

**Power-sharing After Civil War: 30 Years Since Lebanon's Taif Agreement 30
Years Since Lebanon's Taif Agreement**

Authors

John Nagle and Mary-Alice Clancy

Contact Details:

John Nagle, Reader in Sociology, University of Aberdeen, j.nagle@abdn.ac.uk

Mary-Alice Clancy, Honorary Research Fellow in Irish and Scottish Studies,

University of Aberdeen, m.a.clancy@abdn.ac.uk

Biographical details:

Dr John Nagle is a Reader in Sociology at the University of Aberdeen. He has published three monographs and over 25 articles in leading journals. Dr John Nagle acknowledges the Leverhulme Trust for its support (Ref: 2017-616).

Dr Mary-Alice Clancy is Honorary Research Fellow in the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies. She has published two books and her research has been extensively covered in *The Guardian*, *BBC* and the *Irish Independent*.

The purpose of this special issue is to reflect upon and analyse the legacy of the Taif Agreement, the peace accord that formally ended Lebanon's civil war in 1989.¹

Anniversaries of major events are, of course, rather arbitrary markers of periods of time; yet they are also highly important ways in which communities remember the past to illuminate the contemporary condition. Anniversaries provide pathways allowing us to reconstruct the journey that led us to the current point in time.

Anniversaries are particularly potent, symbolically charged events in so-called deeply divided polities, in which the respective groups remember historical dates to legitimate their present political projects. Such memorywork represents a key way in which communal divisions are sustained and exacerbated. In Lebanon – a postwar state that continues to be riven by sectarian cleavages – there is still no agreed version across its various groups on the causes of the civil war. In consequence, the anniversary of Taif, rather than a unifying moment, will feature the major political actors generating polarizing memories and antagonistic interpretive frames.

This special issue does not presume any claim to unanimity less will it pretend to be the authoritative evaluation of the legacy of Taif three decades on. We argue, however, that Taif and its consequences merit serious scrutiny. Taif's legacy is particularly important as it represents the first in the so-called "new wave"² of consociational power-sharing agreements that have emerged in the post-Cold War era. These consociations – including Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995), Northern Ireland (1998), and Iraq (2005) – differ from earlier waves of power-sharing pacts. As Bogaards observes, while power-sharing was once considered as a way to make democracy work in a state divided along linguistic, religious, or ethnic lines, since the end of the Cold War consociationalism is increasingly seen as a means to bring peace to post-conflict polities.³ This shift has entailed a shift in consociationalism's main

role from one that aims to maintain peace and stabilize democracy to a post-conflict framework which strives to generate peace after violence and supports (re)democratization and statebuilding.

Lebanon, as such, is a significant case study in helping us identify and analyse some of the effects of consociations as instruments of peace and statebuilding. Lebanon may yield both important lessons and warnings for policymakers and academics wishing to import its power-sharing model across the Middle East in the wake of the conflicts that have followed the Arab Spring, particularly in neighbouring Syria.⁴ This special issue thus addresses these central themes concerning how postwar power-sharing systems emerge, develop and are shaped in the long term, and its consequences on a wide range of societal and political dynamics. A proviso is required, however. It is not possible to generalize too much from a single case-study. This special issue, given, its focus on Lebanon does not make grand statements that are universally applicable to all post-conflict places containing power-sharing institutions.

THE CIVIL WAR AND TAIF

Signed on 22 October 1989, the Taif Agreement sought to end the civil war which began in 1975 and led to circa 170,000 deaths and 500,000 serious injuries.⁵ The civil war is often simplistically portrayed as sectarian, one that pitted Christians and Muslims against each other. The war was instead extremely complex and can be better understood as a series of conflicts that involved leftist and right wing factions and the direct participation of large number of external actors, including the PLO, Syria, Israel and the USA.⁶

While the conflict is not at root sectarian, it nonetheless expedited an intense “sectarianization” of society. Sectarianization describes how the key belligerents – e.g. state elites, proxy actors, and militia groups on the ground – manipulated and constructed ethnoreligious identities, typically through acts of extreme violence, to cleave society along communal lines in pursuit of strategic self-interest.⁷ Rounds of ethnic cleansing, kidnappings, sexual violence, assassinations, massacres, and revenge killings, were all conducted along sectarian lines. This process of sectarianization can quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy as sectarian group identities rapidly harden and become politicized in a way that generates antagonistic group mobilization.

In the absence of a functioning state, the warlords nurtured forms of governance that covered their sectarian fiefdoms. The sectarian militias constructed their own spheres of civil society to distribute a wide portfolio of services for the communities they claimed to defend. Practically everything – ranging from medical care, education, refuse and postal collection, the supply of gas and electricity, and even childcare – became subject to the purview of the sectarian militias. By providing basic services, the militias exploited the situation to extend coercive control over their war weary communities.⁸

Taif institutionalized the dynamics of sectarianization. It did this by reinstating consociational power-sharing to accommodate Lebanon’s main Christian and Muslim sects. Taif, however, represented an updated version in a long lineage of power-sharing pacts to manage Lebanon’s sectarian pluralism. Power-sharing was first introduced by the Ottomans via the so-called *Mutassarifiya*, an administrative council which reserved seats for sects based on their demographic size. This system was expanded during the French Mandate and the 1926 constitution, which later formalised the custom of executive power being shared by Christian, Sunni and Shiite

political representatives. The National Pact of 1943, which declared Lebanon's independence, formally enshrined consociational power-sharing at all levels of the polity and society.⁹

Power-sharing – in one form or another – has long provided a system designed to regulate conflicting visions of ownership over the very state itself. The logic generating successive waves of Lebanese power-sharing stands on a number of interlocking principles: the nation contains an extremely high level of ethnoreligious heterogeneity; this pluralism, if not institutionally protected, leads to intergroup conflict; and power-sharing should principally involve the respective political elites of the major confessional groups. Power-sharing, thus, can be seen as generating path dependent dynamics that has institutionalized sectarian identity as the bedrock of state and society relations.¹⁰

In essence, the Agreement formalized the sectarian structures established during the war. Taif's title – “no victor and no vanquished”¹¹ – signified that peace is achieved by creating an institutional apparatus that ensured no group could solely dominate the state.¹² In Taif, pre-war Christian hegemony was ended by shifting a large slice of executive power away from the president, a post reserved for Maronite Christians, to the prime minister, reserved for Sunnis. Some executive powers transferred to the cabinet, thus expanding the prerogatives of the prime minister. The 6:5 Christian/Muslim quota was reconfigured to a 5:5 formula. Christians also accepted that Lebanon's identity was Arab while stressing that Lebanon's independence and sovereignty not be subject to outside interference. Shiites were allocated the position of the speaker of the house in the parliament.¹³

As part of maintaining this equilibrium, the quota system, especially, rigidly reserves and allocates executive and legislative positions for the main groups, an arrangement mirrored across the public sector. At the executive level, the positions of president, prime minister and speaker of the house – “the troika” – are reserved for Maronite Christians, Sunnis, and Shiites respectively. The quota system is applied to the 30 cabinet positions and for 128 seats in the national parliament. Parliamentary quotas are operationalized by the state’s electoral law – reformed for the 2018 election – which divides Lebanon into 15 electoral districts. A quota of seats is reserved in each district for specific sects based on what is estimated to be the district’s sectarian demography. The quota system is also reproduced throughout the public sector. To maintain the balance of power, group veto is embedded into the architecture of power-sharing since a two-thirds majority is required for important issues decided by the cabinet (e.g. international treaties and the budget), and for the parliament to make constitutional amendments. Finally, under the terms of segmental autonomy, the constitution devolves legal authority to the religious leaders of the groups over a range of personal matters, including marriage, divorce and child custody rights.¹⁴

Before we analyze some of the main themes concerning the legacy of Taif, it is necessary to summarise some of the main political developments that have unfolded over the last three decades.

KEY EVENTS

Taif made provisions for neighbouring Syria to act as protector of Lebanon, reserving the right to station its army on Lebanese soil, as part of a transitory period until peaceful cooperation between elites was evident. Rather than use their role to support

peace and democratization, Syria pursued policies designed to foster further division and the intensification of authoritarian power in order to maintain its control over Lebanon. Syrian hegemony in Lebanon was exercised through violence and coercive politics.

Opposition to the so-called *Pax Syriana* notably came from Rafik Hariri, the charismatic prime minister who was supported by Saudi Arabia. On 14 January 2005, Hariri was assassinated in downtown Beirut in a massive car bomb, an act that many blamed on the Syrians. In response, a new movement encompassing the major political parties and civil society groups emerged to demand that Syria leave. Importantly, this movement was cross-cleavage insofar as it embraced the Sunni bloc of parties and a number of Christian parties. A countermovement mobilized to maintain Syrian patronage in Lebanon and featured a coalition led by the Shia bloc of parties - Hezbollah and Amal - alongside the largest Christian Party. These two rival coalitions – known respectively as the “8 March” and “14 March” blocs – have subsequently provided the main cleavage through which political contestation occurs.¹⁵

One of the main issues left unresolved in Taif is the question of Hezbollah’s arms. Hezbollah (the “Party of God”) emerged in the 1980s as a militant organization dedicated to resisting Israel and to advancing the political interests of the Shia population in Lebanon. Although Hezbollah did not negotiate Taif, the agreement allowed the party to keep its extensive military apparatus intact on the basis that its arms were to be used fighting Israel. Hezbollah’s weapons were put to this purpose in 2006 when it fought the Israeli military, which had launched strikes across Lebanon and a ground invasion in the south. A looming concern, however, was that Hezbollah could utilise its armoury to give it an advantage against its political rivals within

Lebanon. In the years after Taif, Hezbollah had begun to construct its own *de facto state* within Lebanon, replete with its own institutions. Hezbollah was aided in this objective by Iran, which funds and utilizes the party as an instrument through which Iran can pursue its geopolitical objectives in the region. In 2008, the Lebanese government, headed by the 14 March coalition, sought to bring Hezbollah to heel, which quickly escalated into street battles in Beirut and across parts of Lebanon. Hezbollah emerged strengthened from the conflict.

The use to which Hezbollah deploys its militia wing attained new levels of intensity as it was increasingly drawn into the Syrian civil war from 2011 onwards. Hezbollah's violent imbroglio in Syria can be understood as a response to direct orders by Iran, who see Hezbollah's military as a key weapon in defence of its ally, the Al-Assad regime. While Lebanon itself remains largely immune from the violence of the Syrian war, its effects are keenly felt in the state. More than a million Syrian refugees fled to Lebanon thus providing high burdens on Lebanon's stagnant economy. The Syrian conflict, moreover, has exacerbated Lebanon's polarizing postwar political cleavages, with the Saudi backed coalition supporting the Syrian opposition and the Iran/Syria oriented bloc maintaining allegiance with the Al-Assad government.

DAWLAT AL-MUHASASA

In his magisterial survey of modern Lebanon, Samir Kassir reflected that historically "consociationalism tended to promote the growth of polarization."¹⁶ Yet, Taif outlined a framework in which consociational power-sharing was a necessary but transitory step towards the goal of integration, including by making the election of politicians "on a national, not sectarian, basis."¹⁷ This thinking reflects the

integrationist aspirations of leading proponents of consociationalism that power-sharing helps build trust at the elite level and this iterative process will gradually descend to envelop contending communities below, thereby leading to the erosion of sectarian cleavages.¹⁸

Such hopes were strangled at birth under Syrian tutelage. Lebanon's consociational institutions at the outset cemented rather than ameliorated sectarian divisions. With low levels of trust between the respective political elites, the corporate consociational structures remained unyielding. In this environment, the sectarian elites and warlords divided rather than shared power. The phrase "dawlat al-muhasasa" – "the allotment state" – is used to capture the process by which the spoils of public office, privileges, and state resources are doled out to the sectarian elites.¹⁹ Key ministerial and government posts are thus divvied between leaders, who use these positions as the basis for political clientelism within their own constituency and for their own personal financial gain.

Lebanon's corporate power-sharing has sought to maintain the balance of power between groups, a process that further acts to preserve sectarian group identities in aspic. This desire to reify communal boundaries means that the consociational system permeates into every "nook and cranny" of public and private relations.²⁰ Lebanon's consociationalism has particular consequences for gender and sexuality. The reproduction of sectarian difference can only be made possible through the biopolitical construction of gender and sexual inequalities.²¹ As such, "sectarian difference is dependent on, emergent with, and articulated together with sexual difference and the regulation of heteronormative reproductive sexuality at the level of law and bureaucracy."²² Any move to change the status quo is presented as a threat to the ideal of "*ta'ayush*" ("living together through difference"). For this reason, the

control of women's sexuality is seen as a security issue in Lebanon. The right of a woman to pass on her nationality to her children is denied because it is claimed that women will then be able to marry men from different communities and risk changing the demographic equilibrium of the Lebanese state, thus undermining the very logic of the power-sharing system.²³

WAYNA AL-DAWLA?

"Wayna al-dawla?" – "where is the state?" – is an expression summoned by the Lebanese in moments of exasperation when the absence of the state appears particularly acute, such as during the daily electric power cuts or when garbage accumulates uncollected on the streets. For power-sharing to thrive a degree of stateness is required.²⁴ This process of statebuilding never began in earnest. In fact, endemic state weaknesses are deliberately maintained by sectarian elites so that goods and services are placed under their administrative networks. These social welfare services – especially healthcare and education – are used to ensure that much of the working-class population are heavily reliant on the assistance provided by their communal leaders.²⁵ As Bauman explains, "the political economy of sectarianism is one where a small politically connected elite appropriates the bulk of economic surplus and redistributes it through communal clientelism."²⁶ Thus, the "postwar neoliberal state retrenchment compels the economically underprivileged to seek sectarian patronage for a range of social services."²⁷

The weakness of state institutions is particularly evident in the dysfunctional character of power-sharing. As part of the "pie-sharing" system in which the spoils of state are divvied up, lucrative contracts for public works are awarded to private companies with close ties to sectarian elites. Sectarian leaders and their parties are

able to advance rent seeking through informal elite level bargaining. However, at times of political conflict one or more of the elites can depart from the system of tacit cooperation thus infecting power-sharing with institutional dysfunctionality. Forty-four parliamentary sessions failed to elect a new president, national elections were postponed on three occasions (2003, 2014 and 2017) and political appointments for the head of the military, central bank, and judiciary – positions distributed on a sectarian basis – have been deferred.²⁸

The capacity of power-sharing to underpin statebuilding was further undercut by policies that fomented intercommunal distrust and division. In particular, the sectarian warlords responsible for the atrocities carried out during the civil war used their peacetime political offices to silence investigations and formal inquiries into the war. Recognizing that they would be first to be prosecuted, in 1991 the parliament passed a general amnesty Law 84, which on a selective basis pardoned political crimes committed during the civil war and made no mention of victims. The Lebanese president justified the amnesty law as a necessary condition for peace. This quintessential peace versus justice trade-off in divided polities acted to create a state based on a culture of impunity and unaccountability, which provides little solid ground for the building of a just and stable political order.

EXTERNAL ACTORS

Consociationalism has become the international community's preferred institutional instrument for ending civil war. This preference, however, highlights the difficulty of measuring power-sharing's impact in "new wave" settlements. Lebanon, Bosnia, Northern Ireland and Iraq all feature the heavy involvement of external actors who have imposed, implemented, undermined and restored their respective power-sharing

settlements at times. External actors are often other states – e.g. the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia – but, as in the case of Northern Ireland, it can also be the sovereign power which is “external” to the day-to-day workings of the power-sharing settlement. By providing pressure and/or side payments to their client groups in a power-sharing settlement, these actors can bolster and/or weaken consociational agreements. This pressure is by no means unidirectional, and client groups can also appeal to their external patrons to alter the terms of the settlement in their favour.

The presence of these actors is one of the many variables which undermines consociationalism’s explanatory power. Power-sharing is often hailed for myriad successes – and blamed for a multitude of sins – but convincing causality is rare. Political scientists’ inclination to first look to consociationalism when attempting describe “new wave” settlements has led it to become an overburdened variable. The challenge then is to convincingly explicate its effects: how it works in tandem with other variables to produce particular outcomes, and a willingness to jettison it when other variables can provide more parsimonious explanations.

As noted earlier, external actors can perform a vital implementing and subsequently support consociations, especially by helping overcome unfavourable domestic power relations between the groups. External actors facilitate consociations by guaranteeing the safety of the parties during the demobilization period, and providing domestic political checks on each other’s behaviour once the third party leaves. In post-Taif Lebanon, however, a less benign picture of external actors and power-sharing is seen. Taif is named for the Saudi Arabian city in which it was brokered, and the House of Saud has played a key role in supporting Lebanese, primarily Sunni, politicians. Syria had an overt security presence until the Cedar Revolution of 2005, and the March 8 Alliance which developed in its wake is

supported by Syria and Iran. Hezbollah serves as the latter's proxy in Lebanon and Syria. Lebanon, as such, can be seen as a central figure in the so-called "cold war" between Saudi Arabia and Iran seek to gain geopolitical dominance across the Middle East. Thus, Iran and Saudi Arabia not only exercise a strong control over their respective proxies in Lebanon, but are willing to use them in ways that destabilize and power-sharing.²⁹

¹ The Taif Agreement is more formally known as the Document of National Accord. Taif however, did not coincide with the end of violence, which continued on until the end of 1990.

² For a more systematic analysis of the “new wave” of consociations, see Rupert Taylor, *Consociational Theory: McGarry & O’Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge).

³ Matthijs Bogaards, “How Civil War Transformed Consociationalism,” in *Power-Sharing: Empirical and Normative Challenges*, edited by Allison McCulloch and John McGarry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

⁴ A number of scholars and policymakers have advocated consociational power-sharing as a means to end the conflict in Syria. See, for example, Imad Salamey, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, and Elie Abouaoun, *Post-Conflict Power-Sharing Agreements: Options for Syria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018)

⁵ William Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600-2011* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 235.

⁶ See: Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Picard, *Lebanon*; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2007).

⁷ For a description of “sectarianization,” see Nader Hashemi & Dany Postel, “Sectarianization: Mapping the new politics of the Middle East,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (2017), 1-13.

⁸ Melani Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁹ See: Picard, *Lebanon*; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*; Bassell Salloukh, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2015)

¹⁰ See: Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (California: University of California Press); Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988).

¹¹ The slogan “No victor, no vanquished” was first used at the end of the 1958 crisis in which Lebanon was brought to the point of civil war.

¹² See: John Nagle, “Between Entrenchment, Reform and Transformation: Ethnicity and Lebanon’s Consociational Democracy,” *Democratization* 23, no. 7 (2016):1144-61

¹³ See: Bogaards, “How Civil War Transformed Consociationalism”; John Nagle, *Social Movements in Violently Divided Societies: Constructing Conflict and Peacebuilding* (Abingdon: Routledge); Picard, *Lebanon*; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*; Salloukh, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*.

¹⁴ For an overview of Lebanon’s governance institutions, see: Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁵ For a more extensive overview of these events, see: Michael Kerr, “Before the Revolution,” in *Lebanon: After the Cedar Revolution*, edited by Are Knudsen and Michael Kerr (London: Hurst, 2012), 23-38.

¹⁶ Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 445.

¹⁷ See: Stephan Rosiny, “A Quarter Century of ‘Transitory Power-sharing’: Lebanon’s Unfulfilled Taif Accord of 1989 Revisited,” *Civil Wars* 19, no. 4 (2015):485-502.

¹⁸ Arend Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Salloukh, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, 3.

²¹ John Nagle, "Crafting Radical Opposition or Reproducing Homonormativity? Consociationalism and LGBT Rights Activism in Lebanon," *Journal of Human Rights* 17, no. 1 (2018):75-88.

²² Maya Mikdashi, "Sextarianism: Notes on Studying the Lebanese State," *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle-Eastern and North African History*, edited by Amal Ghazal and Jens Hanssen (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 31.

²³ For example, in 2015 the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gibran Bassil, refused to amend the nationality law to grant equal rights to female citizens, citing sectarian demographic anxieties.

²⁴ Brendan O'Leary, "Power-sharing in Deeply Divided Places: An Advocate's Introduction," *Power-sharing in Deeply Divided Places*, edited by Joanne McEvoy and Brendan O'Leary (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1-66.

²⁵ Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*

²⁶ Hannes Baumann. "Social Protest and the Political Economy of Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Global Discourse* 64, no. 3 (2016): 634-49.

²⁷ Bassell Salloukh, "The Architecture of Sectarianization in Lebanon," *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, edited by Nader Hashemi & Dany Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 225.

²⁸ Iolanda Jaquemet, "Fighting Amnesia: Ways to Uncover the Truth about Lebanon's Missing." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no. 1 (2009):69-90.

²⁹ A notable example of this situation was the shock resignation of the then Prime Minister Saad Hariri in November 2017, a move claimed by many commentators to have been ordered by Saudi Arabia as a way to counter Iran's influence over the political institutions.