LSE Middle East Centre

Consociationalism and the State: Lebanon and Iraq in Comparative Perspective

As part of the Henry Luce Foundation funded project, Managing Religious Diversity in the Middle East: The *Muhasasa Ta'ifia* in Iraq, 2003–2018, since early 2021 the LSE Middle East Centre has run a series of workshops bringing together a diverse range of scholars to critically examine the impact consociational power-sharing agreements have on the post-war state and its institutions. The workshops have allowed participants to develop and receive feedback on a series of papers across three central themes: 1) the assumptions that consociational theory makes about the state and the implications these assumptions and the consociational agreements they generate have on the state and its institutions in Europe, Iraq, and Lebanon, 2) how consociational power-sharing arrangements have shaped the state's civil and coercive institutions and, 3) the politics of anti-systemic protests.

Consociationalism and the state

The first set of papers produced as part of these workshops interrogate the relationship of consociationalism and the state.

In his paper, "**Iraq, Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State**", Professor Toby Dodge of the LSE Middle East Centre, argues that consociationalism has an under-theorised understanding of the state, implicitly defaulting to a neo-Weberian model. He then assesses, how Iraq's informal consociational settlement, established after the drafting of the constitution and the elections of 2005 has transformed the institutions of the state and the senior civil service. He argues that it has shifted the balance away from any autonomous power that the institutions and the civil service possessed towards the political parties which now dominate the system for their own ends.

Professor Dodge's paper is complimented by that presented by Associate Professor & Head of the Politics & International Relations Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Dr Bassel Salloukh's contribution "**The State of Consociationalism in Lebanon**". In this paper, he argues that in contexts such as Lebanon, consociationalism becomes a pretext to justify elite capture of state institutions and resources, thus inhibiting the emergence of stateness and governability. In addition, like Professor Dodge, he argues that the consociational literature already assumes the presence of a neo-Weberian state as opposed to the type of state typically found in Global South states whether in their post-war or postcolonial moments.

In her paper "**Getting Things Done? Process, performance, and decision-evasion in consociational systems"**, Dr Allison McCulloch, Associate Professor at Brandon University, examines the sources and consequences of consociation's propensity to 'get things done' or the conditions under which the decision-making record tends toward gridlock, decision evasion, and 'kicking the can down the road'. To this end, she focuses on perceptions of state legitimacy and the state's legislative capacity during the implementation phase.

This set of papers is completed by a contribution from Associate Professor at the Central European University Dr Matthijs Bogaards. In **"Consociationalism and the State"**, he systematizes insights on the role of the state in consociational theory and practice. Dr Bogaard's paper is structured around three groups of questions and answers. First, a review of five answers to the question "who owns the state?". The second question is a chicken-egg question: what comes first, consociation or state-building? The third question is whether there is an inevitable trade-off between strength of the state and the extent of political and socio-political consociationalism.

The state's civic and coercive institutions

The second group of papers examine the relationship between consociationalism and the state's civic and coercive institutions.

In their paper "**Conflict Mitigation Versus Governance: The case of consociation in Iraq", ** Dr Dylan O'Driscoll, Associate Professor at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University and Dr Irene Costantini, Assistant Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Naples, "L'Orientale" use post-2003 Iraq as a case-study to critically examine consociation in action. They argue that consociational power sharing is extremely valuable to reach agreement, mitigate conflict, and form an 'inclusive' government. However, in Iraq, consociational power sharing has failed to meet the governance needs of the population and although governments are formed, they do not necessarily govern. In a post-conflict society like Iraq with considerable development needs, failure of consociational governance has substantial negative impacts on the population.

Dr Hannes Baumann **Senior Lecturer** at the University of Liverpool presented a paper entitled **"Political Economy, State, and Consociationalism in Lebanon: Beirut's 2015 garbage crisis and the "load" on consociation"**. In this paper he argues that consociational theory claims that rule by elite cartel is the best means of ensuring peace and democracy in "deeply divided" societies. Social and economic issues are conceptualised as an external "load" on the system, which must remain minimal for consociation to work. However, as the gestation of Beirut's 2015 garbage shows, the political economy is no external "load" on consociation: Consociationalism can itself be an important factor that shapes the political economy in often detrimental ways.

Inspired by theories that approach the state as a social space that is contiguous with society, Dr Maria Fantappie from Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, presented a paper entitled "**Inside Iraq's *Muhasasa*: Adhering, deserting or transforming consociationalism"**. In it she argues that consociationalism is built into society rather than floating above it. Consociationalism is a mode of operation—shared by elites and their constituents—that regulates redistribution of power and resources across society.

Professor Michiel Leezenberg of Amsterdam University presented a paper titled **"Between Baghdad and Islamic State: The Kurdish consociational experiment in post-Saddam Iraq**". In it, he argued that whatever consociationalism we find in post-Saddam Iraq, and in particular concerning the Kurdistan Region, may be usefully discussed in terms of practices and of

tactics in ongoing power struggles between different segments of the elites, rather than simply employed as an analytical tool or a normative constitutional and institutional ideal.

The politics of anti-systemic protest

The final set of papers examine how consociationalism has shaped anti-systemic opposition in the form of protests and movements.

Taif Alkhudary, Research Officer at LSE Middle East Centre, presented a paper entitled **"From *Muhasasa* to *Mawatana*: Consociationalism and identity transformation within the Iraqi protest movement 2011-2019"**. In it she argues that the failure of consociationalism in Iraq has resulted in the transformation of identity within the Iraqi protest movement, driving increasingly coherent mobilisations based on unitary nationalism and secular citizenship. She suggests that this is indicative of the way that the sectarian narratives of the political elite used to justify and naturalise the imposition of the *Muhasasa* have shaped the form that nascent political identities in Iraq have taken, as well as limited their effectiveness in challenging the core mechanisms of power-sharing.

In a similar vein Dr Ibrahim Halawi, Teaching Fellow at Royal Holloway University, presented a paper entitled "**Lebanon's Political Opposition in Search for Identity: He who has no sect among you cast the first stone**". In it, he grapples with the impact of the post-war sectarian system on the articulation and organisation of political opposition in Lebanon, focusing on the period between the Arab Spring and Lebanon's October 2019 protests. He argues that the articulation and organisation of political opposition is limited by deeply rooted sectarian identification as a result of decades of sectarian state-society relations, and particularly informal and everyday sectarian identification.