Communal Identity and Sectarian Division in Lebanon: A Comparative Analysis of The National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Agreement

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Abstract

Throughout its history, Lebanon as faced an identity crisis that has been exacerbated by two fundamental documents—the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Agreement. These documents worked to ingrain identity into Lebanese politics and created a power-sharing system that was intended to equally represent all of Lebanon's religious groups. However, these documents failed to create a balance and only created tensions as minority Christian Maronites often had control over majority Sunni Muslims. These two documents have had a lasting impact on the Lebanese state and society and provide important lessons for other Middle Eastern states regarding the implementation of confessional or consociational systems.

Since declaring independence in 1943, Lebanon has faced an identity crisis. Lebanon was created by the French mandate system that has resulted in profound religious divisions, a violent civil war, and state instability. This identity crisis and communal rift has been worsened by two fundamental agreements—the National Pact of 1943, an informal agreement that led to the creation of the Lebanese government, and the Ta'if Agreement of 1989, the accord that ended fifteen years of Lebanese Civil War. These two agreements established a power-sharing system that aimed to divide power amongst Lebanon's seventeen different religious sects, including Maronites, Sunnis, Shias, Greek Orthodox, and Druze. But the agreements failed to create a cohesive, Lebanese national identity in a region dominated by Arab nationalism because they enforced the idea that one's loyalty is primarily to their religious community.[1] The aim of these two agreements was to help Lebanon's many religious groups coexist and to avoid violent conflict. Instead they created an intense competition for power and gave Lebanon a unique identity, in the midst of a region dominated by Arab nationalism, by reinforcing the importance of communal identity.

This paper will briefly discuss the history of communal identity in Lebanon, and then compare the two major documents that shaped identity politics in Lebanon: the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Agreement of 1989. Finally, the impact these documents will have on Lebanon's future will be discussed.

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[1] Brenda M. Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 254.

Since the nineteenth century, communal identity has been key to understanding Lebanon because it is "the core of political representation and part of the fabric of the 'modern' central state."[2] The use of communal identity in Lebanese politics dates back to its time as an Ottoman state. Because of the prominent presence of communal identity, Middle East scholar Hanna Ziadeh argues, Lebanon is the last remaining Ottoman state because communal identity was a basis for the autonomy system during the Ottoman period.[3] The confessional political system places Lebanon uniquely among the Arab states that have tended to be dominated by Arab nationalism and sometimes Pan-Islamism, because Lebanese identity places loyalty to community before loyalty to the state. This identity has created complicated dynamics in the Lebanese government since independence.

Prior to becoming modern Lebanon, the Lebanese state was confined to Mount Lebanon and the religious demographics were balanced between the Maronites and Druze.[4] However, following World War I, the French drastically altered the demographics of Lebanon during the mandate period. France created a mandate area larger than that of Mount Lebanon that made Sunni Muslims the majority and placed the Maronites in the minority category in order to ensure Lebanon's future ties to the French.[5] By shaping Lebanon in this fashion, the French ensured that "competition for power [in the Lebanese government] would be based on sectarian affiliations."[6] The French felt that they needed to manipulate various groups in Lebanon in this way because if Maronites remained the majority, it would have been much more difficult to maintain influence over Lebanon and the Christian Maronite elite and as a minority, the Maronites would need protecting and therefore turn to the French for that protection. The Maronites benefited from this relationship with France and viewed the alliance "as a protective weapon to wield against the Muslims who surrounded them."[7] Maronite leaders envisioned that Lebanon would be a Christian state, while the French, who ignored pre-existing communal tensions in the region, hoped that the Christians would accept Lebanon as an Arab state and that the Muslims would accept that Lebanon would continue to have cultural ties to the West.[8] This, however, would not be the case. France's goals were far too optimistic and the French ended up creating a state that was "a precariously balanced collective of economically and politically linked autonomous societies living in a weak, schizophrenic state" that would be consistently unstable in the future.[9] Lebanon, despite its weakness, was unique in that it had a much easier path to

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[2] Hanna Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon* (London: Hurst, 2006), 8.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Kemal A. Faruki, "The National Covenant of Lebanon: Its Genesis," *Pakistan Horizon* 27, no. 3 (1974): 24.

[5] Ibid.

[6] William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East,* 6th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2016), 214.

[7] Sandra Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World: Lebanon in Conflict* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), 48.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

achieving autonomy than the other French mandate, Syria, because the Maronites were more amenable to mandate rule.[10]

The National Pact of 1943 was not the first inception of communal representation in the Lebanese political system. It was first implemented in the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire, then was introduced as a temporary system in the 1926 Constitution prior to independence, and then "became *de facto* sanctified in the National Pact of 1943."[11] After the establishment of the National Pact, communal identity became ingrained in Lebanese state and society. Communal identity was then used to establish the government and determine government representation proportionally based on the various religious communities, which created a confessional system. The confessional system established by the National Pact remained in place until the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1989.

The 1950s ushered in a period of Arab nationalism in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the ideas of Arab unity and economic equality "threatened to tip the critical balance of power in Lebanese politics…[and the] heaviest weights on the scale were the Sunnis and the Christian Maronites."[12] The period of Arab nationalism caused many Sunnis to question "why they should continue to accept a secondary position in a state dominated by Christians," while Christians viewed the popularity of Arab nationalism as a threat to their political and economic position.[13] In the 1957 parliamentary elections, President Camille Chamoun created a network of new alliances that caused several key leaders to lose their seats. The result was violent attacks on both Christians and Muslims.[14] In 1958, General Fuad Shihab became president and attempted to reshape Lebanon so that each citizen would be "an integral part of a single people committed to a nation rather than a confessional."[15] Shihab's efforts failed as tensions between confessional groups persisted.

Despite having a variety of internal and external causes, such as economic inequality and instability created by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Lebanese Civil War marked the failure of the confessional system in Lebanon.[16] The Lebanese Civil War brought an end to a system based on a very flawed and antiquated census, creating communal tensions by failing to address pre-existing tensions. What followed the Civil War was another flawed attempt to reconcile differences and create power-sharing—the Ta'if Agreement. However, that agreement has failed to resolve communal tensions and has left Lebanon in a constant state of instability.

Power-sharing systems like the confessional system in Lebanon are designed to activate "mechanisms that allow parties to credibly commit to a bargain, thus reducing conflict."[17] Lebanon's case indicates that power-sharing political systems do not always alleviate tensions between communities. Power-sharing systems and institutions can be flawed because they are often defined by the conflict they were designed to address and they

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[10] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 214.
[11] Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon*, 8.
[12] Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World,* 61.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 62.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Faten Ghosn and Amal Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or the Illusion of Peace?" *The Middle East Journal* 65, no. 3 (2011): 383.
[17] Scott Gates et al., "Power Sharing, Protection, and Peace," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 2 (2016): 512.

focus on the elite ruling class.[18] As the National Pact and Ta'if Agreement will demonstrate, these are two of the main flaws of the Lebanese system.

The National Pact

Understanding the National Pact of 1943, or *Al-Mithaq Al-Watani*, is essential to understanding Lebanon today, as it established Lebanese sovereignty and the system of government.[19] The National Pact is an informal and unwritten agreement that was negotiated between Maronite President Bishara Khouri and Sunni Prime Minister Riad Solh.[20] Using the 1932 census to determine the state's demographics, it was established that there was a ratio of six Christians to five Muslims in Lebanon, thus guaranteeing Christians a dominant role in Lebanese government.[21] This ratio was used to establish "the formula of parliamentary seats, cabinet offices, and positions in the bureaucracy."[22] The major leadership positions were divided among the religious groups as follows: (1) the president would be a Maronite, (2) the prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim, and (3) the president of the parliament would be a Shia Muslim.[23] Additionally, the National Pact established that Lebanon would be an Arab state.[24] This system was imposed in order to handle hostility between Christians and Muslims, but as can be seen throughout Lebanese history, the system created more divides and an imbalance in power.[25]

This type of confessional system is referred to as inclusive power-sharing. Inclusive power-sharing is often considered a good way to maintain peace, but it is flawed in that the institutions generally benefit elites and fail to protect ordinary citizens, which "may leave them vulnerable to government repression and thus can lead to an unstable peace."[26] This will be evident in the period following the agreement of the National Pact and also in the Ta'if Agreement, as both were agreements between elites that did not solve deeper issues.

The issue of Lebanon as an Arab state was extremely concerning for the Maronites. The Maronites were "anxious to dissociate themselves from Arabism and its Islamic connections."[27] In response to the push for Arab identity by the Muslim majority, Christian Maronite writers such as Said Aql wrote about Phoenician identity in Lebanon. These writers argued that Lebanese and Arab identities were connected by accident and that it was time for Lebanon to return to its Phoenician identity.[28] Phoenician identity was appealing to Maronites for several reasons. The identity promoted the idea of

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[18] Ibid., 514.

[19] Farid El-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact*, Papers on Lebanon 12 (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991), 3.

[20] Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World,* 53.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Faruki, "The National Covenant of Lebanon," 28.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Michael C. Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis: The Limits of Consociational Democracy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 5, no. 3/4 (1976): 114.

[26] Gates et al., "Power Sharing, Protection, and Peace," 519.

[27] Kamal S. Salibi, "The Lebanese Identity," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 83.

[28] Ibid.

Lebanese as traders, and therefore appealed to the Maronite working class. Aql also pushed for the use of the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic script, but this had little impact.[29] Muslims had a negative view of the popularity of the Phoenician identity because they, primarily Sunnis, viewed Phoenician identity as "part of a French imperialist conspiracy against Arab nationalism."[30] Muslim Lebanese writers countered the idea of Phoenician identity by insisting that Lebanese and Arab identity are intertwined, and that the Phoenicians were Canaanites who came to Lebanon from the Arabian peninsula, and therefore are also Arabs. This appeared to be an attempt at reconciling two competing identities. A third identity was the idea of Lebanon as country of freedom, or *l'aisle de Liban*. Both Christians and Muslims viewed this identity as more acceptable because it was an attempt to unite religious groups under a different non-Arab and non-religious identity.[31] However, this identity also indirectly excluded Muslims because it painted Lebanon as a home for the oppressed and persecuted at a time when Sunnis were viewed as the oppressors throughout the Middle East.[32] The third identity reflected a desire for religious communities to have equality and share power in Lebanon.

Despite the declaration of Lebanon as an Arab state, Lebanon continues to have difficult relations with its Arab neighbors due to the prominence of Christians in government roles, and this has contributed to communal tensions.[33] As the National Pact of 1943 shows, Lebanese identified themselves primarily by religious community and second by their Arab identity.[34] Lebanon struggled to fit into the narrative of Arab nationalism that was extremely popular in the post–World War I Middle East. However, despite this Arab identity, Lebanese foreign policy was neither in line with that of the West or the Arab world.[35] The state often reacted in a passive manner towards the Israel-Palestine conflict; however, the external conflict would later work as fuel to the sectarian divide within Lebanon.[36]

Aside from the National Pact, one of the most controversial documents in Lebanese history is the 1932 census, which established the demographic proportions that were used in the National Pact. The 1932 census was Lebanon's only official census and was antiquated by the time it was used for the National Pact.[37] The 1932 census was the "cementation of the political elite's perception of Lebanon as a Christian nation" and shaped the view of who was Lebanese and who was not.[38] The census was extremely inaccurate because many people were not counted and were "rendered stateless and legally undocumented."[39] Rania Maktabi, a Lebanese journalist, argues that

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[29] Ibid., 84.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 85.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 214.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis," 115.

[36] Ibid., 116.

[37] Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon: Foreign Protectors, Domestic Peace, and Democratic Failure," in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy After Civil Wars,* ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald S. Rothchild (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 220.

[38] Rania Maktabi. "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited: Who Are the Lebanese?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1999): 224.

[39] Ibid., 229.

the failure to count people was, at first, simply an aftereffect of ignorance because the state structure and centralization of power was new and not yet developed, but the failure to count people soon became a politically motivated effort to exclude certain groups of people over time.[40] To maintain Christian control, those who were excluded from Lebanese citizenship tended to be immigrants with a Muslim background.[41]

The 1932 census was an inaccurate representation of Lebanese people at the time because there had been profound demographic changes between the time the census was taken and the establishment of the National Pact.[42] The proportions in the National Pact might have been different if an updated census had been taken. However, it is clear that the 1932 census was used because it ensured Christian control and an updated census would have likely placed Sunni Muslims in power, threatening the interests of the French and the Maronite Christian community.

Many felt that the "National Pact would prove workable precisely because it acknowledged that Lebanon was a country of deep religious antagonisms."[43] However, it fueled religious antagonisms by creating an imbalance in which the Christian Maronite minority would have a majority of the power, despite other religious communities, such as the Shia, making up a large portion of the population.[44] Prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, many called for a change in the power-sharing structure in order to make it more equal.[45] At this point in Lebanese history, it is evident that the National Pact was not an attempt at equal power-sharing, but rather a hierarchical system used to prevent certain communities from gaining power.

After years of discussion on a potential reinterpretation of the National Pact, Lebanese President Sulayman Faranjiyya announced a revision of the National Pact in February 1976, shortly after the outbreak of civil war.[46] The revision of the National Pact abolished the confessional distribution of civil service positions and divided parliamentary seats equally between Christians and Muslims, among other changes.[47] Several Arab groups wanted the National Pact to be re-interpreted to "give a new definition to the notions of Lebanese nationality and Lebanese sovereignty," which would clearly define the relationship between Lebanon and Arab nationalism.[48] A redefined Arab identity and the rise of Arab nationalism threatened Maronite claims of Lebanese identity due to the idea that Arab and Muslim identity are intertwined. Sunni Arab nationalism, a dominant form of nationalism, was considered unappealing to the Maronites because it was woven with Muslim identity and therefore excluded Christian identity.[49] The new interpretations of the National Pact were a feeble and far-too-late attempt at reshaping the Lebanese political system; and just like the National Pact, the changes failed to address underlying issues.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 230.

[42] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 218.

[43] Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World,* 54.

[44] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 218.

[45] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War," 383.

[46] Kamal S. Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958-1976* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1988), 163–164.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 145.

[49] Salibi, "The Lebanese Identity," 85.

Sectarian tensions, corruption, social inequality, and the state's tendency to not align with Arab or with Western states on foreign policy issues created the ideal conditions for civil war in 1975.[50] The elite "were in open conflict with one another" and they were inciting their communities instead of trying to ease the tensions. The military, once an impartial party to communal tensions, was now a part of the conflict.[51] At the beginning of the war, no foreign power intervened. However, Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad soon became aware that Israel might invade Lebanon and began to act. In 1976, Asad approached the Lebanese with a peace plan to balance power between Muslims and Christians, but the Muslims rejected the plan.[52] In an attempt to ensure Maronite success, Asad sent 13,000 troops into Lebanon.[53] In 1982, Israel sent tanks into Lebanon in order to protect their relationship with the Maronites and to eliminate the Palestinian presence in Lebanon.[54] Both countries invaded Lebanon in order to protect their own regional interests.

The Ta'if Agreement, also known as the Document of National Reconciliation, came after fourteen years of brutal civil war and numerous failed attempts at creating a plan for peace that worked for all communities.[55] The Ta'if Agreement differs from the National Pact of 1943 in that it did not establish the government of Lebanon. It instead ended a violent civil war and reshaped the power-sharing system in Lebanon in another attempt to weaken the Maronite elite and allow for other religious communities to have power in governance. Additionally, the Ta'if Agreement was an official written document, whereas the National Pact was an informal spoken agreement.[56] Despite the different purposes and formality of the document, the Ta'if Agreement shares many features of the National Pact: it still worked to institutionalize sectarian divide in the country, because confessional models like the Ta'if Agreement and National Pact are static and cannot account for changing demographics.[57]

In some respects, the Ta'if Agreement acknowledged the limits of the National Pact by stating:

> Lebanon's soil is united and it belongs to all the Lebanese. Every Lebanese is entitled to live in and enjoy any part of the country under the supremacy of the law. The people may not be categorized on the basis of any affiliation whatsoever and there shall be no fragmentation, no partition, and no repatriation [of Palestinians in Lebanon].[58]

This segment of the Ta'if Agreement established that all Lebanese are equal, no matter what religious community they belong to. However, the Ta'if Agreement kept the framework of the National Pact, which stated that the

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[50] Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis," 115–117.

[51] Ibid., 117.

[52] Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World*, 108–109.

[53] Ibid., 109.

[54] Ibid., 116.

[55] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War," 383.

[56] Mackey, *Mirror of the Arab World*, 54.

[57] Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis," 113.

[58] Taif Accords*,* Taif, Saudi Arabia, October 22, 1989, accessed November 1, 2016, http://peacemaker.un.org/lebanon-taifaccords89.

major political offices would still be held by Maronites, Sunnis, and so on. The Tai'f Agreement did succeed at transferring some of the power of the president to the prime minister and the cabinet in order to limit the power of the Christians.[59] The goal of the agreement was not to eliminate the confessional system, but to create a system in which religious communities would share power. A reduction in Maronite power may have eased some of the tensions, but it did not provide a long-term solution for communal tensions.

The Ta'if Agreement and the National Pact both affirm the Arab identity of the Lebanese state that the French had pushed for at the time of independence. The Ta'if Agreement states "Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity."[60] This aspect of the Ta'if Agreement fails to address an underlying external cause of the communal tensions in Lebanon—the Israel-Palestine conflict. This alienated religious communities that did not associate with Arab identity. The Israel-Palestine conflict has made Lebanon vulnerable to extremist groups such as Hezbollah and has spurred divisions because of the tendency for Muslims to support the Palestinian cause.[61] Maronites viewed the operations of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the country as a national security threat because it allowed for the possibility of attack by Israel.[62] The Israel-Palestine conflict was an extremely divisive issue for religious communities in Lebanon and it worked to violate Lebanese sovereignty and the government's legitimacy with the subsequent invasion by Syria and occupation by Israel. These events weakened the confessional government's legitimacy in the eyes of the Lebanese.

The Ta'if Agreement addressed the Syrian intervention and Israeli occupation by stating that Lebanon had sovereignty over all Lebanese territories.[63] The Agreement stated that Syria and Lebanon must mutually recognize the independence and sovereignty of each other, but also that the two states share "a special relationship" that allowed Lebanon and Syria to cooperate with one another.[64] This relationship is tied to Arab identity, which once again excludes Christian identity from the official framework of Lebanese identity.

Whereas the National Pact of 1943 sought to create a power-sharing system that ended up consolidating power in the hands of one religious community, the Ta'if Agreement worked to eliminate the hierarchal communal system created by the National Pact and to create a confessional system that would not give the upper hand to the Maronites or any religious group, and instead create a partnership between communities.[65] The National Pact divided parliament seats based on a six-to-five ratio, and the Ta'if Agreement amended this so that seats would be divided "(a) equally between Christians and Muslims, (b) proportionately between the denominations of each sect, [and] (c) proportionately between the districts."[66]

Distributing power equally did not resolve communal tensions, because as Middle East scholars Faten Ghosn and Amal Khoury argue, power-

[59] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 396.

[60] Taif Accords.

[61] Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure," 270–271.

[62] Zahar, "Power Sharing in Lebanon," 231.

[63] Ibid., 233.

[64] Taif Accords.

[65] Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon*, 140.

[66] Taif Accords.

sharing emphasized loyalty to religious identity and not to the state.[67] In this regard, the Ta'if Agreement failed to make progress towards creating a united Lebanon in the same ways that the National Pact failed. The two agreements failed to create a cohesive Lebanese national identity due to the emphasis on Arab national identity because it alienated religious communities that felt their religious identity was incompatible with Arab identity. It has been argued by many scholars that the confessional form of government more accurately represents the dynamics of the Middle East than the nation-state system.[68] While this may be the case, the Lebanese Civil War demonstrates that confessional or consociational political systems can exploit pre-existing communal tensions and that national identity, while it can have a negative impact on the state, can help to unite communities under one identity.

Despite the fact that the Ta'if Agreement was an attempt at resolving communal tensions, it failed to do so. Lebanon has not witnessed civil war since the signing of the Ta'if Agreement, but some have argued that there is still a political war occurring in the country.[69] This is because the Ta'if Agreement was not meant to be a long-term solution to the violence and "was not inclusive in the sense that it did not truly represent the Lebanese people and their concerns; rather, it was mainly an instrument by which political leaders agreed to 'coexist'."[70]

The Ta'if Agreement, like the National Pact benefited the elite ruling class more than it did the ordinary Lebanese citizen. The Lebanese had more concerns that needed to be addressed other than communal division, thus a cursory agreement to address communal tensions would not suffice. The Ta'if Agreement did not address the socioeconomic disparities or the government's inability to address regional problems, two major factors that led to instability.[71] Socioeconomic divisions will most likely continue to contribute to communal tensions as long as power-sharing agreements only benefit the elite classes.

Looking to the Future

Lebanon's history of communal identity and confessional political system is important for understanding present and future instability in Lebanon. After analyzing the National Pact and the Ta'if Agreement, it is clear that the confessional model "is inappropriate to [apply to] the Lebanese situation because of its static characteristic it was unlikely to bring real stability, political normality, and above all political legitimacy back to the Lebanese political system."[72] Both the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Agreement worked to reconcile differences among the elite or to appease a certain elite religious group, but failed to address the underlying causes of communal tensions in the rest of Lebanese society. It is evident that both the National Pact and the Ta'if Agreement are crucial to understanding why Lebanon's history has been filled with instability, and that the future will contain continued fragmentation in society and government unless the structure of the political system is altered.

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[67] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War," 388.
[68] Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "Consociational Democracy in Crisis: The Case of Lebanon," *Comparative Politics* 10, no. 2 (1978): 252.
[69] Ghosn and Khoury, "Lebanon after the Civil War," 388.
[70] Ibid., 389.
[71] Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure," 257.
[72] Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis," 119.

As these agreements demonstrate, communal identity plays a major role in how historians and the Lebanese interpret their history and in "'extracting' meaning from past events."[73] The National Pact and the Ta'if Agreement reinforced loyalty to religious community above the state. These agreements have had an enormous impact on how the different Lebanese communities view their identity and perceive each other. It will be extremely challenging for Lebanese citizens to make a shift away from understanding themselves and others based on communal identity, because it has been embedded in Lebanese identity since the creation of the Lebanese state.

Lebanon's future is extremely uncertain as the state balances on the edge of failure and potential collapse. The Ta'if Agreement failed to truly reconcile deep communal tensions and has not prevented mistrust between religious communities. The post-Ta'if era of Lebanon has been marred by communal violence. It appears that Lebanon may need to shift away from a confessional political system and instead establish a system that does not institutionalize sectarian identity. Lebanon will continue to be a complex state without a cohesive national identity if the confessional system persists. This is evident in Lebanon's recent struggles to elect a president from 2014 to 2016: the divided parliament took over forty rounds of failing to elect a president before finally electing Michel Auon in October 2016.

One issue with shifting away from the confessional system is the concept of Lebanon as an Arab state. Communities such as the Maronites may continue to reject Arab identity, which will only continue to create sectarian divide. Lebanon must create a national identity that encompasses all religious communities. Therefore, if Lebanon chooses to adopt a new political system, the concept of Lebanon as an Arab state must be altered.

Unless the root of communal tensions is addressed, which appears to be the confessional system itself, Lebanon will continue to experience a major identity crisis that will cripple its ability to progress as a state due to continued communal violence. The country will still witness instability in other forms and implementing a political system that is not based on communal identity may not immediately bring stability to the country.[74] Other political legitimacy issues, such as the prominence of Hezbollah in the Lebanese government, will need to be addressed in order to bring stability to Lebanon. It is, however, apparent that communal identity will continue to be a fundamental element in Lebanese politics and identity for years to come, unless Lebanon moves away from a consociational system.

The history of Lebanon's consociational, or power-sharing, system also provides lessons for other Middle Eastern states. The Ta'if Agreement and its aftermath demonstrate that the creation of a consociational system after a conflict may not resolve underlying communal tensions. This lesson could be applied to the post-conflict Syrian state because Syria is comprised of many different ethnic and religious groups. The Syrian conflict has not been nearly as long as the Lebanese Civil War, but it has been far more violent and the groups involved are even more divided. There has been hesitation to apply the Lebanese model to Syria "because sectarian power-sharing is widely held responsible for galvanizing Lebanon's ongoing sectarian fragmentation."[75] The consociational model might be even less effective in Syria because the

[73] Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon*, 29.
[74] Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure," 272.
[75] Stephan Rosiny, "Power Sharing in Syria: Lessons from Lebanon's Experience," IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc, 2013, 17.

religious groups are not ethnically homogenous as they are comprised of both Arabs and Kurds. Sunni Muslims constitute a large majority of the population, meaning that Sunnis would be able to obtain more power than many of the minority groups.

As both the Lebanese and Syria cases demonstrate, power-sharing systems, or systems in which one religious or ethnic group holds a majority of the power, can contribute to a decrease in government legitimacy. In Lebanon's case, Hezbollah was able to gain legitimacy and even become a part of Lebanese government. In a similar manner, groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and Jabhat Fatah-al Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) have been able to gain legitimacy and receive support from Syrians. Power-sharing systems work to institutionalize sectarian divide and create instability, thus it may be an ineffective model for states in an already unstable region.

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