Power-Sharing for Peace?

Between Adoptability and Durability in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Acronyms

AANES   Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
SDF   Syrian Democratic Forces
PM   Prime Minister
PYD   Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat)
SNIS   Swiss Network for International Studies
UN   United Nations
MP   Member of Parliament

Abstract

This working paper is based on a multi-methods collaborative research project, which explores the relationship between peace and power-sharing in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Specifically, the project investigates the conditions under which power-sharing agreements are adopted (what we refer to as adoptability) as well as whether such agreements, once adopted, can deliver durable peace and functional governance (a process we refer to as durability). Rather than treating adoptability and durability as discrete processes, we stress their continuity as part of a power-sharing lifecycle. The specific power-sharing arrangements agreed at the point of adoption and the circumstances under which they are agreed, as well as the implementation and non-implementation of specific provisions, will inform the viability of the system over time. Not all that could prove durable is agreeable in negotiations, and not everything that is adopted will turn out to be durable. This in turn affects local perceptions of what power-sharing can or cannot deliver for citizens.

1 <u>Introduction</u>

Power-sharing, which refers to elite cooperation in government, has become an important tool used by international actors to pacify violent conflicts and support democracy in deeply divided societies. However, a series of failed or stalled peace processes from Cyprus and Yemen to Syria and Sudan bring power-sharing's 'adoptability problem' into view, where reaching an agreement becomes increasingly difficult. Meanwhile, a series of governing crises – in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, and Lebanon – call into question the functionality and durability of power-sharing arrangements.

This working paper shares some of the key findings of the project "Power-sharing for Peace? Between Adoptability and Durability in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq"[1] which examines the conditions under which power-sharing agreements are accepted and implemented, including when and how well they perform in three Middle Eastern societies. A discourse on power-sharing has presented itself as a central solution to ending the Syrian conflict, yet the convergence required to concretize such proposals into a peace agreement remains elusive. Ongoing constitutional and political conflict in Iraq can be traced back to a rushed political transition process in which the agreement on a power-sharing constitutional framework was neither inclusive nor based on sober evaluations of the durability of the provisions agreed upon. Meanwhile, power-sharing in Lebanon ended a civil war, but has subsequently given way to a series of interlocking political crises, which has impacted the delivery of public goods .

Specifically, the paper explores the following research questions:

1. Under what conditions do power-sharing agreements come into being?

2. Once agreed, what implementation challenges might impede functional governance and subsequently durable peace?

Our research found a direct link between adoptability and durability. The specific institutions agreed at the point of adoption and the circumstances under which they are agreed informs the viability of the system over time, i.e., they will impact durability. After all, not all that is durable is necessarily agreeable in negotiations, and not everything that is adopted will ultimately turn out to contribute to durability (McGarry 2017). Evidence from the cases demonstrates, that not all that is agreed during peace negotiations will ultimately be implemented, which also affects the durability of any power-sharing arrangement. It is because of this intrinsic connection between our two research questions and their practical relevance in the three cases of interest that we argue that scholars and policymakers need to spend more time not only on considerations of what is acceptable and adoptable during negotiations, but they should also anticipate future implementation challenges and durability problems in designing power-sharing arrangements. In short, while mediators and domestic negotiators might substantially focus on the adoption process, the primacy of ending violence and getting the different parties to agree on a settlement, more consideration needs to be given to how agreed-upon provisions will perform in practice and how they will be received by citizens.

2 <u>Methodological approach</u>

This paper is informed by two years of collaborative mixed-methods research. We employed a combination of process-tracing, legal analysis, actor mapping, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to explore the intersection of power-sharing adoptability and durability in the three cases. Data was collected between July 2023 and June 2024. Following data collection, our findings were subject to a two-step validation process. We shared our findings with students, academics and power-sharing and mediation practitioners at the project´s final conference in August 2024 in Fribourg, Switzerland, held in English. This included an expert panel discussion on "Power-Sharing: Solution or Challenge?" In September 2024, we ran an interactive webinar, titled "Power-Sharing for Peace: Voices from Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon "أصوات من سوريا والعراق ولبنان, تشارك السلطة من أجل السلام. held in Arabic, with research participants and other relevant actors.

PROCESS TRACING AND ACTOR MAPPING

Process-tracing established the relevant timelines for adoption and implementation and helped to identify the causal factors (including structural and procedural issues), as well as actor preferences at work (Ricks and Liu 2018). We also completed an actor mapping exercise for each case to provide a basis for the selection of research participants. When researching the adoptability and durability of power-sharing agreements in a state characterized by conflict and division, identifying the main actors in society that are able (or unable) to influence negotiations and implementation of such agreements is an essential first step. The actor mapping allowed us to reflect on terminology and categorization of actors from a case study perspective. This approach helped to better understand the fabric of society and identify two additional actor categories, who do not fit the classic 'civil society' concept. We named them 'traditional affiliation groups and community leaders' (e.g., community leaders, tribal leaders, and members of influential families) and 'political power players.' The latter refers to individuals or groups that exert a certain level of governance within each of the three countries, while not being immediately affiliated with the state or the central government. These can include political parties, militias, local governance institutions, as well as powerful economic and/or political elites.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Our primary focus here was on the power-sharing negotiations and their outcomes. We reviewed peace agreements, minutes from negotiation rounds (where available), and constitutional and non-constitutional texts from the three cases. We were interested in how specific provisions made their way into the final document, for example how Kurdish autonomy was framed in the discussions in Iraq, who contested it, and how was it eventually translated into constitutional provisions in the 2005 constitution. Likewise, in the absence of an agreement, as in Syria, we were interested in proposals by different groups, in their framing of specific power-sharing issues, and how this translated into positions on specific provisions. Despite the inability of the Geneva process to produce a meaningful outcome, different actors, including international actors such as Russia, published constitutional drafts, policy papers, position briefs etc., which we reviewed, and which helped us not only to trace the evolution

of a specific phrase, provision, or institution but it also helped us to understand the different actors' self-positioning in negotiations.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key informant interviews with both domestic and international actors who have closely followed or participated in the negotiation, adoption and/or the implementation processes in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon help to shed light on the (un)adoptability and (non)durability of power-sharing. Our focus in the first phase of the project was on domestic and international peacebuilders, mediators, political party representatives, and elites who would have closely followed or participated in negotiations leading to power-sharing adoption (or non-adoption in the case of Syria). We conducted 54 interviews, focusing primarily on adoptability. Interviews focused on a set of thematic clusters: how power-sharing is put on the agenda in negotiations and by whom, the dynamics at the table, the role of external actors (including regional players), lesson learning across cases, and the connection between power-sharing and durable peace. This includes offering insights on what happens at the table, why talks might break down, and how breakthroughs and compromises are reached.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

We held 15 focus group discussions with individuals from key civil society organizations, traditional affiliation groups, religious leaders, minority communities, and political power players to explore the relationship between adoptability and durability in power-sharing agreements. Focus groups were held in Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and Germany, as well as online, and each group consisted of 5 to 8 participants, with the exception of the Syrian focus group held in Lebanon, which had fewer participants due to the security situation in Beirut at the time. We sought to gather as comprehensive and inclusive data as possible by engaging participants from across the political divide and from diverse backgrounds, including tribal leaders, rural and economic actors, civil society representatives, political figures, historians, women's groups, as well as religious and ethnic leaders. Ultimately, these discussions helped to better understand how perceptions of power-sharing inform prospects of adoptability and long-term durability.

3 <u>Case Study Context</u>

The three case countries share histories of sect-based politics and legacies of colonial governance. At the same time, they have had varying trajectories of power-sharing adoptability and durability. In Syria, power-sharing has thus far proven unadoptable despite ongoing efforts to move towards an agreement that supports political transition (Rosiny 2013; Belser and Keil 2022; Wieland 2021). By contrast, liberal power-sharing was adopted in Iraq as part of the 2005 constitutional negotiations. Nevertheless, the arrangement remains only partially implemented and has produced a dysfunctional political system (McEvoy and Aboultaif 2022; Belser 2020; Bogaards 2021). By the same token, while the adoption of corporate power-sharing in Lebanon has prevented the resumption of large-scale intergroup violence for more than 30 years, the resulting political arrangement has rendered the country virtually ungovernable (Abdelwahab 2021; Aboultaif 2019; Fakhoury 2019; Nagle 2020). Overall, our cases present different manifestations of both adoptability and durability.

LEBANON

The population in Lebanon is estimated at around 4.8 million, of which at least 800,000 are non-Lebanese, including significant numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Central Administration of Statistics 2020). Lebanon also has a massive and growing international diaspora, estimated at anywhere between 4 to 14 million. The last official census took place in 1932, and the country's demographic composition is a highly sensitive subject. Thus while 18 sects are afforded official recognition and legislative seats are divided equally between Christians and Muslims, a precise tally of the different communities is out of reach.

Figure 1: Lebanon: Historical Timeline
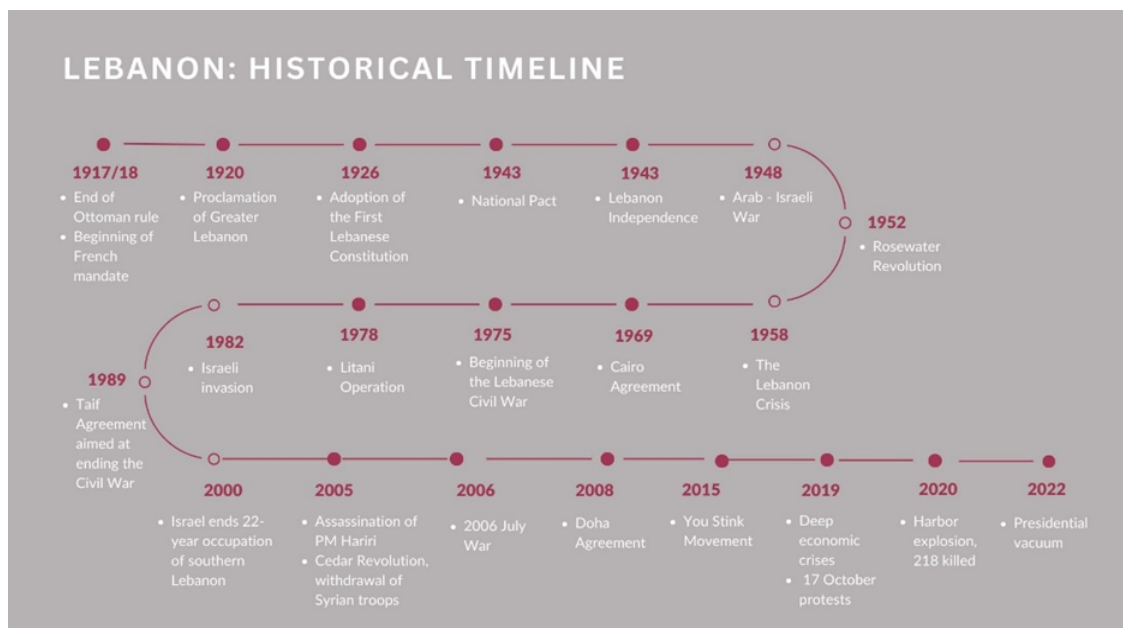
Of the three cases, Lebanon has had the longest experience with power-sharing, dating back to the nineteenth century when Mount Lebanon was governed by an administrative body that represented communities in the mountain proportionally (Aboultaif 2019). The Mutassarifiya, as the system was called, represented a semi-autonomous administration within Ottoman sovereignty. The system was expanded later under the

French mandate after the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, and power-sharing arrangements were maintained in 1943 when Lebanon became an independent and sovereign state. The unwritten National Pact, which is an expression of communal coexistence between Muslims and Christians, proposes that the President of the Republic would be a Maronite Christian, the Speaker of the House a Shiite Muslim, and the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim. The corporate arrangement was also strengthened by the division of parliamentary seats in a 6:5 ratio in favor of Christians, with important positions in the state bureaucracy and armed forces reserved for Maronite Christians. The system fell pressure to demographic realities with the growth of the Muslim population and their subsequent demands for a more equitable distribution of power. Intergroup violence broke out in 1975, leading to a full civil war for more than a decade. At the end of the civil war, power-sharing was reintroduced with the Taif Agreement, signed in Taif, Saudi Arabia in 1989 and resulted in subsequent changes to the Lebanese constitution in 1991 (Aboultaif 2019).

The Taif Agreement is a synthesis of communal demands and political projects proposed by the left- and right-wing parties during the civil war. It entailed a shift from the 6:5 representation of Christians to Muslims to parity representation of both communities in the legislature; redistributed executive powers that previously the president used to enjoy exclusively to the prime minister and Council of Ministers; and the Council of Ministers was expected to take decisions by consensus, and where not possible, by 2/3 majority on so-called 'major issues,' introducing a form of veto power. The aim of these arrangements was to provide guarantees to minority groups to avoid the hegemony of one or two groups over the system. As a result, veto measures create a communal balance of power in the executive that is intended to serve as a safety net for everyone but does not always function this way in practice (Calfat 2023).

The durability of peace in Lebanon been hampered by the disruption of the communal balance of power which was due in part to the unintended consequences of the Taif Agreement that allowed Hezbollah to secure its weapons with the intention to liberate the then-occupied south of Lebanon by Israel. Hezbollah has accumulated political power by using its weapons to control part of the borders in north-east of the country for smuggling weapons, then using its weapons to coerce politicians to change their political opposition (as in May 2008 when they rebelled against the government and November 2011 when they sent large number of their youth wearing black shirts to threaten MPs not to name Saad Hariri as designated PM), and finally exploiting the veto powers to secure the victory of its allies in presidential elections (2017-2018 and 2022-2023). At another level, the politics of state-consolidation and the infiltration of the state by political parties and their cronies transformed the state apparatuses at all levels (except the security one) into an inefficient bureaucracy that is incapable of delivering public goods and services transparently or efficiently (Salloukh 2024). The You Stink! movement of 2015 and the thawra protests of 2019 are indicative of citizen frustrations with the system and its failure to deliver public goods, such as garbage collection and electricity. The 2020 port explosion, in which more than 200 people lost their lives, provides another devastating example of government neglect. Lebanon thus highlights why durability must mean more than simply longevity and why the term must expand to encompass public service provisions and good governance.

IRAQ

Iraq has a population of around 41 million people. The country is home to a diverse range of ethno-religious groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Shabaks, Sabean-Mandean and Ezidis, among others. Most of Iraq's population is Muslim, of which 60% are Shiite and 40% Sunni. The Arab population of Iraq is the largest ethnic group, accounting for around 75% of the population. The Kurds are the largest minority group, making up around 15-20% of the population. The Turkmen, Christians, and Ezidis, as well as other smaller minority groups, each account for less than 5% of the population. The demographics of Iraq have also undergone significant changes, with the population nearly doubling since the 1980s. The country has also seen large-scale displacement due to conflict and persecution, with millions of Iraqis displaced within the country or forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, as well as certain ethno-religious minorities emigrating abroad or attempting to do so

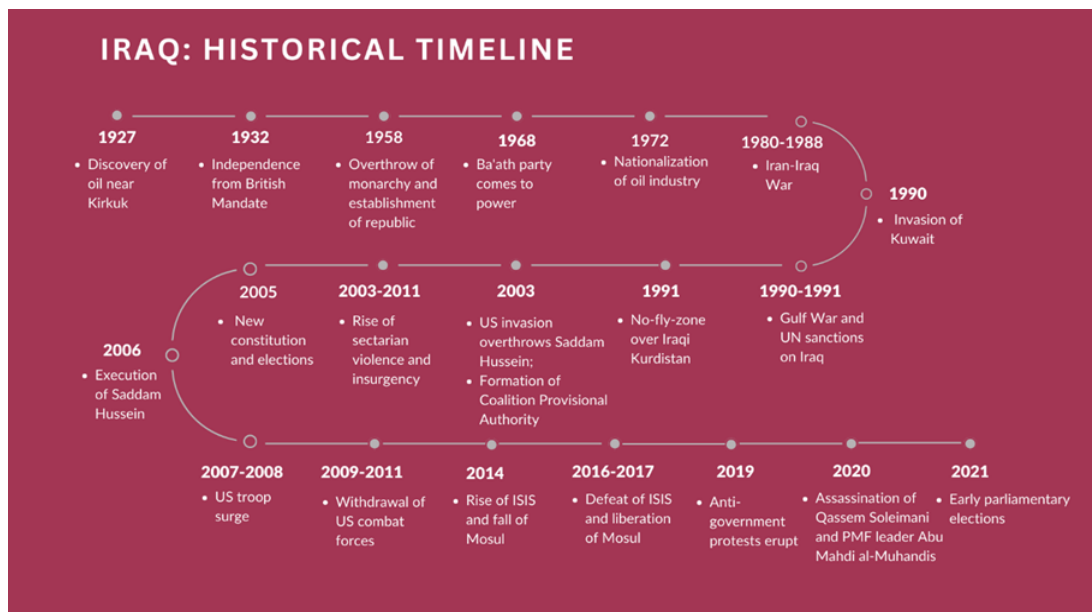After the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the political landscape of the country shift-

Figure 2: Iraq: Historical Timeline

ed, and the Shiite community gained power and influence in the government. This shift has resulted in an increase in tensions between the Sunni and Shiite communities, with Sunni Muslims feeling marginalized and excluded from positions of power. Today, the Sunni-Shiite divide remains a significant factor in Iraqi politics, with many political and religious leaders using the divide for their own gain. The tensions between the two communities have also been exploited by extremist groups, such as ISIS, to incite violence and promote their extremist agenda.

Since 2005, Iraq has had a liberal power-sharing arrangement, but it is at best semi-consociational (Aboultaif 2020), or "consociationalism light" (Bogaards 2021). The Iraqi constitution delegates much of the executive powers to the Prime Minister, who, according to the Erbil Agreement (2006), is always set to be from the Shiite communities. The Sunnis and Kurds are left with the Speaker of the House and the Presidency of the state, respectively. Key political posts are thus distributed in a manner influenced by the Lebanese example. However, the power-sharing arrangements in Iraq are restricted to territorial autonomy for the Kurds in the Kurdish region north of the country, excluding Kirkuk, which has created tension between Erbil and Baghdad, and the representation of communities in the central government. Aside from that, executive power is highly concentrated in the office of the Prime Minister, who names and dismisses ministers, a strong weapon in his hands since decrees are issued by a

countersignature of the minister in charge and the prime minister, particularly in the absence of a voting procedure that deprives parties of veto powers in the executive (Shakir 2024). Moreover, the absence of any sort of ethnic formula for representation in parliament makes it possible for the Shiite community to have an absolute majority in the legislature, in which case they can legislate without coordination or cooperation with Kurds, Sunnis or other minorities A notable example occurred when parliament legalized the Popular Mobilization Forces, despite strong opposition from the Sunni community, whose MPs boycotted the session. (Hameed 2006). However, it is worth noting that Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish groups are all represented by multiple parties, making complex coalition building necessary and usually ensuring the representation of Sunni and Kurdish representatives in government coalitions. Unlike in other consociations, veto powers are weak or nonexistent.

The case of Iraq highlights how adoptability influences prospects for durability. Weak adoptability – as manifested in the Sunni boycott of constitutional talks – has given way to a series of governance problems, many of which the public see as directly tied to the power-sharing system. As O'Driscoll and Costantini (2024) note "In everyday life, consociational power sharing is experienced as the many forms that corruption takes in Iraq, from the grand political to the petty level." Moreover, they conclude that "the consociational system in Iraq has reached the end of its shelf life, having served a conflict-mitigating logic in its initial formulation and implementation but failing in its secondary goal of providing a ground for meeting societal needs" (see also Mako and Edgar 2023). To put it simply, as one interviewee told us, "All political powers gained from this power-sharing agreement, while the Iraqi people are the main loser" (interview, retired politicians and advisor to the Kurdish Democratic Party, Erbil, July 2023).

SYRIA

Syria is home to multiple ethnic groups, including Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Assyrian, Armenian, and Circassian, amongst many others (Izady 2018). Most of the population is Arab, while the Kurds represent the largest ethnic minority at about 10% (Abosedra, Fakih and Haimoun 2021). The largest religious group is Muslim Sunnis making up an estimated 70% of the population. The rest comprises Shiite Muslims, Alawites, Christians, and smaller communities of Druze and Ezidis. Most of these religious groups are characterized by a pan-ethnic dimension, meaning that, for instance, Sunnis belong to a variety of ethnic groups rather than being confined to a single ethnicity.

The relationship between different ethnic groups in Syria has at times, been complicated and fraught with tension. Colonial powers and subsequent authoritarian governments used differences in belief or ethnic background among the population to cement their authority by providing specific groups economic privileges or access to important positions in government or military (Al-Haj 2017, Manfreda 2021). Since the al-Assad family rose to power in the 1970s, the adherents of Alawism, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, which constitutes about 12% of the population, have ruled the country (Izady 2018). Further, tensions between the Kurdish minority and the Arab-dominated government have a long history, and the Kurdish struggle for greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural rights has put them at odds with the central authorities.[2]

What started with a civil uprising marked by anti-government demonstrations and demands of democratic reform in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring soon turned into a protracted, multi-sided armed conflict with numerous regional and international dimensions and ramifications (see Figure 3). As the crisis enters its 13th year, civilians

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2   After 1962, the Syrian government has stripped tens of thousands of Kurds of their citizenship and other fundamental rights, such as the right to private ownership or employment in the public sector (Ziadeh 2009).

continue to suffer greatly. Over half of the population have been forced from their homes, either internally displaced or living as refugees abroad (UNHCR 2022). The massive earthquake in February 2023 affected 8.8 million Syrians, many of whom remain in need of shelter and most basic items (UNHCR 2023).
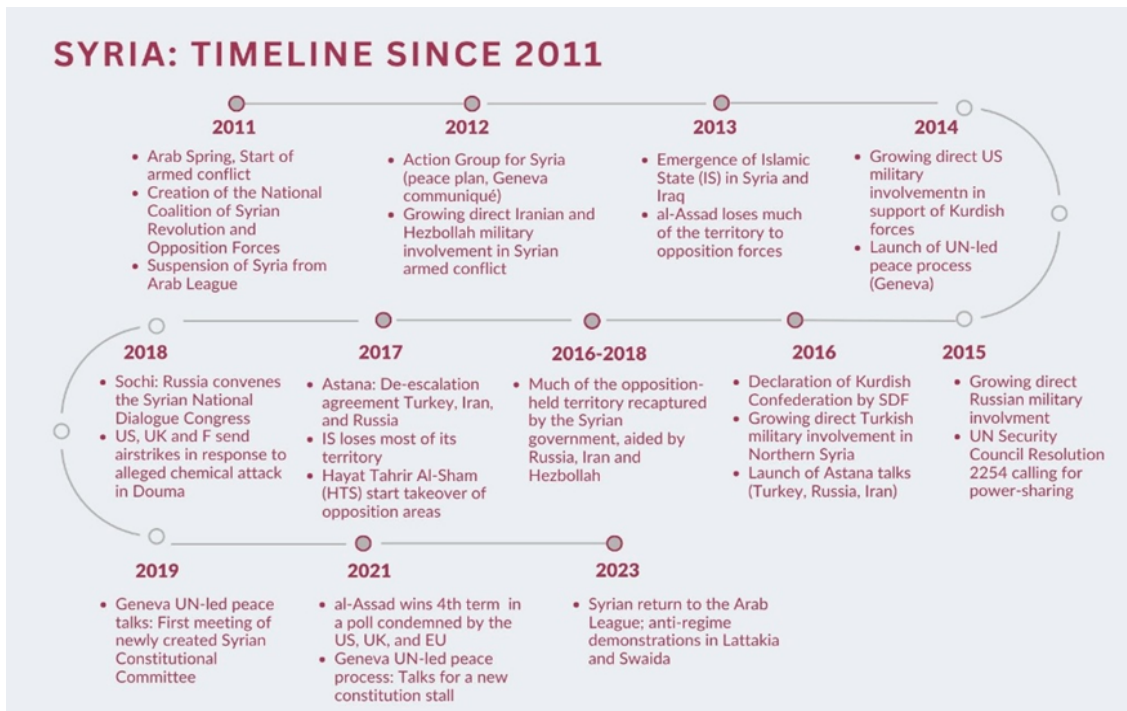
SYRIA: TIMELINE SINCE 2011

2011
- Arab Spring, Start of armed conflict
- Creation of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces
- Suspension of Syria from Arab League

2012
- Action Group for Syria (peace plan, Geneva communiqué)
- Growing direct Iranian and Hezbollah military involvement in Syrian armed conflict

2013
- Emergence of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq
- al-Assad loses much of the territory to opposition forces

2014
- Growing direct US military involvementn in support of Kurdish forces
- Launch of UN-led peace process (Geneva)

2018
- Sochi: Russia convenes the Syrian National Dialogue Congress
- US, UK and F send airstrikes in response to alleged chemical attack in Douma

2017
- Astana: De-escalation agreement Turkey, Iran, and Russia
- IS loses most of its territory
- Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) start takeover of opposition areas

2016-2018
- Much of the opposition-held territory recaptured by the Syrian government, aided by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah

2016
- Declaration of Kurdish Confederation by SDF
- Growing direct Turkish military involvement in Northern Syria
- Launch of Astana talks (Turkey, Russia, Iran)

2015
- Growing direct Russian military involvment
- UN Security Council Resolution 2254 calling for power-sharing

2019
- Geneva UN-led peace talks: First meeting of newly created Syrian Constitutional Committee

2021
- al-Assad wins 4th term in a poll condemned by the US, UK, and EU
- Geneva UN-led peace process: Talks for a new constitution stall

2023
- Syrian return to the Arab League; anti-regime demonstrations in Lattakia and Swaida

Figure 3: Syria: Historical Timeline Since 2011

4 <u>Research Findings</u>

Guided by our two research questions, in this section, we highlight key patterns that emerged across the three cases. Specifically, we examine recurring themes related to factors which induce adoptability, intersections between adoptability and durability, and bottom-up perspectives on power-sharing.

ADOPTABILITY AS COMPLEX AND EVOLVING CONFIGURATIONS OF MACRO/MICRO DYNAMICS

Under what conditions do power-sharing agreements come into being? Power-sharing is agreed upon for different reasons, under different circumstances, and with different incentives. As one research participant noted, "I don't think it's possible to say that there is one path through which power sharing broadly arrives" on the agenda (interview, international advisor in Iraq, online, August 2023). Yet, a number of macro-political factors were repeatedly highlighted by our research participants when asked what might help elicit agreement, or conversely, what might impede agreement. This includes: the political willingness of elites to make compromises, the political economy situation, the security-territory calculus (e.g., ability to gain more territory via military means), path dependence and prior experiences with power-sharing, the inclusion of key constituencies in negotiations, state capacity to subsequently deliver on agreed-upon provisions, and the involvement of external actors, whose shifting interests and priorities within the wider geopolitical environment significantly influence the dynamics of the conflict. Furthermore, the incentives power-sharing provides to conflict parties—such as potential political gains, shared governance, and increased legitimacy—play a crucial role in shaping their willingness to engage. However, the inability to make concessions due to dependency on international backers, combined with low levels of trust between the parties, continues to obstruct meaningful progress. Beyond these macro-political factors that can elicit or impede adoptability, respondents also noted a series of micro-political factors at play. Some discussed the importance of interpersonal dynamics and relationships around the table (e.g., some mentioned name-calling amongst delegates, which would have made compromises difficult); others pinpointed contributions made by specific individuals in the room (e.g., Rafic Hariri's role in the Taif negotiations and subsequently in government was mentioned by respondents); others still emphasized issues such as the timing of talks, the different entry-points available to different constituencies to have their concerns addressed in the agreement, or different mediation styles.

Adoptability, then, should be seen as a composite of these different macro- and micro-political factors, which will take different form across cases as well as across time in the same case. Understanding the intersection of these different factors illuminates the conditions under which power-sharing agreements come into being, and whether such agreements are then capable of supporting durability. To help clarify these complex configurations and to understand how preferences can converge on power-sharing, we present a 'three-arenas model' of power-sharing negotiations (see Figure 4). For a power-sharing agreement to come into being, preferences must converge between different sets of actors within each arena, many of which will start negotiations with "asymmetrical preferences" (Horowitz 2014) on the use of power-sharing as a form of government. Domestic actors must recognize the benefits of peace over continued conflict, and of power-sharing over other forms of government.

International actors need to support and possibly influence domestic compromises (McEvoy 2014). Successful agreements often require a combination of domestic acceptance and international backing to overcome security dilemmas and ensure long-term peace.
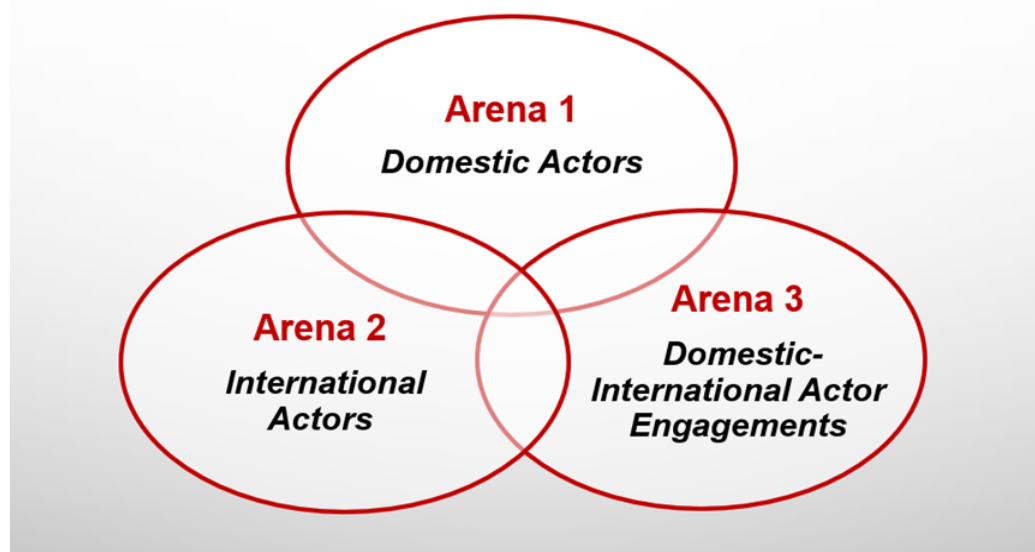

Figure 4: Interplay of adoptability arenas during power-sharing negotiations

Domestic Arena (Arena 1): Domestic actors – who are the ones who will need to share power with one another – must come to see power-sharing as a means for resolving their collective disputes and must commit to governing together. This involves direct negotiations among local actors, such as political leaders, political party representatives, ethnic or religious figures, militias, and civil society representatives. The complexity of reaching a power-sharing agreement arises from these actors' divergent preferences and the need for consensus within their groups. Crucial factors include the security situation, the willingness of elites to negotiate, and the ability to sell compromises to their constituencies. Achieving acceptability in this arena is essential for the agreement's implementation and durability.

In Iraq, power-sharing started to gain traction in the domestic arena outside of the country's borders well before the American invasion. The Salahdin conference in 1992 and London conference in 2002 were key moments that brought together opposition political leaders and helped enshrined the foundation of power-sharing into the discussion of what a post-Saddam Iraq would look like. As one respondent noted, "a power-sharing agreement was a historical necessity at that time" (interview, Ezidi elected official, online, November 2023). Consequently, there was agreement on some degree of power-sharing as the preferred choice among most of Iraq's main post-2003 political actors, especially among Shiite and Kurdish leaders. However, because power-sharing emerged as a model to replace Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime and was perceived as being pushed by the US, all parties did not fully converge on power-sharing: Sunnis were partially (and at times willingly) excluded from the process. One research participant explained: "the impact of the Sunnis was very weak. In the last period, they integrated into the constitutional sessions, working with the Shiite Islamic forces (Supreme Council, and Islamic Dawa Party) to get the central government more power" (interview, former legal adviser for the Office of Constitutional Support, online, November 2023). Although full convergence in the domestic arena was lacking, support among domestic actors was sufficient to achieve acceptability in this arena, at least as a means for overturning Saddam's regime.

This convergence of preferences, by contrast, is absent in Syria, where respondents stressed both the regime's unwillingness to entertain ideas of power-sharing with the opposition (calling to mind the slogan of 'Assad or we burn the country') as well as the unwillingness of the opposition to seriously consider power-sharing, especially when it was making territorial gains on the battlefield. As one international mediator involved in the Geneva process suggested, "the problem was that we got stuck in the agenda discussion, so we never went into substance" (interview, international advisor, online, August 2023). According to most research respondents in Syria, the current impasse is attributed to the fact that the status quo aligns with the interests of both local conflict parties and their international supporters.

International Arena (Arena 2): Here, international actors—including states, regional powers, and organizations like the UN—play a significant role, with interactions among international actors influencing the adoption of power-sharing solutions. In some cases, such as Iraq, one dominant international actor is capable of "enforcing" it will vis-à-vis other international actors. The support for a power-sharing agreement, especially focused on Kurdish autonomy, by the USA after its military invasion, was fundamentally important for the federal design of post-2005 Iraq. In Lebanon, post-Cold War US interests aligned with Syrian and Saudi Arabian interests which helped to pave the way for the Taif Agreement. Moreover, the Gulf War in 1991 played a vital role in shifting US perspectives on the future of Lebanon, which resulted in a longer presence of Syrian troops in the country.

In Syria, the interests of international actors have diverged from one another. As highlighted by Wieland (2021), any sustainable solution requires an agreement between Russia and Turkey in the first place as both states support opposing sides in the conflict. Any agreement will also require US consent, given its continued support for the Kurdish PYD and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), even as these actors remain outside the formal peace negotiations. The divergence between international actors is most notable in the comparison between the different mediation tracks. The UN and some Western actors still push towards a political settlement in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 as part of the Geneva process. The Geneva track emphasized ideas of negotiation settlement and political transition, whereas, from 2017, the Astana process, with Russia at the helm, prioritized military de-escalation, including the introduction of de-escalation or ceasefire zones in Idlib, Homs; Eastern Ghouta; and the Syrian-Jordanian border areas in Dara'a and Quineitra. While UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura described the two processes "complementary and mutually supportive" (e.g., one focused on political transition and one focused on military configurations), they ultimately had contrasting objectives. Further, while the Geneva Track failed to facilitate any face-to-face meetings between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Committee of the Opposition Coalition, the Russian-led Sochi peace conference in January 2018 raised hopes that some agreement could eventually be reached. Albeit the controversy that surrounded the Sochi conference, the Syrian Government, as well as the Opposition showed, for the first time, willingness to undertake some steps and engage in a constitutional review process within the context of the UN-facilitated Geneva process "as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254" (OSES 2023). Efforts to reach a power-sharing settlement thus unfolded against a complicated mediation landscape where regional and international actors have different visions of how the war should end.

Linking Domestic and International Arena (Arena 3): This arena bridges domestic and international spheres, highlighting how international actors influence domestic actor preferences and vice versa. This interaction can either facilitate or complicate

negotiations, depending on the alignment of interests and the ability of international actors to leverage their influence effectively. In Iraq, the Americans dictated the rapid timeline to a draft constitution, with one responded noting: "The Americans utilized monetary incentives as one of the means to push for reaching a power sharing agreement, while the Iranians utilized the influence of religious commitments towards Ayatollah [which] also pushed for the current power sharing agreement to be approved by the Shiite actors" (interview, retired Kurdish politician and advisor to the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Erbil, July 2023). They also suggested a critical agenda-setting role for external actors: "Apart from the Kurdish Alliance, the Shiite and the Sunni powers were all against the decentralization principles, but the American, UN and British influence forced these principles to be adopted in the constitution" (ibid).

Meanwhile, those involved in the Taif negotiation recall a different dynamic, portraying the agreement as "a Lebanese production with Arab endorsement, Syrian acquiescent and Saudi support. But it was an agreement between Lebanese" (interview, media observer, Beirut, August 2023). A similar point was also made by another participant, depicting the Taif Agreement as "one made in Lebanon by Lebanese that added up all the previous summits and negotiations" (interview, former senior politician, Beirut, August 2023). The process of getting to the Taif Agreement entailed Lebanese bargain and compromise, but with regional and international sponsorship. In Syria, there is resentment of foreign (military) presence. Most of our respondents, hailing from areas outside the Syrian government's control, and even those within the southern region of Syria that remains under government authority, have consistently underscored the deleterious influence of foreign interventions, which have further exacerbated the ongoing conflict. A recurrent theme in their discourse has been the decidedly detrimental role played by Iran within the contemporary Syrian landscape. This recurring observation serves to highlight a prevailing sentiment regarding the adverse consequences of Iranian involvement in the intricate political processes unfolding within the nation. In contrast, there exists a consensus among our respondents regarding the pivotal importance of international decisions and the intricate power dynamics among the diverse international actors actively embroiled in the Syrian milieu.

Power-sharing agreements are most likely to be adopted when there is alignment within and across all three arenas. In Iraq, arena 1 did not include sufficient acceptability amongst the local parties (e.g., Sunni election boycott and limited representation in constitutional process) but it did have the convergence of preferences among key international actors in arena 2 to push towards an agreement. Meanwhile, in Lebanon, there was sufficient convergences within and across the three arenas on power-sharing to bring the Taif Agreement into being. Preferences continue to diverge across all three arenas in the case of Syria, which is why adoptability continues to be elusive. The results of this research indicate clearly that power-sharing systems only come into being when three conditions are met (see figure 1):

— when domestic actors come to see power-sharing as the way to solve their collective disputes
— when there is convergence among international actors in support of a power-sharing solution
— when key international actors reinforce the commitment to power-sharing amongst their domestic proxies

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES: INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ADOPTABILITY AND DURABILITY

Once agreed, what implementation challenges might impede functional governance and subsequently durable peace? We address our second research question regarding the intersection between adoptability and durability at two levels: a top-down elite focus and a bottom-up civil society perspective.

The impact of elite preferences on power-sharing performance
Focusing on *elite preferences*, we found that the life of a power-sharing agreement cycles through many ebbs and flows. Not all of what is agreed in negotiations is effectively implemented in the new system. Domestic actors opposed to power-sharing during negotiations may reverse course and support it later on; actors who initially supported power-sharing may turn away from it over time. Where parties come to regret specific provisions or no longer see their value, this constrains system performance. Accordingly, we suggest that adoptability is a throughline in the life of a power-sharing agreement. Indeed, our interviews stressed the fact that some power-sharing provisions are more contested than others and this in turn affects overall system durability. Here we outline three trends linking adoptability and durability.

Provisions that support adoptability may undermine durability at later junctures: The provision in the Taif Agreement regarding the legitimacy of resistance is an illustrative example of this. While the agreement calls for militia groups to disband (Taif, Art. III.2.A), it also includes language on "the implementation of all requisite measures to liberate all Lebanese land from Israeli occupation" (Taif, Art. III.3.C). This has been interpreted as permitting Hezbollah to remain armed, was perceived as necessary in the face of Israeli occupation. Yet, this affords one party "extra-constitutional power" and consequently "the constitution no longer serves as the purpose or as the rulebook of the political system" (interview, political commentator, Beirut, August 2023). Israel occupied some 12 percent of Lebanese land at the time of the Taif negotiations, though it eventually withdrew from Lebanon in 2000 (save for the contested Shebaa farms). Yet, Hezbollah justifies its continued military activities against Israel to preserve its independent status from the Lebanese state. The party is able to simultaneously remain of the state and opposed to it (Khatib 2021) and to employ threats of violence as a means for reaching its political objectives, permitting the party a special kind of veto power not available to others. The initial agreement to allow Hezbollah to function by Syrian patronage against Israeli occupation had the unintended consequence of transforming Hezbollah from resistance actor to domestic hegemon, having a deleterious effect on durability.

Provisions that are agreed to but never implemented may hinder durability: Implementing provisions agreed upon in negotiations is arguably necessary for durability. Key provisions agreed as part of the Taif negotiations have never been implemented, including provisions for a Senate as well as the eventual de-confessionalization of the system. The idea of de-confessionalism emerged prior to the civil war, particularly with the left-wing and Arab nationalist coalition of political parties that gathered under the umbrella of the Lebanese Nationalist Movement (LNM) led by Kamal Joumblatt. When writing the Taif Agreement, MPs agreed that political confessionalism had been a major cause of the civil war and got inspiration from the LNM to work towards de-confessionalism. Consequently, it was agreed that a national commission to propose policies to achieve de-confessionalism would be formed. The de-confessional committee, however, was never established, and there are two reasons for this, one regional and one domestic. Regionally, Syria sided with the Americans in the Iraq War of 1991. In return, the Americans gave Syria a relatively free

hand to run Lebanese affairs. Syria had no incentive to dismantle the confessional system, as doing so could weaken Assad's authoritarian control within Syria and remove a key strategy for maintaining its influence in Lebanon—namely, playing Lebanese communities against one another to justify an ongoing presence. Domestically, warlords-turned-politicians benefitted from confessionalism. They used it to fill the public agencies with their cronies at all levels, which in turn solidified their power at the community level. When combined with the fact that the clause itself was deliberately ambiguous, there was very little incentive to ensure it was implemented. As one observer told us, "There's no real timeline there because there's no incentive for the local class to actually do those reforms because it would undermine their own authority and control of the system....All too often, the implementation is kind of left to the political elites' own devices rather than an attached monitoring mechanism that is part of the settlement" (interview, NGO program officer, online, November 2023). So, while the Taif Accord might contain the 'key' to de-confessionalism, our research participants agreed that political will to do so was lacking. Put differently, the provision did not hold sufficient acceptability. Provisions in the Iraq constitution on a second chamber, to be called the Federation Council, have similarly never been implemented and have consequently not been able to function as a necessary counterweight to the Chamber of Deputies.

Actors change their minds about provisions: An illustrative example comes from the provisions on asymmetrical federalism in Iraq. Art. 119 of the Iraqi constitution allows one or more governorates to merge to form a federal entity after conducting a referendum in the respective regions and have been commended by scholars as allowing each community to determine its relationship to the larger community (McGarry and O'Leary 2007). While Art. 119 was staunchly rejected by the Sunni community early on, claiming regional federalism hinders the integrity of the Iraqi state (Morrow 2005), corruption in Baghdad, the mismanagement of funds from oil and gas, as well as a tendency towards renewed authoritarianisms appear to have convinced Sunnis of the benefits of the provision. By 2011, two Sunni regions (Salahdin and Diyala, respectively) had attempted to form federal entities, though both attempts were rebuffed by the government in Baghdad, which had by then adopted a more centralizing and power-concentrating mindset. Elite preferences in relation to key constitutional provisions changed over time, with those opposed to federalism at the inception of the new political order – namely, the Sunni community – coming to see it more positively while those initially in favor among the Shia community came to view it negatively. This preference reversal has undermined constructive group relations across all major constituencies in Iraq.

Overall, a focus on elite preferences reminds us that changes in elite positionality may affect power-sharing performance – with some parties turning away from it whereas other may be convinced it is in their interests to accept it – in ways unanticipated at the moment of adoption.

BOTTOM-UP PERSPECTIVES ON POWER-SHARING PERFORMANCE

If the elite preferences perspective is focused how the system operates, the bottom-up perspective emphasizes what the system can or cannot deliver. Focus group participants across all three case studies predominantly view power-sharing agreements as necessary instruments to halt violence. However, they recognize that such agreements reflect the existing power dynamics at the time they are made and run the risk of reinforcing sectarian and ethnic divisions. Power-sharing as experienced by research participants fails to provide a sustainable framework for societal progress, integration, or the development of a shared national identity and social contract.

Perceptions of power-sharing as a concept
The concept of power-sharing, sometimes also called consociationalism, refers to a variety of institutional arrangements, including provisions for elite cooperation (grand coalitions, mutual vetoes, proportionality) and territorial decentralization and group autonomy (Lijphart 1977). As a system of government, power-sharing can take different institutional forms. Specifically, a power-sharing system can either predetermine which groups will share power (called corporate power-sharing) or let groups self-determine the terms of their participation (liberal power-sharing) (Lijphart 2008). Corporate power-sharing "accommodates groups according to ascriptive criteria, such as ethnicity or religion" (McGarry and O'Leary 2007, 675). Yet, by naming those groups entitled to a share of power, it represents a rigid governing system, often difficult to modify. Liberal power-sharing "rewards whatever salient political identities emerge in democratic elections, whether these are based on ethnic or religious groups, or on subgroup or transgroup identities" (McGarry and O'Leary 2007, 675). Group members can determine the terms of their own participation, opening the possibility of multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties gaining executive and legislative power, should voters support them (McGarry and O'Leary, 2007, 687).

Scholars often argue that corporate rules encourage the tendency toward ethnic outbidding whereas liberal rules may be more prone to temper divisions and open up political space for inter-ethnic compromise (McCulloch 2021). Thus, the intention of a power-sharing settlement (e.g., to end violent conflict) as well as its institutional manifestation (e.g., whether it is liberal or corporate) will influence prospects for adoptability and durability. What is more, in practice it has been proven that intended liberal consociational rules can also become de-facto corporate, as seen in the division of the Head of State (President), Prime Minister and Speaker of the House of Representatives in Iraq. While the Constitution does not foresee any particular office belonging to a specific group, and instead asks for representation of all groups and regions, in practice a de-fact corporate regime has been established since 2005, with the President of the country always a Kurd, the Prime Minister a Shiite, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a Sunni.

In moving from the academic literature to the field, we found terminological variance at several levels: direct translation between our two working languages (e.g., finding equivalent terms with shared meaning across English and Arabic), terms holding consistent meaning across the three countries and the meaning held in local contexts vis-à-vis the academic literature. Power-sharing, it turns out, is not one thing, but many (Keil and Aboultaif, 2024). One of our first steps was to determine the Arabic terms commonly understood and used in debates and discussions around power-sharing within Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria by the broadest range of local actors. This was achieved by examining local newspapers, televised news reports and interviews, and social media platforms. In Arabic, the literal translation of "power sharing" is

تشارك السلطة However, the concept is not always well understood or consistently used, leading to vague definitions and confusion with other terms. This issue was evident in our interviews and focus groups.

Firstly, there is a shallow understanding of what power-sharing entails. Participants often struggled to define the concept and rarely cited specific mechanisms or examples. For instance, when asked what power-sharing means, many referred to UN Resolution 2254 for Syria as a framework, rather than providing a clear definition or mechanism. As one key informant from Syria mentioned, "the general public does not have a grasp of these concepts" (interview with a civil society actor from northern Syria, online, July 2023.) Some respondents associated "power-sharing" with "separation of powers." For others, power-sharing was associated with "power dividing," referring to allocating power among warlords or de facto authorities, particularly in the context of Syria. Moreover, when it comes to "power-sharing" frameworks and principles, various terms are used to express similar concepts and principles. These terms are very politicized, used in public debates about political and constitutional frameworks, as well as minority rights and representation. In Lebanon, for example, "consensual democracy" or "confessionalism" are often used interchangeably with power-sharing.

At other times, the term is, as one international actor suggested, designed to be deliberatively ambiguous, as a means for eliciting consensus: "Power sharing...I mean that's of course a diplomatic term that came into the Geneva communiqué and [Resolution] 2254 because it was impossible to either write Assad must go or Assad must stay under certain conditions. So, power-sharing was kind of the camouflage to avoid that discussion beforehand and it was left to the discussions which never really developed sufficient substance to really tackle it" (interview, international advisor, online, August 2023).

We addressed this challenge through several different mitigating strategies. First, we developed a common set of terms to be used in the interviews and focus groups. When it became obvious people had different understandings of power-sharing, we captured and recorded them. For instance, in one of the focus groups on Syria, a participant understood power-sharing as power-dividing, assuming that the project aimed to maintain the current status quo in Syria and the existing de facto divisions. We were then able to clarify that we meant power-sharing (تشارك السلطة) and not power dividing (تقاسم السلطة). It is important to note that these perceptions were not shared in the group but were communicated to the researcher prior to the focus group. This underscores the significance of establishing a trust relationship between the researcher and the interlocutors, as it enables stakeholders to express their views and perceptions freely, genuinely participate in discussions, and feel comfortable doing so.

Second, we developed probing questions that included references to specific topics, such as decentralization in Syria, which relates to political power-sharing. This approach allowed us to link the topic to local realities and debates. Likewise, in Iraq, we distinguished between elite power-sharing in Baghdad from Kurdish autonomy and federalism as a form of territorial power-sharing to better understand people´s perceptions and their underlying arguments.

Third, we started the research not with a fixed perception or definition of power-sharing beyond some form of elite cooperation, but instead, we probed the perspectives of local actors on how they see and understand power-sharing. The fact that there is, for example, no common position on what power-sharing means and between whom power should be shared in Syria, is therefore an important finding of our research.

Indeed, the views on how power-sharing should be structured in Syria and between whom are still underdeveloped. While interlocutors referenced UNSC Resolution 2254 as the general framework, several factors mentioned earlier in the paper contribute to the absence of a common vision: a lack of trust, political deadlock, the unwillingness of actors to engage in dialogue or make compromises, and divisions even within the same sectarian or ethnic groups. These elements significantly hinder the maturation of a shared understanding of power-sharing. Likewise, connecting power-sharing with sectarianism in the Lebanese case has helped us not only to understand the grievances with the current political system, but it has also enabled a better categorization of power-sharing institutions and their implementation as highlighted below.

Local experiences and expectations of power-sharing
Local perceptions of power-sharing have been significantly influenced by the experiences of Lebanon and Iraq across all three cases. These experiences have resulted in negative perceptions, with power-sharing seen as failing to achieve its intended objectives. As a result, research participants generally perceive power-sharing negatively. Many associate it with deals between warlords and elites disconnected from local realities, as well as with dysfunctional, confessional, and sectarian systems that further exacerbate divisions.

In the context of Syria, respondents frequently reference the Lebanese and Iraqi examples as lessons to avoid. They express a strong desire to avoid the sectarian system produced by the Taif Agreement. Even among Syrian Kurdish actors, there is skepticism about the model of Iraqi Kurdistan, with many highlighting the gaps that exist in the Iraqi power-sharing system. Participants view power-sharing primarily as a temporary tool for halting hostilities and achieving negative peace, rather than as a long-term solution that could foster functional systems, positive peace, genuine reconciliation, and trust-building. As one of the Syrian participants stated, "We understand power-sharing as a temporary division among warlords to stop the conflict, measure to stop the war, but it often leads to the re-emergence of the conflict in a new form" (Focus group with Syrian diaspora actors, Berlin, April 2024).

An illustration of this opinion is the quota system. While quotas are intended to ensure representation for minorities and marginalized groups, they have often been manipulated and misused by political actors in both Iraq and Lebanon. As a result, local actors construe quotas as forms of patronage. In Lebanon, the lack of formal drafting has allowed political manipulation, and similar perceptions are echoed in Iraq. Syrian respondents also refer to how quotas have been misused in Lebanon and in previous Syrian experiences, where the government appointed figures who symbolically represented minorities but were loyal to the regime rather than genuinely representing their constituencies. As one of the Syrian participants stated "Quota should serve as a means of representation. What we dislike about quotas is the element of patronage embedded within them, and this aversion is particularly shaped by the Lebanese example" (Focus group with Syrian diaspora actors, Berlin, April 2024). In Iraq, while the constitution aimed to establish a system based on political consensus, the reality has often been a quota-based approach, misinterpreted as consensus governance. As explained by a focus group participant, "We reached what is called political consensus, but in reality, it is quota-based, because what happens in Iraq cannot be described as consensus" (focus group with subject-matter experts, Erbil, March 2024). This has resulted in the perception of political arrangements being about power sharing among elites rather than genuinely representing the people's will and the interests of Iraq's communities.

Participants generally had low expectations surrounding power-sharing performance. In the Syrian context, respondents view power-sharing at best as a temporary measure for negative peace. In Lebanon and Iraq, where there has been extended periods of power-sharing governments, expectations have diminished over time. Some Iraqi participants initially held high hopes that the system would achieve its objectives, only to be disappointed as it became evident that individuals were controlling the system for their own benefit rather than establishing institutions that would govern effectively and meet the population's needs. As one participant put it, "The current system has not moved towards enhancing citizens' trust in its institutions and organizations" (focus group discussion with civil activists, Baghdad, March 2024). This lack of trust in institutions has led certain actors to establish parallel functional institutions. This is evident in Iraq, where tribal leaders and armed groups have developed their own systems to fill the gaps left by formal governance structures.

The negative experiences associated with power-sharing stem from several factors discussed throughout this paper, particularly the discrepancies between the adoption and implementation of agreements. Not all agreed-upon elements were fully realized; for instance, the de-confessionalization provisions of the Taif Agreement and the establishment of a federal council in Iraq remain unfulfilled. Additionally, regional dynamics and the involvement of external actors, who have either imposed or obstructed the implementation of certain aspects of power-sharing agreements, have also contributed to the negative results. The disconnect between political elites and local constituencies has also contributed to this lack of trust in the power sharing system.

Seen from the perspective of civil society, it is an open question whether power-sharing models are suitable for the three country contexts. Clearly, any effective power-sharing arrangement must take into account the unique societal, social, economic, religious, political, and historical specificities of each country. Additionally, the expectations, demands, and needs of the people must be considered, as there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for power-sharing design and performance.

5 <u>Conclusions</u>

This working paper summarized the findings from the 'Power-Sharing for Peace? Between Adoptability and Durability in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq" project. Our research reveals that achieving a power-sharing agreement as in Lebanon and Iraq—or the ongoing difficulty of doing so in Syria—is shaped by both external and internal factors. Externally, international involvement, the parties' willingness to compromise, and battlefield dynamics play crucial roles. Internally, interpersonal relationships and the design of the negotiation process are also significant. To account for the complex configurations of macro- and micro-political dynamics that influence adoptability, we introduced the three-arena model, which shows that agreement on power-sharing arrangements emerges when preferences align across three key arenas: between sets of domestic actors; between sets of different invested international actors; and between international actors and their domestic proxies. This makes the window of opportunity for power-sharing adoption very small indeed. This model highlights that not all what can be agreed across these arenas will necessarily be durable, and not all durable agreements will be perceived initially as acceptable to all actors. We showed how the acceptability of distinct power-sharing provisions affects the wider durability of the system by differentiating between provisions that are agreed to but never implemented, those that might have been necessary to get to agreement but which later serve to undermine durability, and those where elite preferences change over the life of an agreement, either because actors turn away from them or because they come to see them as advantageous to their interests.

Perhaps the biggest gap our research uncovered was between how citizens and wider civil society actors perceive power-sharing, their expectations for it, and what it in turn can deliver for them. This stems in part because the contours of the term itself take on different meanings by different actors, either by citizens themselves (e.g., understanding power-sharing as power-dividing or the separation of powers) or by the ambiguous renderings of the term by elite actors in order to elicit agreement (e.g., to avoid the difficulty of determine whether Assad must stay or must go in the Geneva talks). But the expectations gap is also a direct upshot of the very real grievances and governance deficiencies that citizens face in their daily lives under power-sharing governments, including a dearth of public service delivery and endemic corruption. These concerns are not always given due diligence during the adoptability phase but will undoubtedly affect overall system durability.

Two key lessons emerge from the research. First, while constructive ambiguity can play a vital role in moving conflict parties towards an agreement, it is imperative that some shared meaning around key terms – including power-sharing as a concept – is cultivated not only amongst those at the peace table, but also with their constituencies. Indeed, how citizens perceive the performance of power-sharing is often tied to their understanding of the concept, which sometimes aligns with notions of power-dividing or the separation of powers rather than with traditional rendering of the term. Citizen perceptions and preferences ought, we suggest, be given greater credence at the peace table in order to enhance shared meanings and stabilize expectations. Second, even when elite actors converge on power-sharing as the way to solve collective disputes, they may not agree on the substance or practicalities of how to do so. Translating agreed-upon provisions into governing systems can be challenging, especially so when provisions that may be needed to support adoptability later impinge on durability, when key provisions remain unimplemented, or when actors

subsequently change their minds about power-sharing provisions. Inviting opportunities to recalibrate the relationship between domestic elites, between domestic elites and international actors, and between elites and their citizens will, we suggest, help support power-sharing performance from adoptability to durability.

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ABOUT SWISSPEACE

swisspeace is a practice and research institute dedicated to advancing effective peacebuilding. Partnerships with local and international actors are at the core of our work. Together, we combine expertise and creativity to reduce violence and promote peace in contexts affected by conflicts.

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