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AFTERWORD

Afterword: Consociationalism and the State: Situating Lebanon and Iraq in a Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In this afterword to the special issue on Consociationalism and the State: Lebanon and Iraq in Comparative Perspective, we reflect on the insights from the articles in the special issue and their contributions to the wider field of consociationalism studies, including the relationship between the state, state formation, and consociationalism; the interplay between consociationalism and identity construction and change; and the functionality, longevity, and agility of the consociational state. We suggest that the emergent research agenda on consociationalism and the state should engage further with ideas of agency and with wider cross-regional comparisons from the global south in order to show how historically contingent developments precondition conflict processes, group grievances, and post-conflict preferences in power-sharing systems.

It is a pleasure to see these seven articles in the pages of *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, a journal devoted to, among other matters, developing more constructive intergroup relations. While the issue is focused on the two cases of Lebanon and Iraq, the articles invite critical reflection on broader thematic considerations including the relationship between the state, state formation, and consociationalism (Salloukh, Dodge, Bogaards); the interplay between consociationalism and identity construction and change (Halawi, Alkudary), and the functionality, longevity, and agility of the consociational state (Baumann, O'Driscoll and Costantini, Leezenberg). The authors approach these questions from a variety of different perspectives and employ a variety of different methodological tools, including elite interviews, participant observation and engagement with grassroots actors, survey data, and archival materials. At the level of case study, the issue offers rich empirical data on Lebanon and Iraq, and together, they offer compelling conceptual insights about the consociational state writ large.

The special issue, then, marks the emergence of yet another important line of inquiry in consociationalism studies. More than 50 years on from Arend Lijphart's first articulation of consociationalism as a theory of democracy for plural societies, there are still new avenues to explore, omissions to rectify and dilemmas to overcome. As Bogaards, Lijphart, and Helms note in a separate special issue devoted to consociationalism, "consociational literature is booming."[1] Amidst this growth in consociationalism studies, what is novel about the framing of this special issue and the research agenda it seeks to develop, is the emphasis on the state. As several of the authors note, the state has been given surprisingly short shrift in consociational theory. Salloukh, Dodge, and other call

attention to the fact that consociational theory takes the state—and, importantly its functionality—for granted, defaulting to a neo-Weberian conception at odds with many of the places where consociationalism is adopted, particularly so across the global south. The issue is at its strongest when it interrogates the meaning of the state, as with Salloukh's emphasis on "different forms of state" and the impact of colonial state formation in Lebanon and Dodge's reading of the consociational bargain in Iraq through the lens of state theory. Bogaards' contribution, the most conceptual of the collection, cuts most effectively to the crux of the issue when he poses the question of "who owns the state" and comes up with five different answers ("we do," "we want a piece of the cake," "we want our own state," "nobody," and "someone else"). The range of answers highlights both that power-sharing partners come to co-governance with different understandings and expectations of consociationalism—that is, they have "asymmetrical preferences" that can be difficult to satisfy concurrently[2]—and that "there is still many things we do not know" (Bogaards, this issue) about how consociationalism performs. The articles thus open up a critical conversation about how to theorize the consociational state.

The special issue raises important questions about what consociationalism is, what it does, and what it should be expected to do. Yet, as it turns out, not all scholars understand consociationalism as the same thing. The standard approach is to see it as a package of four concurrently adopted institutions (grand coalition, vetoes, proportionality, and autonomy), designed to facilitate broad inclusion along identity lines in divided settings, and to bring historically excluded minorities into government. In this standard account, assessing the consociational record is about considering how well the institutions work—or not—according to their own underlying incentive structures. Following institutional theory, which explains what people do as a function of their position within "man-made" [sic] constraints,[3] these four institutions are meant to work together to incentivize positive political actions—in this case, interethnic accommodation and compromise—while also constraining undesirable behavior, including ethnic outbidding, brinkmanship, and the resort to violence. The liberal-corporate distinction is one such example of this approach. Scholarship tends to advance an argument in favor of liberal consociation, seeing it as flexible and self-adjusting, noting that corporate consociational rules may "create obstacles to the dissolution of the protected identities."[4] In this approach, get the institutions right and positive outcomes are more likely to obtain; get the institutions wrong and challenges abound. This perspective ties consociational performance directly to institutional design choices.

Yet, many of the authors in this special issue present a more nuanced reading of consociationalism, seeing it as more than the collection of the four institutions and the extent of their functionality. Instead, consociationalism functions as a shorthand for a particular kind of political *modus operandi* or mindset about how politics function. Ideational claims explain what people do as a function of the cognitive and/or affective elements that organize their thinking,[5] and in so doing, the ideational perspective emphasizes the "-ism" in consociationalism, seeing it as an ideology.

Consociation's precise institutional configuration is not the primary source of contention in this account. Indeed, none of the four consociational institutions are unique in and of themselves. Coalition governments are common in Germany, Iceland, Italy, and

elsewhere; proportional representation—consociation's preferred electoral system—is one of the most popular electoral systems in the world, used in some 70 countries. A wide range of countries, including Croatia, Jordan, Bolivia, and Colombia also employ reserved seats, special electoral districts, or pan-ethnic party lists for ethnic minority communities.[6] There are around 25 federations in the world, many of which are designed for group autonomy, as in Canada, Spain, and India; devolution and decentralization are also used consistently in plural settings (for example, Åland Islands, Greenland, Hong Kong, Mindanao, New Caledonia). Non-territorial autonomy arrangements are also utilized in non-consociational settings, as with the Sámediggis in the Nordic countries.[7] Even veto rights—one of the more contentious consociational devices—are found in non-consociations, with the use of qualified majorities and other voting thresholds for extraordinary issues (for example, constitutional amendments) in a variety of countries.[8] In short, for the ideational perspective, consociationalism must mean something more than the sum of its parts.

To explain the functionality or dysfunctionality of the consociational state, the authors draw emphasis to "the biopolitical technologies of consociational power-sharing": "By tying access to state resources to parties asserting sectarian and ethnic identities, political elites harden ethno-sectarian modes of mobilization while neutralizing threats from oppositional groups championing cross-sectarian identities and class interests."[9] Consociationalism is thus understood as a kind of amorphous entity, working its way into "every nook and cranny" of state power, facilitating state capture and making institutional reforms difficult.[10] This ideational understanding of consociationalism is reflected in Dodge's discussion of the points selection system for coalition formation in Iraq and in Baumann's contrast of the "immobile" state during the garbage crisis in Lebanon with a more "agile" iteration of the state during the Rafiq Hariri-led post-conflict reconstruction years. Halawi vividly captures this approach in his analysis of the challenges facing activists in the 2019 *thawra* protests in Lebanon, likening the framing of *kilun ya'ani kilun* (all of them means all of them), to "a veritable consociational slogan in and of itself." Halawi's depiction of the struggle of activists to counter the state when they "did not agree on where the regime begins and where it ends," nor on what might begin to replace it, offers critical insights into the tenacity of consociational thinking, even for those who may be opposed to it. Indeed, the authors offer exceptionally rich and detailed analysis that highlights the devastating consequences of what happens when elites are less interested in governing and more concerned with how they can extend the idea of consociational pie-sharing to new venues and forums beyond the executive level. They also highlight how society becomes trapped within a consociational mindset, narrowing the articulation of alternative forms of state.

Why does this difference between institutional and ideational renderings of consociationalism matter? To start, they have different expectations of what consociationalism delivers. Some who adopt the ideational approach invoke strong causation in their assessments: once consociational logic takes root, it takes over the whole state apparatus, is incapable of being dislodged (even in the face of weak institutionalization) and is the causal source to which all political outcomes are traced. This overburdens the consociational record, making it the primary—and sometimes the only—source of negative political outcomes. Take the example of Iraq. While Iraq's formal institutions are

recognized as only minimally consociational—"consociation light" as Bogaards labels it[11]—this perspective nonetheless depicts the Iraqi state as operating according to a "consistent and inflexible set of informal rules [which] has imposed a consociational logic on the system."[12] This logic is then traced to numerous problems, including "systematically sanctioned corruption" and "violent suppression."[13]

Meanwhile, despite some of the big promises made by the institutionalist perspective in the realm of peace and security, it places a relatively thin set of causal expectations on the model when it comes to what it delivers, with success often defined merely as the absence of large-scale political violence. McGarry sees performance as "the ability of consociations to be adopted, maintained, and to secure peaceful stability."[14] McEvoy and Aboultaif conceptualize performance similarly: "a functional power-sharing system is one that proves useful for its intended purpose, ostensibly to promote elite cooperation, help the state transition to democracy, and secure peace."[15] While peace, of course, is no minor accomplishment, the institutional account could say more about governance. Lijphart argues "decision-making that entails accommodation among all subcultures is a difficult process, and consociational democracies are always threatened by a degree of immobilism." Thus "a relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus" should be considered as a favorable factor for consociational success.[16] Yet, this flies in the face of the post-conflict political agenda, which is, more often than not, overloaded with competing issues all in need of urgent resolution. O'Driscoll and Costantini grapple with this contradiction in their consideration of consociationalism's "shelf life," and the tensions between mitigating conflict in the short term and meeting citizens needs through governance in the long run. Leezenberg's discussion of the "dead letter" of the Iraqi constitution and its unimplemented clauses could be read in this light as well. If the ideational perspective overburdens consociationalism, it underperforms in the institutional perspective.

To come back to the themes of the special issue, the consociational state appears both too strong and too weak at the same time. Consociationalism undermines stateness and precludes the emergence of alternative organizational forms (Salloukh, this issue); it breaks the "institutional coherence" of the state (Dodge, this issue) but can also render the state impervious to reform (Halawi, this issue). The state is too weak to cope with its basic duties of public service provisions but can also effectively demobilize protest movements against it (Alkurdary, this issue). The consociational state is both "agile" and "immobile" (Baumann, this issue). Yet when we make consociationalism the source of all of which ails a country, we miss the lasting effects of imperialism, invasion, and identity-based cleavages on current political trajectories, which are all vital components in a complete assessment of stateness and performance. Consociationalism, that is, can only tell us part of the story.

A crucial missing link between the institutional and ideational renderings is the role of agency—and agents—as units of analysis for drawing cross-case generalizations of patterns of consociational performance and dysfunctions. Measuring and theorizing performance necessitates an examination of actors who benefit from and wield consociational arrangements to maximize their winning coalitions. If we accept consociationalism as a "government by elite cartel," we need more granular data on the nature of the cartel's internal bargaining and negotiation interactions, and on both inter- and intra-

elite persuasion dynamics to draw conclusions about the macro-political outcomes of consociationalism's performance.[17] In other words, focusing on agency functions as a unit of analysis for capturing variations in institutional and ideational explanations.

As Mako argues, Iraq's *muhassasa,* or informal consociational arrangements, were not merely born out of the American-led occupation and statebuilding project in 2003, but emerged out of a multitude of negotiations among Iraq's multiethnic opposition movement that coalesced in the decade leading up to 2003.[18] Iraq's ethnic dissident and exiled elites saw power-sharing as the most persuasive formula to allot previously excluded and repressed majority and minority communities a stake in governing the state in the aftermath of regime change. Seen as a consequence of a long durée of ethnic elite bargaining dynamics, consociationalism is deeply rooted in intense negotiations, not as an anomalous rupture in a state's temporal political development. Consociational arrangements are ultimately products of intense elite negotiations over the control and allocation of state resources as negotiated settlements born out of political ruptures rooted in either endogenous or exogenous shocks. Far from incoherent, the resilience and durability of consociational power-sharing are embedded in the discursive power of ethnic elite bargaining and persuasion strategies that ensure their survival even amidst institutional decay.

If we treat power-sharing as a set of institutional arrangements that "prevents one agent or organized collective agency, from being the winner who holds all critical power, whether temporarily or permanently," it underlines the need for a closer scrutiny of the agents' interests in shaping consociational systems and outcomes.[19] An empirical and theoretical gap in existing explanations is how discursive institutions—that is, the role of inter- and intra-elite ideas and discourses—shape and transform negotiations around consociational arrangements across time and space.[20] These attributes are not mere checks on institutional and structural prescriptions, they tell us not just how consociational power-sharing arrangements fare across cases, but *how and why* they become too sticky to alter even when they underperform. As Dodge and Mansour have argued, Iraq's informal consociationalism sustains endemic corruption, resulting in uneven development and socio-economic decline in one of the region's most resource-rich states.[21] However, there is much to learn about *what* incentive structuring mechanisms (ISM) characterize the persuasive tactics of elite buy-ins in post-election elite negotiations and bargains.[22] Corruption in consociational arrangements, we might propose, is the outcome, not the cause. To fully capture the causal mechanisms that sustain the system, we need to unpack the discursive logic that structures internal deliberations that make the system function just enough to ensure its survival; this logic underlies its reliance and "stickiness." The special issue proposes some strategies for how we might begin to do so.

As it stands, comparative works on Lebanon and Iraq, including this special issue, have demonstrably and convincingly illustrated the intended and unintended *outcomes* of consociationalism's underperformance, but lack substantive engagement with a crucial counter-factual: what might emerge as an alternative that would generate elite buy-ins in deeply divided societies? Applying a longitudinal analysis of articles on power-sharing and consociationalism, Farag and colleagues demonstrate a net positive effect of power-sharing arrangements from across a universe of cases spanning various

regions, with 462/553 articles finding positive effects and 91/553 finding negative effects.[23] Situating the two cases at the heart of this special issue, Lebanon and Iraq, within the wider universe of consociational cases, especially post-colonial and post-conflict cases, might lead to a more nuanced rendering of the consociational state.

As fields that have occupied much of the post-conflict statebuilding prescriptions for divided societies, consociationalism and power-sharing in the Middle East are embedded in a long durée of conflict processes which are themselves embedded in regional and international interventions.[24] While comparisons between states in the Middle East with Western states have generated important insights into the functions and limits of consociational power-sharing, the dearth of comparisons between MENA and global south cases ignores their constitutive multiplicity and their co-constitution as sites of larger macro processes of post-colonial development.[25] The literature at times tends to extrapolate Western experiences onto countries in the global south with colonially entrenched interethnic hierarchies and institutionalized exclusion. As the special issue seeks to explore, this creates generalizations that pay insufficient attention to how historically contingent developments precondition conflict processes, group grievances, and post-conflict preferences. Much of the literature on governance in divided societies similarly relies on Western European case studies, including, but not limited to, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, and Eastern Europe following the breakdown of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Although divided post-colonial societies share attributes and conditions that heighten the potential for ethnic cleavages, the history and legacies of colonial policies altered state development in distinct ways that differ in scope from European cases.[26]

In line with insights from Lebanon and Iraq, cross-regional comparisons show that consociational arrangements are not a panacea.[27] If consociationalism functions to end post-election crises in divided societies by allaying disparate elite interests through the adoption of a minimally inclusive government that represents the interests of a broad range of concerned parties, then consociationalism in Lebanon and Iraq meets this bare minimum standard.[28] However, the articles in this special issue complicate why these arrangements have underperformed in both cases. The historicization of state formation (Salloukh, this issue) for understanding the emergence and adoption of consociationalism is still primed by comparisons with European and European-adjacent cases and historical developments than post-colonial cases in the global south. For colonial legacies to be operationalized as a scope condition to explain variation in the functions and dysfunctions of power-sharing arrangements in the global south where Middle East cases fit, more robust and systematic comparisons ought to be made, not (just) with European cases, but with other post-colonial global south case studies. We know how Middle East cases fare in comparison with Western and Eastern European cases (for example Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Spain, and Bosnia and Herzegovina), but how do Iraq and Lebanon compare with, say, Burundi, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Indonesia, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines? Arguably, these countries more closely align with the colonial and post-colonial state formation and statebuilding processes in the MENA region than with European experiences of state formation.

This brings us to broader comparative theoretical and empirical dynamics that should be considered, especially when conducting comparisons within the MENA region and between MENA states and other regions. At a theoretical level, the *purpose* of consociation varies, having been adopted, at once, as a device for: achieving democratic stability in plural but peaceful societies (for example, Belgium, the Netherlands); embarking on decolonization and new statehood in divided and developing societies (for example, Cyprus, Suriname, Mauritius, Indonesia); or resolving ethnic conflicts and (re)building states in war-torn societies (for example, Northern Ireland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Burundi). Surely, variations in these different contexts will impact performance outcomes. Indeed, stateness will manifest differently in each of these settings. Whereas in the plural societies which first drew Lijphart's attention, stateness could reasonably be assumed, this is not the case everywhere, with many post-colonial and post-conflict states coming to consociationalism as a state-*building* strategy. This can result in perverse outcomes, particularly in the realm of political economy, as Baumann's contribution to the special issue effectively shows.

In closing, the articles in this special issue demonstrate the importance of methodological pluralism, including surveys, and semi-structured elite and non-elite interviews and participant observation, for consociationalism studies. They illustrate creative ways researchers can engage with what Fu and Simmons call political ethnography[29] through the study of macro-level dynamics such as elites and their position in state institutions as well as the micro-foundations of grassroots contentious politics. Qualitative and quantitative research in the Middle East is difficult amidst fragile political contexts and is further complicated by the persistence of authoritarian political conditions and insecurity.[30]

The contributions in this special issue yield important generative insights about the consociational state, but also pose important questions for thinking about what Parkinson calls "methodological cognates"[31]—how crisis settings may structure researcher access, data collection, and questions of validity and generalizability. In line with the articles included in this issue, an emerging research agenda has focused on drawing more comparisons between cases in the global south with similar historical experiences with colonialism and violent conflict and civil wars.[32] Ultimately, the methodological, theoretical and empirical insights generated from studying the development and trajectory of consociational power-sharing arrangements from cases in the Middle East should stand to inform, and be informed by, cases in the global south. We thus welcome the contributions made by the editors and authors of this special issue and look forward to the ongoing conversations sure to emerge out of this important line of inquiry.

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