Nationalism and Ethnic Politics

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fnep20

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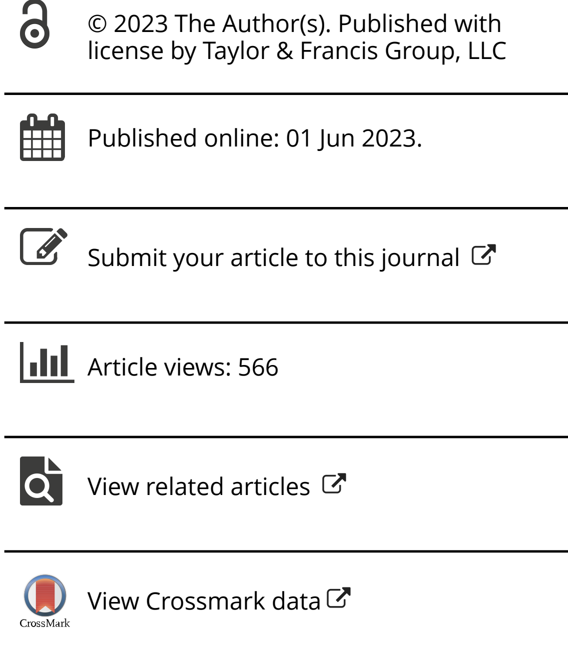
To cite this article: Toby Dodge (2023): Iraq, Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2023.2215600

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2023.2215600



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Published online: 01 Jun 2023.

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NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC POLITICS
https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2023.2215600

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Iraq, Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State

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ABSTRACT
This paper uses Iraq as a case study to answer the research question, how do consociational settlements impact the state? Firstly, the paper argues that consociationalism, at best, has an under-theorized conception of the state, implicitly defaulting to an unexamined neo-Weberian model. The paper then surveys state theory and finds that key works on the state in the Middle East are vulnerable to the postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism. To overcome this, the paper deploys the works of Mann, Jessop, and Bourdieu to develop a universal model of the state, disaggregating the state, conceiving of it as a series of competitive fields, bureaucratic, political, coercive, and economic. The paper then uses this model to assess how a consociational political settlement impacts upon the state. Deploying a disaggregated model of the state, the paper argues that Iraq's consociational settlement shifted the balance of power in the bureaucratic field away from any autonomous power or centralized coherence that the institutions and the civil service possessed toward the political parties empowered by the consociational system. After being empowered by the informal consociational settlement, it is the political parties who now dominate the system for their own ends.

Introduction

This paper uses Iraq as a case study to answer the research question, how do consociational settlements impact the state? To answer this question the paper develops three separate but interlinked arguments about consociationalism, the state, and Iraq. Firstly, it outlines how consociational theory understands the role that the state plays in its approach to power sharing in deeply divided societies. It concludes that consociationalism, at best, has an under-theorized conception of the state, implicitly defaulting to a neo-Weberian model. This leads those promoting consociational settlements to often work with an unexamined assumption that coherent state institutions exist and can be unproblematically deployed as part of that settlement. These institutions are then subjected to a consociational division of power. The expectation within consociational theory is that state institutions, once shared among the different consociational players, will retain their autonomy and place limits on the power of the communal elites who run them, thus preserving the coherence of the state.

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Given consociationalism's own under-theorized conception of the state, the paper then surveys state theory, both that which was developed to understand the state in Europe, the postcolonial world, and specifically the Middle East. Using work developed during the ongoing postcolonial turn in the social sciences, the paper identifies a common Eurocentricity in attempts to develop a model of the state and state formation to analyze the Global South and the Middle East. Postcolonial theory identifies a reified and overly positive understanding of the European state, which allows the state in the Global South to be unfavorably compared with its European counterparts. Negatively drawn conclusions are then developed to highlight the supposed pathologies, absences, or failures that prevent the Global South from reaching a European ideal.[1] The paper seeks to avoid the postcolonial critique of Eurocentrism by deploying the works of Mann, Jessop, and Bourdieu to develop a concept of the state that does not negatively compare the state in the Middle East or wider Global South to an apparently more coherent European model. Instead, the paper seeks to develop a universal model, equally applicable to the Middle East, the wider Global South, or Europe. In doing this, the paper disaggregates the state, conceiving of it as a series of competitive fields, bureaucratic, political, coercive, and economic.

The third aim of this paper is to use Iraq as a case study to examine how an informal consociational settlement, put in place in the aftermath of invasion and regime change in 2003, directly impacted upon the institutional coherence of the state. Iraq, post-2003, has repeatedly been used by a number of academics as a case study of consociationalism.[2] However, the case study has been used to illustrate different arguments about consociationalism at different times in Iraq's political trajectory since 2003. In 2007, for example, McGarry and O'Leary celebrated the liberal consociational aspects of the then recently written constitution. Over 10 years later, both Romano[3] and Bogaards[4] lament the failure of the constitution because it is not consociational enough.

This paper argues that Iraq is certainly consociational, but, following both Lijphart's later work[5] and Bogaards' examination of Lebanon,[6] it sees the country as a case study of informal consociation. Since 2005, these informal norms have ensured that the three main offices of state—the Presidency, Prime Minister, and Speaker of the Council of Representatives—are divided among elite representatives of the country's ethno-sectarian communities. Each government, after the six national elections since regime change, has been built around a grand coalition, with, since 2014, the proportional appointment of senior civil servants concurrently negotiated among the ethno-sectarian parties.

There is little doubt that the contemporary Iraqi state is profoundly incoherent and undermined by politically sanctioned corruption. This paper details how Iraq's informal consociational settlement played a central role in transforming the balance of power within the competitive fields that make up the state, undermining the autonomy and coherence of its institutions. By deploying a model of the state shaped by the work of Mann, Jessop, and Bourdieu, we can see that Iraq's consociational settlement shifted the balance of power in a number of competitive fields that make up the Iraqi state, especially the bureaucratic field. This shift was away from any autonomous power that senior civil servants possessed, toward the representatives of a number of political parties, which, as a result, came to dominate the system and manipulate the resources of the state and the senior civil servants for their own ends.

Research question, methods, and data collection

This paper uses the Iraqi state and the informal consociational political settlement put in place after 2005 as a case study to answer the research question, how do consociational settlements impact upon the state? To do this, research for this paper focuses on the evolution of Iraq's informal consociational system from the elections of January 2005 until today. It then examines how the evolving norms and rules that regulate this system directly impacted upon how the institutions of the state functioned. The paper examines how senior Iraqi politicians built the system and oversaw its functioning and how senior civil servants in the higher echelons of Iraqi state institutions reacted to the system's demands. Data for this paper came from 69 semi-structured confidential elite interviews, analysis of US and Iraqi government documents, both those officially published and those published by WikiLeaks, contemporaneous newspaper and television reportage and interviews published in the Arabic and English press, and secondary sources.

The elite interviews were carried out during eleven separate research trips to Amman, Jordan, and Baghdad, Basra, and Erbil in Iraq from November 2018 to March 2023, and in London. A number of former prime ministers, serving and former government ministers and deputy ministers, senior civil servants, senior advisers to political parties, members of parliament, and Iraqi journalists and analysts were interviewed in confidence. A number of senior government ministers were interviewed on numerous occasions, both while in office and afterwards. All the data gained during these interviews were triangulated with the other interview data collected. Interview data were then triangulated with research carried out on government documents, journalistic coverage, and secondary sources.

Consociationalism and state theory

Although consociational theory and its application, developed and deployed by academics and practitioners, has continued to evolve, it remains greatly influenced by the foundational work carried out by Arend Lijphart.[7] Lijphart focused on what he saw as the four pillars of consociational democracy—inclusive grand governing coalitions that unite the elites representing different communities, a mutual veto on government policy held by each group through their communal elites, segmental autonomy for those communities, and the proportional division of representation, state resources, and employment. These four pillars are reproduced across work that claims to be consociational.[8] This paper argues that Iraq's post-2005 system is built around three of these four pillars, a grand coalition, some geographic segmental autonomy for the two dominant parties claiming to represent the Kurdish section of society, and high levels of proportionality in the distribution of senior government offices and state resources. Lijphart went on to stress that "the sharing of executive power and group autonomy" were the two most important pillars for success.[9] Those who have found fault with Iraq's consociation highlight problems with its asymmetric federalism and the failure to extend its remit beyond the geographic areas dominated by the two main parties representing the Kurds. However, the dominance of grand coalitions in government formation, the division of the most senior offices of state among those parties that claim to represent the

ethno-sectarian communities, and the apportionment of state resources among those representatives, makes the system consociational.

In his later work, Lijphart developed a distinction between pre-determined groups in consociations and those who self-determine. This distinction was further developed by later consociational theorists as the difference between corporate and liberal consociation. Liberal consociations can be built around whichever groups emerge from a political field and have the strength or popularity to claim autotomy.[10] It is this distinction that McGarry and O'Leary identify in the parts of the Iraqi constitution that define the state's federal structures, arguing that it represents a liberal consociational settlement.

A final innovation, developed in Lijphart's work, rests upon the formal and informal application of consociation: the agreements to divide power that are written into law, peace settlements, or constitutions and those informal agreements arrived at through extended negotiations that are norm or practice-based. Lijphart himself argued that informal rules "generally worked better" because they were more flexible but also because they might indicate greater levels of trust between the political elites involved in negotiating the settlement.[11] This paper argues that Iraq's post-invasion political settlement is a clear example of informal consociationalism, guided, as it has been since 2005, by a number of unwritten but rigidly and repeatedly applied rules and norms.

Lijphart's work and the wave of consociational theory that followed in its wake have surprisingly little to say about the state, whether as a set of coercive and distributive institutions, as a focal point for a population's allegiances, or as a target for protest.[12] The state, as a unit of analysis, does not even figure in the index of Lijphart's most influential book, *Democracy in Plural Societies*. Instead, Lijphart's work is dominated by three other units of analysis: first, the "segmental cleavages," which he identifies as the key societal threat to political stability; the second, democracy, which he believes is directly threatened by those cleavages; and finally, political elites whose collective agency, rationality, and cooperation are the central vehicle for stability and democracy.[13] Lijphart is certainly universal in his use of case studies; the original focus on Europe in the 1969 *World Politics* article was globalized in *Democracy in Plural Societies* to include multiple cases from what he labels the "Third World."[14]

Along with Lijphart, wider consociational theory has a tendency to take the state for granted, as an implicit but largely unexamined presence. This is clearly apparent in the four European case studies that Lijphart used to first develop his general model but also when his focus expands to include case studies from Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia.[15] The institutional capacity of the state, for Lijphart, is assumed to exist and to be functionally coherent. The institutional, coercive, and economic power of the state can then be divided between the different communities by the elites as the main vehicle for building a rational, interest-driven political settlement. Lijphart does not appear to countenance that this parceling out of state resources, the division of civil service jobs and senior military positions among the members of the different communities, and the appointment of communal elites to run the various ministries can be done without a fully functioning state in place or that once it has been done such a political settlement will do any harm to the efficiency or coherence of the states that are subjected to consociational bargains.

As two of Lijphart's most prolific and influential academic inheritors, McGarry and O'Leary appear to have an evolving and somewhat contradictory attitude to the role of the state in a consociation. In their 2007 piece celebrating the Iraqi constitution, they commit very clearly to Lijphart's requirement that proportionality among different groups should be promoted "not just in the executive and legislature but also in the bureaucracy, including the army and the police."[16] Following in Lijphart's wake, they do not comment on the negative impact this could have on the state's institutional coherence or autonomy.

By 2009, they appear to back away from consociationalism, arguing "… we admire consociations when they are appropriate, but argue that consociational institutions may be too integrationist for national minorities." Instead, they develop an argument in favor of bi-national and pluri-national solutions for deeply divided and conflict ridden societies, with each presumably self-defined nation attaining something approaching its own state.[17]

However, in 2013, O'Leary argued that for power sharing to be successful in "deeply divided places" there needed to be some form of "stateness" or "governability." In the 2013 piece, O'Leary deploys the standard definition of a neo-Weberian state, one that has "coercive capacities to ensure security," that expresses "… authentic legal authority over persons, property, and their movements, and are recognised as such entities by their citizens, civil society organisations, and other states." This he positively juxtaposes against "kleptocracies" and "governments of thieves," arguing that "… failing and failed states are personalised: previously dominated by rulers, a family, clan, or clique, which did not distinguish public from private realms." He concludes by arguing that power sharing needs the "soil of functioning states" to be successful.[18] From this 2013 work, we can deduce that O'Leary is arguing for a neo-Weberian state, with coherent institutions, overseen by an autonomous civil service, who implement the rule of law in a rational and depersonalized way. This, he argues, is an essential starting point for successful power sharing.

What explains Lijphart's apparent indifference to and McGarry and O'Leary's evolving understanding of the state, first as a threat to sub-state communities or minorities but then, for O'Leary in 2013, as the crucial vehicle for any form of successful power sharing? There is no doubt that Lijphart, McGarry, and O'Leary intend their consociational theories to be universally applicable, well beyond the European case studies first used by Lijphart. The need for an institutionally coherent state, as made clear in O'Leary's[19] piece, is implied and assumed throughout Lijphart's work and, after him, in the majority of those influenced by him. However, Lijphart at no point in his work outlines his understanding of the state or the impact that a consociational settlement might have on its institutional coherence.

In order to gauge the impact of consociational settlements on a state, in this case Iraq, it is not possible, as Lijphart and O'Leary do, to take a functioning and coherent state as an untheorized given. Political science has for many years been riven by ongoing debates about how to theorize the state and understand its role within society.

For many years, neo-Weberian understandings of the state, taking a specific, if disputed, reading of Weber as their point of departure, were very influential, if not dominant, within political science. Weber himself was careful to acknowledge that different

states undertake a variety of different tasks, thus trying to move his own heuristic definition away from a list of specific functions that all states have to undertake all the time.[20] Instead, what interested him about the state was its capacity, as an organization, to manage social orders by centralizing and monopolizing "ordering functions," what Anter has labeled "statalisation."[21] It is this process of "… tightening state-society relations, caging social relations over the national rather than the local-regional or transnational terrain …" that Mann identifies as the central power of the modern state.[22] Weber himself and neo-Weberians, personified by the work of Theda Skocpol, among others,[23] see this power as vested in a cadre of senior civil servants at the head of the state and the bureaucracy they run, which remains largely autonomous from society it has dominion over. It is this model, dominant for so long in political science, that Lijphart and younger generations of consociationalists take as an implicit point of departure.

However, as in the work of Lijphart and consociational theory more generally, it is not only the explicit and implicit deployment of this model that makes it so influential but the role it plays in providing an often-unstated point of comparative departure for understanding states in the Global South that do not possess the cascading institutional hierarchies of control that Weber outlined in his ideal type. Postcolonial political theory has drawn attention to the problematic Eurocentricity involved in this comparison.

Bryan Turner has pointed to the dichotomy that animates Weber's work, between "the rational and systematic character of Occidental society" and Oriental societies that were, for Weber, hostile to the pre-requisites of capitalist development.[24] Gurminder Bhambra and Julian Go highlight the analytical damage done by the refusal to recognize the direct role that imperial extraction had on both Weber's theory of the state and then on those works influenced by him.[25] Weber's conceptualization of the modern state was based upon the construction of the German state as it engaged in both internal and external colonialism. Go examines a comparable dynamic in the influential work on European state formation by Charles Tilly. Tilly, Go argues, draws a distinction between internal state formation in Europe and the functioning of external European empires beyond Europe. Tilly studiously ignores the role that European empires played in the construction of European states, allowing him to claim the result was the building of successful nation states in Europe, not empire states, whose strength is based upon imperial extraction.[26] For Bhambra, the central role that colonization played in the formation of the states of Europe mean a properly postcolonial theory of the state, one that could be universally applied, could only be based on case studies developed during and after decolonization.[27]

The influence of Eurocentrism in comparative discussions of the state in the Global South and specifically the Middle East is to be seen in the negative juxtaposition of Southern states with an internalist explanation of their "strong" European counterparts. This focuses on the search for absences, what is missing in the states of the Global South that accounts for their weakness. For Nazih Ayubi, one of the most innovative Marxists who has written on the state in the region, the failings of the state can be explained because it was not, unlike states in Europe, "a natural growth of its own socio-economic history or its own cultural and intellectual tradition." This meant the Arab bourgeoisie could never build an ideational hegemony over society and were thus

forced to rely on coercion over consent, thus building “fierce” but not strong states.[28] Writing more recently, Saouli blames the instability of Middle Eastern states on their late formation. Deploying both Weber’s ideal type and Tilly “internalist” work on European state formation,[29] Saouli juxtaposes late state formation in the Middle East with the ability of European states institutions to “incorporate different social powers.” Part of this inability to incorporate social actors, Saouli argues, especially in Iraq, has been the lack of social homogeneity in various Middle Eastern states.[30]

Insights from the work of Bob Jessop, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael Mann may be able to act as an analytical vehicle to move away from Eurocentric understandings of the state by undermining the dominant leitmotif at its core, the strong centralized European state ruling over a homogenized society.[31]

Mann terms his approach to conceptualizing the state “organisational materialism,” by which he argues that power is contained within organizational forms.[32] Power is vested in state institutions but also, crucially, in societal groupings. Both sets of actors use their power on each other, with each interpenetrating the other’s realm. This leads Mann to understand states to be polymorphous, with their form at any one time the result of ongoing struggles between elites in and outside the institutions of the state crystallizing in the higher levels of the state. “Thus the state need have no final unity or even consistency.”[33]

Mann’s approach deliberately echoes Jessop’s, who argues that analytically it is not the state that acts but “specific sets of … state officials located in specific parts and levels of the state system.” Influenced by the work of Bourdieu and Poulantzas, as well as Mann, Jessop argues that instead of understanding the state as a unified whole, it is better to conceive of it as a “strategic field,” an arena where intersecting societal power networks fight with each other for dominance over separate state institutions.[34]

This approach has the key analytical advantage of removing both the neo-Weberian model’s focus on the autonomy of the state and the explicit or implicit unfavorable comparison between the European state and those in the Global South. It also problematizes the role of the state’s senior civil servants, who compete with others in their struggle to control the institutions of the state. All states are universally shaped by larger struggles between and within wider social formations.[35] Under this analytical rubric, every state’s form is dictated by the balance of forces within society at any given time.[36] Different state forms have their origins in the different balance of forces competing for domination in any historical period.[37] However, there is a “political lag,” with states institutionalizing the outcome of previous social conflicts, which in turn shape more contemporary struggles.[38]

What are the most important fields within which competition takes place? Mann identifies four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political. As part of his “organisational materialism,” these four sources are institutionalized means of obtaining human goals.[39] This is echoed in two of the primary fields that Bourdieu identifies: the bureaucratic and the political. The bureaucratic field would be the institutionalization of Mann’s political power. It is the location of the “servants of the state” that neo-Weberianism places such an emphasis on. However, this field, far from being homogenous, is like all other fields subject to intense competition over who can enter, claim authority, and be able to distribute the resources it has dominion over.[40]

Bourdieu's political field is the source of Mann's ideological power. It is within the political field that politicians compete to define what the social world is in its totality. Bourdieu labels these competing definitions of the social as "principles of vision and division." These, in the hands of politicians, start off as "speculative ideas" only to harden into powerful positions once they are adopted and used to mobilize people.[41] The political field thus has a powerful role within any society, a role of censorship, of "limiting the universe of political discourse," of placing boundaries on what is politically thinkable.[42]

In a similar fashion, control of Mann's two remaining sources of social power—economic and military—are fought over in their respective economic and coercive fields. As Mann argues, coercive capital is won or lost in the military field, but it is not the sole possession of those competing within the state but is also possessed by those operating outside its formal institutions.[43]

Iraq's consociational bargain

Iraq's claim to be a case study in consociation is based upon the political system built after the end of the formal US occupation in May 2004. The system was largely created during 2005, with the election of a transitional national assembly, the writing of a completely new constitution, its anointment through national referendum, and then the election of a full-term parliament and government. Bogaards, among others, argues that power sharing under this system is "weak, liberal and voluntary." This informal power sharing, he argues, did not build "a stable framework" that could have mediated communal tensions and stopped Iraq's collapse into civil war.[44] Bogaards and the numerous other critics of Iraq's consociational system are correct to identify the formal regulations in the constitution as weak, with key power-constraining initiatives that were time-limited. However, these critics overlooked the powerful, consistently applied, and largely inflexible set of informal consociational rules that were put in place in 2005 and 2006 and have played a dominant role in shaping each post-election process of government formation since.

The consociational logic was agreed upon by those who were to become the ruling elite long before regime change, at a series of conferences in exile during the 1990s.[45] The specific rules that were to shape government formation were then largely put in place following the first elections of January 2005, before the new constitution was written. The first of these informal but lasting agreements was about the three most senior offices of state, the roles of Prime Minister, President, and Speaker of the Council of Representatives. All three were subjected to an informal consociational agreement, dividing them up between the parties that claimed to represent the three main dominant communities: Shiʿa, Sunni, and Kurd. The premiership, the office seen by the elite as having the most power within the state, was claimed by the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), then the dominant coalition of Shiʿa Islamist parties, who argued they represented the largest of Iraq's societal blocks. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) took the Presidency in the name of the Kurdish block, leaving the Speaker of the Council of Representatives to be allocated to the fractured set of groups struggling to speak for the Sunni section of society.[46]

More important for the consociational settlement was the formation of the grand coalitions, which run each government after every election. The allocation of ministerial appointments within the consociational agreement was key because it is the ministries that control the largest slice of government budgets and who make the majority of government hires. Although the consociational division of ministries between the ethno-sectarian parties was readily agreed to by the ruling elite, post-election negotiations after the first elections were time-consuming, as different parties competed for ministries that controlled the greatest wealth and power. After the second national elections of December 2005, this process was informally institutionalized "to stabilize the system."[47] The creation of a grand coalition government was now regulated directly by the seats each party gained in elections. The "point selection system" allowed parties to spend the points they received on ministries with different levels of financial power, with two parliamentary seats worth one point. The senior government offices of the "three presidencies"—the Prime Minister, the President, and the Speaker of Council of Representatives—were already divided between the three different communities. However, among the different parties competing to represent each community, these grand offices of state cost fifteen points each to obtain. Government ministries were separated into two categories, depending on the wealth and power they controlled. Sovereign ministries—Interior, Finance, Oil, Foreign Affairs, and Defence—wielded symbolic capital but also coercive and financial power. Service ministries, mainly Electricity and Health, had neither the prestige nor coercive power but did have large budgets, which were spent through regular and extensive contracting that facilitated contract fraud.[48] In 2018, the leadership of sovereign ministries cost five electoral points, whereas service ministries cost four points.[49]

Between 2005 and 2018, post-election negotiations to form grand coalitions and divide up the government along consociational lines have settled into a predictable, rule-governed but time-consuming schedule. First, the votes are counted and disgruntled parties and coalitions launch legal appeals based on allegations of fraud. Detailed negotiations surrounding government formation are then triggered by the Iraqi Federal Court's certification of the results. Initial negotiations in this process focused on who will become Prime Minister. These mainly take place among the Shiʿa Islamist parties who secure the plurality of members of parliament. After the introduction of the points-based system in 2005/2006, the division of cabinet posts between the different parties and the resources they deliver has been the most lucrative but least controversial of all the negotiations. From 2005 to 2018, this negotiated process of grand coalition formation occurred six times, with the negotiations, from the elections to government, taking an average of 138 days to complete.

In the aftermath of the second national elections of December 2005, the agreement negotiated among the ruling elite, as the basis to forming a government, formalized the proportional division of the higher ranks of the civil service, as suggested by Lijphart, O'Leary, and McGarry in their formula for consociational government. A committee was set up with members drawn from the key representatives of each coalition in the consociational bargain, two Shi'a Islamists, one Kurd and one Sunni.[50] Between 2006 and 2014, this National Balance Committee managed the apportionment of the private-grade appointments, the most senior civil servants at the top of all government ministries, between each of the major ethno-sectarian parties, subjecting the senior ranks of the civil service to the logic of the consociation.[51]

Since the 2014 elections, the appointment of party-aligned private grades at the top of each ministry became a central part of government formation negotiations, alongside ministerial appointments.[52] Parties could then choose, within the points-based system, whether it was to their advantage to pick ministers, deputy ministers, or senior civil servants, or a mixture of all three.[53] In 2018, for example, 800 senior civil servant positions, spread across the all ministries, were an important asset in negotiations to form a government, with each electoral coalition demanding their "share," based on their claims to represent their ethno-sectarian communities and then the number of seats they gained in the elections.[54] The Sadrists (Shiʿa Islamists) received the highest number of private-grade positions at the height of the civil service, taking 200, because they did not opt for ministerial posts or bid on the position of Prime Minister. Khamis al-Khanjar's National Axis Coalition, which claimed to represent the Sunni section of Iraq's population, secured 150, with the Kurdish parties getting 120.[55] The party-aligned senior civil servants then became key players in government, acting as vehicles for the interests of the parties that had placed them at the top of each ministry.[56]

By its very consociational nature, the political system created by the 2005 negotiations and solidified through post-election agreements in 2006 and 2014, remains highly fractured and decentered. Within the conception of the state developed above, through the work of Jessop, Mann, and Bourdieu, the post-2005, informal consociational settlement has shifted the balance of power within the competitive fields that make up the state. The consociational settlement has allowed the political parties and their interests to triumph. Each political party, the majority of whom still claim to represent ethno-sectarian societal blocks, amass influence within the bureaucratic field. This comes at the direct expense of any institutional coherence, any independent power of senior civil servants, and the rule of law. Each government minister and the senior civil servants at the top of their ministries gain their appointment through the success of ethno-sectarian party leaders in post-election negotiations. To continue in their role they must follow the orders and interests of those party leaders, not bound by cabinet collective responsibility, the demands of the Prime Minister, nor any civil service code.[57]

Overall, it is clear that criticisms that focus on the lack of formal consociational mechanisms in the Iraqi constitution have a point. Romano is correct to argue that the constitution did not mandate formal "… quotas for the representation of various ethno-sectarian identities, nor did it mandate a certain ethno-sectarian identity for the president, prime minister, speaker … ."[58] However, it is also clear that a set of robust and consistently applied informal norms, arrived at through extended negotiation between the main parties, did guarantee that the occupants of the three main offices of state would be decided through their ethno-sectarian identity, and these informal norms have been in operation during the formation of every post-election grand coalition since. After every election since 2005, the President has been a Kurd, the Prime Minister a Shiʿa, and the Speaker a Sunni. Until 2021, no major electoral force challenged these consociational norms. Secondly, the constitution did not mandate the need for coalition government. However, the negotiated norms that arose in 2005 have guaranteed that every government formed since then has indeed been a grand coalition that claims to represent the ethno-sectarian communities of Iraq, as delineated though

elections. Finally, beyond ministerial positions, negotiated norms have, since 2006, meant that the most senior ranks of the civil service in each ministry, the private grades, have also become part of post-election government formation negotiations, with their posts divided among the ethno-sectarian parties.[59]

McGarry, in his 2019 paper, is right to conclude that some of the formal consociational "demos-constraining" institutions mentioned in the constitution have not been put in place. However, his larger claim that because of this the Iraqi system degenerated into a "… Shiʿa Arab majoritarian dictatorship in which executive power has become focused in the prime minister's office …" is empirically unsustainable.[60] The tortuous consociational negotiations that guarantee the formation of grand coalition governments and the proportional distribution of cabinet positions and senior civil service jobs have and continue to take place among all victorious political parties after each national election since 2005 up until the last national elections in 2021.

The impact of Iraq's consociational system

At the core of the definition of the state developed above is its disaggregation into a number of competitive fields, political, bureaucratic, coercive, and economic. Bourdieu stresses that these fields are created, shaped, and ultimately function through the competition for dominance within each. The overt aim of consociational theory is to vest power in political parties as representatives of societal groups. However, with its under-theorized understanding of the state, consociational theory has not investigated the impact this will have on the balance of power within each of the state's fields. In his 2013 paper, O'Leary contrasts the need for neo-Weberian "stateness" or "governability" with "kleptocracies" and "governments of thieves." For consociationalism to work, he argues, some form of "stateness" is essential.[61] However, what O'Leary does not seem to appreciate is that consociational settlements, when applied to the bureaucratic field, or indeed the coercive field, deliberately empower those acting on behalf of political parties, at the expense of what Mann would see as the vehicles for statist power: senior civil servants in the bureaucratic field and army officers in the coercive field. Consociational agreements divide the institutions of the state among political parties who claim to represent social interests, thus directly challenging the autonomy of the senior civil service and army officers and their ability to independently run the institutions of the state. Within this understanding of the state, consociational settlements tilt the balance of power in field-centered competition toward party-political actors at the costs of statist ones. It is this process in Iraq, the division of state institutions and the resources that they control, in the name of a post-conflict political settlement that has done so much damage to the coherence of the state's post-2005 institutions.

In his own paper for this special edition, Matthijs Bogaards urges us to ask which of the four pillars of a consociational settlement leads to state weakness in general and corruption, clientelism, and patronage in particular.[62] In Iraq's consociational system, it is the intertwined commitment to grand coalitions in cabinet formation and proportionality in the distribution of state jobs, specifically senior civil servant and senior military positions, that has been the major driver of state weakness. It is this commitment that

gives rise to two major aspects of the politically sanctioned corruption that has done so much to undermine the coherence of the state and delegitimize its ruling elite.

The first is linked to a sustained expansion of those employed by the state, driven by the demands of the consociational settlement, not the administrative needs of state institutions. Under the terms of post-election negotiations, party functionaries, from the minister down, are allocated direct control over the resources of their ministries during the time they remain in office. As part of the consociational division of state resources, each party in control of a ministry issues a *Tazkiyya* or letter of recommendation to their loyalists. This allows party followers to gain employment within the ministries the party controls.[63] Access to state employment, twenty years after regime change, is only guaranteed either by pledging loyalty to one of the dominant political parties or by paying a bribe to a civil servant. The resultant politicization of the state's payroll can be seen in the rapid growth of those employed by the state, which expanded from an estimated 850,000 to 1.2 million employees a year after regime change to three million in 2015.[64] By 2020, the then-Finance Minister estimated that the number of government employees had further expanded to 4.5 million.[65]

This massive expansion in the state payroll, directly driven by consociational commitments to proportionality in the distribution of cabinet positions and jobs, explains why government expenditure on the state's wages and pensions bill increased by 400 percent in real terms between 2004 and 2020. Wages and pensions, in 2020, consumed 74 percent of all government expenditure, leaving little resources to invest in rebuilding infrastructure, expanding education or other development projects.[66]

The second outcome of the consociational commitment to proportionality is the direct influence that political parties have on the appointment of senior civil servants, the private grades, operating in the bureaucratic field. As explained above, from 2006 to 2014, the appointment of private grades was overseen by the National Balance Committee, whose role was to deliver proportionality in senior civil service appointments. This process, the negotiations between the major political parties to proportionally appoint private grades in each ministry, after 2014 was included in post-election government formation negotiations. By 2018, between 500 to 800 special grades positions, placed in the higher echelons of each government ministry, were divided between the victorious political parties during these negotiations.[67]

The reason that private-grade appointments have become so politically important and a central part of government formation is due to the financial resources that the private-grade civil servants control in each ministry. These senior civil servants control the millions of dollars spent each year in government contracting.[68]

Radhi Hamza Radhi, a former head of the Commission of Public Integrity, argued that state contracting with the private sector was "… the father of all corruption issues" in Iraq.[69] A large number of lucrative contracts issued by ministries, as part of their everyday business, are awarded to private sector proxies, known in Iraq as *hitaan*, or whales, who work in partnership with the dominant political parties and/or their private-grade representatives in the ministries. The price that the contracts are awarded at is set at a much higher level than could be justified by costs or a normal competitive market rate. These excess margins are then used to fund the operations of the parties and the personal corruption of their senior leaders.[70]

The party-aligned private grades in each ministry, appointed through the post-election government formation process, are responsible for government contracting and facilitate both the contract corruption and the flow of resources from it to the "economic offices" of each party.[71] Contracting fraud thus becomes the main vehicle for corruption, extracting resources from the state and delivering it to the dominant political parties. It also creates the elite cohesion that underpins the consociational consensus.

This is the most damaging outcome of the consociational settlement, the deliberate empowerment of party-political operatives, at the expense of nonaligned civil servants, in the struggle to dominate the bureaucratic field and the resources available there. The informal consociational bargain among Iraq's governing elite, negotiated from 2005 onwards, has been responsible for placing politically sanctioned corruption at the core of the new political system. This has transformed the state, breaking its institutional coherence and undermining its ability to deliver public services. It has also thoroughly discredited the ethno-sectarian ideology used to justify the consociational system and the place of the ruling elite at its pinnacle. When in October 2019 that elite faced a mass movement, *Tishreen*, calling for the abolition of Iraq's consociational system and its replacement with one based upon a secular nationalism and equal citizenship for all, Iraq's elite resorted with extended violent repression. The violent targeting of civic activists played a major role in the 2021 election campaign, in effect demobilizing those who were campaigning against the consociational system.

Conclusions

Consociational theory, first developed by Arend Lijphart in his early work and then refined and applied by successive generations of consociational social scientists and practitioners, has retained a remarkable influence in academia, where his four pillars of consociational democracy are still reproduced across a wide range of social science literature. If anything, the influence of consociational formulas for post-conflict peacebuilding are even more influential among practitioners, those involved in negotiating elite pacts and crafting constitutions that are aimed at ending civil wars and establishing a sustainable peace. However, as we have seen, Lijphart and those social scientists that have developed his work since pay little or no attention, theoretically or empirically, to the state and the impact of consociational agreements on it. Lijphart's own units of analysis were dominated by the fear of conflict driven by segmental cleavages and the role of rational elites in avoiding it. Those consociational scholars who have followed him have either continued the tradition of ignoring the state, defaulting to a largely unexamined neo-Weberian model or instead see the state and its apparent integrationist tendencies as the major threat to be countered.

This paper has attempted to overcome the intellectual lacuna at the core of consociationalism by developing a non-Eurocentric model of the state, based on the work of Jessop, Mann, and Bourdieu. This model disaggregates the state, understanding its shape, power, and coherence as the outcome of an ongoing struggle for dominance between different players in several fields that together comprise the whole.

By using the in-depth case study of Iraq, this paper has shown how two of consociationalism's four pillars, inclusive grand governing coalitions and proportionality in the allocation of jobs, especially in the senior ranks of the civil service, have tipped the balance of power

in the bureaucratic field away from statist or autonomous power holders toward party-political ones. The consequences for the Iraqi state and its population are wholly negative. At the center of Iraq's consociational bargain is the division of a number of senior civil servant positions between the major political parties. This agreement has directly broken the collective coherence, autonomy, and power of the civil service competing in the bureaucratic field. In their place party functionaries, loyal to their party bosses, have used their positions to extract millions of dollars annually from the state budget to fund the personal and political interests of their parties. It has caused the progressive weakening of state institutions to the point where today they cannot deliver order, healthcare, education, reliable supplies of electricity, or clean water to the population, although Iraq is one of the world's major oil exporters.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Taif Alkudary for the Arabic research she carried out for this paper. I would like to thank Renad Mansour for the joint research we carried out in Iraq and the joint publications we produced on this topic together. I was greatly aided by my discussions with Bassel Salloukh that shaped a number of this paper's central themes. Thanks also to Matthijs Bogarrds, Allison McCulloch, Melani Cammett, and especially Dylan O'Driscoll for their very useful comments on earlier drafts of the paper presented at the workshops linked to this special edition.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Funding

This work was supported by a grant from the Henry R. Luce Foundation's Initiative on Religion in International Affairs.

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