni Muslims versus Shia Muslims.

As Palestinian activity heightened in Lebanon, the Maronites' readiness to tolerate an 'Arab-centered view of Lebanon' substantially declined.⁶⁹ In response to the growing presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Christians started setting up armed militias and readying government forces as they were concerned that the PLO would attempt a seizure of Lebanon.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Lebanese Sunni groups began establishing armed militias as well, to compete against those of the Christians. The tension between Lebanese supporting the Palestinian cause versus the Maronite militias

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Crighton and Martha Abele Mac Iver, "The Evolution of Protracted Ethnic Conflict: Group Dominance and Political Underdevelopment in Northern Ireland and Lebanon," *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 2 (1991): 127.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Lina Khatib, "Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, June 9, 2014.

and government forces led to the outbreak of Civil War after a PLO-associated Muslim attempted to assassinate a Maronite leader.⁷¹ On May 31st 1975, a Maronite militia attacked a civilian bus in response to the attempted Maronite murder.⁷² Thus, Lebanon experienced its first eruption of sectarian violence between the Christian and Muslim communities which translated into a civil war that lasted 15 years.

This period of turmoil solicited foreign intervention, principally the involvement of Syria after it intervened in 1976 to prevent PLO domination of Lebanon. The Lebanese President at the time, Suleiman Frangieh, welcomed the Syrian troops into Lebanon to serve as deterrence in the fight between Lebanese and Palestinian factions – little did he know that Syria would not only play a vital role in the Civil War, but also maintain an extended presence in the years to follow.⁷³ Syria cheerfully strengthened its oversight over Lebanese domestic politics during the war and maintained its troublesome presence long afterward furthering the sectarian strife between Lebanese that supported the Syrian presence and those that strongly opposed it.⁷⁴ Other external forces, such as Iran and Israel, got involved in Lebanon during this time as well, each engaging in a proxy war over Lebanese territory. For instance, the emergence of the Iran-backed Shia militant group Hezbollah was largely prompted by the presence of Israel in the south of Lebanon, and relied on the transportation of weapons and cash from Iran through Syria.⁷⁵ These sectarian militias such as Hezbollah necessitated foreign financial support, deepening

⁷¹ Lina Khatib, “Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict.

⁷² Elizabeth Crighton and Martha Abele Mac Iver, "The Evolution of Protracted Ethnic Conflict: Group Dominance and Political Underdevelopment in Northern Ireland and Lebanon."

⁷³ Lina Khatib, “Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Syria and Iran's ties to Lebanese politics. As Author and Lebanese Professor Bassel

Salloukh states,

*The outbreak of the civil war underscored the failure of the National Pact to manage the inherent contradictions of Lebanon's confessional politics, ones that were exacerbated by overlapping domestic and external contests. During the following 15 years of civil war, the Lebanese state lost its monopoly over the use of legitimate violence. Sectarian sub-communities stood supreme, each with its own militia, symbols, and administrative apparatus.*⁷⁶

As a result of the war, sectarianism became a visible aspect of one's everyday life in Lebanon. Sectarian militant groups took control over customs, duties, ports, indirect taxes, and forms of communication such as television channels, radio stations, and newspapers. "Militia power not only practiced ethnic, sectarian and political 'cleansing' of territories,' it also eradicated all memories of coexistence and shared interests between the Lebanese."⁷⁷ The Lebanese demographic realities were entirely reconstructed due to the sectarian cleansing, causing hundreds of thousands of Lebanese to lose their homes and families. Many Sunnis regarded the Christians as collaborators with the Western powers and Israel and lost their image of being fellow Lebanese, while the Shia felt extremely marginalized because of the 1982 Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon.⁷⁸ "Sectarianism was much a repudiation of the social hierarchy as it was a collapse of the Lebanese state that had been created under the National Pact."⁷⁹

The Civil War amplified the tensions between sects as it was a clear display of religious-based atrocity and discrimination. Unarmed civilians were executed simply on the basis of their religion. The instability that followed invigorated corruption and one's

⁷⁶ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁷⁹ Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

identity became strongly associated with religious loyalty. Lebanon witnessed many changes, including the “political-social advancement of the Shia ethnic group,” following the evolution of Hezbollah.⁸⁰

Israeli Invasion of Lebanon in 1982 & Re-emergence of Shiism

In 1982, in the midst of Lebanon’s fifteen-year-long civil war, Israel invaded Lebanon in attempt to eradicate the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and insert an amiable government in Beirut that would be willing to make peace with Israel.⁸¹ At the time, the Shia community was located in Southern Lebanon, the northern Bekaa valley, and Beirut’s suburbs in the south.⁸² While some Shiites first supported the Israeli force’s mission to remove Palestinian militants from the area, over time popular opinion against Israel “began to turn as the occupation continued and outside influences, such as the Iranian Revolution, inspired Shiites in Lebanon to mobilize.”⁸³

Largely abandoned at the time of Lebanon’s establishment, the Shiite community was repeatedly politically and economically marginalized. In 1974, Imam Musa al-Sadr, notable Iranian cleric of Lebanese descent, began mobilizing the Shiite community through his Movement of the Dispossessed.⁸⁴ As a supporter of peace, Sadr promoted unity within the government and the creation of a political forum to openly discuss the concerns of the Shia community to the state.⁸⁵ Musa al-Sadr dedicated two decades to “raising the political and religious consciousness and the quality of life of Lebanon’s long

⁸⁰ Ronen A. Cohen and Yael Keinan-Cohen, "The rebirth of the Lebanese identity in the philosophy of the Lebanese intellectual Samir Kassir."

⁸¹ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics," *The International Spectator* 42, no. 4 (December 06, 2007): 475-91.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ "Hezbollah," *Stanford University: Mapping Militant Organizations*, April 9, 1983.

⁸⁴ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

underprivileged Shia community.”⁸⁶ This led to the formation of the nonviolent Shiite group Amal, literally meaning “Hope,” in 1975 with “both political and military elements whose members are motivated by the presence of local Palestinian militias and anti-Israeli sentiments.”⁸⁷ Amal, led by Husain al-Musawi, initially received support from the Shia community for their peaceful approach that avoided Islamic rhetoric.⁸⁸ However, after Israeli forces caused harm to the Shiite civilians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, and at a Shiite festival known as Ashura, several Shiites were prompted to join a militant resistance group, later known as Hezbollah (the “Party of God”).⁸⁹

After the disappearance of Imam al-Sadr in Libya in 1978, Iran experienced an Iranian Revolution of 1979, which accompanied substantial changes to the political structure of the Iranian state.⁹⁰ The revolution shifted the power from the pro-Israeli Shah to anti-Zionist Ayatollah Khomeini, who was keen to administer support and military assistance to his Lebanese Shia followers. Simultaneously, the Shia activists were exhausted by the lack of recognition and aid from their state, and the ineffectiveness of the peaceful Amal movement, thus inspiring them to establish a militant strategy intended to battle foreign forces and protect the Shiite community that was profoundly affected by the Israeli invasion.⁹¹

With support from Iran’s Khomeini, several individuals once part of the Amal movement split away from the group to join the establishment of the militant group Hezbollah. Unlike other secular political organizations such as Amal, Hezbollah

⁸⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

⁸⁷ "Hezbollah."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁹¹ Ibid.

welcomed Iran's Islamic model of clerical rule.⁹² The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) became significant players in the group's formation, promoting Hezbollah's mission through providing funds and training. Additionally, the Syrian government along with other foreign actors backed Hezbollah, propelling it to grow and expand rapidly as the most significant Shiite organization in Lebanon.⁹³

In 1985, Hezbollah officially launched its political program through the release of a manifesto that outlined the group's most prominent goals, including the creation of an Islamic regime, the expulsion of Israeli and Western influences in Lebanon, and the destruction of the Israeli state.⁹⁴ The document attempted to "toe the line between Islamic ideology and appeal to Lebanese outside the Shi'a community," and pledged Hezbollah's allegiance to Iranian leader Khomeini, portraying the initial establishment of ties between Iran-linked entities and the Shiite group, which are still prominent today more than ever before.⁹⁵

Israel continued to occupy southern Lebanon with little concern to the Shia community there, with little to no knowledge of Hezbollah's establishment. Yet, once the Israeli army ventured to Beirut to lay siege, they encountered resilient resistance where Lebanese Hezbollah Shia fighters were stationed and ready to fight.⁹⁶ Hezbollah continued to serve as a resistance force against the Israeli troops until their withdrawal in 2000, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Essentially, as the civil war was coming to its end, Hezbollah exhibited itself as a dominant actor in Lebanon.

⁹² Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

⁹³ "Hezbollah."

⁹⁴ Jonathan Masters and Zachary Laub, "Hezbollah," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 3, 2014.

⁹⁵ Eric Patterson, "Lebanon: The Persistence of Sectarian Conflict," *The Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs*, August. 2013.

⁹⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

The expansive turmoil that the civil war unleashed was deplorably inviting to foreign influences that maintain a presence in Lebanon today. Iran's initial involvement in Lebanon represented its campaign to spread the notion of an Islamic revolution, utilizing zealous ideologies to mobilize Shia fighters. The Syrian regime also found sanctuary in supporting the Shia party as it was an unforeseen mechanism to protecting its interests of power consolidation and establishing an alliance with Iran against both Israel and the United States.⁹⁷ This Hezbollah-led "Shi'a political ascendancy and the subsequent claim for a larger share of political power transpired within the context of struggle against Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon," marking a transition towards the emergence of Shia influence in the country.⁹⁸

Taif Agreement of 1989

The **Taif Accord** of October 22nd, 1989, put an end to the 15-year Lebanese civil war. In addition to settling the warring parties, the Taif agreement modified the constitution to alter the confessional political system put in place under the National Pact, consequently reconstructing the sectarian order and offsetting the proportion in place that favored the Christians.⁹⁹ The representation in government which was previously 6:5 in favor of the Christians was modified with the Taif accord to be 50:50 Christian/Muslim representation.¹⁰⁰ There is a total of 128 seats in the Lebanese parliament that were distributed equally amongst the Christians and Muslims (reference **Table 1** for the complete breakdown). Further, the agreement upheld all the components of the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

⁹⁹ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹⁰⁰ Imad Harb, "Lebanon's Confessionalism: Problems and Prospects."

confessional system, but altered the organization to represent the demographic realities of contemporary Lebanon, such as a growing Muslim population.¹⁰¹ The reshuffling of the system through Taif altered the sectarian landscape that once hosted divisive tensions between the Christians and Muslims, to tensions between Lebanon’s two central Muslim communities: Sunni versus Shia.

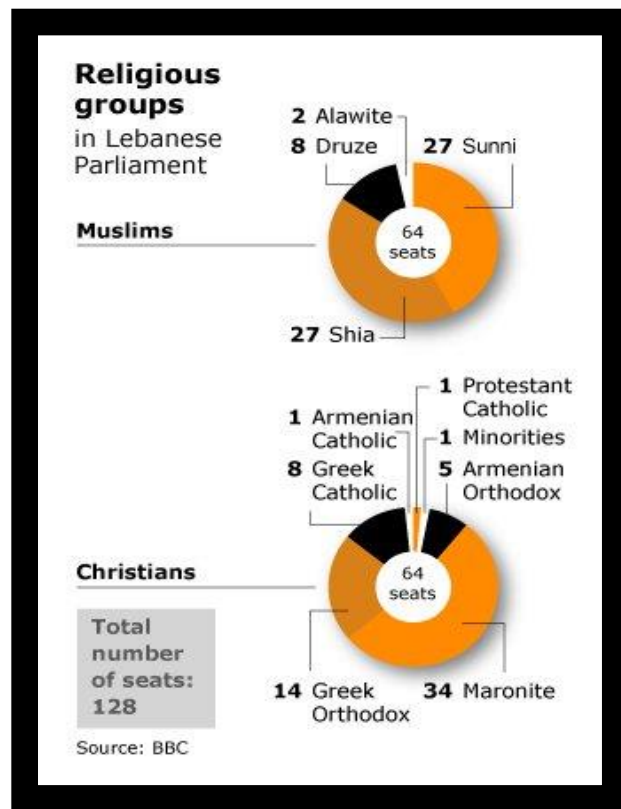


Table 1. Source: “Lebanon’s Governance,” *Fanack*, last updated October 24, 2017.

Ultimately, the agreement substantially diminished the Maronite Christians influence, decreasing the President’s control of the cabinet and executive power.¹⁰² As a result, the Prime Minister (Sunni), Speaker of Parliament (Shia), and the Council of

¹⁰¹ Rima Majed, “The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon.”

¹⁰² Diane Riskedahl, “Graphic Identity in the Scriptorial Landscape of Lebanon.”

Ministers received larger shares of powers to equalize the power dynamics.¹⁰³ The Muslim Prime Minister was no longer appointed by the Christian president, but rather directly elected by the assembly.¹⁰⁴ Radically, Taif shifted the executive power away from the Maronite president, and largely towards the Council of Ministers' 'collective capacity.'¹⁰⁵ The Council of Ministers, which is composed of all sects, gained the true executive authority and is required to take decisions in a consociational manner, giving a larger percentage of religious denominations a say in government matters. Certain choices such as those regarding war, peace, and international treaties, among others, require two-thirds approval by the ministers in the cabinet, which was intended to protect the system from Christian or Muslim domination.

Similarly, the Taif Accord also expanded the powers of the Shia speaker of parliament. The speaker would now serve for a four-year term, and "was subject to a very difficult two-thirds vote of confidence, albeit only at the end of the second year."¹⁰⁶ The Speaker was to also play a key role in the choosing of a Prime Minister, and election of the President, along with substantial say Lebanon's domestic and foreign relations.¹⁰⁷ The rise of Hezbollah along with the redistribution of representation embodied the political and military rise of the Shi'a community.

The Taif Accord also required the disarmament of all Lebanese militias, yet Hezbollah did not cede, stating that the armed militias are essential in defending the south

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Patterson, "Lebanon: The Persistence of Sectarian Conflict."

¹⁰⁵ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

of Lebanon from Israeli occupation.¹⁰⁸ The political document also failed to provide a timeline for the withdrawal of Syrian influence and troops in Lebanon. Michel Aoun, Commander of the Army and interim Prime Minister at the time, rejected the Taif Accord stating that Syria's so-called 'invisible hand' in Lebanon was causing turmoil and wanted international guarantee that its withdrawal would be enforced before approving it.¹⁰⁹ In response to this, on October 13th, 1990, a Syrian-led military operation dethroned Aoun from the Presidential Palace in Lebanon, causing him to leave Lebanon and seek refuge in France.¹¹⁰ This incident portrays the inability of the Taif Accord to be void of sectarian politics and reveals the role the agreement played basically 'granting' Syria the position of post-war power broker in Lebanon. Yet, the Taif Accord eventually acknowledged the presence of relations between Lebanon and Syria and requested that Syrian troops relocate to the Beqa region, instead of complete withdrawal.¹¹¹ This decision was representative of the privileged influence that Syria had on Lebanon, furthering its intervention in Lebanese affairs.

Nonetheless, the postwar power-sharing agreement reconstructed the sectarian political system to manifest the modern demographic and political realities. In doing so however, the Taif agreement made sectarian modes of political identification and mobilization salient in post-war Lebanon as each sect was given appropriate representation.¹¹² While the National Pact was more of a hierarchical confessional power-sharing arrangement, the Taif Accord restructured the system to be more of an "inter-

¹⁰⁸ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹⁰⁹ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

sectarian partnership.”¹¹³ This led to the phenomenon in postwar Lebanon known as “troika” in which policy-making depended on the Maronite President, Sunni Prime Minister, and Shia speaker of parliament, in accordance with other Lebanese sectarian and political elite.¹¹⁴ Salloukh defines the troika in his book as,

*“The three figures [acting] as sole representatives of all major demands raised by their sectarian communities. Each assumed the role of negotiator in the name of his sect in a dizzying bargaining game involving the two counterparts. [...] Thus, the troika represented the most powerful clientelistic para-institution in postwar Lebanon.”*¹¹⁵

Hence, the Taif Accord is viewed by many as the “formalization of the decline in Christian, and specifically Maronite, power within the government.”¹¹⁶ This agreement re-established the power dynamic, especially in favor of Sunni-controlled Cabinet and premiership.¹¹⁷

Post-War Lebanon under Pax Syriana (1990-2006)

I was against Syria's presence in Lebanon because they were influencing Lebanese decision making to meet their interests, not ours. When Rafic Hariri was Prime Minister, he took a trip to meet the Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. Yet, before he could do so, the Syrians put him through heavy security screening and had him go through security forces before he could meet the President. Hariri was Lebanon's PRIME MINISTER and he had to go through an officer. That's humiliating! He should not have to deal with a low-positioned Syrian officer in intelligence services – he should be welcomed directly by the Prime Minister of Syria, out of respect. Especially at a time when Syria's engagement in Lebanon was widespread, and no one could do a thing about it. It's plain disrespect.

- Salim, AUB Graduate

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Diane Riskedahl, "Graphic Identity in the Scriptorial Landscape of Lebanon."

¹¹⁷ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

Rafic Hariri, a Lebanese business tycoon and Sunni diplomat, emerged as Lebanon's first post-war Prime Minister. Hariri was elected in 1992, Lebanon's first post-war elections since. Hariri had recently played a significant role in the development and implementation of the Taif Agreement and was heading the reconstruction efforts in Lebanon.¹¹⁸ Hariri's landslide victory was quick to pose problems for those who supported Damascus's strategic intervention in Lebanese affairs. Unlike his Pro-Syrian predecessor, Hariri heavily opposed the Syrian presence in Lebanon and was not willing to embrace the 'status quo.' Despite Hariri's discontent, Syria maintained its presence in Lebanon after the conclusion of the Civil War, signifying the weakness of the Lebanese national army as they were unable to ensure the withdrawal of all foreign forces.¹¹⁹ Syria was known to be the "ultimate arbitrator of all things Lebanese," and received help from its elite Lebanese political allies.¹²⁰ "The postwar state was replaced by what opposition pundits later labeled the 'mutual security regime' (*al nizam al-amni al-mushtarak*), in which Damascus maintained control over Lebanon, intimidating Syria's opponents and rewarding its allies."¹²¹

The Syrian intelligence apparatus in Lebanon also played a significant role in establishing Hezbollah's dominance over resistance operations against Israel, and ensuring that the Shia militant group had its needs met.¹²² Syria's involvement in Lebanon and support for Hezbollah continued to raise the eyebrows of the non-Shia sectarian groups, particularly the anti-Syrian Christian opposition that demanded all

¹¹⁸ "Post-War Lebanon (1990-2006)," *Living Lebanon*, last updated 2016.

¹¹⁹ "Post-War Lebanon (1990-2006)," *Living Lebanon*, last updated 2016.

¹²⁰ Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

external influenced be removed from their territory. Several Christian followers of Aoun, the former Christian president that was exiled by the Syrians, organized the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.¹²³

Furthermore, Hezbollah's decision to compete in the Lebanese elections of 1992 was unprecedented, and a defining moment for the party's identity.¹²⁴ Under the rule of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah and its non-Shia electoral allies won twelve seats in this election, including eight Shia seats.¹²⁵ As a result, the Shiite group has since governed approximately two-thirds of Shia districts and was additionally granted veto power in the cabinet in 2008 via the Doha agreement.¹²⁶ Winning parliamentary seats is accompanied with greater access to government resources, providing the Shia community with better living standards. While Hezbollah initially emerged as a militant group with intentions to protect Lebanese territory from Israeli invasion, the group was quickly evolving into a hybrid organization deeply rooted in the social and political climate in Lebanon.

The rise of Hezbollah "marked the leveling of political power among the three main power players in the country."¹²⁷ With increasing power and influence, spearheaded by Hezbollah, came urbanization and migration of the Shia community from the suburbs into more cosmopolitan areas. This allowed the Shia community to significantly contribute to the Lebanese economy, creating a change in the socio-economic living standards.¹²⁸ The parliamentary elections of 1992, 1996, and 2000 served to assemble

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹²⁵ Yaya Fanusie and Alex Entz, "Hezbollah: Financial Assessment."

¹²⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹²⁷ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde, "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹²⁸ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

political elites that were submissive to Syria's personal interests and plans in Lebanon, which again, alienated Christian public opinion aggravating sectarian relations.

Israel Withdraws from Lebanon in 2000

After a long, yet successful, sequence of launching Hezbollah guerilla attacks against the Israeli militia, Israel announced the removal of its troops from Lebanese territory on May 24th, 2000, ending 22 years of occupation.¹²⁹ Hezbollah's success in achieving peaceful Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon heightened the group's popularity and approval in the region, bringing them substantial political gains. Through militant mechanisms, Hezbollah was able to win the support of the local community, including support from the non-Shia community, proving that they are a better representative of the people than the Lebanese government. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah was deemed a hero as this occurrence united all Lebanese regardless of sect as they celebrated the freedom from Israeli occupation. This national admiration for the Shiite group, however, did not last long.

The Assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri

In October 1998, Pro-Syrian Christian Emile Lahoud was elected as President which stirred some unrest with Hariri and his followers as they disapproved of the penetration of Syrian influence in their country. In 2004, Syria's 'pro-consuls' in Lebanon ensured that Pro-Syrian Emile Lahoud received a three-year extension to his Presidency, which the Lebanese parliament approved as a 'one-time exception,' even though it was not the first nor the last time that they had done so.¹³⁰ This extension

¹²⁹ Mansoor Moaddel, Jean Kors, and Johan Garde. "Sectarianism and Counter-Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹³⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

resulted in extreme outrage and vocal opposition towards the Syrian presence in Lebanon and the Christian president, especially by Sunni Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and his followers. Extremely bothered by Syria's role in Lebanese politics, Hariri resigned after Lahoud's extension was permitted by the Lebanese government in October 2004.¹³¹ The UN Security Council firmly responded to the extension by passing Resolution 1559, which called for, "among other things, the disarmament of militias (that is, Hezbollah) and the withdrawal of foreign forces (the Syrian army)."¹³²

Only four months following his resignation from the parliament, on February 14th, 2005, former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was murdered in a car bombing attack along with the lives of ten colleagues.¹³³ The assassination was widely assumed to be the work of Syria and pro-Syrian allies. As a result, Hariri's assassination provoked large-scale anti-Syrian demonstration in Beirut that was slightly successful in liberating Lebanon from Syrian influence.¹³⁴ These protests and rallies were the largest in Lebanese history and overwhelmingly spearheaded by Sunni, Christian, and Druze communities, also known as the *March 14th Coalition* or the *Cedar Revolution*.¹³⁵

Since the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the sectarian lines were most commonly drawn between the Christians and the Muslims. It wasn't until the assassination of Hariri that the political lines were utterly re-configured to reflect a newfound sectarian imbalance between the Sunni versus Shia Muslims. Hariri's death split the country into two groups: the '*March 8th Coalition*,' which supported the Syrian regime and their

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Eric Patterson, "Lebanon: The Persistence of Sectarian Conflict."

presence in Lebanon, placing the assassination blame on the U.S. and Israel, and the *'March 14th Coalition'* which placed the blame entirely on the Syrian regime.¹³⁶ The March 8 Coalition is majorly composed of Shia communities that support Hezbollah and Christians that are part of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) following Michel Aoun.¹³⁷ The group is referred to the March 8th group due to the sizeable demonstration held by Hezbollah and Amal on March 8th, 2005, out of respect for Hariri, but more largely to show gratitude for Syria's supposed role in ensuring peace in Lebanon.¹³⁸ While Christian Aoun followers, known as 'Aounists,' were actually part of the March 14th protests, after their General was prohibited from competing in the elections in May they shifted their support to the March 8th coalition, sharing a sense of victimization and marginalization with the Shia.¹³⁹ Oppositely, the March 14th anti-Syrian coalition is mostly composed of Hariri's Christian, Druze, and Sunni followers.¹⁴⁰ Shockingly for the first time in Lebanese history, sectarian groups that were previously enemies (such as the Muslim-based and Christian-based political parties) united for this political occasion, as Christian loyalties were split among the coalition groups based on who their representative was.¹⁴¹ Even though confessional groups were harmonizing through the unification of forces, the Sunni-Shia strife was quickly worsening, contributing to a divide that is still detrimental to this day in Lebanese politics.

On the other hand, the Christian identity experienced diminishing salience in Lebanon as the sect became less politically relevant following Hariri's death. This

¹³⁶ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Rima Majed, "The Shifting Sands of Sectarianism in Lebanon."

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

shifting of sectarian sands portrays the continuous mechanisms of identity definition and redefinition in Lebanon, depending on the evolving political boundaries. The deviation away from Muslim-Christian sectarian conflict disproves the notion that sectarianism is everlasting and innate, but rather changeable. Identity politics are prone to modification in association with the political power relevant to the moment. The weakening of the Christians and the simultaneous rise of Shia power served to diminish the tensions between the historic Christian-Muslim sectarian conflict. This realization may act as an indication that it is possible to resolve the current sectarian strife in the Arab region, as the conflict is not rooted in religious biases as it may shallowly appear. Hence, the basis of this shift is attributed to the modified socio-economic and political variables, alongside the external forces involved in Lebanese politics.

After receiving international condemnation and pressure from enraged Lebanese protesters of the Cedar Revolution, the Syrian army withdrew from Lebanon in April 2005 for the first time since its involvement in the civil war almost 30 years prior.¹⁴² Under hefty pressure from Western nations, especially the United States, Lebanon held elections in May 2005.¹⁴³ The March 14th Coalition, also known as the Cedar Revolution consisting of Sunni Muslims, Druze, and some Christians, received victory in the elections - capturing a significant majority in the parliament of 72 out of 128 seats.¹⁴⁴ Walid Jumblatt, Druze leader, took action to ensure that all sects were adequately represented by deciding to include both Hezbollah and Amal (Shia political parties) in the

¹⁴² Eric Patterson, "Lebanon: The Persistence of Sectarian Conflict."

¹⁴³ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

parliament.¹⁴⁵ Jumblatt worried that if the Shia groups were not represented, they would turn against the elected political elite and align themselves with Christian politician Michel Aoun, who had returned to Lebanon from his refuge in France.¹⁴⁶

The 2006 War

In March 2006, top political elite from Shia, Sunni, Druze, and Maronite sects including Nasrallah, Aoun, Berri, Geagea, Siniora, Saad al-Din Hariri, and former President Amine Gemayel, held a “*National Dialogue*” to address important issues facing Lebanon at the time.¹⁴⁷ The most pressing problems that were to be addressed were: “The UN-led inquiry into the assassination of Rafic Hariri, Lebanon’s relations with Syria, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the disarming of militias.”¹⁴⁸ While there was strong Lebanese sentiment towards disarming Hezbollah, the dialogue was unable to reach a firm conclusion as the Shia group applied their defensive rhetoric, stating that they required their arms in case of another Israeli invasion. The dialogue concluded in July after Hezbollah insistently reiterated and promised that it would absolutely refrain from engaging in any action that would put the summer tourist season at risk, especially at such a time of economic recession in Lebanon.¹⁴⁹

However, the group also promised the return of the remaining three of four Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails. Realistically, the Hezbollah leaders and its supporters were convinced that the group’s rising military power, aid, and arsenal provided by Iran

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

and Syria would be sufficient in deterring Israel from penetrating Lebanese territory once again. Secretary-General Nasrallah believed that this operation would receive limited retaliation from the Israeli forces and result in a quick, impressive success that would silence those who opposed Hezbollah's decision to maintain arms.¹⁵⁰ To Hezbollah's dismay - and Lebanon's utter surprise - after the group launched its attack to retrieve the Lebanese soldiers, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to respond with a large-scale retaliation, devoted to destroying Hezbollah as a military force. Israel was supported by its U.S. ally, as both nations were keen to engage in a proxy war in Lebanon intended to diminish Iran's influence and demolish what the U.S. deemed as a terrorist group (Hezbollah).¹⁵¹

In response to Hezbollah rockets that killed two in Israel, on July 14th 2006, Israel enforced an entire naval blockade on Lebanon and sent airstrikes into Lebanon that hit all three runways the Beirut International Airport, two Lebanese Army bases, Hezbollah's Al Manar television station, and the main highway between Beirut and Damascus, Syria.¹⁵² Israel placed the blame of Hezbollah's actions on the Lebanese government, stating that "the cross-border raid that captured two of its soldiers on Wednesday was an unprovoked act of war by a neighboring state," even though the government was unaware of Hezbollah's intentions to take action.¹⁵³ While the European Union minorly criticized Israel for "the disproportionate use of force in Lebanon in response to attacks by Hezbollah on Israel," Hezbollah still received international

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁵² Hassan M. Fattah and Steven Erlanger, "Israel Attacks Beirut Airport and Sets Up Naval Blockade," *The New York Times*, July 13, 2006.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

condemnation from not only Western countries, but also key Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, for “violating Israel’s border and snatching the soldiers, especially since Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from the country six years before.”¹⁵⁴

Nonetheless, Israel’s response to Hezbollah absolutely devastated the country, destroying Lebanon’s airport and necessary infrastructure such as internal transportation. The timing of the attack was particularly troubling as it followed Hariri’s death in 2005, and the recent civil war. Lebanon faced severe reconstruction bills costing around \$4-5 billion, and over 1,109 civilian deaths and 15,000 family homes destroyed.¹⁵⁵ Over 78 bridges required rebuilding and would take until 2008. Lebanon’s economy relies heavily on tourism, and as a result of the 2006 July bombings, around \$2 billion in income was forfeited at a time when the country’s national debt was \$40 billion (twice the annual GDP - one of the highest debt levels in the world).¹⁵⁶

The majority of the country blamed Hezbollah, rather than the Lebanese government, for meddling with Israel in the first place. The 2006 war also deepened the already present Sunni-Shia tensions by completely splitting Lebanon into two divisions politically – those who supported Hezbollah (largely Shia) and those who opposed it (largely Sunni). While Hezbollah maintained a large Christian and Shia following due to the resources and benefits they provide the Shia community (March 8 group), the Sunnis, Christians, Druze and any others that were previously the slightest supportive of Hezbollah after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 ultimately turned against the group,

¹⁵⁴ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

demanding its disarmament (March 14th group). As the March 14th coalition held power in parliament during the time of the 2006 war, the group deemed Hezbollah's actions extremely provocative and a form of coup d'état, charging the Shia group of being Iran and Syria's Islamic pawn in their proxy war against Israel and the West.¹⁵⁷

Following the conclusion of the 2006 war, on October 31st Hezbollah's SG Nasrallah posed an ultimatum to the Lebanese government. The government was to approve of a national unity government or face retaliation with protests and blockades, such as those on main highways and routes.¹⁵⁸ Unwilling to give Hezbollah what they want, especially after their role in the 2006 war, the government denied to provide the group with what they wanted. This caused all five Shia members of the government to abruptly depart in November, with intentions to create uncertainty regarding the government's legitimacy.¹⁵⁹ Hezbollah claimed that according to the Taif Agreement every major sect must be represented in government, and since the Shia community was no longer represented, the government should not be allowed to function.¹⁶⁰ As the March 14th alliance refused to accept their opposition's vocalization of government failure, Hezbollah and its supporters turned to widespread demonstrations "announcing that they would not budge until the government succumbed."¹⁶¹ The lack of an efficient government in Lebanon only worsened the relations between the Sunnis and Shias, causing dangerous fights and several deaths between the two sects in the protests that preceded until January.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

2006 Onwards

The government in Lebanon has continually proven itself to be an illegitimate and weak institution that is incapable of making sovereign domestic and foreign political decisions. Since Hariri's assassination, the politics in Lebanon have been controlled by Iran-backed March 8 coalition, directed by Hezbollah, and the Saudi-backed March 14 group, commanded by the Future Movement – which is led by Saad Hariri, the son of the late prime minister. Both coalitions, in the context of the proxy war between Iran and Saudi, possess conflicting interests in the Syrian war. To Hezbollah, a victory for Syrian President Assad would assure that the group receives numerous military and economic benefits, along with the expansion of Iran's political influence in Lebanon. On the other hand, the March 14th coalition views the failure of the Assad regime as a way to diminish Hezbollah's increasing power in Lebanese politics and expel Iran's dominance.¹⁶²

Additionally, Hezbollah's political involvement in Lebanon has heightened the sectarian tensions in the region and exacerbated the Sunni-Shia divide. Although the Shiite group emerged as a force committed to combating Israel, it has much evolved.¹⁶³ Its political members include government ministers, legislators, and local counselors, while its military wing is heavily involved in the backing of Shia Regime of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian war, and more recently plays a role in Yemen and Iraq.¹⁶⁴ Hezbollah's deep engagements in the neighboring Syrian war have upset many Lebanese civilians, as they have faced the repercussions of the party's actions. For instance, in November 2015 in an attempt to target Hezbollah, the Islamic State executed double

¹⁶² Lina Khatib, "Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict."

¹⁶³ Yaya Fanusie and Alex Entz, "Hezbollah: Financial Assessment."

¹⁶⁴ "Sectarian Conflict in Lebanon," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Updated January 5, 2018.

suicide bomb attacks in Beirut, killing forty-three people and harming over two hundred.¹⁶⁵

Resentment and disputes over Hezbollah's involvement in Syria "led to the resignation of the Lebanese cabinet in 2013 and a subsequent ten-month long political vacuum," once again portraying the weakness of the political institutions in Lebanon.¹⁶⁶ The sectarianism caused divisions over election law reforms, resulting in postponed elections from June 2013 to November 2014, and then to June 2017.¹⁶⁷

Nonetheless, Hezbollah maintains a sizeable Shia following in Lebanon due to the positive contributions made to the Shiite community, including building an array of institutions and providing public services such as health centers, schools, and clinics, among others.¹⁶⁸ Taking family members into account, the group has an average payroll of 400,000, providing Hezbollah salaries to a quarter of Lebanon's Shias/ approximately one-tenth of the entire population. On the other hand, a substantial portion of Lebanese – particularly the Sunnis – view Hezbollah's engagements as detrimental to the country and prayed for its defeat in the 2006 war.¹⁶⁹ The Christian community has split between both sides, creating political deadlock and paralyzing the government.

The tensions in the regions and the Syrian civil war have significantly altered the mechanisms of inter-sectarian mobilization in Lebanon. What was once interest-based and political mobilization has shifted into more identity-based and religious modes of mobilization. Both the Sunni and Shia communities are perceiving a newfound existential

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Lina Khatib, "Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict."

¹⁶⁷ Doug Bandow, "Squabbling Politicians Push Lebanon to Sectarian Brink," *Huffpost*, October 19, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

¹⁶⁹ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics."

threat in addition to defending one's resources and power. This fight for the survival of one's very sect has accompanied the encompassing sectarian rivalries that are only worsening in the region.

Underdevelopment in a Politically Sectarian Landscape

Corruption in every Lebanese Corner

Since the termination of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, Lebanon has experienced consecutive political paralysis and internal waves of crises that have negatively impacted the country's economy and ability to function. The management of the country has long been executed with the underlying theme of how best to maximize personal profits while doing the bare minimum. The corruption, as a result, has reflected poorly on several aspects of the economy and Lebanon itself. The nature of this exploitation in government, as politicians squabble over who reaps the most benefits, has led to weak provision of key public services, such as waste disposal, reliable electricity, clean water, transportation, healthcare, construction, natural resources, and social assistance programs.¹⁷⁰ To this day, Lebanon has yet to target investments and innovations that would provide sustainable infrastructure to prevent and help diminish the crises that amount. This demonstrates the level of neglect towards ambitious planning and tending to the public. The way in which the Lebanon's sectarian-based government was constructed, as "a system that drives politicians and leaders to act sectarian or else risk missing a promotion or being punished by their constituents," has played a significant role in the corruption present today.¹⁷¹

Since Lebanon's independence, the country has been unsuccessful at developing a legitimate government institution that fosters a sense of citizenship and national

¹⁷⁰ Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012.

¹⁷¹ "Lebanon and its Multiple Challenges." *Brookings*, January 31, 2013.

identity. The irrelevance of large-scale structural modifications crucial to producing tangible advancements to all municipalities has led to a lack of faith in the state's weak institutions. The power-sharing arrangement has allowed the Lebanese state to neglect its obligations and duties, as each citizen turns to their sect constituent for rights and representation, "opening up the space for political parties, charities, religious organizations, NGOs, and various branches of the UN to fill the needs of communities and keep them afloat."¹⁷² Consequently, the Lebanese citizens have no reason to trust their government, thus revealing its role as an illegitimate institution.

This chapter aims to provide insight into the ways in which government corruption and political sectarianism in Lebanon has infected the country's ability to function and, as a result, deteriorated the path to development. Simultaneously, I aim to portray the ramifications of underdevelopment, and how they have recently worsened the relations between certain sects, such as the Sunni-Shia divide. The involvement of foreign states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the U.S. has contributed to the political stagnation through exacerbating the Sunni-Shia divisions in Lebanon. Thus, the amalgamation of corruption, political sectarianism, and foreign intervention, all band together to inhibit Lebanon's ability to develop, while also allowing the Sunni-Shia divide to reach a breaking point.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Nathalie Bekdache, "Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience," *International Alert*, 2015.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Political Stagnation + a Proxy War¹⁷⁴

When Hariri resigned there was this uneasy general feeling that the economy might crash, or that we're going to have another void where our government should be. This created a sense of uncertainty for the people and their jobs. It shook the stability of the country and people's confidence in the future of the nation. Just before Hariri resigned everyone was hopeful because we had recently elected a President and things were starting to look up... But this was just another reminder that Lebanon is not a stable country. – Karim, AUB student

Lebanon's government experienced a political vacuum starting May 25, 2014, when Michel Suleiman concluded his role as the Lebanese president. It wasn't until Maronite Michel Aoun was elected on October 31, 2016, that this vacuum came to an end - over two-and-a-half years later.¹⁷⁵ The Lebanese political parties and parliament underwent "46 rounds of voting and multiple backroom discussions" before finally agreeing on Aoun for the candidacy.¹⁷⁶ The failure to conduct a quick and accurate vote in a timely manner was largely due to the rival factions blocking one another.¹⁷⁷

Newly elected Maronite President Aoun is part of the Iran-backed, pro-Syrian Assad Regime, *March 8th alliance*, along with Shiite group Hezbollah and its followers.¹⁷⁸ This newly formed government also consists of Sunni Saad Hariri as Prime Minister, who ironically leads the opposing pro-Western, Saudi-backed *March 14th alliance*, along with his Sunni, Christian, and Druze followers.¹⁷⁹ This post-2006 vertical split in the country between the March 8 and March 14 alliances represents the growing

¹⁷⁴ Portions of this paper have been taken from a previous paper I wrote titled, "Review of United States Policy toward Hezbollah." The original sources have been cited rather than citing myself, so that the reader can directly reference the data or arguments being made.

¹⁷⁵ Jacob Uzman, "A Country in Crisis? Challenges facing Lebanon's new Government," *Nations and States*, December 16, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Diana Hodali, "New President - but no new Lebanon."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

sectarian tensions in the government that must be managed in order to establish a credible government and reinvigorate the concept of Lebanese citizenship. For the most part, these political parties have failed to overcome their differences, widening the Sunni-Shia split in Lebanon.

During Lebanon's long political paralysis, the neighboring Syrian civil war was rapidly escalating, pulling Turkey, Iran, Russia, and the United States into its embrace. With the heightened presence of the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Lebanon quickly became a pawn in their chess game, worsening the ongoing Sunni-Shia divide. Aoun is largely criticized by Hariri's Sunni supporters as his election is viewed as a win for Hezbollah and Iran's plan of Shiite power consolidation in the Middle East. Majority of the Sunnis in Lebanon disapprove of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, and are demanding that the group give up their arms. This regional rivalry has aggravated polarization between Lebanese representations, resulting in a disruption of the country's delicate balance of power. The distinct domestic agendas, each influenced by opposing foreign actors, have made the political crises close to unresolvable within Lebanon. This newly elected government, with *Michel Aoun (Maronite)* as *President* and *Saad Hariri (Sunni)* as *Prime Minister*, is left with many domestic and international challenges to face.

The following section serves to provide the reader with an understanding of regional perspectives and foreign influences that play a current role in Lebanon's political stagnation.

Iran. Predominantly Shiite Iran has interests in growing its power in the region, inevitably destabilizing multiple countries in the process. Iran-backed Hezbollah is no longer just a domestic political group intended to help Lebanon fight Israel, but is now an Iranian proxy playing a key role in sectarian conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.¹⁸⁰ Iran maintains its substantial annual funding to Hezbollah, providing the group with \$700-800 million worth of financial aid in 2016-17, via suitcases of cash by flying it over Iran and/or trafficking it through Syria and Turkey.¹⁸¹ With the help of Hezbollah, Iran has been expanding its scope of influence in the region. Lebanese members of the March 14th alliance oppose Iran's increasing role in Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a predominantly Sunni state that has been in conflict with Shia Iran, and opposes its regional military arm, Hezbollah. The Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri is heavily supported by Saudi Arabia as they are both Sunni actors advocating to "cut off Iran's hands in the region."¹⁸² Riyadh has recently been more involved with the sectarian conflict in Lebanon, encouraging the Sunni Prime Minister Hariri to resign on Saudi territory as a way to expose the overbearing involvement of Tehran in Lebanon through its proxy, Hezbollah.¹⁸³ Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is an important ally of the U.S. for security and critical energy supplier reasons, especially under the current Trump administration, as "he [is] eager to distance himself from his predecessor's pro-Iranian inclinations and repair U.S. tensions with Saudi Arabia and

¹⁸⁰ Matthew Levitt, "How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah," *Foreign Affairs*, July 23, 2015.

¹⁸¹ Andrew Higgins, "Branded Terrorist by U.S., Israel, Microcredit Czar Keeps Lending," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 28, 2006.

¹⁸² David Kenner, "The Saudis Go for Broke Against Iran," *Foreign Policy*, November 8, 2017.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Israel from the Obama years.”¹⁸⁴ Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia is persistent in pushing Washington to develop a more aggressive attitude against Iran.¹⁸⁵

Syria. The Tehran-backed Hezbollah militia is deeply engaged in the Syrian war in support of the Shiite Assad regime, with approximately 6,000 to 8,000 fighters deployed there.¹⁸⁶ Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria is opposed by a significant portion of the Lebanese population as it is causing sectarian strife in the region, especially angering the Lebanese Sunni population. Hezbollah would also benefit from a funding increase if the Assad regime wins the Syrian Civil War.¹⁸⁷ This would give Iran more influence in the region, and raise the chances of Hezbollah-affiliated companies to ‘win construction contracts in Iraq and Syria.’¹⁸⁸

United States. While the U.S. may not be directly involved with Lebanese affairs, it’s engagements with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Syria indirectly impact Lebanese policy. Iran’s power consolidation in the MENA region is viewed as a threat to U.S. security interests. In October 2017, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Royce stated, “Hezbollah is Iran’s leading terrorist proxy and it is only growing more dangerous. It now has an arsenal of more than 100,000 rockets aimed at Israel, [...] has taken hundreds of thousands of lives, including American lives. We send a strong message that the United States will not allow this threat to go unchecked.”¹⁸⁹ As a result, especially under

¹⁸⁴ Aaron D. Miller and Richard Sokolsky, “Donald Trump Has Unleashed the Saudi Arabia We Always Wanted — and Feared,” *Foreign Policy*, November 10, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Dan De Luce, “Syrian War Takes Rising Toll on Hezbollah,” *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2015.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Yaya Fanusie and Alex Entz, “Hezbollah: Financial Assessment,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ “House Cracks Down on Iran Terror Proxy Hezbollah,” U.S. Foreign Affairs Committee, October 25, 2017.

the current Trump administration, the U.S. has sided with Saudi Arabia to diminish Iran's power, which ultimately affects Lebanese stability.¹⁹⁰

The current situation in Lebanon is highly volatile due to Hezbollah domination and Iranian influence. Escalated tensions between the sectarian groups in Lebanon led to Hariri's recent resignation from his role as Lebanese Prime Minister in Saudi Arabia on November 4th, 2017. These efforts were coordinated with U.S. President Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman.¹⁹¹ In a televised interview, Hariri stated that "Iran controls the region and the decision-making in both Syria and Iraq," and is devastating Lebanon through its involvement with Hezbollah.¹⁹² As Lebanese politician Yassine Jaber stated, "there's one question anyone who wants to put pressure on Lebanon should remember: Do you want another failed state on the Eastern Mediterranean?"¹⁹³

A Devastated Economy Here to Last

I went to a top university in Lebanon, studied International Business, and graduated at the top of my class. Yet, I was making nothing at my first job. I made \$800 a month, which I spent on gas, parking, and basic necessities - and that's not even considered a meager amount in Lebanon! No one is happy and everyone spends the majority of their time and income on clubbing. A large amount of Lebanese citizens have moved abroad and become expats. Why do you think they would leave? There are no job opportunities for them here - there is no chance at making a living and having a sustainable lifestyle with a family.

– Sarah, Lebanese American University Graduate (LAU)

¹⁹⁰ Anna Edgerton, "Iran Sanctions Over Support for Hezbollah Pass U.S. House," *Bloomberg*, October 25, 2017.

¹⁹¹ Chandrika Narayan, "Lebanon's Prime Minister resigns, plunging nation into new political crisis," *CNN*, November 5, 2017.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Lisa Barrington, "Changes to proposed U.S. anti-Hezbollah sanctions allay Lebanon's fears," *Reuters*, August 26, 2017.

Lebanon maintains a service-oriented, free-market economy that is heavily dependent on the banking, tourism, and real estate sectors.¹⁹⁴ Yet, to Lebanon's discontent, the economy is extremely fragile and incapable of growth as it's been subject to a six year neighboring war in Syria, financial crises, and an influx of Syrian refugees. The Lebanese civil war left a massive dent in the country's economy as Lebanon had large debts to pay and even larger reconstruction efforts to fund. The country's inescapable high level of corruption, with Lebanon "ranked number 146 on the Corruption Monitor Index for 2014 (1 being least corrupt),"¹⁹⁵ has prevented the economy from growing more than a sparse 2% in the past two years.¹⁹⁶ As of 2016, the country maintains one of the largest debt-to-GDP ratios in the world, with "Lebanon's government debt skyrocketing to 144 percent of GDP - only topped by Japan and Greece [...] Lebanon relies on inflows of outside capital to maintain the peg."¹⁹⁷ Power and wealth in Lebanon are highly concentrated within entrenched elites, creating soaring poverty lines and worsening sectarianism between municipalities.

Saudi Arabia-Iran Proxy War on Lebanese Economy

The Saudi-Iran cold war has manifested itself in several ways in Lebanon, negatively affecting the economy. When Lebanon disregarded the 2016 attack on Saudi Arabia's embassy in Iran, Saudi retaliated by aborting plans of \$4 billion of aid to Beirut.¹⁹⁸ This severely hurt Lebanon's economy as it chiefly depends on remittances

¹⁹⁴ Nathalie Bekdache, "Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Lisa Barrington, "Changes to proposed U.S. anti-Hezbollah sanctions allay Lebanon's fears."

¹⁹⁷ Hannes Baumann, "Lebanon's economic dependence on Saudi Arabia is dangerous," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2017.

¹⁹⁸ Jacob Uzman, "A Country in Crisis? Challenges facing Lebanon's new Government."

(approximately billions of dollars) from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, several countries that are part of the GCC followed Saudi's lead and contributed to Lebanon's punishment by releasing travel advisories against Lebanon, with the United Arab Emirates going as far as imposing a travel ban.²⁰⁰ Other GCC countries "terminated the service and residency permits of Lebanese employees and immediately deported them."²⁰¹ Many GCC governments and authorities have banned or advised their citizens against travelling to Lebanon due to stated 'safety concerns' regarding Lebanon's domestic political instability. Yet, while it is true that Lebanon faces shaky security, the underlying regional proxy war is a main contributing factor to the hostility of GCC countries. Nonetheless, the travel bans and weak safety circumstances in Lebanon have devastated the tourism sector and the economy.

The banking sector is also walking a tightrope as Lebanese analysts predict that there was little to no growth in 2017.²⁰² The banking sector is highly reliant on depositors and investors as they play an essential role in upholding the country's power - however, this dependency has become extremely dangerous as several investors, especially GCC countries, have reduced their assistance. From 2003-2015, the financial aid of three Gulf countries "accounted for 76% of new foreign direct investment projects in Lebanon, [...] remittances averaged about 20% of the country's annual GDP over the past 10 years, with 60% coming from the Gulf countries."²⁰³ As political instability worsens and the

¹⁹⁹ Elias Al Araj, "How The War on Syria left Its Mark on Lebanon's Economy," *Al-Monitor*, May 13, 2016.

²⁰⁰ Jacob Uzman, "A Country in Crisis? Challenges facing Lebanon's new Government."

²⁰¹ Elias Al Araj, "How The War on Syria left Its Mark on Lebanon's Economy."

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Hannes Baumann, "Lebanon's economic dependence on Saudi Arabia is dangerous."

war in Syria continues, investors have become more reluctant to invest in Lebanon's unpredictable economy. This has led foreign and domestic investors to locate alternative destinations and companies abroad, such as in Cyprus.²⁰⁴

Consequences of International Sanctions on Lebanon's Stability

The Lebanese people have taken the brunt of international condemnations and economic sanctions as a result of Hezbollah's actions, which inevitably impairs the country's economy.²⁰⁵ The U.S., Israel, France, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and the Arab League (excluding Lebanon and Iraq - both with substantial Shia populations), have designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.²⁰⁶ Since the U.S. Treasury's designation of Hezbollah in 2012, the U.S. has taken multiple countermeasures to restrict Hezbollah's access to finances.²⁰⁷ In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA),²⁰⁸ which was intended to restrict Hezbollah and its Lebanese Al-Manar TV channel's access to banking in Lebanon, inhibiting the organization's financial operations.²⁰⁹ The act imposed sanctions on Hezbollah's international and domestic fundraising networks and threatened to close the accounts of individuals or businesses caught funding Hezbollah, including members funding the group through drug trafficking and money laundering.²¹⁰

The Lebanese economy is significantly dollarized, with "65% of deposits in Lebanon in U.S. dollars, and 72% of loans denominated in U.S. dollars," and thus

²⁰⁴ Elias Al Araj, "How The War on Syria left Its Mark on Lebanon's Economy."

²⁰⁵ David Kenner, "The Saudis Go for Broke Against Iran."

²⁰⁶ Paul Cochrane, "The Impact of the USA's Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act on Lebanon," Triangle Consultants, July 4, 2016.

²⁰⁷ "Treasury Designates Hizballah Leadership," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, September 13, 2012.

²⁰⁸ "H.R.2297 - Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015," *U.S. Congress*, 2015.

²⁰⁹ Sami Nadir, "Lebanon's banks to pay price of sanctions on Hezbollah," *Al-Monitor*, October 14, 2016.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

depends on their U.S. correspondent banks to operate.²¹¹ The Lebanese banks' primary concern is that U.S. correspondent banks, "which face huge fines if found to be dealing with people or companies sanctioned under anti-terrorism financing legislation, might finally decide Lebanese banks are too risky to do business with."²¹² The HIFPA sanctions directly threatened this relationship between the Lebanese and U.S. banks. As a result, the Lebanese central bank issued instructions to close accounts of individuals or institutions linked to Hezbollah to avoid being denied access to international financial markets.²¹³ Terminated accounts included those of 'Hezbollah parliamentarians, as well as the group's major hospitals such as Al-Saroul al-A'zam, and foundations such as the Martyrs Foundation and Imdad Committee.²¹⁴ This act was thus successful in the closing of hundreds of Lebanese bank accounts associated with Hezbollah, yet simultaneously affected institutions that provided social service support to the Shia community.

While it is in the U.S. interest to completely restrict Hezbollah's finances, Lebanon is torn between desiring the elimination of Hezbollah and maintaining its existence because of the substantial Lebanese Shia population that supports the group due to the services Hezbollah provides them.²¹⁵ Hezbollah is very much integrated into Lebanon's political system, with its leverage increasing through its veto power over cabinet decisions.²¹⁶ Hezbollah also spends approximately \$600 million a year in payments and social services provided to Shia, Sunnis, and Christians lacking support

²¹¹ David Kenner, "The Saudis Go for Broke Against Iran."

²¹² Lisa Barrington, "Changes to proposed U.S. anti-Hezbollah sanctions allay Lebanon's fears."

²¹³ Reuters Staff, "Bomb blast in central Beirut aimed at bank minister," Reuters, June 12, 2016.

²¹⁴ Tony Badran, "Hezbollah's Incendiary Threat to Lebanon's Banks," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 13, 2016.

²¹⁵ Yaya Fanusie and Alex Entz, "Hezbollah: Financial Assessment."

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

from the government. Taking family members into account, Hezbollah has an average payroll of 400,000, providing salaries to a quarter of Lebanon's' Shias, or approximately one-tenth of the entire population. Hezbollah's social services, such as health centers, schools, clinics, charitable institutions, no longer cater to the entire community due to depleted funding.²¹⁷

The HIFPA sanctions have resulted in small victories per U.S. interests in blocking Hezbollah's funding, yet the group continues to obtain ample funds to deploy substantial militias in Lebanon and Syria, and smaller forces to Iraq and Yemen.²¹⁸ On the other hand however, the sanctions have had an extensive negative impact on the stability of Lebanon and its banking sector. After the implementation of HIFPA in 2015, Hezbollah retaliated against the bank's decision to close Hezbollah-associated accounts by detonating a bomb containing 15 kg of explosive material outside the headquarters of Lebanese Blom Bank - the second largest bank in Lebanon and one of the institutions that had complied with HIFPA.²¹⁹ The bombing caused large-scale material damage but no casualties. Hezbollah's response to Lebanon's application of the U.S. HIFPA law was that "it would lead to bankruptcy and a rift between a large segment of the Lebanese population and the banks,"²²⁰ while also accusing the banking sector of starting a financial war against them.²²¹

The Lebanese banking sector has been at the core of an intensifying crisis. The Blom Bank incident is representative of the threat these U.S. laws and sanctions pose to

²¹⁷ Hanin Ghaddar, "Economic Alternatives Could Help Split Shiites From Hezbollah," The Washington Institute, October 18, 2016.

²¹⁸ Yaya Fanusie and Alex Entz, "Hezbollah: Financial Assessment."

²¹⁹ Reuters Staff, "Bomb blast in central Beirut aimed at bank minister."

²²⁰ "Explosion rocks Blom Bank headquarters in Beirut," Al Jazeera, June 12, 2016.

²²¹ Tony Badran, "Hezbollah's Incendiary Threat to Lebanon's Banks."

the Lebanese economy, devastating its stability.²²² Inevitably, Hezbollah's association with the attack resulted in increased political and sectarian tensions, heightening instability as the Lebanese community increasingly splits between those in support of Hezbollah and those in support of the Sunni Prime Minister Hariri.²²³

The Absence of Basic Necessities: Electricity, Trash, Water, Transportation

Electricity

It's really hard for people to be change agents because every time they try, the government just doesn't listen. My friend's mom works for Electricite Du Liban (EDL). EDL stopped working for the entirety of December because the government didn't pay their salaries. They've been protesting for a couple weeks now, but the government still hasn't paid them. Kilo aal fadi! (It is all a waste of time). This affects the workers who aren't receiving the salary they're relying on, and it affects our people that are now dealing with a lack of electricity. Nothing is stable. You can lose your job in a day and have no money to rely on. It is absolutely terrifying. – Rana, LAU Graduate

The Lebanese administration has continuously struggled with providing government services to its municipalities, with one of the oldest challenges being the generation of reliable electricity. This persists even today in the 21st century. Electricity is no longer the luxury it once was, but a fundamental necessity that the government is incapable of providing due to the political paralysis, weak governance, and corruption.

Electricity cuts are frequent in Lebanon, with three-hour blackouts a day in Beirut, and up to twelve hours per day in the rest of the country.²²⁴ The extreme recurrence of energy cuts leaves the Lebanese citizens no choice but to pay for personal

²²² “Explosion rocks Blom Bank headquarters in Beirut.”

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

generators. This is both pricey and destructive to the environment as they are fueled by diesel.²²⁵ Up to 30% of electricity generated in Lebanon is self-generated, leaving these citizens with costs of two separate electricity bills - one for EDL, and the other for the generators that cost twice the price.²²⁶ The average Lebanese household consumed \$1,300 on electricity in 2013, “in a country where the gross national income per capita is \$9,800, according to World Bank estimates.”²²⁷ Private companies must also rely on generators for electricity, increasing company costs and inevitably hurting Lebanese businesses.

Electricite du Liban (EDL) is Lebanon’s state-owned, primary provider of electricity, “mandated with the responsibility of the generation, transmission, and distribution of electrical energy in Lebanon.”²²⁸ The presence of a single electricity provider in Lebanon that manages over 90% of the sector is a main source of the energy issue. EDL’s monopolization of the electricity industry has resulted in a substantial shortage of electricity generation that is required to meet citizen demand. Whenever EDL’s electricity is faulty or cuts off due to corruption in government, the Lebanese citizens have nothing else to rely on, unless they own a costly generator. Further, the Lebanese government allocates 15% of its annual expenditures, equivalent to \$2 billion a year, on subsidies to obtain fuel for EDL.²²⁹ In contrast, the government only spends 7% of its funds on education, and 9% on health.²³⁰ With the government spending this much

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Farouk Fardoun, Oussama Ibrahim, Rafic Younes, and Hasna Louahlia-Gualous, "Electricity of Lebanon: Problems and Recommendations," *Energy Procedia* 19 (June 6, 2012): 310-20.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Sylvia Westall, “No light at end of tunnel for Lebanon's power crisis,” *Reuters*, October 26, 2015.

²³⁰ Ibid.

of its resources on electricity, one would expect the system to be flawless. Evidently, it is far from that. As Salim, AUB graduate and Civil Engineer, says when addressing the energy situation,

The Lebanese government has no problem renting fuel from Turkey for \$1.8 billion, but realistically, with that money they could create their own power plants. They are unable to do this unfortunately, because politics and money get in the way. An excessive amount of money is dedicated to this sector with no tangible results. If the government decentralized the electricity industry, it would allow other people to develop solutions to the problem. Yet, politicians and decision makers choose not to privatize these utilities because they wouldn't be able to profit off it. What ends up happening is that the money that is supposedly intended for investing in EDL's production goes straight into the pockets of politicians.

As Salim makes clear, each politician is concerned with reaping the largest profits off of their contract with EDL, that it often stagnates the process and the company's ability to function. According to Agence France Presse, "more than \$500 million ended up in the pockets of leaders, ministers, and entrepreneurs" that was intended for investment in the energy sector.²³¹ Political elites make deals with companies that make offers to pay them large amounts to uphold their contract. Several political elites have even utilized the distribution of free energy to their constituents in attempts of re-election, leaving 55% of EDL bills uncollected.²³² Today, EDL's collective deficit is approximately \$27 billion, comprising 40% of Lebanon's public debt.²³³ With the significant amount of money that goes into sustaining EDL's functionality each year, the government should be able to create a more sustainable mechanism for electricity generation.

²³¹ Ziad Abdelnour, "The Corruption Behind Lebanon's Electricity Crisis," *Middle East Intelligence*, August 2003.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Jean Aziz, "Lebanon's continued electricity cuts portend disaster," *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2015.

Additionally, the refugee crisis in Lebanon has made the cost of electricity increasingly higher, with costs rising from \$206 million in 2013 to \$432 million in 2014.²³⁴ According to a study conducted by The Ministry of Energy and Water in partnership with the UNDP, the influx of hundreds of Syrian refugee families into Lebanon, and their consumption of 486 kW on a daily basis has cut 5 hours of electricity a day for Lebanese households.²³⁵ Blackouts are largely prevalent in the countryside, where the majority of Lebanon's impoverished communities and the refugees reside, and can sometimes last up to a full day. Moreover, the sectarian strife in Lebanon has an impact on the energy sector. For instance, in 2012, the parliamentary committee proposed authorizing permanent contracts to EDL workers, providing them with long-term employment security. However, this proposal did not pass as Christian representatives accused this decision of benefitting more Muslims than Christians.²³⁶ In Lebanon, this is considered to be a bad thing as sectarian balance is required in most industries, and this proposal would upset the balance of power in the energy sector. Once again, corruption, divisions, and disagreements among rival politicians in the Lebanese government infiltrate the path to development and stability.

On a more positive note, there are now prospects for Lebanon to become an oil-exporting country after the government awarded several companies gas exploration licenses in December 2017.²³⁷ The IMF had approved the creation of the Lebanese

²³⁴ Nathalie Bekdache, "Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience."

²³⁵ "Refugee Crisis Hits Lebanon's Electricity Network." *United Nations Development Programme*, Last Updated 2018.

²³⁶ Richard Hall, "Lebanon's got 99 problems and trash is just one," *Public Radio International (PRI)*, August 24, 2015.

²³⁷ Osama Habib, "Lebanon a step closer to clarifying its oil prospects," *The Daily Star*, December 15, 2017.

National Oil Company much before 2017, yet unsurprisingly, due to the government corruption there have been many delays in initiating this process.²³⁸ The Lebanese government refrained from investing in oil exploration on the city's coast, even though it was estimated to contain "96 trillion cubic meters of gas and 865 million barrels of oil."²³⁹ It's still unclear whether the oil companies will be able to extract anything off the Lebanese coast, but in the case that they are successful, this could be significant for Lebanon's economic growth and energy production.

Trash

When asked about the origin of the trash crisis:

Ifih (gross), it's all political! The government used to dispose of all the trash in the Jumblatt's Druze area called Naameh, even though it wasn't the Druze's trash. In addition to that, the government did not provide any aid to the municipality or manage any health concerns. Understandably, the Druze got frustrated, and Jumblatt told the administration that they should go throw their trash in their own hometown instead of destroying his. This led the government to start dividing the trash into different areas based on representation! One of the areas was Muslim dominated called Costa Brava, and the other was a Christian area called Bourj Hammoud. Neither of those areas was a good place to dispose of the trash as one is near the beach in Beirut, and the other near the airport. It is awful for the environment, and the entire city STUNK! If the representatives in government cooperated and pooled funds, I'm sure they could've found a more economical and environmentally conscious way to dispose of the trash. But of course, sectarian politics permits such things from happening. – Tanya, AUB Student

Following the Civil War, the Lebanese government has largely focused its waste management efforts on Beirut and Mount Lebanon, abandoning the remaining municipalities to manage the waste themselves without financial or technical support.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Rami Rayees, "Dim Prospects for Lebanon's Economy." *The Arab Weekly*, June 4, 2017.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Bassam Khawaja, "As If You're Inhaling Your Death," *Human Rights Watch*, December 1, 2017.

While trash disposal has been an issue in lower-income areas for several decades, the trash crisis recently reemerged as a massive problem due to the collapse of the waste management system in 2015. The closing of the city's landfill led to excessive piling of trash on the streets, including in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Since the start of the crisis in 2015 until June 2017, the Lebanese fire department has dealt with 4,426 cases of open waste burning in Lebanon, with the number of reports exceeding over 500% in the last two years.²⁴¹ According to the World Health Organization, Beirut's air pollution has exceeded the safety limit by 70%, leading to over 1,500 pollution-related deaths a year.

In July 2015, the vile overflow of trash became too abominable to ignore after the city's landfill closed, causing thousands of Lebanese protesters to take to the streets of Beirut and form a non-political, and non-sectarian movement known as "You Stink."²⁴² The citizens have long overlooked the corruption and inaction in the Lebanese government, but the ongoing trash problem sparked a strong sentiment of discontent and extensive frustration, inviting the "largest public action" Lebanon has seen in many years.²⁴³ While the protests began calmly, several enraged protestors engaged in damaging property and even starting fires in the capital. The security forces responded by discharging tear gas and rubber bullets, resulting in 400 injuries (99 of which were policemen) and 32 arrests.²⁴⁴ In reality, the protests regarding the trash represented frustration and anger of Lebanese citizens over a culmination of issues that all stem from the sectarian nature of government. This includes the political vacuum that persisted for

²⁴¹ Bassam Khawaja, "As If You're Inhaling Your Death."

²⁴² Richard Hall, "Lebanon's got 99 problems and trash is just one."

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

over a year, shaky electricity, government corruption, millions of refugees, and the neighboring civil war that Lebanese groups, such as Hezbollah, are involved in.

The citizens were most irritated by the situation considering that environmental activists in Lebanon had been extremely vocal about the landfill being full for quite a while. Yet, the government failed to consider alternative arrangements.²⁴⁵ As Lebanese journalist Tamara Qiblawi said, *“The infuriating thing is it that the government knew the exact hour the landfill would expire. They knew the exact hour the trash crisis would begin, yet they did nothing about it. And when it struck, the entire conversation among the political leaders was about how to divide the spoils.”*²⁴⁶ This further highlights the corruption present in government, as politicians base their decisions and actions not on the needs of their constituents, but rather on the profits they will be making. The system works like this: if the contract with a waste management company costs \$1 million, politicians will say it costs \$5 million and take the remaining \$4 million to divide upon themselves. If the politicians are willing to share the profits, things get passed, if not, they get blocked.

Although the protests of 2015 and 2016 seemed to have put an end to the trash problem as authorities claimed that they had developed a solution, as of 2017, the garbage crisis came back under the radar of the citizens as a result of trash burning and waste disposal in the sea. Several international actors accused the Lebanese government of environmental and health conditions and attempted to help Lebanon solve its trash crisis through funding and foreign interventions, but all efforts failed. The European

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Richard Hall, “Lebanon's got 99 problems and trash is just one.”

Union funded two sorting plant operations in Beirut that could manage up to 45% of the waste.²⁴⁷ Yet, the administration exploited these resources and neglected the maintenance - finding ways to cut corners to extract money for themselves at the sake of the environment. Instead of creating a viable solution with the EU funds and external assistance, the contractors turned to shifting the trash to coastal dumps, with an “estimated 2 million metric tons of waste” sitting on the shore of the Mediterranean sea, producing liquid pollution that is negatively affecting the marine wildlife.”²⁴⁸ By disposing of waste in the sea, Lebanon is breaching the 1995 Barcelona Convention agreement to preserve the marine environment of the Mediterranean.²⁴⁹

Additionally, due to the absence of a suitable disposable plant, many have taken to burning the trash on streets, near homes, schools, and hospitals, leading to what was referred to by the health minister as a “health catastrophe.”²⁵⁰ On one occasion, the trash burning was so severe and consistent outside a school in Naameh that the school had to call for emergency measures and cancel school for a couple weeks.²⁵¹ The Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report in 2017 titled, “As If You’re Inhaling Your Death,” outlining the severe short and long-term health risks of open burning of waste in Lebanon.²⁵² According to the HRW, the burning of waste leads to exposure “to fine particles, dioxins, volatile organic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon, and polychlorinated biphenyls, which have been linked to heart disease, cancer, skin diseases,

²⁴⁷ Martin Jay and Ruby Russell, “Lebanon Garbage Crisis Pollutes Mediterranean,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 14, 2017.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Richard Hall, “Lebanon's got 99 problems and trash is just one.”

²⁵¹ Bassam Khawaja, “As If You’re Inhaling Your Death.”

²⁵² Ibid.

asthma, and respiratory illnesses.”²⁵³ The government is legally compelled to ensure that its citizens’ health needs are met, yet they have not even provided their people with information regarding the potential risks of open burning and how to take safety precautions, leaving many families unaware how to protect their children. Hence, the Lebanese government is incapable of providing incentives or taking initiative to find sustainable, and potentially cheaper, solutions to the trash issue despite international assistance.

Water

Decreased amounts of precipitation, an awfully hot climate, and consistently inadequate management of water resources have created near-annual water shortages and crises in Lebanon.²⁵⁴ Shortages in the water supply to central cities such as Beirut have been firmly declining, while in less prominent regions, steady water supply averages from 8 to 13 hours a day in the summer and winter periods, correspondingly.²⁵⁵ Lower-income families that reside in the North and Beqaa areas, where the influx of refugees is highest, are most vulnerable as they lack connection to public water networks.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the enormous arrival of Syrian refugees has only drained the country’s renewable water resources. The Lebanese government has been incapable of supplying water and sanitation services “mainly due to the spatial and temporal variations in water availability, delayed implementation of critical storage, distribution and treatment

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Tamara Saade, “Lebanon May Face Water Shortage... Again,” *The Daily Star Lebanon*, July 11, 2016.

²⁵⁵ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

infrastructure and the incomplete institutional reforms needed to enable sustainable operations and cost-recovery of sector institutions.”²⁵⁷

There once was an abundance of snowfall and precipitation in Lebanon, but the recent climate changes have affected the volume of water available, producing lower-than-average water levels that contribute to the yearly water shortages. According to Rafik Hariri International Airport’s meteorological department, during winter of 2016, “rainfall was 509.4mm for Beirut, lower than the yearly average of 825 mm.”²⁵⁸ In 2014, Lebanon witnessed its driest year with no rainfall or snowfall since the 1980s. Obtaining sufficient precipitation has become a severe issue, especially for citizens involved in the agricultural industry. Farmers in Lebanon primarily rely on the rainfall that fills their rivers and wells to irrigate their plantations, accounting for 60% of the country’s water expenditures. As a result, in recent consecutive years these farmers had no choice but to “pump groundwater for irrigation, [of which] if the drought continues, only five percent of groundwater will be left.”²⁵⁹ The public infrastructures available to capture rainfall are extremely limited, with only 2 dams and 650 public wells. Oppositely, there are over 50,000 private wells inefficiently utilized for domestic water demand and irrigation - many of which have completely dried up or are suffering from salinization.²⁶⁰ Thus the majority of citizens, including those with private wells, are dependent on water trucks and government resources. Evidently, there is a discrepancy between the low levels of rainfall captured and the large amounts of water needed for daily use. The scarcity of

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Tamara Saade, “Lebanon May Face Water Shortage... Again.”

²⁵⁹ Sara Samad, “Everything You Need to Know about Lebanon’s Water Shortage,” *Beirut*, July 24, 2014.

²⁶⁰ Tamara Saade, “Lebanon May Face Water Shortage... Again.”

water has allowed for the independent furnishing of water through unplanned digging of wells in various municipalities, which is both expensive for the civilians and detrimental to the environment.²⁶¹

From my personal experience having lived in Lebanon, the deteriorating water supply levels have forced residents to develop defense mechanisms or alternative ways to manage the issue each summer. For instance, the building I live in maintains a salt-water system, in which all the tap water is composed of undrinkable salt water. Other citizens live in complexes or buildings that substitute conventional water purifiers with Chlorine - the cheap and harmful alternative. As a high intake of concentrated Chlorine may cause damage, the Lebanese households must refrain from cooking with it, turning to bottled water each time they want to cook. As you may imagine, continually relying on bottled water for cooking and drinking becomes an economic burden. Several Lebanese households must also pay two separate water bills: one for the government, and the other to private companies that provide them with water during droughts.

Even under the best circumstances, the Lebanese government struggles to regulate and refine its infrastructure for managing water resources. According to Fadi Comair, Director General at the Ministry of Energy, “70% of the water that moves through Lebanon’s 16 rivers ends up in the Mediterranean, and 48% of the water [they] do manage to collect ends up getting lost due to leakage and poor infrastructure.”²⁶² Lebanon requires a more integrated approach to water management. One solution recommended by several activists is the creation of a “closed water-use cycle,” in which wastewater is

²⁶¹ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

²⁶² Sara Samad, “Everything You Need to Know about Lebanon’s Water Shortage.”

not discarded but rather viewed as a reusable, purifiable resource.²⁶³ If Lebanon were to exploit its natural resources to their full potential with better water management, the country would be capable of substantially increasing its water supply.²⁶⁴ Until then, citizens that can afford to pay for purified water will face high costs, while others begin storing the water they do have through reducing their consumption.

Transportation

Beirut was once known as the ‘*Paris of the Middle East*’ for its astonishing functionality and unique culture of openness in the region. Alas, the civil war completely transformed the country and its infrastructure, comprehensively impairing the cities, roads, and train operations. Political tampering and intervention in Lebanon have largely constrained the capabilities of the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation.²⁶⁵ According to the ministry, 65% of the road networks are in mediocre condition, while 20% are doing very poorly.²⁶⁶ The ministry is unable to make beneficial modifications chiefly due to the meager financial resources and “poor maintenance, which is bestowing high costs on rehabilitation and reconstruction of many roads.”²⁶⁷

A significant implication of lacking a sustainable and effective transportation system and requisite infrastructure is worsened congestion on the streets. Lebanon’s traffic catastrophe might not sound so bad, but it has negatively impacted the daily lives of commuters and the economy. Beirut is especially overpopulated, as 1.3M out of

²⁶³ Tamara Saade, “Lebanon May Face Water Shortage... Again.”

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Lebanon's 4.5M citizens live in the capital.²⁶⁸ The majority of these residents must depend on private vehicles of transportation to get around as a consequence of having no public transportation. According to Urban Transport Development Project, "passenger vehicles reached 434 per 1,000 in 2012, ranking Lebanon at 17th place worldwide [...] indicating that 50% of Lebanese households own 1 car, while 25% own at least 2."²⁶⁹ The extremely high numbers of vehicles on the road create a profusion of traffic, especially during peak hours. Moreover, there are substantial economic costs of urban congestion which equate to 8% of Lebanon's GDP, approximately \$3 billion.²⁷⁰ Citizens that are stuck in traffic all day have less time to dedicate to their jobs, activities, and chores. Lebanese citizens have also incurred high costs for maintaining and operating their own private vehicles, including fuel, taxes, insurance, and car service. Driving in Lebanon is also extremely risky - with little to no traffic lights, distinct streets with specified directions, and liberally enforced rules. Finally, the rise in the number of vehicles on the road poses environmental concerns, with the transportation sector making up 25% of the country's CO2 emissions.²⁷¹ Even freight services have no choice but to make deliveries in their sizeable trucks on the streets as there are no existing railways, increasing street traffic and worsening the transportation inefficiencies.²⁷²

Lebanon is in critical need for reconstruction efforts targeted towards developing an effective public transportation system. Sustainable infrastructure would relieve the

²⁶⁸ Marwa Mikhael and Lana Saadeh, "Transportation Sector: Problems and Solutions," *Blominvest Bank*, June 13, 2015.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Nathalie Bekdache, "Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience."

country from excessive traffic in exchange for lower levels of stress and higher levels of productivity. Transportation systems would also provide a solution to the parking problem that is very present in Lebanon today. With barely any place to park on the streets, several citizens take to parking on the streets, contributing to the congestion and chaos.

The Neighboring War and Refugee Crisis

People in Lebanon think that the Syrian refugees are taking their jobs, but they shouldn't forget that these people didn't choose to come to Lebanon, they feared for their families and safety. There should be a way to help them, but how do you expect our government to do that? Take a look at the size of our country versus the size of Jordan. We don't have the space to hold 4 million refugees! Forget space, we don't have water or electricity... do we even have a President right now? – Dana, AUB Student

The outbreak of the neighboring Syrian crisis in 2011 has manifested itself as a critical economic and social threat to Lebanon and its stability. The threat is chiefly centered on the influx of Syrian refugees, and the additional challenges they pose to an already underdeveloped Lebanon. According to the UNHRC, there are now approximately 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees, which is about a quarter of Lebanon's population, along with an estimated 3 million undocumented Syrian refugees.²⁷³ This makes Lebanon the largest receiver of Syrian refugees in the world. An estimated 86% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have settled in some of the poorest and municipalities in the country, such as Wadi Khaled, Hermel, and Badghan, where 66% of vulnerable Lebanese communities reside, worsening the already insufferable conditions

²⁷³ "Lebanon," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, Last Updated October 2017.

that “pre-date the Syrian refugee crisis.”²⁷⁴ The Beqaa valley is most troubled by the presence of the Syrian refugees, as there are over “770 informal tented settlements hosting around 410,000 refugees.”²⁷⁵ In addition to the Syrian refugees, Lebanon also hosts 450,000 Palestinian refugees residing in refugee camps all over the country.²⁷⁶ The World Bank anticipates that the Syrian refugees will cost Lebanon’s already devastated economy an additional \$7.5 billion to provide services and basic necessities.²⁷⁷ Aside from economic costs, the neighboring Syrian war and the substantial presence of refugees has had a negative impact on the local Lebanese communities as there is observed competition for jobs, services, security, resources, and education, among other factors.

Firstly, the Syrian War has taken a huge toll on the Lebanese economy through rivalry over employment and decreased trade. Prior to the war, a substantial plurality of Lebanese citizens living in lower-income regions have struggled to obtain and uphold a job, let alone receive an adequate amount of pay to support their family. These economic conditions are aggravated by the incoming refugees as they are now competing for jobs. Many Syrian refugees are offering to work for cheaper pay than the Lebanese laborers, which has allowed them to occupy 60% of the labor force in Lebanon.²⁷⁸ The employment of Syrian refugees instead of lower-income Lebanese families has created tensions with the host population, as they view these immigrants as taking their jobs. Additionally, before the Syrian war, Lebanon was a large importer of Syrian goods as

²⁷⁴ Lina Khatib, “Repercussions of the Syrian Refugee Crisis for Lebanon,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, December 10, 2014.

²⁷⁵ Andrew Purvis, “Top UN humanitarian officials visit Syrian refugees, call for support for Lebanon,” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, September 16, 2014.

²⁷⁶ “Lebanon,” *United Nations Relief and Works Agency*, Last Updated July 1, 2014.

²⁷⁷ “Sectarian Conflict in Lebanon.”

²⁷⁸ Mario Abou Zeid, “A Time Bomb in Lebanon: The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, October 6, 2014.

they were less costly than domestic goods. The outbreak of the war, however, led to the closure of the Syrian borders, forcing the Lebanese to turn to overpriced local products.²⁷⁹ The combination of harsher employment conditions and domestic goods rising in price has been detrimental to marginalized local communities that have been neglected by their state.

Education services in Lebanon are also facing complications as a result of the presence of the Syrian refugees. The Lebanese school systems are attempting to enroll the Syrian students, yet most schools only have enough room for less than 30% of them.²⁸⁰ The Syrian students are struggling to assimilate into the Lebanese curricula, as it is taught in mainly English or French and most of the refugees were previously educated in Arabic.²⁸¹ Many Syrian refugee families are also incapable of paying tuition fees. The Ministry of Education is trying their best to accommodate the Syrian refugee students by offering courses at later times, while other international organizations such as the UNHCR, Save the Children, and Amel Association are also providing restorative classes. Nonetheless, the shift in the schooling environment is causing tensions between the students. The disparities between Lebanese and Syrian levels of education and systems have affected the Lebanese students, as they are no longer the top priority in their own country's education systems. With substantially larger numbers of students enrolled, the teachers are scrambling to attend to students needs with severely limited funding and resources. Additionally, the presence of humanitarian organizations and nonprofits in

²⁷⁹ Nathalie Bekdache, "Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience."

²⁸⁰ Tzevetomira Laub, "Mapping the Education Response to the Syrian Crisis," *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies*, February, 2014.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Lebanon intended to aid the refugee population has triggered antagonisms from undervalued Lebanese communities. In the perspective of these vulnerable local communities, they are frustrated with the neglect from such organizations and their government in comparison to the aid centered on refugee communities.

Lower-income Lebanese communities have also faced challenges in receiving appropriate healthcare services, as the state is known to be incapable of providing healthcare to all its civilians, and private healthcare is known to be expensive. Prior to the closure of the Syrian border, Lebanese communities living near the borders used to access healthcare centers in Syria for cheaper fares.²⁸² Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Syrian crisis meant that these vulnerable Lebanese families must now turn to more expensive local services even though they cannot afford it. The presence of the Syrian refugees suffering due to a lack of crucial nutrition, water, and sanitation has caused tensions within the host populations.²⁸³ Several healthcare organizations have prioritized providing healthcare to the Syrian refugees due to their unstable conditions, leaving the vulnerable Lebanese communities to feel not only entirely neglected by their state and people, but also as second-class citizens in their own country.²⁸⁴ It is a thoroughly unfortunate situation for both the refugees who did not choose to flee their country but had to do so for their safety, and the vulnerable Lebanese host communities that have been deserving of state support for a very long time, but were unable to receive aid due to the political gridlock and corruption.

²⁸² Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

²⁸³ “Lebanon: Agonizing Choices: Syrian Refugees in need of Healthcare in Lebanon,” *Amnesty International*, May 21, 2014.

²⁸⁴ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

Due to the unbalanced and insufficient governance for the arrangement of social services, several of these lower-income areas, especially the bordering regions, have experienced a widened sense of insecurity. The security of the refugee camps is rapidly diminishing, with the camps regarded as “safe havens for terrorists, with refugees no longer seen as victims.”²⁸⁵ This perception is largely due to the “explosions, suicide bombings, Syrian army shelling of border villages, and kidnappings of over 30 Lebanese military and security personnel to use them to negotiate the release of 300 Islamists held in Roumieh prison.”²⁸⁶ No form of security or police forces is present. This resulted in host communities monitoring refugee campsites as a form of informal security assistance, which has been to the disadvantage of the refugee population. For instance, in Badghan, the citizens take turns monitoring the campsite and enforced a curfew for the Syrian refugees.²⁸⁷

According to a HRW report, there are now around 45 municipalities that impose curfews on Syrian refugees, even though there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that these curfews will create any order or security.²⁸⁸ In fact, the curfews have had the opposite effect by contributing to the growingly antagonistic environment for the Syrian refugees. On the other hand, Hermel, a highly underdeveloped municipality located nearest to the Syrian border, has had to rely on Hezbollah for aid to help manage the refugee presence.²⁸⁹ These communities experiencing the brunt of the refugee crisis are in

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ “Lebanon: At Least 45 Local Curfews Imposed on Syrian Refugees,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 3, 2014.

²⁸⁹ Nathalie Bekdache, “Resilience in the Face of Crisis: Rooting Resilience in the Realities of the Lebanese Experience.”

desperate need of aid from the state institutions. However, the government is incapable of providing such assistance, causing vulnerable communities to resort to militant political parties such as Hezbollah, informal clans, and religious figures.

Finally, the Syrian conflict has had a polarizing effect on Lebanon, heightening the sectarian tensions between the Sunni and Shia communities.²⁹⁰ There have been violent outbreaks between Sunni and Shia Lebanese in different regions as the Sunni communities are largely against Shiite group Hezbollah's military support for the Shia Syrian regime. The Sunni communities believe that as long as Hezbollah continues to interfere in the neighboring war, it will only aggravate the conditions and bring in more refugees to Lebanon. The looming hostility between certain Lebanese and Syrian communities is deteriorating, as many Lebanese turning to needless violence against the refugees, and some even threatening to kill them.²⁹¹ Attacking and harming the Syrian refugees won't solve the refugee crisis, but instead contribute to the instability and misery present. Nonetheless, the vulnerable host population has reached a breaking point - to which the administration must quickly develop a solution.

²⁹⁰ "Sectarian Conflict in Lebanon."

²⁹¹ "Lebanon: Rising Violence Targets Syrian Refugees," *Human Rights Watch*, September 30, 2014.

Political Sectarianism through a New Lens: The Case of Iraq

Sectarianism has been an indispensable element of Lebanon's cultural and political composition since the French established a *consociational system*, also known as a power-sharing arrangement, in 1936 prior to their departure. Lebanon's consociational government structure subsists as a pursuit to resolve interreligious conflict and uphold religious tolerance. It was first formalized through the *National Pact of 1943*, an agreement constituting Lebanon as a multi-confessional nation, and further modified through the *Taif Agreement of 1989*, which attempted to re-distribute the confessional divisions to represent modern demographic realities. This structure required all public service roles to be distributed equitably along the same religious divisions, allowing sectarianism to persist in every corner of Lebanese life. While the purpose of this consociationalist government system was to ensure that each of Lebanon's 18 recognized religious groups received representation in parliament based on their demographic percentage, this system allowed for the marginalization of underrepresented religious communities.

The previous chapters have provided a more in-depth analysis of the ramifications of this formalized government structure, and how it inhibits Lebanon's development by fueling sectarianism rather than nationalism. Yet, it is essential to consider how this power-sharing arrangement may have *benefitted* Lebanon, especially given the dysfunctionality of the surrounding Middle Eastern nations. Since the commencement of the Arab Spring in 2011, several pluralistic, heterogeneous Arab nations such as Libya,

Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, have experienced substantial street demonstrations demanding the overthrow of their regime, leading to the complete collapse of their government institutions.²⁹²

Contrary to its neighbors, Lebanon's fragile central government managed to withhold itself from crumbling at a particularly trying time. This leads me to believe that there may be some positive implications of the power-sharing arrangement, in the sense that *it is the sole reason Lebanon will never have a dictator as it prevents one singular actor or group of people from achieving exclusive political control*. In this case, stagnation and corruption in Lebanon can be viewed as superior to the alternative, if the alternatives are foreign control or dictatorship. Several theorists and journalists have gone so far as to praise the consociational power-sharing system in Lebanon, claiming that "despite its evident flaws, [it] could just conceivably offer a solution that ensures a degree of stability."²⁹³ Lebanon's unique survival skills have even spiked several scholars' attention to the consociational arrangement, "driving a renewed interest in sectarian power-sharing systems as a possible model for [Arab countries'] rehabilitation."²⁹⁴ While there is no single solution to the majority of malfunctioning Arab governments, Lebanon's power-sharing arrangement appears to be the lesser of the evils.

²⁹² Joseph Bahout, "The Unraveling of Lebanon's Taif Agreement: Limits of Sect-Based Power Sharing," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 16, 2016.

²⁹³ Michael Bell, "Consociationalism: The Last Best Hope for the Middle East?" *Transatlantic Academy*, January 22, 2015.

²⁹⁴ Joseph Bahout, "The Unraveling of Lebanon's Taif Agreement: Limits of Sect-Based Power Sharing."

On the other hand, a handful of scholars have raised doubts regarding the *Lebanonization*, or implementation of the Lebanese model, elsewhere. These hesitations arise due to the Lebanese state's consistent corruption, mounting public debt, political paralysis, and weak governance that has allowed for the emergence of sectarianism and the marginalization of minorities, among many other factors. Theorists claim that perhaps an authoritarian figure is best for these Arab nations attempting to achieve stability because dictators take necessary means to suppress marginalized sentiments. Thus, in attempt to effectively analyze whether the power-sharing arrangement is the most viable government structure for Lebanon and similar pluralistic Middle Eastern states, this comparative government chapter will serve as a case study into *Iraq* - a Middle Eastern state that has experienced massive waves of turmoil over its past years.

Iraq is a particularly fascinating country to apply as a case study because it has witnessed a shift from a dictatorship to a consociational democracy in the past decade. The Lebanese and Iraqi political situations present critical parallels, particularly following the U.S.-led ousting of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Ba'athist administration in 2003. The political structure in Iraq that was created after Saddam's decline is often referred to as the "Lebanonization of Iraq," or as author Melani Cammett describes the discourse: "the recurrence of instability combined with entrenched external meddling in the domestic politics."²⁹⁵ In other words, after Hussein was forcibly removed from his position as dictator, a power-sharing arrangement, similar to the one in Lebanon, was implemented instead. Hence, both countries have witnessed the institutionalization of a

²⁹⁵ Melani Claire Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

power-sharing system that enabled the materialization of sectarian parties and reinstated identity politics as a way of life.

There are three probing questions that must be addressed in order to evaluate Lebanon's political constitution: *a)* is the power-sharing arrangement a legitimate government structure?, *b)* how has this consociational government indirectly, or directly, contributed to the politicization and prominence of sectarian relations and antagonisms between ethnic groups?, and *c)* is a power-sharing arrangement the most viable government structure for multiethnic, pluralistic Middle Eastern states? Thus, in order to provide explanations for the above questions, a case study into pre-and-post Saddam Iraqi government structures will share some insight on the legitimacy of such governmental structures. The Iraqi case is important to understand as it maintains several similarities to the Lebanese situation. Firstly, Iraq and Lebanon both host multiethnic societies, with Iraq's most prominent divisions being among Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Kurds, while Lebanon's are among Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Maronite Christians. Secondly, both states have experienced influential waves of foreign intervention, with the U.S. and Iran playing a key role in Iraq's government structure, and Syria, Israel, Iran, and more recently, Saudi Arabia playing a pivotal role in Lebanon. Furthermore, both states have experienced the emergence of 'terrorist' groups or insurgencies, such as ISIS in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, *following* the marginalization of a major religious sect.

This chapter will provide analysis into the conditions under which a pluralistic Middle Eastern state beyond Lebanon, in particular Iraq, existed with a consociational system. The investigation intends to present another outlet through which the pros and cons of a power-sharing arrangement are observed, providing insight into whether this

government structure is the most feasible for Middle Eastern states dominated by religious plurality, or whether these illegitimate institutions facilitate a sectarian nature, such as in Lebanon. Furthermore, an examination of Iraq under a dictatorship will reveal the positive and negative implications of living under an authoritarian rule in the Middle East, in attempt to answer why some scholars view a dictatorship as a necessary means of stability in the region. My analysis of the situation based on the research to be presented is that power-sharing arrangements divided along religious lines allow for the politicization of identity when power, resources, and territory are at stake. The politicization of identity thus creates a vacuum for sectarianism to emerge, as ethnic groups are marginalized and competing for influence in their state. This is evident through the current volatile situation in Iraq that followed the U.S.-led removal of Saddam Hussein, and the implementation of a consociational democracy. Before delving into the conditions in Iraq, the next section aims to provide the reader with a detailed background on consociationalism, highlighting the most prominent theories associated with its creation.

Understanding Consociational Democracies

Power-sharing arrangements, also known as *consociational democracies*, are a relatively recent phenomenon that have been sporadically successful when applied to some states, while reaching opposite results in others. Consociational theory is amid the most noteworthy methods applied to multi-ethnic societies that desire to democratize.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Kenneth Vaughn, "Who Benefits from Consociationalism? Religious Disparities in Lebanon's Political System," *MDPI*, February 8, 2018.

Initially, consociationalists claimed that power distribution along ethnic or religious identities is the most efficient way to diffuse intergroup antagonisms and solidify a democracy.

Dutch political scientist Arend Lijphart, widely known for his 1977 publication of *Patterns of Democracy*, coined the concept “Consensus Democracy” and largely advocated for the adoption of consociationalism in pluralistic nations. Lijphart argued that “if [political leaders of plural societies] wish to establish or strengthen democratic institutions in their countries, they must become consociational engineers.”²⁹⁷ This theory was originally created as a solution for ethnic, class, and religious dissections in the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Switzerland.²⁹⁸ In the case of these four states, peace and political stability were achieved, leaving consociationalists to believe that it was this proposed structure of government that led to their success, even though many scholars predicted the multiplicity would inhibit it.

In his book, Lijphart pinpoints four factors of consociationalism which he views as capable of reducing ethnic and religious tensions, and advises them for demographically divided states. These four focal propositions are²⁹⁹:

- 1) The Grand Coalition: Each nation government is to consist of representatives from all the prime religious, linguistic, class, or other ethnic groups. Executive power is to be split among the representatives.

²⁹⁷ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, pg. 223.

²⁹⁸ Kenneth Vaughn, “Who Benefits from Consociationalism? Religious Disparities in Lebanon’s Political System.”

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

- 2) Proportionality: each demographic faction must have corresponding representation in the government and critical political positions. Each confession is to receive relatively equal government benefits.
- 3) Autonomy/Decentralization: Ensuring that each ethnic community receives sufficient autonomy and the right to self-governance.
- 4) Mutual Veto-Rights: representatives of “each demographic group are to be granted the right to veto political actions that are deemed contrary to their group interests.”³⁰⁰

These propositions will only succeed if the interests of all ethnic communities are competently and uniformly demonstrated in a grand coalition; if one of the groups feels as though its interests are not adequately represented, this could lead to marginalization which would inevitably erode the validity of a consociational government system.³⁰¹

Lijphart additionally suggests that “these principles are most likely to succeed when a strong case can be made that national unity is in the best interests of all groups in conflict [...] for example, groups at war may find cooperation under nationalistic terms to be beneficial when a mutual threat, external to their nation, is perceived.”³⁰² Northern Ireland’s Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is routinely referenced by consociationalists as an example of antagonistic political groups that were able to concur on power-sharing principles, which has led to a significant reduction of intergroup violence.

In theory, the principles of power-sharing governmental structures are intended to be inclusive of all different ethnicities present to reduce intergroup violence and hatreds.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Mark Farha, "Global Gradations of Secularism: The Consociational, Communal and Coercive Paradigms," *Comparative Sociology* 11, no. 3 (2012): 354-86.

³⁰² Kenneth Vaughn, “Who Benefits from Consociationalism? Religious Disparities in Lebanon’s Political System.”

It is even true to state that since the establishment of the Taif Agreement, Lebanon's most contemporary power-sharing arrangement, intergroup brutality has largely dwindled. That is not to say, however, that consociationalism yields no negative repercussions. As the previous chapter on underdevelopment suggests, the institutionalization of a consociationalist system in pluralistic Lebanon has paved the path for sectarianism, reinvigorating the vicious cycle of corruption, lack of basic resources, and a faulty economy, among other things. The following case study on Iraq hopes to provide insight on the consequences of a consociationalist government and the ways in which Iraq's circumstances erode the validity of Lijphart's propositions.

Iraq: before and after

Note: I have attempted to include credible first-hand accounts gathered by journalists, non-governmental organizations, blogs, and interviews to illustrate that sectarian violence and political identity in Iraq are less a result of innate religious animosities and more a result of shared protective responses to the terror and marginalization produced in a time of political instability and civil war.

Iraq is particularly significant to observe because it provides an understanding of sectarianism under Saddam's reign and the way in which it evolved afterward due to U.S.-led intervention and the establishment of a power-sharing arrangement. A brief overview is first presented, followed by an in-depth glance at the sectarian conditions.

A Brief Overview of the Situation in Iraq

Saddam Hussein rose to power in the 1970s "on a wave of nationalist, revolutionary sentiment that had been sweeping the Middle East for years."³⁰³ Under his initial reign, Iraq rapidly became one of the most advanced and developed Arab nations

³⁰³ Mohamad Bazzi, "How Saddam Hussein's Execution Contributed to the Rise of Sectarianism in the Middle East," *The Nation*, January 15, 2016.

as Hussein invested Iraq's substantial oil profits into agricultural production, free education, universal healthcare, sustainable infrastructure, and the creation of new industries.³⁰⁴ Simultaneously, however, Hussein was a ruthless ruler involved in the killings of thousands of women, children, minorities, or anyone who opposed his leadership, with no regard to human rights violations. He plunged Iraq into long-lasting, destructive wars with its neighbors, forcing his soldiers to fight for what *he* believed in, inevitably weakening his country. Through his terroristic tactics, Hussein managed to silence those who wished to speak, allowing him to maintain order and stability in Iraq.³⁰⁵ Saddam was also a Sunni Muslim in a country where the Sunni Arabs were a minority. While Saddam maintained a secular rule, the majority of his Ba'ath party was of Sunni descent. Under Saddam's rule, the party underwent several substantial persecutions of Shia and Kurd communities, allowing for the marginalization of these dominant sects.³⁰⁶

Iraq witnessed a significant shift in March 2003, beginning with the U.S.-led military occupation of Iraq, codenamed *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, which toppled Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath Party government, resulting in the outbreak of the Iraq war.³⁰⁷ In April 2003, U.S. brokered discussion with Iraqi representatives to help shape the country's transition to a newfound democracy intended to replace the displaced Baathist government.³⁰⁸ Paul Bremer was appointed by the U.S. to be the civil administrator in Iraq, and lead the path to '*de-Baathification*' in which he destroyed all institutions present

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Hayder Al-Shakeri, "Trump is wrong about Saddam Hussein. Take it from an Iraqi," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2016.

³⁰⁶ Mohamad Bazzi, "How Saddam Hussein's Execution Contributed to the Rise of Sectarianism in the Middle East."

³⁰⁷ CNN Library, "Saddam Hussein Fast Facts," *CNN*, April 27, 2017.

³⁰⁸ "Timeline: Iraq after Saddam," *BBC News*, March 20, 2007.

under Saddam and banned former members of Ba'ath party from holding government positions. Bremer also utilized 'divide-and-rule' strategy in brokering the alternative Iraqi state, which had severe repercussions in worsening the ethnic divide. Instead of viewing Iraq as a nation that desperately needed conciliation policies, Bremer treated Iraq as a nation filled with minorities that are averse to coexistence; thus, the only correct way to occupy the nation in his mind was to pit the ethnic groups against one another.³⁰⁹ This is evident through Bremer's creation of the Iraqi Governing Council, a power-sharing arrangement, in which members were chosen via sectarian demographic ratios. The UN lifted economic sanctions against Iraq in May 2003 and stated their support for the U.S.-led administration.³¹⁰

The U.S. initiated trials against Saddam in Iraqi court, which eventually convicted him of treacherous human rights violations and declared his punishment to be death, making him "the first modern Arab ruler to be tried and executed for his crimes."³¹¹ Saddam's execution on December 30, 2006, 'created a new schism in the Sunni-Shiite relations' in Iraq.³¹² Right before he was killed, the room was filled with Shiite religious chants as many previously marginalized Shia were happy to witness the death of a man who had imposed so much suffering on their sect.³¹³ On the other hand, the Sunni minority who were placed on a pedestal by Saddam blamed the Shia for killing their ruler and solidified his execution as an integral symbol for the Sunni struggle that was to follow, turning Saddam into a martyr. The sectarian form in which Saddam was executed

³⁰⁹ Musa al-Gharbi, "The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq," *Al Jazeera*, August 18, 2014.

³¹⁰ "Timeline: Iraq after Saddam."

³¹¹ Mohamad Bazzi, "How Saddam Hussein's Execution Contributed to the Rise of Sectarianism in the Middle East."

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

instantly worsened the Sunni-Shia rift, and intercommunal violence became prominent. U.S. military deployment ended in 2011 with the departure of U.S. troops.

Saddam's Iraq: Pre-2003

It is easy to idealize Hussein's rule, arguing that a brutal dictatorship is better than the terrorism, corruption, sectarianism, and weak governance that exists in Iraq today. In reality, with or without Saddam, Iraqis have never been able to escape their struggle. Their suffering has just shifted from living under a dictatorship to living under several smaller ones. Under Saddam Hussein's reign, Iraqi citizens suffered greatly through repression tactics, torture, and killings. Saddam's cruel repression tactics are evident through the Al-Anfal Campaign and the suppression of the 1991 Rebellion.

Hussein was notorious for his attempts to ethnically cleanse the Kurds living in Iraq prior to 2003. In 1988, Hussein launched a series of chemical weapon attacks, known as *Al-Anfal Campaign*, to eliminate the presence of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish rebels residing in the North that were battling for their autonomy and freedom.³¹⁴ In a matter of a few months, Hussein had exterminated approximately 100,000 Kurds, including Kurdish families and refugees living in resettlement camps.³¹⁵ The U.S. was aware of the human rights violations and use of chemical weapons, yet were hesitant to take action as they were supporting Hussein at the time during his ongoing war against Iran. After 2003, Al-Anfal was primarily used as a justification for international repercussions against Iraq, and is a crucial reason why the Iraqi Kurds were granted

³¹⁴ Zack Beauchamp, Max Fisher, and Dylan Matthews, "27 maps that explain the crisis in Iraq," *Vox*, August 8, 2014.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

sovereignty following Hussein's downfall. This incident is just one amongst many others for Kurds periling under Saddam's reign.

Similarly, in 1991 following Iraqi defeat in the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War, many Kurdish rebels in the north and Shia Islamists in the south took advantage of Hussein's vulnerability to rebel against his rule.³¹⁶ The Shiites and Kurds were perpetually marginalized under Hussein, and were under the impression that they would receive U.S. backing and military support as President Bush had encouraged them to rise up.³¹⁷ Unfortunately, U.S. assistance fell short, and within weeks, Saddam had not only defeated the rebels but slaughtered thousands in response. Hussein's assertive aptness to crush any uprising held against him allowed him to strengthen his hold over Iraq and delivered a clear message that any rebels will face severe repercussions. For this reason, the majority of marginalized sects living in terror refrained from uprising in order to save their lives and families. In this way, Saddam's repression tactics may have simultaneously suppressed sectarianism from surfacing.

While Iraq faced ethnic tensions prior to the U.S.-led occupation in 2003, Saddam's authority inhibited conspicuous sectarianism from emerging. There was a mutual sentiment of coexistence between the Sunni and Shia, especially in more densely populated cities flourishing with populations of various ethnic and religious minorities.³¹⁸ Approximately a third of Iraqi citizens had engaged in intermarriage; a concept that is life threatening in contemporary Iraq.³¹⁹ Prior to the 2003 U.S.-led occupation, evidence of

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Musa al-Gharbi, "The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq."

³¹⁹ Ibid.

notable warring between the country's religions, sects, ethnicities, or nationalities was extremely limited.

Sami Ramadani is an Iraqi-born scholar that was politically exiled from Saddam's regime. Nonetheless, Ramadani campaigned against U.S.-led sanctions and the Iraqi occupation, and writes about the underlying tolerance between religious groups that existed under Saddam:

[Referring to pre-2003 conditions] One of the greatest testaments to the tolerance that exists between the various communities in Iraq is that Baghdad still has up to a million Kurds, who have never experienced communal violence by Arabs. Similarly, 20% of Basra's population is Sunni. Samarra, a mostly Sunni city, is home to two of the most sacred Shia shrines. Every tribe has Sunnis and Shias in its ranks. Every town and city has a mix of communities.

The most serious sectarian and ethnic tensions in Iraq's modern history followed the 2003 US-led occupation, which faced massive popular opposition and resistance. The US had its own divide-and-rule policy, promoting Iraqi organizations founded on religion, ethnicity, nationality or sect rather than politics. Those who claim Iraq can only have peace if it is divided into three states do not appreciate the makeup of Iraqi society - the three regions would quickly fall under the rule of violent sectarians and chauvinists. Given how ethnically and religiously mixed Iraq's regions are, a three-way national breakup would be a recipe for permanent wars in which only the oil companies, the arms suppliers, and the warlords will be the winners.³²⁰

Similarly, Riverbend, the pseudonym of a Baghdadi blogger, recounts the high levels of tolerance in Iraq prior to 2003:

[The U.S. goes on and on about Iraq's history and how Sunnis and Shia were always in conflict and I hate that. In Baghdad before the war, one could live anywhere. We intermarry, we mix and mingle, we live. We build our churches and mosques in the same areas, our children go to the same schools. No one asked about religion or sect [...] or bothered with what was considered a trivial topic: are you Sunni or Shia? You only asked something like that if you were uncouth

³²⁰ Sami Ramadani, "The Sectarian Myth of Iraq," *The Guardian*, June 16, 2014.

*and backward. Our lives revolve around it now. Our existence depends on hiding it or highlighting it - depending on the group of masked men who stop you to raid your home in the middle of the night.*³²¹

As Ramadani and Riverbend state, coexistence under Saddam's Iraq was not only a possibility but a way of life. Even though Saddam's regime was chiefly Sunni-dominated, he still allocated a significant amount of representation to Shia and other socioeconomic minority groups in order to repress any protests. While Hussein was a ruthless ruler who slaughtered anyone who threatened his power, he did so indiscriminately; for the most part, as long as one stayed out of Saddam's way, it was possible to live a semi-bearable life. Political affiliation under Saddam's reign was "largely based on secular ideologies [...] it was considered taboo to inquire about or divulge one's religious persuasion."³²²

U.S. Involvement and Interference

It is critical to understand the role the U.S. played in Iraq's demise. U.S. intervention and involvement in Iraq was a direct factor of the poor living standards before 2003. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, which is believed to be an attack encouraged by the West, the U.S. retaliated by imposing harsh economic sanctions on Iraq for the next 12 years, which inevitably stifled the economy, employment, and income, making the state a terrible place to live. According to UNICEF, the U.S. and UN sanctions against Iraq caused an estimated half a million children, equivalent to 30% of Iraq's children under five, to die of malnourishment due to the lack of food and

³²¹ Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq*, New York: Feminist Press at the City Univ. of New York, 2007.

³²² Musa al-Gharbi, "The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq."

medicine.³²³ When America intervened once again in 2003 to remove Hussein from his position, the Iraqis didn't care to defend their country because it had become so terrible to live in, allowing the U.S. troops to take control.³²⁴ Thus, the U.S. played a significant role in worsening the situation in Iraq prior to 2003 and then appearing as the saviors when they returned years later to save the citizens from the misery they had contributed to.

A Vulnerable State Divided: Post-2003

With foreign intervention and a power-sharing arrangement that has exacerbated sectarian brutality, contemporary Baghdad is starting to look a lot like Beirut. The *Iraq Governing Council* (IGC) was the first institution created in 2003 based on a power-sharing arrangement. Similar to Lebanon's structure, the amount of representation was based on demographic sectarian realities, with 13 Shia, five Sunnis, five Kurds, one Turkmen, and an Assyrian.³²⁵ This immediately made identity politics in post-2003 Iraq the norm rather than an oddity because the structure of the governmental system became based on sectarian divisions. As previously mentioned, Paul Bremer, the U.S. appointed civil administrator in Iraq, spearheaded the formation of the IGC and employed *divide-and-rule* tactics such as sectarian appointment. Bremer also required that all state-issued documents reveal the declared sect of the Iraqi citizens, thus entrenching identity politics in the post-2003 institution.³²⁶ The IGC, as a result, realigned the power dynamics in Iraq, radically shifting the power in favor of the Shia population. This was a crucial moment for previously politically deprived Shia population as it not only altered the future of the

³²³ Dina al-Shibeeb, "Where is Iraq's Baath party today," *Al Arabiya*, August 21, 2015.

³²⁴ Wael Al-Sallami, "I Grew Up In Iraq During Saddam's Worst Days — Here's What Life Was Like," *Business Insider*, July 2, 2014.

³²⁵ Zack Beauchamp, "The real roots of Iraq's Sunni-Shia conflict," *Vox*, June 20, 2014.

³²⁶ Musa al-Gharbi, "The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq."

nation, but also dramatically shifted the balance of Shia power in the Middle East, which historically favored the Sunnis.³²⁷

Furthermore, Bremer engaged in comprehensive ‘*de-Baathification*’ policies that inordinately harmed the Sunnis who had once held the majority of power under Saddam’s Baathist government. One of Bremer’s policies was the large-scale dethroning of Sunni social and military elite from high-status positions demoralized the freshly vulnerable Sunni population, and undermined their role in the new Iraq.³²⁸ Additionally, an International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) report reveals that over 50,000 Sunni citizens were discharged from governmental positions, solely based on their ranking in Saddam’s Ba’ath party.³²⁹ This left massive numbers of the Sunni population unemployed, including teachers who were senior Ba’ath party members, “which left children without instructors until they could be replaced by non-Ba’ath Party members [...] the new teachers were less experienced, and often Shiite Muslims, deepening the resentment among Iraqi Sunnis who saw Shiites as taking all the good jobs.”³³⁰ Even worse, many Sunnis that were penalized for their associated with the Ba’ath party had only joined in order to be considered for certain job positions.³³¹

Prior to Saddam’s overthrow, Iraq’s army and military were known to be one of the most capable in the Middle East. As part of Bremer’s de-Baathification, the U.S. disbanded the army, causing disillusioned Sunni soldiers to become a part of the

³²⁷ Musa al-Gharbi, “The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq.”

³²⁸ Musa al-Gharbi, “The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq.”

³²⁹ Alissa J Rubin, “Ahmad Chalabi and the Legacy of De-Baathification in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 2015.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

insurgencies. De-Baathification inevitably paved the path for the rise of Sunni armed resistance and insurgencies as a means to defend their sect from abolition, contributing to the rise of the sectarian Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) - later known as ISIS. While the U.S. scrambled to reassemble an experienced military from scratch, many of the newly dismissed Sunni ex-Ba'ath party members and militants joined ISIS as a form of reprisal. Ironically, the U.S.-generated Iraqi army quickly became obsolete, and “today 2,875 American service members are in Iraq to advise, train, and assist Iraq’s military so it can defeat ISIS,” even though the U.S.’s de-baathification policies assisted ISIS’s recruitment and establishment.³³² The disbandment of highly-trained Sunnis that were part of Saddam’s army and now part of ISIS emphasizes the adeptness of this insurgency.

ISIS thrives of the mobilization of Sunni dissatisfaction, which is largely fueled by the corruption and exploitation of the Shia-dominated government policies.³³³ ISI’s rogue incumbency provoked the ethnic cleansing of Christians and Assyrians from Iraq and played a crucial role in enforcing geographic segregations of ethnic groups.³³⁴ Intermarriage was no longer common under ISIS’s reign of terror, and fragmentation became a commonly accepted way of life. ISIS has been occupying mostly Sunni populated areas since its conception, including the notable city of Mosul, and manipulated Iraqi citizens to believe they will be safer under their control.³³⁵ Many individuals currently residing in Mosul under ISIS control told Vox reporters that “they

³³² Kevin Frey and Alexander Mallin, “Iraq Invasion 12 Years Later: See How Much Has Changed,” *ABC News*, March 19, 2015.

³³³ Zack Beauchamp, “The real roots of Iraq’s Sunni-Shia conflict.”

³³⁴ Musa al-Gharbi, “The myth and reality of sectarianism in Iraq.”

³³⁵ Max Fisher, “Iraqis under ISIS control say their lives have gotten better,” *Vox*, June 20, 2014.

preferred life now in the besieged city.”³³⁶ ISIS has been slyly exploiting Sunni citizens to gain support by allowing tribal, local Sunni armed groups to control the occupied areas, making it seem as though the insurgency’s presence is barely visible. Consequently, this strengthens ISIS and increases the tensions against the Shia majority. This also creates a vicious cycle - Sunni action triggers an aggressive Shiite response, which persuades more Iraqi Sunnis to retaliate against their government.

When the U.S. officials captured Saddam in 2003, they thought it was an accomplishment to celebrate, for they perceived the seizure of this dictator to be a victory against authoritarianism and the path to spreading democracy. In reality, however, Saddam’s death exacerbated the sectarian tensions in Iraq, with the violence reaching a peak in 2006-2007, also known as the outbreak of Iraqi civil war, when casualties exceeded the deaths of tens of thousands.³³⁷ In February 2006, Al-Qaeda - a Sunni organization- bombed the al-Askari Mosque, which is believed to be one of the Iraqi Shias most sacred sites. This set off a trend of Shia attacks and Sunni responses. The UNHCR reported that since the bombing of the al-Askari mosque, over 370,000 Iraqis have been dislocated, raising the number of Iraqi refugees to over 1.6 million - which was later increased to 4.7 million in 2008, only two years later.³³⁸ A Red Cross report released in 2008 announced that the humanitarian conditions in Iraq were among the gravest in the world, with millions of citizens dependent on inadequate water sources, poor electricity,

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Sami Ramadani, “The Sectarian Myth of Iraq.”

³³⁸ “Iraq: No let-up in the humanitarian crisis,” *International Committee of the Red Cross*, March 15, 2008.

and insufficient access to basic necessities.³³⁹ Is this starting to sound like Lebanon in 1975 yet?

Wael Al-Sallami is a Sunni-Muslim Iraqi citizen who published a first-hand account titled, ‘I Grew Up In Iraq During Saddam’s Worst Days - Here’s What Life Was Like,’ in which he details his experience before and after Hussein’s regime. Sallami clearly portrays the ramifications of U.S.-led armed interference when he says,

Instead of living safely in poor conditions, Iraqis became somewhat wealthy, but lost all measured of personal safety. Where once they just had one tyrant to be afraid of, now they have hundred more! Even keeping their mouths shut, which used to keep them safe, didn’t help anymore. People were dying for having the wrong religion, place of birth, or even the wrong name! The year 2006 [when Hussein was killed] was worse than 1991 and 2003 combined. Militias took over the streets, and it was chaos. Iraq was safe for most of the Sunni before 2003, but was hostile towards Shia and Kurds, depending on their affiliations. After 2003, the Sunni descended to become the oppressed minority while the Shia took control of the central government.³⁴⁰

Further, the manifestation of sectarianism became evident through the demographic divisions that encompassed Iraq. By 2007, the once pluralistic city of Baghdad was split into disparate homogenous communities based on religious identification.³⁴¹ Several families and individuals have fled from regions where their sect is the minority to more religiously homogeneous areas that appear to be safer; a situation that didn’t exist prior to U.S. occupation and the establishment of a consociational ‘democracy.’ The map below (**Table 2**) displays Baghdad’s diverse religious make-up in 2005, with mixed neighborhoods dominantly shown in yellow. The right side of the map

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Wael Al-Sallami, “I Grew Up In Iraq During Saddam's Worst Days — Here's What Life Was Like.”

³⁴¹ Ches Thurber, “From Coexistence to Cleansing: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Baghdad, 2003-2007,” *Al Nakhlah: Tufts Fletcher School*, Spring 2011.

shows Baghdad just two years later in 2007 after Sunni/Shia ethnic cleansing had taken a toll. Red dots represent the bombings, death squads, and militias, and it is evident that the coexistence represented by yellow areas have been significantly reduced. Violence has become a conventional aspect of daily life in Iraq due to the increasing amounts of sectarian attacks.

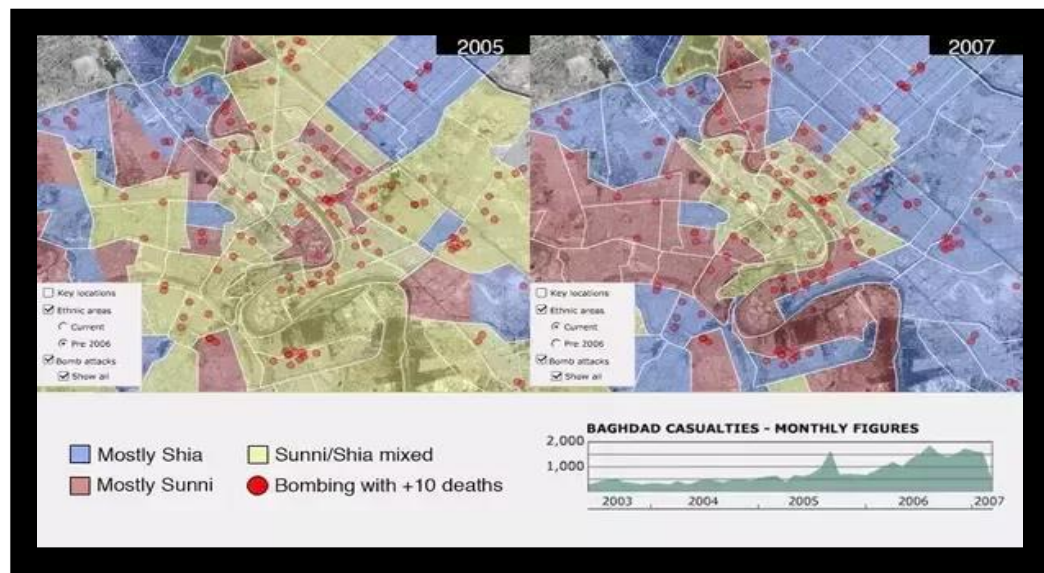


Table 2: Ethno-religious cleansing. Source: *Vox*³⁴²

Iraq’s Shia dominated government run by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki from 2006 to 2014 has only further aggravated the tensions between the ethnic groups. al-Maliki has convinced the Iraqi Sunnis that government will not benefit them, which is counterproductive in overcoming ISIS and threatens national unity. Instead of having a religiously tolerant Prime Minister that is pushing for peace and reconciliation between the Sunni and Shia at such a critical time, Prime Minister Nouri has done nothing to affirm his care for the minority ethnic group.

³⁴² Zack Beauchamp, Max Fisher, and Dylan Matthews, “27 maps that explain the crisis in Iraq,”

Identity Politics in Iraq: The Evolution of a Sunni Identity

The way in which Sunni identity exists today was non-existent in Iraq prior to the previous decade. Since the creation of the Iraqi nation-state in the 20th century, everyone, regardless of ethnicity or religion, was part of an ‘Iraqi entity’ and shared a sense of belonging to the mutual homeland. Currently, sectarian rivalry in Iraq has reached new lows, chiefly due to the way in which power and influence in this nation was divided amongst its people. It wasn’t long after Iraq’s establishment in 1921 that discussions regarding Shiite disregard and marginalization became a relevant discourse, yet even then, tolerance and coexistence was the norm between different sects for the 80 years to follow. Sectarian identity was not particularly pertinent in political mobilization, but rather other ‘frames of reference that were politically dominant.’³⁴³ The significance of a sectarian identity became relevant in 2003, among the many changes that Iraq witnessed.

The chief forces that opposed Saddam in 2003 were ethnosectarian parties, such as the marginalized Kurds or Shia. While the U.S. occupation forces deserve a substantial amount of the blame for entrenching sectarian identity as the key indicator of Iraqi politics, it is essential to recognize that these ethnosectarian parties, such as the Shia that opposed Saddam, have wanted a power shift in their favor even before 2003. The U.S. aided these groups by imposing a government structure that promoted political divisions along religious lines. This was in the Shias best interest as they were the largest demographic majority in Iraq, so the power-sharing arrangement was understood to benefit them the most. The formerly oppressed Shia were long awaiting a situation in which they hold a substantial amount of control and could finally speak their mind. To

³⁴³ Zack Beauchamp, “The real roots of Iraq’s Sunni-Shia conflict.”

the Sunnis, the Shia that accumulated power after 2003 weren't just political actors who happened to be Shia - but instead they were politicians whose political perspectives were deeply rooted in promoting the influence of their sect. Thus, when the new governmental structure was instituted, the Sunni had hesitations and concerns about the *raison d'etre* of the new political regime, and in little to no time, these suspicions were reaffirmed through the policies and decisions made by the Shia elite.³⁴⁴

As a result of the power divisions along sectarian demographic lines, Sunnis became aware of their 20% minority in Iraq and its association to second-class privileges and lessened power - an awareness that ceased to exist prior to 2003. Under Saddam's rule, the Sunni in the Ba'ath party were untouchable, even though their demographics haven't changed.³⁴⁵ In Iraq today, the Sunni view their minority demographic reality as a loss of power and have encompassed the identity of the victimized or marginalized as the Shia once were. It's hard for the previously privileged Sunnis to accept their minority because it's directly representative of the meager amounts of power and influence they hold in Iraq. All of a sudden, it didn't matter how capable, intelligent, or hard-working they were - their numbers spoke for them and determined their future in the nation. The Sunnis thus rejected the legitimacy of the government institution and viewed the post-2003 order as a complete lie.

Oppositely, the Shia and Kurds welcomed the institutional change with open arms as it worked directly in their favor. The once irrelevant Shite now have the leading stakes in power - and even though the Iraqi government is near obsolete and widely unpopular,

³⁴⁴ Zack Beauchamp, "The real roots of Iraq's Sunni-Shia conflict."

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

the Shia are most likely to defend its honor and preach to its legitimacy. It becomes evident once again, that power-sharing arrangement allows for the crystallization of a religious identity into a political one, and place the strongest emphasis on identity politics. Fanar Haddad, an expert and author on Iraqi politics and sectarianism, best explains the evolution of a previously non-existent Sunni identity in Iraq in an interview with *Vox*³⁴⁶:

The parallel we've always drawn with regards to Sunni identity is a parallel with race relations. There wasn't a coherent form of identity, like the American notion of whiteness as the 'normal' American view, a 'default setting.' Sunnis didn't see themselves as having a perspective before 2003. It was not a Sunni view; it was the norm, the Iraqi view. Come 2003, it was a bit of a rude awakening. [...] a lot Sunnis were completely oblivious to the deeply held Shia notions of identity they were just hearing about.

Sunnis weren't concerned with or particularly knowledgeable about sectarian dynamics because it wasn't an issue for them. They did not perceive themselves to be on the losing end of sectarian dynamics, they weren't even aware of sectarian dynamics! So this is a game that they only started playing in 2003. The other thing is that, in 2003, they had to form a Sunni identity whether they liked it or not because the system mandated it. The system required and made communal identity the central political marker. So they had to find that presentation along identity lines. Now you've got quite a strong sense of Sunni identity, one that has been anchored in a sense of victimhood.³⁴⁷

Haddad's statements draw the audience's attention to the powerful impact of in-group perceptions when crafting a collective identity. Once the Sunni began to perceive themselves as victims of a demographic minority, they ascribed their identity to highlight the newly-established dynamics that they believe have 'cheated' them. The Sunni claims

³⁴⁶Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

³⁴⁷ Zack Beauchamp, "The real roots of Iraq's Sunni-Shia conflict."

of being victimized by an oppressive Shia state is especially emblematic because of its transnational implications in today's world. Religion, a part of one's cultural identity that used to be cherished, has now become a political identity with no means to disassociate from it.

An Analysis: Implications and Criticisms of a Consociational Democracy

With a failed power-sharing arrangement that has been unable to encourage economic and political recovery, many began to refer to the Iraqi climate in 2010 as the *Lebanonization* of Iraq: “a derogatory term, a hint at imminent civil war, political deadlock, foreign domestic involvement, and a warning that the state would fall apart like Lebanon did from 1975-1991.”³⁴⁸ Similar to Lebanon, contemporary Iraq has armed-political groups and insurgencies, and a government that is incapable of supporting its citizens with basic needs, such as security, electricity, and water, among other things. Analyst Louay Bahry refers to the two countries as ‘junior democracies at work,’ discriminately capable of protecting the majority. Other scholars view the system as a consensus democracy that struggles to achieve success due to a suffocating Arab political way of life.³⁴⁹

There is a need for further examination of the efficacy of consociational democracies in pluralistic Middle Eastern states. While intended to promote peace by providing a platform for each ethnic division in the country, this governmental structure can hold negative repercussions if the pluralities are then forced to compete for power and resources. In the case of Iraq and Lebanon, the establishment of an institution divided

³⁴⁸ Lara Setrakian, “Beirut in Baghdad: Is the ‘Lebanonization’ of Iraq complete?” *Foreign Policy*, August 24, 2010.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

across religious lines has contributed to the politicization of one's religious identity. In particular, the association of religious identity in politics has evidently induced religious inequality and exacerbated conflict. As scholar Kenneth Vaughan puts it,

Consociationalism unnecessarily essentializes ethnic and religious identities to political disputes, which leads to intergroup inequality and conflict. Political decisions and group gains and losses then become inextricably tied, which increases the degree to which religious identification is politically consequential. As group identities become intrinsic to political decision making, socioeconomic and other prudential interests are rivaled by group identity.³⁵⁰

While consociationalists believe that this form of government is the most effective way of adequately distributing resources among various ethnic groups, several scholars are highly critical of the incapability of such structures to do so fairly and equally. Critics argue that is almost impossible to achieve equal accommodations, especially if the individuals chosen to represent a particular religious group don't advocate for their group's best interest, but for their own political agenda.³⁵¹ In many situations, the religious or ethnic group receiving misappropriately large amounts of representation and influence in government appears to be the group that views the government with the most legitimacy. Oppositely, ethno-communities that are not receiving adequate representation are likely to feel marginalized, distrust the institutions present, and view their government as illegitimate. As previously discussed, post-2003, the Shia in Iraq are most likely to view their government as legitimate, while the marginalized Sunni discredit it.

³⁵⁰ Kenneth Vaughn, "Who Benefits from Consociationalism? Religious Disparities in Lebanon's Political System."

³⁵¹ Ibid.

Kenneth Vaughan completed a 2017 study in which he investigated whether Lebanon's prominent demographic groups think that they are equal beneficiaries of their government's public services and expenditures.³⁵² Vaughan's results suggest that not only is Lebanon's power-sharing government incapable of providing equal benefits for the religious confessions as it is supposed to, but also that Lebanese Shia Muslims regularly view the government as more legitimate on democracy-related matters than the Sunnis, Maronites, and Druze.³⁵³ The Druze and Maronite Christians participants viewed the Lebanese government most negatively regarding constitutional issues. Low trust in government is emblematic of distinguished discrimination.

What if Sectarian Violence is Inevitable in Pluralistic States?

Several scholarly advocates of consociational democracies claim that *all ethnic antagonisms will lead to sectarian violence* unless a power-sharing arrangement is implemented. In the case of Iraq, the Shia Muslims had been violently oppressed for nearly 23 years under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Any attempts of Iraqi Shia rebellion was quickly, and severely, retaliated against by Hussein, which inevitably increased the feelings of repression and anger from these marginalized communities. Given this protracted history of oppression and deprivation, it is appealing to perceive Iraq's outbreak of sectarian brutality and warfare as conceivably inescapable due to the prehistoric ethnic antagonisms and antiquated identities, such as that of the Sunni-Shia Muslim divide. Several scholars actually contend that "this is the most persuasive explanation of ethnic conflict. [International Relations Scholar Robert Kaplan] argues

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

that through centuries of conflict, ethnic hatreds had become so fossilized that the region would be inevitably plagued by warfare between these groups.”³⁵⁴ It is possible that these scholars would view the situation in Iraq pre-2003 as a ticking time bomb, with the only thing keeping these ethnic antagonisms from evolving into a civil war being Saddam’s repressive dictatorship.

However, the belief that racial loathing *inevitably* leads to sectarian violence and warfare is truly flawed. As academic Ches Thurber explains, even though the Sunni-Shia conflict had been present for decades and was aggravated by Saddam’s cruel reign, “the nature, timing, and degree of violence that occurred between 2003 and 2007 still remains puzzling. The narrative of continual conflict overlooks the high levels of coexistence and tolerance that existed among Baghdad’s middle-class communities. Intersectarian tolerance persevered after the fall of Saddam, and it was not until 2005 that violence took on a deadly sectarian pattern.”³⁵⁵ In other words, while Saddam was a ruthless ruler that placed Sunni on a pedestal and violently targeted Shia and Kurds, Iraqi citizens were still capable of coexistence under his rule. This is evident through the accounts of intermarriage and pluralistic living conditions prior to 2003. If it is true that ethnic antagonisms don’t always evolve into violent encounters, there must be a third variable contributing to the outbreak.

In the case of Iraq, the violence that erupted was primarily triggered by the U.S. interference and their establishment of a Shia-dominated consociational democracy and de-baathification policies that forced the *ethnic communities to compete over power*,

³⁵⁴ Ches Thurber, “From Coexistence to Cleansing: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Baghdad, 2003-2007.”

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

resources, and territory. Following the toppling of Saddam's government, sectarian violence became indiscriminate - anyone, including innocent civilians, could be killed at any moment solely based on their religious identity. This illegitimate government institution re-instigated identity politics and propagated a hostile environment for intergroup ethnic communities, which as a result, created a platform for sectarian-based brutality. As Thurber puts it: "rather than an unpreventable cause of war, identity-based violence is a product of war that is shaped and driven by the surrounding conflict."³⁵⁶ For this reason, preexisting ethnic antagonisms are inadequate in explaining, and should *not* be applied as the *cause*, for why these masked tensions erupted into such barbaric violence. The religious tensions and hatreds had been present for years, and thus, it is evident that there are *certain actors or groups that play a key role in driving these tensions to the brink of war.* It is plausible that if Iraq's history had taken a different path, the outbreak of brutal sectarian violence could have been masked or avoided.

The understanding that not all ethnic antagonisms lead to sectarian violence has critical implications on the viability of a power-sharing arrangement in Middle Eastern multiethnic states. In the case of Lebanon, this suggests that a lack of violent outbreaks between sectarian groups *are not representative of the functionality of a power-sharing arrangement.* In other words, while it seems that Lebanon is faring better than its neighbors because it has avoided an 'Arab Spring' situation of brutality like the one in Iraq, it is an oversimplification to believe that their governance structure is working effectively. Sectarian violence, or lack thereof, should not be utilized as an indicator of

³⁵⁶ Ches Thurber, "From Coexistence to Cleansing: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Baghdad, 2003-2007."

consociational structure success, as certain actors or events often tend to trigger ethnic violence. In the case of Iraq, the outbreak of violence was largely due to external factors, such as the U.S. intervention, rather than entrenched ethnic antagonisms. While Lebanon has also experienced vast waves of foreign intervention, it was never as sudden and forceful as the U.S. in Iraq. Similarly, Lebanon has functioned under a consociational democracy for decades, while Iraq was undergoing a transition from a dictatorship to a democracy for the first time ever. Thus, even though Lebanon appears to be experiencing less sectarian violence than Iraq, the power-sharing arrangement has proved to be detrimental to the functioning of the Lebanese state. There is an urgent need for Lebanon to adopt an alternative government structure that is better tailored to its people and their needs, or wait until the increasing sectarian tensions ensnare the country in another civil war.

Recommendations for Iraq and Lebanon

In the consensus system, you cannot win everything and you cannot lose anything. This becomes difficult because compromise in Arab culture is not acceptable - it's seen as a shame or weakness. If you look at Arab countries there are two phases: dictatorship or a zero-sum struggle between the tribes, which we've seen in Lebanon. The problem is that consensus democracy is an oxymoron: consensus is the rule of all; democracy is the rule of the majority. So you get paralysis, which has governed Lebanon, until one of the tribes grows strong enough to dominate the others.³⁵⁷

- Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to President Massoud Barzani of Iraqi Kurdistan

Iraq

Sectarianism is firmly rooted in the principles and policies of the political procedure in Iraq. The Shia overwhelmingly control the governance of the nation-state,

³⁵⁷ Lara Setrakian, "Beirut in Baghdad: Is the 'Lebanonization' of Iraq complete?"

creating a consummate climate for the radical mobilization of Sunni extremist groups, and a desire for decentralization by the Kurds. The power-sharing arrangement has also allowed Iraq “to become a playground for different regional and international powers who are competing for influence and the country’s oil resources”³⁵⁸ As each party and ethnic group is prioritizing their efforts on assembling their communities, little effort is targeted towards bridging the sectarian gap. Many significant political players today are advocating for a ‘managed breakup of Iraq under international auspices, facilitated through a pre-agreed revenue allocation formula for distributing oil revenues among autonomous regions that will have their own governments, police, army, civil service, and systems of justice.’³⁵⁹ The breakup of Iraq is intended to warranty security and defense of marginalized groups and contested land.

Through the politicization of religious identity due to sectarian-based power-sharing institutions, the nationalistic narrative is indubitably tainted. As individuals turn to their religious confessions for group identification, it is easy to forget that first and foremost, one’s loyalty should be to the state itself. The sectarian nature that exists in Iraq has been so encompassing that it has led opposing religious confessions to believe that co-existence is inherently impossible, even though it is evident that the under Saddam’s rule, religious differences were to some degree tolerated and normalized, especially in multiethnic cities such as Baghdad.

In order to prevent Iraq from crumbling into several independent microstates, the Iraqi government needs to focus on nation-building and “finding communal

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Pauline H. Baker, “From Failed State to Civil War: The Lebanonization of Iraq 2003-2006 — An Analysis for Civil-Military Transitions,” *The Fund for Peace*, January 2, 2006.

representatives [that don't advance] communal divides."³⁶⁰ Reconciliation plans are *necessary* to re-institute government legitimacy, beginning with policies attending to the alienation of the Sunni community. Power should no longer be divided across ethnosectarian lines, but rather decentralized to eliminate exclusionary politics. An increase in Sunni participation is essential to solving the issue of marginalization in Iraq and eliminating insurgents such as ISIS. ISIS, a chief source of insecurity in Iraq, must be eradicated, which can only be done by proving to the Sunnis that their government will do a better job of representing their interests than an insurgency - easier said than done. The progressive accumulation of Shiite power must come to an end, or else Sunni disenfranchisement will continue to empower the insurgencies.

Lebanon

In a fractured society like Lebanon, the consociational government structure has been a recipe for continual volatility rather than a framework intended to achieve ethnic rapprochement. To reference Fuad Hussein's quote from above, Lebanon's power-sharing political institution prioritizes demography over democracy, inescapably risking identity-based exclusion and the marginalization of minorities. Political sectarianism has emerged as a result, "creating perverse self-serving incentives for state officials and poor governance outcomes."³⁶¹ These trends are continuously fortifying: heightening mistrust and antipathies between religious communities, eroding prospects for improvement.

While Lebanon has remained stable-ly unstable, increased foreign domination and a

³⁶⁰ Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, "Iraq's Sectarian Crisis: A Legacy of Exclusion," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 23, 2014.

³⁶¹ Maha Yahya and Jean Kassir, "Political Sectarianism in Iraq and Lebanon," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, June 30, 2017.

gridlocked government might cause the country to fall apart - a disastrous situation in the context of the Middle East today.

In order for Lebanon to escape the vicious cycle of crises, it must face the challenge of drastically modifying its sectarian-based political institution to one that is secular and tolerant. This refined governmental structure must be one in which the national government is divided along political issues rather than religious lines, where cross-sectarian political action is encouraged. In Lebanon today, to join the government as a Sunni Muslim, one would have to adhere to the Sunni Prime Minister Saad Hariri's views and join his political organization, even if they don't personally agree with his politics. This logic is outdated and faulty. The future of Lebanon should consist of a climate in which young leaders can join together to create platforms based on their similar views on economic, social, and political views, instead of basing one's alliance on their religious affiliation.

While the transition into a stable centralized secular government is difficult, it is unquestionably possible. The youth in Lebanon are frustrated with the politics of their parents' pasts and have begun to speak out about the corruption and sectarianism encompassing their streets. This is largely evident through the formation of cross-sectional political platforms such as *Beirut Madinati*. The next, and final chapter will address the recommendations for Lebanon's future, and analyze the ways in which we are currently witnessing a movement towards secular politics.

Conclusion

Over the course of this Thesis, I have attempted to investigate the role of illegitimate political institutions in creating sectarian identities through the politicization of a religious identity, the ethnic antagonisms that arise as a result of this power-sharing arrangement, and the impact of political sectarianism on Lebanon's development. Sectarianism has been a critical factor behind Lebanon's destructive wars, underdevelopment, foreign intervention, and incessant political and social instability. It is through Lebanon's sect-based power-sharing governmental structure that an unhealthy relationship between religion and politics is formed, prioritizing the needs of certain confessions over those of individual citizens.³⁶² In summary, this thesis offers the following main arguments:

1. Consociational democracies or power-sharing arrangements accentuate segmental cleavages, such as religion/identity-based divisions, due to the dissection of power and influence along ethnic lines. As a result, this heightens intergroup antagonisms and violence.
2. Sectarian identities are associated with the relative power of certain ethnic groups. Thus, these identities are not salient, but rather subject to change as long as they are accompanied by shifting power dynamics and political reforms. Since the

³⁶² Maya Yahya, "The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, June 30, 2017.

sectarian discourse in Lebanon has shifted from a Christian-Muslim divide to a Sunni-Shia divide, is it possible for these identities to shift again.

3. In the case of Lebanon, identity-based divisions can be alleviated with a shift towards a secular government that erases the focus on one's sect identity and prioritizes the Lebanese national identity. The emergence of cross-sectional platforms and reforms to the current sectarian-political system are crucial in eliminating sectarianism.

This thesis first explores how divisions *along religious lines* in Lebanon's political institutions allow for the politicization of one's religious identity, and the manifestation of religion into one's most defining feature. The structure of the Lebanese consociational democracy, intended to represent all of Lebanon's 18 religious communities, instead creates a scenario in which these ethnic groups are pitted against each other in government. Since religion in Lebanon is directly associated with the amount of power, resources, and territory a religious group receives in government, this creates for ethnic antagonisms between marginalized religious communities and those with larger influence - also known as sectarianism.

However, through delving into the history of Lebanon and its consequent power-shifts between prominent ethnic groups, it is evident that *sectarian identities are subject to change* depending on the amount of influence held by a group at a particular time. For instance, prior to the Lebanese Civil War, the Maronite Christians maintained the most abundant share of power, causing the Sunni and Shia Muslims to feel as though they lacked adequate representation. The conflict was initially rooted in antagonisms between Muslims versus Christians. Oppositely, the end of the civil war led to some modifications

in the Lebanese power-sharing arrangement that gave Christians and Muslims equal representation. Now that the Sunni and Shia Muslims held more representation in government, this caused a shift in the sectarian conflict from Christians v. Muslims, to Sunni v. Shia. This historical transition is representative of the ever-constant shifting sands of sectarianism, and that ethnic antagonisms are often associated with power and resources and less rooted in imminent religious hostilities. It is important to recognize that the seemingly 'religious' conflict in Lebanon and the Middle East more broadly is not religious at all, but rather deeply politicized and determined by intergroup power dynamics.

There is reason to believe that since the sectarian lines have been previously altered in Lebanon's past, it is possible that they can be altered again. Sectarianism in Lebanon is chiefly based on the infiltration of religious politics in government; hence, in order to eliminate this entrenched system, there needs to be a move towards a secular state. By removing the association of religion with power and resources, the elimination of political sectarianism is achievable. The current illegitimate power-sharing institution diminishes the significance the Lebanese national identity and allows for the prioritization of one's sect/religious identity. The shift towards a secular government would reduce the current perpetual cycle of competition between Lebanon's prominent confessions, and place emphasis on the national identity, reducing ethnic antagonisms.

Underdevelopment in Lebanon is largely a result of sectarian politics that allow for a clientelist system that encourages an ever-spinning web of corruption, lack of accountability of the political elite, and inept basic services for all Lebanese citizens - despite the noteworthy amount of foreign aid. Further, Lebanon's economy is devastated

and consumed by crippling debt that it is incapable of paying off. Yet, due to the sectarianism in government, the dominant political elite have managed to uphold their authority even though they continuously find ways to profit from misspent public funds, and manage to place the blame of failing to provide public services on the state itself. This volatile situation, as described by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a *vicious cycle* in which: a “lack of cross-sectarian competition insulates elites from accountability, fostering patronage and clientelism, which leads to corruption and misspent public funds, which leads to state weakness and a failure to provide services for all, which leads to increased citizen dependence on the clientelist system, which leads to a lack of elite accountability.”³⁶³

Moreover, the case of Iraq provides evidence that ethnic antagonisms between groups are not inevitable; rather, they can be triggered by events or illegitimate organizations that prioritize certain groups while marginalizing others. Power-sharing institutions or consociational democracies, as implemented in Iraq and Lebanon, may not be the most practical solution for multiethnic states attempting to achieve reconciliation. As explained by Donald Horowitz, Professor of Law and Political Science at Duke, societies that are ethnically segmented are more likely to face adverse repercussions from power-sharing arrangements, since they “encourage ethnic or religious-based voting, thereby reinforcing polarization and communal tensions rather than moving towards peace and democratic reform.”³⁶⁴ Additionally, as highlighted by Rima Majid, consociationalism should not be a policy prescription or solution for multiethnic states, because it can often do more harm

³⁶³ Maya Yahya, “The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq.”

³⁶⁴ Donald L. Horowitz, “Ethnic power sharing: Three big problems,” *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 2 (2014): 5-20.

than good. Instead of serving as a solution, the institutionalization of identity-based divisions often become a self-fulfilling prophecy, increasing the intergroup tensions and making it more challenging to overcome political reforms.³⁶⁵ Thus, in order to develop an appropriate alternative, post-conflict solutions must adequately analyze the root causes of the crisis instead of rushing to resolve the conflict in ways that yield larger complications, inevitably worsening the situation.

In the case of Lebanon, the most effective way to overcome the deeply entrenched system of sectarianism is to eliminate it in its entirety through the separation of religion and government. While this is substantially easier said than done, I hypothesize that it is a plausible solution for several reasons. First, it is evident that political identities are not salient, and highly associated with regional, geopolitical, structural, and power changes. Thus, through modifying the political structure and power dynamics, social identities are subject to change, and intergroup rivalries - especially that of the Sunni-Shia divide - can be reduced over time. Second, while it is difficult to envision a political horizon in Lebanon that doesn't entail sectarianism, there has been a recent emergence of cross-sectional platforms that give hope to the notion of a secular government. While the transition away from a sectarian political system may take months, or even years, if there is a youth movement of civic activism large enough, they are capable of creating equalized power relations between ethnic groups and restoring faith in the Lebanese government for all. There's reason to believe that this movement currently exists, and is taking Lebanon by storm.

³⁶⁵ Rima Majid, "Consociationalism: A false remedy prescribed on a misdiagnosis," *Al Jumhuriya*, December 12, 2017.

It Is Time to Challenge the Status Quo: An Alternative Lebanon

The problem today, because of the religious leaders sharing power in government, is that they are also sharing the income and benefitting off the government. No Shia can go into government if he is not pro-Hezbollah, no Druze can go in if he's not pro-Jumblatt. Without a major change in the mindsets of people, nothing will change. There should be a civilian new generation party that is secular, and that has a spectrum of all different religions but same mindset and goals for country. There should also be separation between religion and government in Lebanon. I know it's not an easy transition, and a historically established part of Lebanese life and identity, but it's possible. We just need the community to take initiative.” - Dana, AUB Student

In order for Lebanon to overcome its deeply entrenched system of political sectarianism, the people must aim for progressive reforms that will ultimately create a secular society. The notion of secularism in the Lebanese context is extremely contradictory to the subsisting sectarian order. This multifaceted consociational system consists of “both the distribution of government and administrative posts among the various confessions and the relinquishing of personal status jurisdictions to the religious courts,” making one’s religious sect an inescapable reality of everyday life.³⁶⁶ For this reason, investigating anti-sectarian movements in Lebanon after the civil war was considered impractical. Everyone believed that any efforts to challenge the status quo were doomed to fail in a system of political deadlock and regional instability, discouraging individuals from local level mobilization. Then came July 2015. Despite the mounting challenges, the first prominent *al-Hirak* (anti-sectarian movement) became a reality. It’s time to stop talking about our sectarian differences, and start talking about our fundamental rights.

³⁶⁶ Alexandra Kassir, “‘We are here’: a new wave of anti-sectarian mobilizations in Lebanon,” *Open Democracy*, October 12, 2015.

Tul'it Rihitkum - Lebanon, YOU STINK!

The 'You Stink' movement, briefly mentioned in the third chapter on underdevelopment, erupted in July 2015 out of resentment and anger against an illegitimate government witnessing a presidential vacuum, corrupt political elite, a lack of basic services, and a river of trash that absorbed the streets of Beirut - to say the very least. The citizens had long overlooked the corruption and inaction in the Lebanese government, but the ongoing trash problem sparked a strong sentiment of discontent and extensive frustration, inviting the "largest public action" Lebanon has seen since 2005. With over 150,000 protesters taking to the streets for over 12 weeks, this citizen-led movement was *unprecedented* in Lebanon not only for its size and duration, but most significantly, for its *cross-sectional* and *anti-sectarian* nature.

In regards to the trash crisis and the absence of a permanent landfill, the protesters called for the development of an environmentally friendly, sustainable solution for disposing of the waste, and a functional recycling system. With a growing sense of frustration, these demands broadened to include the resignation of the Ministry of Environment, overdue parliamentary elections, accountability of corrupt political elite, and the elimination of sectarianism, among other things.³⁶⁷ As the movement gained momentum, numerous "existing civil society organizations, student movements, leftist groups, and newly formed collectives" bound together to increase the impact.³⁶⁸ Concurrently, citizens of all genders, ages, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds, joined these collectives on the streets, abandoning the mention of political parties. The

³⁶⁷ Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action," *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, September 2016.

³⁶⁸ Alexandra Kassir, "'We are here': a new wave of anti-sectarian mobilizations in Lebanon."

Lebanese diaspora also communicated their support and unanimity through assembling peaceful protests in a myriad of cities all over the world.³⁶⁹

While these demonstrations initially pressured state institutions to engage in paramount reforms, in an environment where identity politics and sectarianism persists, the political elite were incapable of agreeing on a solution for the trash crisis - and got away with it. It became quickly evident that power-sharing arrangements play a role in limiting mobilization dynamics.

Yet, despite failing to achieve political reforms, the civic mobilization efforts can be considered a success as they provoked a sense of empowerment and political activism among the Lebanese population, in a particularly trying time of paralysis. Further, the #You Stink movement was novel in demonstrating that *it is possible to challenge the status quo*. To do, however, civic activists must “establish cross-sectarian relations across the country, or create new political formations that can compete in elections at all levels.”³⁷⁰ This suggests that in order to overthrow the stifling sectarian order, civic groups must unite mixed ethnic populations on issue-based activism, rather than religion or political party based divides. This form of civic activism is taking place in Lebanon at this very moment.

Understanding *al-Hirak*

Prior to the new anti-sectarian wave, civic activism along sectarian lines has long been a vital attribute of the Lebanese population tracing back to the 1990s. Following the civil war, Lebanon’s well-established network of civil society organizations, labor

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Maya Yahya, “The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq.”

unions, and political parties strongly advocated for government reforms and parliamentary elections to occur. One of the significant contributions of these groups was the creation of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) in 1996 to oversee the elections and ensure their legitimacy.³⁷¹ To this day, LADE observes all levels of governmental elections. The “Baladi, Baldati, Baladiyahati” (My Country, My Town, My Municipality) movement of 1998 was also distinguished for fighting against the postponed municipal elections, making it clear to the political elite that this is unacceptable, preventing them from delaying the elections again.³⁷²

The recent influx of anti-sectarian movements in the post-war era has been dominated by the plurality of individuals, collectives, NGOs, and student groups, among others, fighting a collective battle to abolish the sect-based confessional system of governance. Many activists that have joined anti-partisan collectives have vocalized frustration with the system placing emphasis on one’s religion. They claim that religion should not be representative of one’s political affiliation, or even one’s beliefs, thus rejecting the role of religion in their country’s government. Anti-sectarian civic activism first emerged in 2006 with the “first conference of the seculars in Lebanon, which brought together the various collectives promoting secularism at the time.”³⁷³ Yet the movement did not gain much recognition until the Arab uprisings of 2011, which aroused an atmosphere of upheaval in Lebanon that led to demonstrations aimed to demolish the sectarian regime. After which several youth collectives surfaced to advocate for issues of

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Alexandra Kassir, “‘We are here’: a new wave of anti-sectarian mobilizations in Lebanon.”

individual freedoms, LGBT rights, domestic violence, women's rights, and government services.³⁷⁴

These youth coalitions chiefly operate on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and crowdfunding, to share their message and mobilize the masses.³⁷⁵ According to Lebanese Professor Mona Harb, since 2011, these collectives have become dominantly issue-based, and tend to include high percentages of young women in executive positions.³⁷⁶ With time, the excitement from the 2011 protests died down, and it wasn't until the 2015 You Stink movement that organized protests and coalitions began to emerge.

The *Beirut Madinati* (Beirut, My City) Experience

The You Stink protests were significant in encouraging the mobilization of young individuals and civil society organizations against government corruption. Yet, due to their separation from the formal political process in Lebanon, the movement was inadequate in forcing the political institutions to undergo any changes. This led to the emergence of *Beirut Madinati*, a cross-sectional, anti-sectarian platform consisting of young urban activists that were inspired to compete in the 2016 Beirut municipal elections as opposition to the existing sectarian-based political system. The group's candidates came from diversified milieus, including arts, media, business, engineering, architecture, and urban planning.³⁷⁷ In a span of six-months, they created a campaign based on critical urban issues, recruited candidates and over 1,500 volunteers, arranged

³⁷⁴ Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action."

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Maya Yahya, "The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq."

neighborhood discussions and dialogues on prominent matters, and succeeded in obtaining the necessary funds they needed to compete through crowdfunding campaigns and social media outreach.³⁷⁸

The basis of this grassroots organization's platform was to increase political conscientiousness about the widespread misconduct and defective forms of decision-making present in state institutions.³⁷⁹ Beirut Madinati wrote and compiled a thirty-two-page program that tackled the capital's shortcomings and limitations, and advanced their solutions on enhancing public services such as transportation, public spaces, costly housing, conserving cultural heritage, eco-friendly initiatives, and more.³⁸⁰ The group was able to allure a large following across generational, religious, regional, and class divides through their anti-government rhetoric, offering the citizens of Beirut a practical alternative to the political elite and their dysfunctional patronage system that has long prioritized personal benefits over public good.³⁸¹ For many Lebanese, Beirut Madinati was indicative of a 'return to the essentials of politics,' especially after experiencing decades lacking consequential political activity.³⁸²

Even though Beirut Madinati lost the municipal elections to the Beirut political elite, they managed to secure 30% of the votes - a considerable amount for an anti-sectarian platform in a city governed by partisan politics.³⁸³ More significantly, by operating a comprehensive issue-based platform, Beirut Madinati indirectly forced the

³⁷⁸ Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action."

³⁷⁹ Jeffrey G. Karam, "Beyond Sectarianism: Understanding Lebanese Politics through a Cross-Sectarian Lens," *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, no: 107 (April 2017).

³⁸⁰ Maya Yahya, "The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq."

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action."

Beirut political elite to address critical matters for the first time if they wished to secure their previously unopposed win. This initiative galvanized civil society groups to form on the basis of issues, rather than sectarian groups, revealing a loss of confidence in Lebanon's political parties. By addressing critical matters that the public viewed as important and the sectarian system had failed to address, Beirut Madinati proved that it was possible to challenge the political elites.

This was also the first time in Lebanon's history that a cross-sectarian coalition made it this far, further empowering the activists all over Lebanon to continue their attempts at dismantling the multifaceted power-sharing arrangement. This ripple effect is evident through the prominence of "independent municipal campaigns that were running in other regions and towns in Lebanon taking up similar names, such as Jounieh Madinati, Nabatieh Madinati, Tripoli Madinati, Deir el-Kamar Baldati, etc."³⁸⁴ Beirut Madinati was successful in revealing a basic underlying truth: "as long as the elites control institutions and public resources, the Lebanese electoral system will continue to create very limited opportunities for non-elite cross-sectarian movements to effectively challenge the status quo."³⁸⁵ The momentous takeaway from the Beirut Madinati experience was that one way to make a tangible change in a rigid political system is to partake in the political process, particularly elections, rather than whining aimlessly while waiting for conditions to magically improve. Finally, The Beirut Madinati experience set a precedent for other civil society groups, and is a key factor behind these newly formed nationalistic, anti-government platforms' decision to compete in the upcoming

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Jeffrey G. Karam, "Beyond Sectarianism: Understanding Lebanese Politics through a Cross-Sectarian Lens."

parliamentary elections taking place in May 2018. The elite's place in the political system is not definite, and citizens are irrevocably ready to see how fast they can fall.

The Upcoming Elections May 2018

They're like the guy who pisses in the ocean and thinks it will rise. I don't view these [nonsectarian, nonpartisan groups] as a threat in the elections.

- Bassem Shabb, current Member of Parliament within Hariri's Sunni Future Bloc

We can start to make progress by changing the way that we vote. We should be allowed to vote for individuals outside our religious sect based on the ideas and issues they address. Just because someone is Shia or Sunni or Orthodox doesn't mean that I don't agree with their political viewpoints. It's not fair, limiting us to only voting for our sect and representatives from our area. The entire youth population needs to opt for secular leaders, and stop re-electing the political elite. – Kaiya, LAU Student

Lebanon is currently gearing up for its first election season in nearly a decade, with the last parliamentary election held on June 7th, 2009. These elections have been consistently delayed due to political gridlock over electoral law reforms, security issues, and a two-year political vacuum that inappropriately permitted the parliament to 'extend its own mandate twice.'³⁸⁶ With a new electoral law in place, elections are ready to be held on May 6, 2018. Yet, unlike previous elections, this year several cross-sectional anti-sectarian groups are competing in the political battle, pitting the country's old corrupt elite against a new, unorthodoxly radical current. With 128 parliamentary seats, 976 candidates are competing, 111 of which are female candidates, up from the 12 women who engaged in the previous 2009 elections and the 4 women who are a part of the parliament now.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Kareem Chehayeb, "In Lebanon's parliamentary elections, independent candidates hope to shake up the political status quo," *The Arab Weekly*, January 28, 2018.

Further, on January 19 a group of independent activists came together to announce their creation of *Tahaluf Watani* - Lebanon's National Coalition -, which contains over ten anti-sectarian groups, including "Li Baladi, Baalbek Madinati, and You Stink, to compete for seats across the country's 15 districts."³⁸⁸ *Sabaa*, Arabic for Seven, is another nonsectarian/nonpartisan group that has emerged to compete in the upcoming elections. Similar to other alternative groups, *Sabaa* calls for radical change, accountability, and a functioning society with basic services, which they claim they can provide. According to their campaign, "Seven sees Lebanon as the ultimate homeland for all its people and a model of multiculturalism within a civil state that preserves all freedoms, respects all human beings, and *separates religion from the state*."³⁸⁹ Uniquely, *Sabaa* believes in the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and wants to ensure that national parties don't receive foreign funding, from Iran or Saudi Arabia for example, as that would hinder the government's functionality.

It is important, however, to consider the overbearing difficulties this civic activism movement faces in surpassing an identity-based power-sharing system and accomplishing durable reforms. Some of these challenges include: a hegemonic sectarian political system that has been in place since the country's independence, a tense geopolitical war in which Lebanon is caught in the middle, a neighboring refugee crisis, and powerful parliamentary elite and government policies that have 'threatened youth activism before through co-optation, manipulation, neutralization, and repression.'³⁹⁰ It's difficult to conceive that the country's youth is capable of overcoming these challenges

³⁸⁸ Nour Samaha, "Lebanon elections pit old guard against new movement."

³⁸⁹ "About Us." *Sabaa*, last updated April 9, 2018.

³⁹⁰ Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action."

and eliminating the sectarian government - but there's reason to believe that it's possible. After Beirut Madinati's ability to receive a significant percentage of the votes in the last municipality elections there was a shift in public mood. Many individuals and groups felt empowered to continue fighting for political change because they could finally see the possibilities of their efforts. There is still an arduous road to face dominated by many obstacles, but it is a path many are willing to take.

Due to the extensive delay in elections, this round of elections will bear a new generation of voters that were previously unable to vote. With worsening socioeconomic living conditions and a corrupt system of patronage, these promising alternative and radical groups might actually stand a chance at reforming Lebanon's rigid sectarian political scene. While this thesis concludes prior to the election date, I am hoping that this cycle brings positive change to Lebanon. Yet, even if the nonpartisan groups fail to grab a significant amount of parliamentary seats, I am confident that Lebanon is experiencing a wave of positive change that starts with the youth. It doesn't happen in days, or even months, but with time, even a pluralistic Lebanon can find a way to overcome its sectarian antagonisms.

We are in the midst of a movement.

Long Live Lebanon.

Lubnan Balade.

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