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Consociational Democracy and The Prospects of Agonistic Peace:

A Mixed Method Study of the Effects of Lebanese Power-Sharing from 2006 to 2022

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Abstract

The thesis highlights the need for a broader understanding of consociational democracy and its relationship with government immobilism and agonistic peace. Being a mixed study of the period 2006 to 2022, it suggests that the existing theory of consociational democracy, as proposed by Arend Lijphart (1969) overlooks the cyclical nature of these factors in Lebanon. The thesis argues that government immobilism in Lebanon reinforces conflictual identities and the consociational political apparatus, thus calling for an expansion of Lijphart's theory to incorporate its cyclical aspects. Furthermore, the thesis suggests that understanding the effects of consociational democracy on agonistic peace is crucial. Government immobilism, which can be perpetuated by the consociational democratic structure, hampers the attainment of thick recognition between parties and undermines institutional inclusion, which is a key component of agonistic peace theory. Furthermore, the thesis argues that consociational democracy, reliant on elite-level consensus making, limits anti-hegemonic discourse.

Keywords: Consociational democracy, Lebanon, power-sharing, agonistic peace, government immobilism

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. The Lebanese civil war and the Ta'if Agreement.....	5
3. Theory.....	6
3.1 Previous literature.....	6
3.1.1 Consociational democracy.....	6
3.1.2 Government immobilism.....	10
3.1.3 Agonistic peace.....	10
3.2 My Contribution/theoretical framework.....	12
4. Research design.....	14
4.1 Method.....	14
4.2 Case selection.....	16
4.2.1 Potential biases.....	18
4.3 Material.....	18
4.4 Operationalization of variables.....	21
5. Results.....	22
6. Analysis.....	28
6.1 Causes of government immobilism in consociational democracy theory compared with the data.....	28
6.2 Agonistic peace theory compared with the data.....	30
6.3 Towards a broader understanding of consociational democracy.....	32
7. Conclusion.....	33
8. References.....	35

1. Introduction

Lebanon's insistence on the use of power-sharing to govern its heterogenous society has thus far succeeded in stopping the outbreak of another civil war. The last civil war erupted in 1975 and was concluded with the signing of the Ta'if agreement in 1989, whereby the previous consociational democratic structure was altered yet retained. Indeed, much of the literature on power-sharing argues that power-sharing in many instances can be deployed as an effective tool for combating the security dilemma and the reemergence of open violence (Sisk 1996, p. 109; Hartzell & Hoddie 2003, p. 330). However, it has also been noted that problems persist despite over three decades of nominal peace (Bassel F. Salloukh 2023, pp. 10-11). One such problem has to do with government immobilism, which could be argued as being the result of Lebanon's consociational power-sharing system, and which helps to reproduce it (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5).

This thesis aims to investigate the effects of power-sharing on positive peace rather than its traditional connection to negative peace. Seeing as Lebanon still experiences problems related to state immobilism despite over three decades of negative peace, one must ask whether or not its consociational democracy has contributed to these problems and the prospects of positive peace. The years 2006 to 2022 were chosen for the investigation given the availability of data for this period. The concept of positive peace takes the form of Agonistic peace developed by Lisa Strömbom and Isabel Bramsen. This branch of positive peace stresses the need for not only institutional transformations of inclusion as an important step towards positive peace but also the transformation of relations to a degree of mutual respect (Strömbom 2019, p. 951; Strömbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1243-1244).

The investigation addresses the question of whether or not — in highly heterogeneous societies such as Lebanon — there is a potential dissonance between two existing goals within the peace- and conflict literature: On the one hand, it is argued that power-sharing (i.e the fragmentation of

state power) can be an effective tool for societies emerging from civil conflict to achieve lasting negative peace (Sisk 1996, p. 4). On the other hand, the literature on agonistic peace would claim that the state needs to accommodate all voices of society and that relationships between groups must be improved (Strömbom 2019, p. 951), which is difficult in elite-led consensus politics found in consociational democracies. One solution to this problem could be to deploy consociational democracy as a transitional arrangement, however, the problem of the rigidity of the system makes this difficult (Horowitz 2014, p. 12). My research question is thus: *RQ: In what way does Lebanon's consociational democratic system impact government immobility, and ultimately the prospects of agonistic peace?* Given the scope of the question, a mixed methods approach was chosen to establish the connections between all three phenomena, to reach a broad understanding of the potential effects of consociational democracy.

First, a brief history of the civil war and the Ta'if agreement will be presented. After this, the previous literature on consociational democracy, government immobilism, and agonistic peace is summarized, followed by a presentation of my theoretical framework which combines Lijphart's conception of consociational democracy as well as Strömbom and Bramsen's development of agonistic peace. Following this, the research design is outlined, after which follows the results part. Next follows an analysis of the results in conjunction with the theoretical framework, and lastly a conclusion is presented.

2. The Lebanese civil war and the Ta'if Agreement

Whilst the Ta'if Agreement is the most recent iteration of power-sharing in Lebanon – the name deriving from the Saudi city in which it was signed in 1989 – there exists a long precedence. Lebanon experienced its first institutionalized power-sharing arrangement in 1861– called the Mutassarifiya – under Ottoman rule, whereby quotas were used to divide roles of power between the Maronites and Druze that occupied the then smaller territory of Mont Liban. In the constitution of 1926, under the French mandate, power-sharing was yet again institutionalized and expanded upon. Later still, the National Pact of 1943 enshrined consociationalism as a core future of the Lebanese state during the inception of its independence, which remained in place

until the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 2). During this time, the balance of power was arranged according to the initial demographic distribution of Lebanese confessional groups (people with the same religious affiliation), and whilst the simple Maronite-sunni-shia delineation does not demonstrate the complexity of Lebanon's many subgroups, it is important to note that the Maronites held most power during this period (UCDP 2023, Lebanon).

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of today's inter-group-dynamics one must recognize the effects of the former civil war. As suggested in a recent article by John Nagle and Mary-Alice Clancy write, it would be wrong to interpret inter-group animosity as inherent and thus unavoidable. Instead, Nagle and Clancy urge us to consider these inter-group dynamics as manipulated by certain elites to further their ambitions, which forces us to consider how the immobilisms of the Lebanese state today might be in the interest of certain people (pp. 2-3). This is important, as Sisk writes, since ethnic conflicts in many instances are a product of elites whose interests are advanced in mobilizing group members. Additionally, recognizing ethnic conflicts within fractured societies as stemming from deeper reasons than simply ethnicity itself allows policymakers and peace and conflict researchers to identify ways forward (Sisk 1996, p 4).

The distribution of power was challenged first in 1958 by the Nasserite movement (composed mainly of Sunni Muslims) who sought integration with Nasser-led Egypt during the era of pan-Arabism. The second challenge came in the early 1970s when changing demographics gave rise to questioning the legitimacy of the power distribution which favored the Maronites. In 1975, fighting erupted which would become the Lebanese civil war. The participating actors included political militias that were formed along sectarian lines, Palestinian groups such as the PLO resided in Lebanon to avoid the Israelis, as well as the states of Israel and Syria. The fighting would ultimately claim more than 100 000 lives (Ochsenwald & Kingston, Britannica 2023). Having defeated the opposition to the Ta'if agreement which redistributed power according to the new demographic realities so that no group held majority power, the Lebanese parliamentarians signed the agreement in 1989. While the UNDP dataset begins in 1989, the spike in the number of deaths in 1990 drops significantly afterward until almost completely

disappearing around the year 2000. Another spike in 2006/2007 coincided with the Israeli-Lebanese conflict in 2006 (UNDP 2023, Lebanon).

3. Theory

3.1 Previous literature

3.1.1 Consociational democracy

In surveying the literature on power-sharing, different authors make their contributions to explain its emergence, the forms it can inhibit, and the effects it can have on societies fraught with large group cleavages. Furthermore, while power-sharing arrangements can be seen as a permanent solution for these societies (Lijphart 1969), they can also be viewed as a useful transitional arrangement into more productive modes of political organization (Sisk 1996, p. 129). Whereas there is some divide as to the effects of power-sharing, most authors seem to agree why it historically has been — and continually is being deployed.

Two main reasons stand out. The first is that power-sharing can act as a security guarantee for minority groups, and the other is that it can regulate inter-group conflict in societies emerging from civil conflict (Sisk 1996, p. 4). Donald Horowitz describes power-sharing as arising as the solution to the problem of ensuring minority rights in heterogeneous societies where ascriptive affiliations such as ethnicity, race, religion, or language are threatened by the dominant group in power. Even in democratic countries, ethnic cleavages tend to produce ethnic parties and voting according to ethnic delineations, which can cement conflictual relationships (Horowitz 2014, p. 5). Following this view, some of the recent literature considers consociational power-sharing (not least in Lebanon) as perpetuating and entrenching sectarian conflict (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5; Salloukh 2023, p. 1-2). The conflict-regulation attributes of power sharing are often understood in terms of negative peace, connected to its ability to regulate conflict in societies emerging from civil war (Hartzell & Hoddie 2003). In so doing, deeper understandings of peace and its relation to power-sharing are often left out.

The focus of this thesis is the consociational democratic form of power-sharing as this is what is deployed in Lebanon. Consociational power-sharing refers to a system of agreed guarantees, which in effect often involves instituting veto powers and a proportional right to participate in government for minority groups (Horowitz 2014, p. 5). The thesis rely mostly on Lijpharts work on consociational democracy. In Lijpharts early work studying the case of the Netherlands, he notes that a well-functioning democracy took root there despite vast religious and class cleavages (1968, pp. 1-2). Deriving his ideas from liberal notions of pluralism as a potentially beneficial aspect of societies (1968, pp. 3-7), Lijphart attributes the success of the Netherlands' system of consociational power-sharing, wherein the behavior of the elites was characterized by a willingness to cooperate and stabilize the society. Such behavior, Lijphart argued, is what allowed the Netherlands and other similarly fractured societies to reject the sort of immobilism that otherwise permeates in deeply divided societies (1969, pp. 212-213).

According to Lijphart, elites of various subcultures can either engage each other competitively and thus further aggravate tension, or they can take the direction towards cooperation. The latter is argued by Lijphart to counteract the government immobilism and destabilization that can emerge in fragmented societies (p. 212). By examining several successful consociational democracies, Lijphart identified three common characteristics.

The first characteristic is good *inter-subcultural relations at the elite level*. This can be achieved by a) the existence of external threats, b) multiparty systems wherein no single party can form a majority, and c) low burdens on the decision-making apparatus — i.e. positive factors such as a productive economy and social equilibrium (1969 p. 216). Lebanon is mentioned here as a prime exhibitor of these characteristics (1969, pp. 218-219), which in hindsight should be subject to a degree of scrutiny given the eruption of the Lebanese civil war which followed. Lijphart notes that a tendency of government immobilism is ever-present in all fragmented societies. While the structure of consociational democracy is conceived to combat this tendency, he notes that immobilism will always remain a danger if the elite is unable or unwilling to cooperate.

Secondly, good *inter-subcultural relations at the mass level* are sustained by distinct lines of cleavage. Groups with little contact between them need not conflict, whereas dispersed diverging

interests are more easily guided toward coalition (p. 219). The argument is that the number of transactions among antagonistic subcultures in divided societies increases the possibility of violent conflict. While homogeneous societies can benefit from increased interactions by garnering mutual understanding and further homogenization, interactions between the various subcultures of heterogeneous societies are believed to accumulate tension and risk hostility (p. 220).

Thirdly, Lijphart identifies that *elite-mass relations within the sub-cultures* are also helped by distinct lines of cleavage between subcultures. In consociational democracies, political elites need to cooperate and compromise with each other while maintaining the allegiance and support of their constituents. When subcultures are cohesive political blocs, it becomes easier for elites to garner support from their followers. The ability of party leaders to carry their followers along is crucial for successful elite-mass relations. Secondly, distinct cleavages make it more likely that parties and interest groups will serve as organized representatives of the political subcultures. While these parties may not be perfect aggregators of interests, they provide an adequate articulation of subcultural interests (1969, p. 221).

Ever since Lijphart developed the theory of consociational democracy in 1968, other authors have made contributing findings. René Lermarchand investigates examples of failed consociational power-sharing arrangements in Africa, where she recognizes the merits of consociationalism, while noting that many examples of power-sharing arrangements in Africa indicate unsuccessful outcomes (Lermarchand 2007, p. 2). More recently, Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie built on Lijphart's work by arguing that that power-sharing theory has suffered from too little statistical analysis, a gap which they aimed to fill by conducting a large-N study (p. 318). Their findings indicated that power-sharing arrangements is an effective tool for post-war societies to counteract the security dilemma and regulate conflict (Hartzell & Mathew 2003, p. 330).

3.1.2 Government immobilism

Seeing as power-sharing arrangements equip minority groups with veto powers and proportional political participation, there is an inherent risk of government paralysis. Lijphart notes that

Continental European systems — which he associates with the partition of power and consociationalism — tend to be inherently unstable and threatened by immobilism (Lijphart, 1969, p. 208). Nagle, and Clancy find that Lebanese consociational democracy is in large part to blame for the country's government immobilism. They suggest that the systems reliance on elite cooperation has produced an ineffective state where incentives of rent-seeking and elite bargaining have only worked to reproduce inter-group animosity (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5).

Likewise, Bassel F. Salloukh claims that government immobilism has been characterizing the Lebanese state since 2005, in that state institutions and policies have been captured by the Lebanese political elite (2023, pp. 10-11). According to Salloukh, the Lebanese political elite has been able to produce clientelist networks and have actively fostered sectarian politics which has allowed them to stay in power at the demise of government mobility (pp. 11-13). Likewise, Donald L. Horowitz explores the difficulty of transforming and adjusting power-sharing structures once they are in place. Consociational arrangements — which in the setting of Lebanon is referred to as confessional power-sharing— are according to Horowitz prone to immobilism at the same time as adjustments are identified as crucial. As power-sharing agreements grant minorities veto rights, the outcome is a system wherein each party blocks the other's initiatives (2014, p. 12).

3.1.3 Agonistic peace

Agonistic peace theory emphasizes the importance of both structural and relation transformation in order to address root causes of conflict and to thus stop its reemergence. The theory builds on newer developments within peace and conflict studies that take issue with attempts at only dealing with direct or visible violence, understanding such approaches as limiting peace to the short term.

Understandings of deeper peace such as Galtung's conception of positive peace primarily focuses on the importance of structural transformation in transforming conflict-ridden societies — pointing out how violence first embeds itself in structures of power from which exclusion and marginalization eventually causes direct violence to (re)emerge (Shinko 2022, pp. 1405-1406). Agonistic peace theory rather stresses the combination of institutional inclusion in combination

with identity transformation as two crucial parts in moving away from merely the absence of violence, into what can be understood as agonistically peaceful societies (Strömbom 2019, p. 951).

The fundamental building blocks of agonistic peace are often cited as originating with Chantal Mouffe (1999; 2013) and Lederach (2003), who in an attempt to address the inadequacies of traditional peacebuilding — represented in part by the high rate of conflict recurrence (Walter 2004, p. 375; Darby & Mac Ginty 2008, p. 148; Greig 2012, p. 173) — sought to expand the notion of peace beyond its traditional understanding in negative terms.

More recently, Strömbom and Bramsen have made contributions to agonistic peace theory by arguing for both institutional transformation toward inclusion, but also the transformation of relationships between adversarial groups toward respect for one another. This necessitates spaces where conflict can be channeled through peaceful means and spaces for counter-hegemonic views (2022, p. 1243). Crucially for the case of Lebanon, while consociationalism represents a form of institutional inclusion, it is fundamentally built on consensus at the elite level. Strömbom and Bramsen note that agonistic peace should not be conflated with the notion of consensus-building prescribed by the literature on deliberative democracy (2022, pp. 1242-1243). Nagle finds that challenges to the hegemonic political structure of Lebanon comes from sectarian politics come from civil protests characterized as pluralizers and intersectionalists that utilize agonistic frameworks in their counter-hegemonic discourse (Strömbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1241-1242). However, counter-hegemonic voices are limited to outside the formal political sphere.

Connected to institutional inclusion is the second central facet of agonistic peace: relational transformation. Chantal Mouffe's understanding of identity and differences as co-constituting each other (Strömbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1243-1244). Borrowing from Lederach's pyramid of analytical levels, Strömbom stresses the need for not only elite-level inclusion but also transformation on lower levels, where interactions between confessional and ethnic affiliations are mentioned (Strömbom p. 957). Identity transformation toward recognition should according to Strömbom be analyzed in terms of thick and thin recognition (2019, p. 915). *Thin recognition*

means a formal kind of recognition connected to former opponents recognizing each other as legitimate negotiation partners which is an important first step in negotiation and signing peace accords. However, this level of recognition is not concerned with the root causes of conflict which is rather connected to *thick recognition*, meaning transforming relationships so as to create respect between adversaries (2019, pp. 953-954). Additionally, reconciliation is seen within agonistic peace theory as an important component in addressing and improving intra-societal relationships (Maddison 2021, p. 1308).

3.2 My Contribution/theoretical framework

To explore the relationship between consociational democracy, its effects on government immobilism, and how this, in turn, affects the level of positive peace in Lebanon, two theories were chosen: Firstly, Lijpharts theory of democratic consociationalism was chosen to establish how Lebanon's consociational power-sharing has impacted government immobilism. Here, Lijpharts proposed causes of government immobility were tested — that is the willingness of the elite to cooperate, and the pressure on the decision-making apparatus.

Secondly, Strömbom and Bramsen's developments on agonistic peace theory was chosen to connect Lebanon's consociational democratic structure — and possibly the government immobilism stemming from it — to the concept of positive peace. This peace theory opposes consociationalism's insistence on elite-led consensus building as it is seen as a political apparatus that is not conducive to agonistic peace, which in turn can be connected to the phenomena of government immobilism and the resulting public (dis)trust in government institutions. Relations at all levels of society was analyzed— which is a crucial aspect of agonistic peace, along with efforts of reconciliation. Additionally, the insights from agonistic peace theory — alongside insights from previous research on the effects of Lebanon's consociational democratic system — shed light on how the relationships between various levels of society help contribute to upholding the very system that gave rise to it. All these potential connections are represented in Figure 1.1.

The contribution of this thesis to the literature on consociational democracy is to incorporate the theory of agonistic peace. In so doing, power-sharing will be broadened to include its effects on

positive peace rather than its traditional connection to negative peace. The analysis focuses on the connections between consociational democracy, government immobilism and agonistic peace by comparing the emerging data with Lijpharts prescription causes of government immobilism in consociational democracies, while also comparing it to more recent qualitative data (in the form of previous research). In order to establish an understanding of the impacts of consociational democracy on the prospects of agonistic peace, the thesis analyzes how government immobility and the elite-led consensus-oriented nature of consociational democracy have impacted relations within and between societal levels.

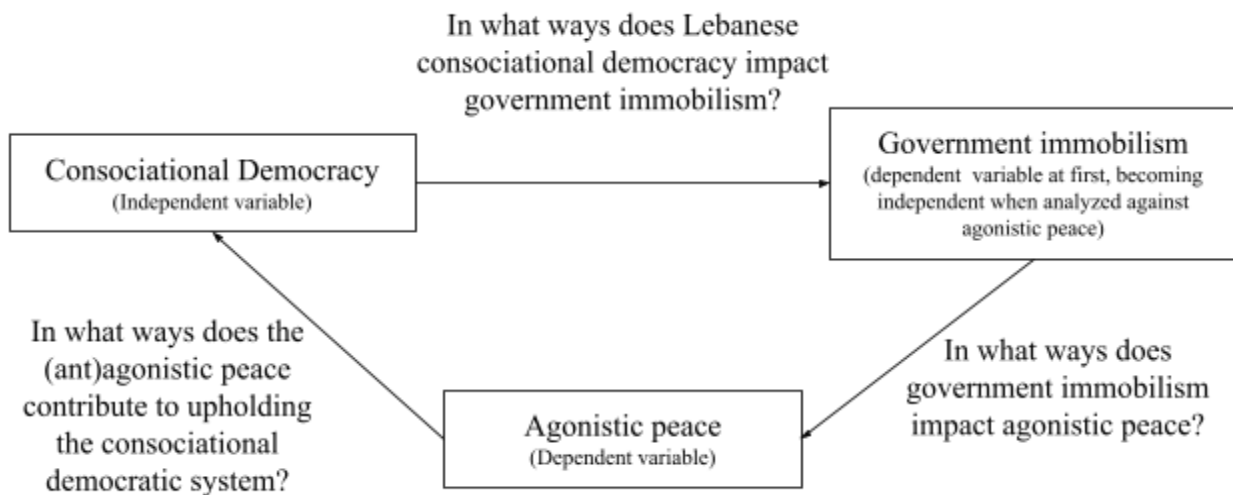


Figure 1
Source: Authors drawing.

4. Research design

4.1 Method

This thesis is a mixed methods single case study of Lebanon, seeking to test and develop Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy. This was done by testing and incorporating Strömbom and Bramsen's development of agonistic peace, as well as the relevant literature on government immobilism in Lebanon.

Single case studies can serve as critical tests of a theory (Schramm 1971, p. 15). Mixed method approaches allow for a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Seeing as this thesis' research question is rather broad, such an approach is ideal for capturing complex issues by incorporating insights from both quantitative and qualitative data. In so doing, the aim of the thesis was to garner a broader understanding of the potential effects of consociational democracy. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach allows for more scrutiny into Lijpharts theory of consociational democracy by comparing it with new data in a setting where the system has failed to mitigate government immobility rather than looking at successful cases. The newly available qualitative research regarding the effects of Lebanon's government immobility complement the quantitative data by offering newer explanations than those proposed by Lijphart.

Smaller case studies, like the case of Lebanon, grant a deeper understanding of a subject than a larger study would allow. Through such an approach, a high degree of validity can be reached, and it is through smaller in-depth analyses of countries that theories and mechanisms can be tested (Yazan 2015, p. 146). The strengths of qualitative research listed by George and Benett are; Conceptual validity, deriving new hypotheses, exploring causal mechanisms, as well as assessing complex causal relations (George and Benett 2005, pp. 27-30). Moreover, case studies offer policymakers clearer directives that tell them under which specific circumstances a certain theory may be valid or not (p. 20). There are of course potential drawbacks of case studies that will need to be discussed and taken into account throughout this study discussed later.

The thesis is comprised of two parts. The first is quantitative, where numbers pertaining to government immobilism and agonistic peace were studied from 2006 to 2022. The second part analyzes this data in conjunction with the theoretical frameworks described earlier, as well as comparing it with qualitative data constituted by the previous literature on these topics. The literature has been chosen primarily on the basis of its proximity in time and for its focus on the phenomena under investigation in this thesis, so as to update Lijpharts theory of consociational democracy with newer findings in the case of Lebanon. The analysis answers the research question by establishing the possible connections between consociational democracy, government immobilism, and agonistic peace (see Figure 1.1).

4.2 Case selection

The case of Lebanon has been selected with several aims in mind. Firstly, Lebanon represents a prime example of consociational democracy. Seeing as there is much data available, and since Lijpharts consociational democracy theory comments on Lebanon in a much earlier period, Lebanon also represents a revelatory case. Revelatory cases allow the researcher to generate new knowledge and further theoretical advancement by accessing new information previously unavailable (Yin 2018, p. 86).

Lijpharts' theory of consociational democracy details that such political arrangements are prone to government immobilism given a number of factors, and thus Lebanon represents a good case for studying the effects consociational democracy on government immobilism. Lebanon is also an interesting case seeing as Lijphart praised it as a stable consociational democracy (writing before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war). He writes that Lebanon exhibits some characteristics identified in stable consociational democracies such as long precedence of consociational democracy, “multiple balance of power among the subcultures instead of either a dual balance of power or a clear hegemony by one subculture”, and a “relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus” (siting the then prosperous Lebanese economy) (1969, p. 217).

While Lebanon at that time — and with the theoretical framework of Lijpharts theory of consociational democracy — would seem a most-likely case to test the theory, I would argue that today Lebanon rather represents a probable case. This is because the ex-ante government immobilism in Lebanon is present despite the unaltered factor of Lebanon's multiple balance of power prescribed by Lijphart as favorable to consociational democracy free of government immobilism. However, Lijpharts other proposed causes of government immobilism, such as bad elite cooperation and heavy loads on the decision-making apparatus (in part reflected in Israeli attacks, the Syrian refugee crisis beginning in 2011, the port explosion in Beirut (2020) and the coronavirus pandemic) are present and possibly contributing to the observed government immobilism. Seeing as some of the proposed causes of government immobility seemingly did

little to stop the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, and the continuing struggles with government immobility, Lebanon was chosen as a revelatory case since these factors are in need of scrutiny.

As for agonistic peace, it can be assumed that Lebanon represents a "most likely" case. The theory stresses the need for counter-hegemonic discourse in order to reach agonistic peace, and as such, consensus-oriented political arrangements such as consociationalism can be seen as problematic from the viewpoint of agonistic peace theory. Furthermore, the government immobilism that is stressed in the previous research on Lebanon suggests bad relations within the elite level and can be speculated to reflect badly on elite-grassroots relations arising from frustration with the Lebanese government. Theory-testing, which is one of the aims of this thesis, is well served by "most likely" cases since they can reveal shortcomings or confirm theories (Goerge and Benett 2004, p. 81).

The Lebanese setting was also chosen in order to answer the research question "*In what way does Lebanon's consociational democratic system impact government immobility, and ultimately the prospects of agonistic peace?*" due to the availability of data and the need to update Lijpharts theory to present revelations. In addition, the fairly new development of agonistic peace theory offers an interesting angle into the effects of consociational democracy for which Lebanon is a suitable case.

While single case studies are best suited for critical tests of a theory by using critical cases, or least-likely cases (George & Bennett 2005), this thesis aims to combine two theories. Thus, having Lebanon as a probable case for exploring Lijpharts consociational democracy theory, and as a "most likely" case for studying the prevalence (or lack thereof) of agonistic peace suits this purpose. This is because Lebanon is a case where the chosen theories offer overlapping and complementary insights into the effects of consociational democracy.

4.2.1 Potential pit-falls in single case studies

In order to address the potential pitfalls associated with single case studies, the researcher must keep in mind the purpose, scope, and limitations of such studies. Furthermore, it is important that

the researcher incorporates multiple sources of evidence (triangulation), and that there is rigorous and transparent outlines of the research process. The potential pitfalls of single case studies identified by Yin are limited generalizability, biases regarding the case selection, lack of comparison, limited statistical analysis, time/resource constraints, and the potential for experimenter effects (Yin 2018).

Likewise, George and Benett write that case studies are better at assessing “whether” or “how” something matters, rather than the extent to which it matters (2004, p. 32). The former is the concern of this thesis. The potential impact of consociationalism on government immobility and agonistic peace is not measured in the extent of its impact, but rather whether and how it matters. Regarding the lack of representativeness of case studies, the thesis attempts not at deriving universal laws, but rather to demonstrate the effects of consociational democracy in the Lebanese setting. As George and Benett write, “case studies sacrifices generalizability by offering cumulatively contingent generalizations that apply to well defined types or sub-types of cases” (pp. 36-37). Another point, limited statistical analysis, is to some extent counteracted by having the thesis be a mixed methods approach, thus incorporating quantitative data into the analysis. George and Benett also mentions the “degree of freedom problem” which means “the potential inability to discriminate between competing explanation” (p. 34). However, they write that case studies can still develop important context-based theories to study how different factors interact in to produce a specific result (p. 35).

4.3 Material

Excluding written sources, the material used for this thesis will derive from two main sources: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) and Arab Barometer. These sources were specifically chosen over other sources due to having similar time-frames of data, thus allowing for a comparison over time. Moreover, BTI provided well defined indicators and criteria that matched the phenomena of interest for this thesis.

BTI is an institute that produces bi-annual country reports. These reports divulge information on a range of dimensions, measured and assessed qualitatively by experts. Such reports come with a

degree of subjectivity, however, this is attempted to be countered by having both local and outside experts working on the country reports. In addition, the thesis attempts to combat the potential subjectivity of these reports by comparing them with the existing literature on the subjects. What makes the data of BTI appealing is that its qualitative approach allows it to capture dimensions that otherwise elude purely quantitative analysis (BTI Methodology). Such aspects are crucial for this thesis.

The BTI data-set includes indicators that are of interest for both the measurement on government immobilism and agonistic peace. To measure the former, the “*steering capacity*” indicator will be utilized, which is comprised of three criteria: 1) Prioritization, 2) implementation, and 3) policy learning. According to the BTI codebook of 2022, prioritization means the extent to which the government set and maintain strategic priorities. Implementation means the extent to which the government effectively implements its own policies. Lastly, policy learning is defined as the extent to which the government is innovative and flexible.

Furthermore, the BTI indicators “*level of difficulty*”, “*Resource efficiency*”, “*consensus building*” and “*political participation*” will all be utilized in order to determine the validity of Lijpharts proposed causes of government immobility, seeing as all these shed light on the willingness and capacity of the elite to cooperate (BTI codebook 2022).

The criterion under “*level of difficulty*” that will be of interest for this thesis is: Structural constraints. According to the BTI codebook of 2022, this criterion is defined as the extent to which structural difficulties constrain the political leadership’s governance capacity (BTI codebook 2022).

The criterion under “*resource efficiency*” that is of interest for this thesis is: Policy coordination. This criteria is defined as the extent to which the government coordinate conflicting objectives into a coherent policy (BTI codebook 2022).

The criteria under “*consensus building*” that are of interest for this thesis are: 1) consensus on goals, 2) anti-democratic actors, 3) cleavage/conflict management, 4) civil society participation,

and 5) reconciliation. Consensus on goals is defined as the extent to which the major political actors agree on democracy and a market economy as strategic, long-term goals. Anti-democratic actors are defined as the extent to which reformers exclude or co-opt anti-democratic actors. Cleavage/conflict management is defined as the ability and willingness of political leadership to moderate cleavage-based conflict. Civil society participation is defined as the extent to which political leadership enables the participation of civil society in the political process. Finally, reconciliation is defined as the extent to which the political leadership bring about reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators of past injustices.

The criterion under “*political participation*” that is of interest to this thesis is: Effective power to govern. This criterion is defined as the extent to which democratically elected political representatives have the effective power to govern, or the extent to which there are veto powers and political enclaves.

Moreover, the data from Arab Barometer on trust in government institutions will be a further measure of agonistic peace, along with some of the aforementioned criteria related to reconciliation, civil society participation and relations within the political elite. Arab barometer conducts public opinion surveys in the Middle east and North Africa (MENA), where measurements on “trend in institutional trust: government” will be compiled from 2007-2022. The surveys of Arab Barometer include all non-institutionalized citizens and are conducted through the use of interviews. Those asked in the surveys are above 18 years old, and the sampling strategy is that “every eligible respondent in the country has a known and calculable probability of being included in the sample” (Arab Barometer 2023, methodology).

4.4 Operationalization of variables

The data from the aforementioned sources are compiled and contrasted, presented in charts and tables. The results are followed by an analysis which incorporates insights from the theoretical framework comprised of Lijpharts' theory of consociational democracy and Strömboms theory of agonistic peace, as well as qualitative data within previous research.

The two phenomena are measured against the independent variable of consociational democracy. The first phenomenon is the impact of consociational democracy on government immobilism using indicators corresponding with Lijpharts proposed causes of government immobilism. Here, consociational democracy is the independent variable, whereas government immobilism is dependent. The second part measures the ways in which government immobilism impacts agonistic peace. Here, indicators corresponding to relations within the elite level, inter-sectarian relations at the mass level, as well as relations between elite and grassroots levels are analyzed in light of Strömbom and Bramsens development of what constitutes agonistic peace. In this part, government immobilism is the independent variable, whereas agonistic peace is the dependent variable.

5. Results

Figure 2 seen below shows the development of the five indicators of interest from BTI for this thesis from 2006 to 2022. Figures 2.1-2.5 are representative of each of the individual criteria that constitute the indicators, thus allowing for a more in-depth view. Figure 3 found further below, represents the trend in trust in government institutions over time. For the definitions of each

criteria and indicator, refer to 4.3(Material).

BTI scores, 2006-2022

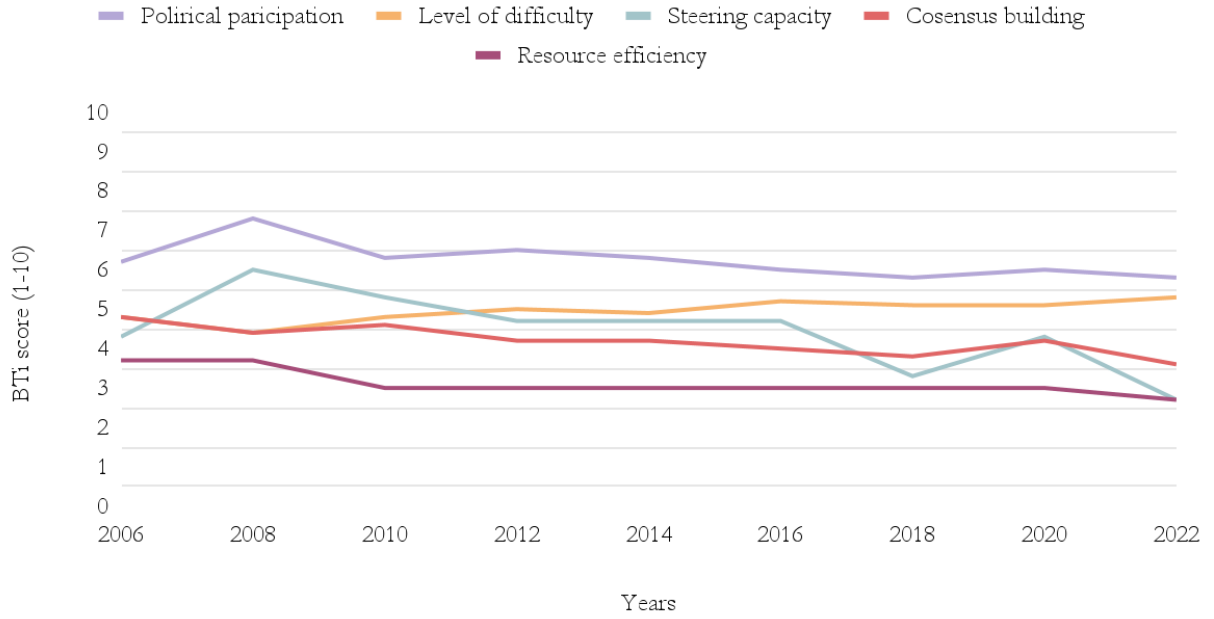


Figure 2

Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Criteria under the
“steering capacity” indicator

Year	Prioritization	Implementation
2006	4	4
2008	7	5
2010	5	4
2012	5	3
2014	5	4
2016	5	4
2018	3	3
2020	4	4
2022	2	2

Figure 2.1
Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Criteria under the
“level of difficulty” indicator

Year	Structural constraints
2006	4
2008	6
2010	8
2012	8
2014	8
2016	8
2018	8
2020	8
2022	8

Figure 2.2
Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Criteria under the
“Resource efficiency” indicator

Year	Policy coordination
2006	5
2008	5
2010	4
2012	4
2014	4
2016	4
2018	4
2020	4
2022	3

Figure 2.3
Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Criteria under the
“Consensus building” indicator

Year	Consensus on goals	Anti-democratic actors	Cleavage/ conflict management	Civil society participation	Reconciliation
2006	6	4	5	4	5
2008	6	3	3	7	3
2010	7	4	3	8	3
2012	7	3	2	6	3
2014	6	4	2	6	3
2016	6	3	2	6	3
2018	5	3	3	5	3
2020	6	3	3	5	4
2022	4	3	3	4	4

Figure 2.4
Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Criteria under the
“Political participation” indicator

Year	Effective power to govern
2006	4
2008	5
2010	4
2012	4
2014	4
2016	4
2018	3
2020	4
2022	4

Figure 2.5
Source: BTI 2006-2022 scores

Trend in institutional trust: Percent saying they have a great deal or a lot of trust in government institutions

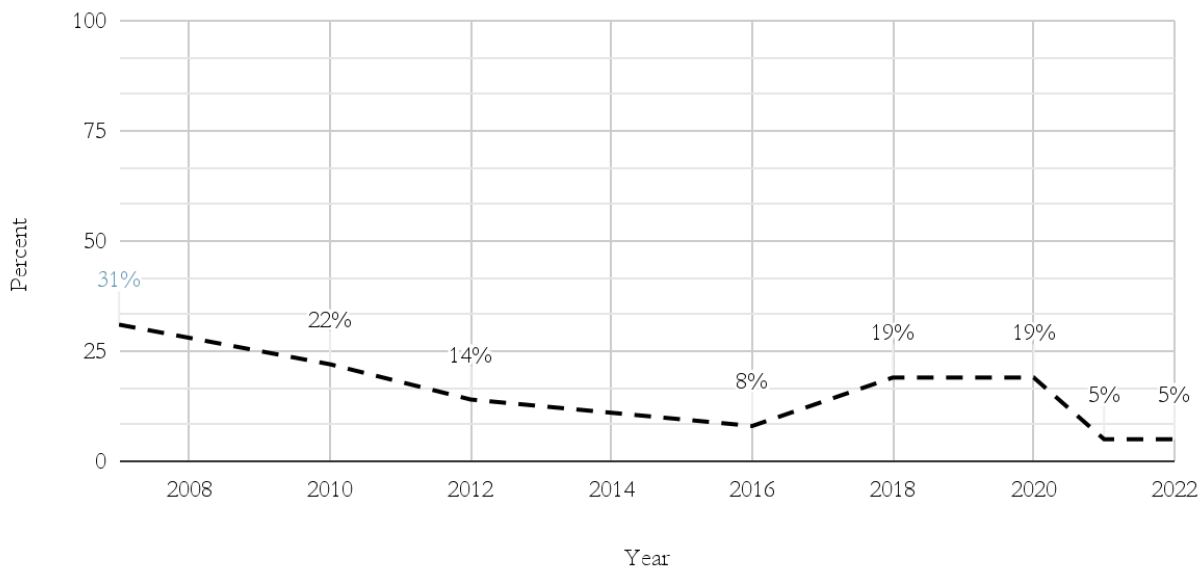


Figure 3

Note: Weighted estimates (2010, 2012, 2016, 2018); unweighted estimates (2007). The scores for 2020-2022 are from “Lebanon Country Report 2021-2022”. Source: Arab Berometer

The results reveal several important insights regarding government immobility and relations between elite-and grassroots levels, as well as within the elite level. The data pertaining to government immobilism indicates that “*steering capacity*” has remained limited throughout the time period of 2006 to 2022, and it shows a general decline from a score of 4.3 in 2006 to 3.6 in 2022. There is a slight variation to the observed trend however with the score ascending to 4.6 in 2008. Looking at the individual criteria within the “steering capacity” indicator, it is revealed that the worst score is found within the “implementation” criteria whose only score above 4 is in 2008, and where the score of 3 appears in 2012, 2018 and 2022. According to BTI, a score of four means that many of the policies set by the government are not implemented which is indicative of government immobility. Furthermore, the two other criteria — “prioritization” and “policy learning” — score rather low consistently, which according to BTI demonstrates a prevalence of short-term decision-making and non-innovative policy-making (BTI 2022 Governance, pp. 39-40).

Moreover, the data on “*level of difficulty*” appears to have remained high throughout the selected time period. The indicators “structural constraints” and “conflict intensity” are of particular interest for the later analysis of government immobilism. This subset of data reveals that structural constraints have been especially high in Lebanon since 2010 (reaching a score of 8 from 2010 to 2022). According to BTI, this means that the governance performance has been limited by the prevalence of constraints such as extreme poverty, natural disasters and the pandemic (Governance BTI 2022, p. 37). We know for instance that in 2020 alone, Lebanon experienced three large events: Severe economic decline, the Beirut port blast and the coronavirus pandemic which likely contribute to these numbers (Mjaess et.al 2021, p. 535)

The “*political participation*” indicator reveals quite high numbers throughout the selected time period, however, there is a slight decline moving forward in time, 2022 being the worse year. When looking at the individual indicators for each of the chosen criteria, the criteria “effective power to govern” becomes of interest when analyzing the level of government immobility. This criterion represents the de facto power (or lack thereof) of democratically elected leaders to govern. This particular criterion consistently remains the lowest throughout the chosen time period — the lowest being in 2018 (coinciding with low points of other relevant indicators)— suggesting the presence of government immobility. Interestingly, the dip in 2018 to a score of 3 is according to BTI’s definition indicative of an autocracy as 4 is the minimum requirement of a democracy.

The data on “*consensus building*” shows relatively low numbers throughout the selected time period, with especially low numbers in 2018 and 2022 coinciding with the declines in steering capacity during these same years. According to BTI, consensus building scores around 4 (the number around which Lebanon has remained throughout the selected time period) means that there is considerable conflict over the notion of democracy, and that consensus on goals is fragile and likely challenged (Governance BTI 2022, p. 43). When looking at the individual indicators for each of the chosen criteria, “cleavage/conflict management” appears to score worst throughout this period, often approaching what BTI describes as intended exacerbation of

societal cleavages and conflict and at best (these being scores around 4) not preventing cleavages and conflicts (Governance BTI 2022, p. 44).

Other criteria within “*consensus building*” also remain constantly low. “Consensus on goals” show a general decline, descending from a score of 6 in 2006 to a score of 4 in 2022. Moreover, the “anti-democratic actors” indicator shows a consistently low score of 3 throughout the time period, the only exception occurring in 2008 and 2014 where the score of 4 was reached. The criteria “civil society participation” saw a steep decent throughout the time period. While Lebanon reached a score of 4 in 2006, the criteria descends from a score of 7 in 2008 to a score of 4 in 2022. Lastly, the “reconciliation” criteria shows consistently low numbers throughout the time period with a score of 3, but ascends in 2020 and 2022 to a score of 4.

The “*Resource efficiency*” indicator has also scored low throughout the time period, descending from 3,7 in 2006 to 2,7 in 2022. According to the BTI codebook of 2022, a score of 4 means that “The government makes efficient use of only some of the available human, financial and organizational resources.”. The “policy coordination” criteria found within this indicator descends from 5 in 2006 to 3 in 2022.

The data on trust in government institutions from Arab Berometer reveals low numbers throughout the years from 2007 to 2022. The highest percentage of trust is marked in 2007, and the lowest being in 2016 and 2022. The latter reveal an astonishingly low number of 5 percent. Compared with other MENA countries, Lebanon consistently scores low with regard to trust in government institutions, being the lowest of them all in 2022. According to Arab Barometer, this low level of institutional trust is coupled with all time low government satisfaction and interpersonal trust, coupled with high perceptions of government corruption (Lebanon Country Report 2021-2022).

6. Analysis

The data demonstrates that Lebanon throughout the period of 2006 to 2022 has suffered from government immobilism, low levels of elite cooperation, and low trust in government institutions while being governed as a consociational democracy. This part begins by analyzing how Lijpharts' theory of consociational democracy aligns with the results. Next, agonistic peace theory is contrasted with the data, followed by a part wherein the findings are combined.

6.1 Causes of government immobilism in consociational democracy theory compared with the data

As seen in the results, there appears to be a strong connection between some of the causes of government immobilism in Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy, and the observed decrease in the Lebanese government's steering capacity throughout this period. Firstly, Lijphart writes that for consociational democracies to avoid the ever-present threat of government immobilism, there needs to be a willingness among the elite to cooperate, but also the capacity to solve political problems (1969, p. 218). Some of the proposed causes of government immobilism by Lijphart are in line with the results of the BTI data set — which showed decreasing and persistently low steering capacity for the Lebanese government over time. As Lijphart writes, the stability of consociational democracies is dependent on the willingness of the elites to cooperate, which is understood within the theory to counteract the possibility of government immobility. As seen in the results part, the data suggests that the indicators connected to the willingness of the Lebanese elite to cooperate has been low throughout the time period of 2006 to 2022 and that there have been decreases over time. This development has been accompanied by decreasing scores in government steering capacity, which has also remind low throughout this period.

However, some of Lijpharts proposed causes for good “*inter-subcultural relations at the elite level*” are factors that have been unchanged since he developed the theory of consociational democracy, despite the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. For instance, the existence of external threats and a multiparty system wherein no single party can form a majority are factors that have been present for a long time (Elisabete-Cristina Dinu 2022). Despite this, the data

pertaining to government immobility show decreasing numbers over time. This suggests that these factors — if at all counteracting government immobility — do not possess enough explanatory power in and of themselves.

However, another factor argued by Lijphart to be conducive to good inter-subcultural relations at the elite level — and by extension conducive to counteract government immobility — is low burdens on the decision-making apparatus. As the data suggests, Lebanon has had high burdens on the decision-making apparatus reflected in the “level of difficulty” indicator, which is seen to have ascended over time. Thus, there is reason to believe that this factor has contributed to the observed Lebanese government immobility.

In short, there appears to be a correlation between Lijphart's overarching argument that bad elite cooperation is a cause for government immobility and the decreasing numbers pertaining to government steering capacity in Lebanon. However, Lijphart's arguments for which factors are conducive to bad elite cooperation are only in part reflected in the data. Furthermore, the data does not in itself allow one to differentiate between causes and effects. In fact, there is not sufficient evidence to deploy terms such as “correlation”, let alone “causation”. One can merely state that there appears to be a strong connection between parts of what Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy and is seen as a potential cause of government immobility.

The data supports the literature on government immobilism, which claims that Lebanon has been characterized by government immobilism since 2005 (Salloukh 2023, pp. 10-11). Horowitz writes that consociational democracies are prone to immobilism since power-sharing agreements grant minorities veto rights, the outcome is a system wherein each party blocks the other's initiatives (2014, p. 12). However, authors such as Salloukh, Nagle, and Clancy see Lebanon's government immobility as deriving from the consociational democratic system itself, in that the reliance on elite cooperation has produced an ineffective state wherein inter-group animosity is reproduced in the interest of the elite (Salloukh 2023, pp. 10-11; Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5). Thus, such articles suggest that bad elite cooperation is not only a potential underlying condition conducive to government immobilism (as Lijphart suggests given the presence of aforementioned conditions). Rather, elites can also purposely employ strategies of bad

cooperation for their own benefit by perpetuating clientelism and by making ordinary people reliant on their personal patronage rather than that of the state (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5).

Another demonstration of the cyclical effects of consociational democracy in Lebanon is that pressure on the decision making apparatus is not only — as Lijphart argues — conducive to government immobility, but it is also important to highlight how government immobility can exacerbate such pressure by inadequately handling it. As Mjaess et.al write, events such as the Beirut port explosion and coronavirus pandemic can be seen as having been handled poorly by the Lebanese state due to lack of coordination. The government's poor handling of such situations is also connected to the second part of this section concerned with agonistic peace. As Arab Barometer explains, recent low numbers regarding trust in government institutions is probably a result of the general population perceiving that the government has handled the recent crisis poorly (Arab Berometer 2022, Lebanon Country Report 2021-2022). Consequently, government immobilism in consociational democracies can be seen as not only stemming from a result of high burdens on the decision making apparatus. Rather, government immobility can also be seen as heightening the pressures on the decision-making apparatus, resulting in further government immobilism and the potential added consequence of lowering peoples trust in government institutions.

Insights from these qualitative studies suggest a break from Lijpharts linear understanding of consociational democracy and its potential effects on government immobility, towards a cyclical understanding. That is, bad elite cooperation (whether intentional or not) can lead to government immobility, which further entrenches sectarian divisions and reinforces the perceived need for consociational democracy as a mechanism for protecting one's sect's interests through mechanisms such as veto rights and proportional representation.

6.2 Agonistic peace theory compared with the data

The theory on agonistic peace argues that elite-led consensus-oriented politics can be harmful to achieving agonistic peace (Strömbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1241-1242). Given that Lebanese consociational democracy is inherently reliant on elite cooperation, this seems to be an obstacle

to achieving agonistic peace. As Nagle and Clancy writes, the Lebanese political elite has unanimously been pursuing sectarian politics in order to personally benefit from clientelism which can be seen as an expression of the hegemonic discourse centered around sectarianism (Nagle & Clancy 2019, p. 5).

There are however some expressions of anti-hegemonic discourse as shown by Nagle at the grassroots level. Nagle finds that challenges to the hegemonic political structure of sectarian politics come from civil protests through art and demonstrations characterized as pluralizers and intersectionalists that utilize agonistic frameworks in their counter-hegemonic discourse (Strömbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1241-1242). However, the problem remains that hegemonic discourse at the political elite level gives little to no room for counter-hegemonic voices to be heard. Moreover, as indicated by the data pertaining to “*civil society participation*” (while relatively high in the initial years) show decreasing values over time in conjunction with decreasing numbers in the “*steering capacity*” indicator, which demonstrates the increasingly low impact of actions taken outside of the formal elite-led political sphere. Similarly, Arab Berometer’s “Lebanon Report” of 2022 state that “a plurality of citizens do not believe there is any action they can take to influence government” (p. 2). This is important when analyzing the level of agonistic peace in Lebanon since this indicates that counter-hegemonic voices resisting the sectarian discourse at the elite level are increasingly limited.

Another important aspect of agonistic peace has to do with efforts of reconciliation in post-war societies (Söderbom & Bramsen 2022, pp. 1245-1246). The potential of reconciliation processes lies in their abilities to address past grievances, and to act as a space for continuous contestation and a debate of relations (p. (Schaap 2005, p. 89). A measurement of reconciliation can be found in the BTI data-set as a criteria under the “*consensus building*”. The results show that reconciliation has remain limited throughout the time period from 2006 to 2022, increasing slightly in the last two years. At no point does Lebanon reach a score higher than 4, which according to the BTI codebook of 2022 means that “The political leadership does not address historical acts of injustice and does not initiate a process of reconciliation.”. This suggests that this crucial part of agonistic peace theory leave much to desire.

The results pertaining to government trust reveal that relations between the elite and grassroots level of society have been persistently bad, and increasingly so over time (descending to an all-time low of 5 percent in 2021-2022). This is coupled with the low BTI scores for the indicators “*consensus on goals*” and “*cleavage/conflict management*” which in turn suggests that relations within the elite level have also remained strained throughout the chosen time period and that the elite level has been unconcerned with — and at times have actively exacerbated — sectarianism.

6.3 Towards a broader understanding of consociational democracy

One can argue that the three factors under this thesis' investigation — namely Lebanon's consociational democracy, government immobilism, and the prevailing antagonistic peace — reproduce each other. Seeing as the consociational democratic system can be prone to government immobilism, and since government immobilism can worsen sub-cultural relations (for example deliberately by the Lebanese elite), the perceived need for a structure that protects sectarianism can be argued to increase. Another way to explore the cyclical aspects of consociational democracy is that bad cooperation between the sub-cultures at the elite level leads to government immobility. While one of the factors conducive to bad elite cooperation is pressure on the decision making apparatus, bad elite cooperation can also be argued to heighten the pressure on the decision making apparatus through inadequate handling of the situation. This is, among other, argued in the case of the Lebanese economic (Baumann 2019, pp. 64-65).

This part is seemingly missing in Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy, which merely proposes that there is a potential linear relationship between consociational democracy and government immobilism. Seeing as the sort of government immobilism which is present in Lebanon further aggravates intra-societal relations, this further entrenches conflictual identities and the consociational political apparatus. There is thus reason to expand Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy to include aspects of its cyclical character. Moreover, such an understanding of consociational democracy allows us to review its effects on the prospects of agonistic peace. Seeing as there is the potential for consociational democracies such as Lebanon for government immobilism — which in itself helps to reproduce the consociational democratic

system — this has important implications for agonistic peace. As a consequence of the reproduction of antagonistic relationships through the expansion or maintenance of antagonistic relations within and between all layers of society, there is little hope of achieving thick recognition between parties. Furthermore, it is important to understand how the consociational democratic structure in itself — being reliant on elite-level consensus-making — disables forms of anti-hegemonic discourse. Consociational democracy can thus be seen within agonistic peace theory as unsuitable for achieving the other main pillar of this theory, namely institutional inclusion.

However, there is room for more nuance here. Seeing as many writers and the large N-study conducted by Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) confirms power-sharing to be an effective tool for achieving lasting negative peace, perhaps power-sharing should be seen to be most effective as a transitional political apparatus. The difficulty, however, remains that such a system can tend to reproduce itself as seen in the case of Lebanon. Horowitz elaborates on this point, dubbed “the immobilism problem”, writing that consociational structures, once established, are difficult to modify or to transition out of all together (p. 12). The problem is thus that consociational democratic structures such as that of Lebanon are in need of constant adjustment to be able to adequately handle the problems of the day, at the same time as immobility easily manifests itself in such structures.

7. Conclusion

The thesis has demonstrated the complexities of consociational democracy in Lebanon as it relates to government immobilism and agonistic peace. Given the potential impact of consociational democracy on government immobilism and agonistic peace, it suggests that we need to broaden our understanding of consociational democracy so as to not limit ourselves to its potentially beneficial relation to negative peace. Rather, it is revealed through the data, and accompanying qualitative research, that consociational democracy has been detrimental to the development of agonistic peace in Lebanon. In part, this has been through the pervasive government immobilism, which is argued to worsen relations between the Lebanese political elite and ordinary citizens, reflected in the data on trust in institutions.

Furthermore, a number of interesting data indicators have accompanied the observed descent in government steering capacity. While Lijpharts general point that bad elite cooperation is conducive to government immobility, only some of the underlying factors listed as conditions for bad elite cooperation are reflected in the data. One such factor is pressure on the decision-making apparatus, which can be seen to increase over time. The points made by Lijphart that the existence of external threats and a multiparty system wherein no single party can form a majority are factors conducive to good elite cooperation are not reflected in the data or the historical record. Seeing as these factors have been present for a long time, preceding and following the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, they appear to hold little explanatory value. The rise of one factor, however, which is proposed by Lijphart to be conducive to bad elite cooperation has accompanied the descent in steering capacity is pressure on the decision-making apparatus. This factor thus seems to potentially hold explanatory power in connection with the observed increase in government immobility in Lebanon.

The data pertaining to agonistic peace indicates a bad relationship between consociational democracy and this sort of positive peace. The system's inherent reliance on elite cooperation is not conducive to the sort of institutional inclusion propagated by agonistic peace theory, in part because it does not allow for counter-hegemonic discourse - the prevailing hegemonic discourse in Lebanon being centered around sectarianism. Data pertaining to relations within the elite level as well as between the elite level and grassroots level seem to indicate a worsening situation not characterized by agonistic peace. Likewise, the data on reconciliation efforts indicate little interest by the Lebanese to address historical animosity, which is another key challenge to establishing agonistic peace.

Furthermore, insights from the qualitative literature offer a more nuanced understanding of the effects of consociational democracy. The argument that has been made is that bad elite relations can be purposely pursued for the benefit of the elite, and is not necessarily as Lijphart suggests an accidental outcome. Moreover, seeing as the Lebanese elite is concerned with defending the hegemonic discourse around sectarianism, worsening inter-state relations can be seen as entrenching sectarian identities and reaffirming the need for the consociational democratic

structure designed to defend sectarian interests through veto powers and proportional representation. All this means that the consequences of consociational democracy should be viewed as cyclical and reinforcing the structure that gave rise to them. This points to the difficulty of utilizing consociational democracy as a transitional arrangement, which could harness the potentially beneficial effects of negative peace without impeding on the potentially detrimental consequences of long-term agonistic peace.

While this thesis highlights the complexities of consociational democracy in connection to agonistic peace, further research into each of the analyzed phenomena is needed to more reliably understand its effects. Larger studies would be of value here, as this thesis has only studied the effects of consociational democracy in the Lebanese context.

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