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How do consociations craft their asylum policy, and how do they deal with the rights of "others"? Research has started to explore the relationship between consociational governance and non-ethnic or non-sectarian social groups. Yet, we still know little about how consociations interact with refugee flight on the one hand, and with the ethics of refugee protection on the other. As a form of thick institutional complexity, consociationalism risks limiting the ability of the state to respond to refugee displacement in a manner that is timely, effective, and which respects the rights and dignity of displaced individuals. We draw on Lebanon's response to the arrival of some 1.5 million displaced individuals in the country since the start of Syria's lethal conflict in 2011 as an exploratory case study that seeks to further knowledge on how consociations craft and implement their asylum policy. Specifically, we consider three mechanisms of immobilism that constrain the crafting of unified, responsive, and inclusive asylum policy and that are posed by the consociational state apparatus itself: ethnicization/sectarianization, procrastination, and fragmentation. Building on Lebanon's patterns of refugee policymaking, we show how these mechanisms mutually reinforce one another, backfiring on policy congruence as well as refugee rights and protection.

¿Cómo elaboran las consociaciones sus políticas de asilo y cómo tratan los derechos de los ≪otros≫? Los investigadores han empezado a estudiar la relación existente entre la gobernanza consociacional y los grupos sociales no étnicos o no sectarios. Sin embargo, todavía tenemos escasos conocimientos sobre cómo las consociaciones interactúan con la migración de refugiados, por un lado, y con los fundamentos éticos relativos a la protección de los refugiados, por el otro. El consociacionalismo, por ser una forma de densa complejidad institucional, corre el riesgo de limitar la capacidad del Estado para responder al desplazamiento de refugiados de una manera oportuna, efectiva y que respete los derechos y la dignidad de las personas desplazadas. Usamos la respuesta del Líbano a la llegada de unos 1,5 millones de personas desplazadas al país desde el inicio del conflicto letal de Siria en 2011 como un estudio de caso exploratorio que busca obtener un mayor conocimiento sobre cómo las consociaciones elaboran e implementan sus políticas de asilo. De manera más concreta, consideramos tres mecanismos de inmovilismo que limitan la elaboración de una política de asilo unificada, receptiva e inclusiva y que son planteados por el propio aparato estatal consociacional: etnización/sectarización, procrastinación y fragmentación. Demostramos, sobre la base de los patrones de formulación de políticas de refugiados del Líbano, cómo estos mecanismos se refuerzan mutuamente, siendo contraproducentes para la coherencia de las políticas, así como para los derechos y la protección de los refugiados.

Comment les consociations élaborent-elles leur politique d'asile et envisagent-elles les droits des ≪ autres ≫ ? La recherche commence à s'intéresser à la relation entre la gouvernance consociationale et les groupes sociaux non ethniques ou non sectaires. Pourtant, nous en savons encore peu sur les interactions des consociations avec la fuite des réfugiés d'une part, et avec l'éthique de la protection des réfugiés d'autre part. Importante complexité institutionnelle, le consociationalisme risque de limiter la capacité d'un État à répondre au déplacement de réfugiés rapidement, efficacement, et de manière à respecter les droits et la dignité des personnes déplacées. Nous nous appuyons sur la réponse du Liban à l'arrivée de quelque 1,5 million de personnes déplacées dans son pays depuis le début du conflit mortel en Syrie en 2011. Cette étude de cas d'exploration vise à enrichir nos connaissances sur l'élaboration et l'application d'une politique d'asile dans une consociation. Plus précisément, nous nous intéressons à trois mécanismes d'immobilisme qui restreignent l'élaboration d'une politique d'asile unifiée, réactive et inclusive. Ils sont d'ailleurs établis par le système d'État consociational : l'ethnicisation/la sectairisation, la procrastination et la fragmentation. En nous fondant sur les schémas libanais de définition de politiques sur les réfugiés, nous montrons comment ces mécanismes se renforcent mutuellement, ce qui a un effet contre-productif sur la congruence politique, mais aussi sur les droits et la protection des réfugiés.

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Introduction

How do consociations craft asylum policy, and how do they deal with the rights of "others"? All governments face undeniable pressure to balance state sovereignty with the recognition of refugee rights. Refugeehood arises both as an exogenous shock to which the state must urgently respond as well as a source of domestic contention between local parties and other political actors. While all refugee-receiving states must engage with this duality, how do such pressures manifest themselves in political systems that primarily seek to accom-

modate already existing ethno-national communities, and whose equilibrium is predicated on well-protected ethnic demarcations? Research has started to explore the relationship between consociational governance and non-ethnic or non-sectarian social groups, including gender and LGBTQ rights (e.g., Finlay 2011; Byrne and McCulloch 2012; Nagle and Fakhoury 2018). Yet, there is still much to learn about how consociations interact with refugee flight on the one hand and with "the ethics of refugee protection" (Benhabib and Nathwani 2021, 114) on the other.

This line of inquiry is important for two reasons. First, as a theory of conflict management, consociationalism has not engaged fully with the literature on refugee governance, defined herein as the crafting of conditions and processes for the purpose of ordered and collective action around refugee issues (Fakhoury 2019a). This is partly because consociationalism considers non-citizens and displaced individuals as non-core groups (Mylonas 2012; Serhan 2019), and as a result, knowledge about how consociations craft asylum policy, and whether they do so in ways that respect the rights and dignity of displaced individuals, is limited. Second, given what we do already know about consociation's capacity for robust policymaking—that is, its alleged "immobilism problem" (Horowitz 2014, 11) and its tendency toward "lowest common denominator" decision-making (Gray and Birrell 2012, 15)—there is reason for concern about its ability to deliver unified, responsive, and inclusive refugee governance. Studying consociational policymaking in this area provides a critical opportunity for informing and enhancing extant policy responses and for analyzing how consociational policymaking regulates identities that do not align with salient sectarian or ethnic cleavages (Salloukh and Verheij 2017; Agarin, McCulloch, and Murtagh 2018; Fakhoury and Nagle 2018).

With this in mind, we draw on Lebanon's response to the arrival of some 1.5 million displaced individuals in the country since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 as an exploratory case study that seeks to "re-situate knowledge" (Cornish 2020, 139) on how consociations craft and implement their asylum policy. Specifically, how do power-sharing partners, who often come to the policymaking arena with diverging interests and competing logics, respond to the plight of refugees? How and under what circumstances does refugeehood pose a challenge to the logic of consociational governance? We investigate Lebanon's refugee response through the lens of *recalcitrant hosting*, in which inaction and volatility in terms of policymaking as well as reticence to negotiate with international stakeholders on refugee-related commitments has prevailed (Mourad 2017; Geha and Talhouk 2018, 2019; Nassar and Stel 2019).

We shed light on three features of consociational policymaking that help to account for these outcomes. We explore how Lebanon has developed a *sectarianized* policy toward displaced individuals, framing them as threats to, and outcasts from, the power-sharing system. We also unpack how political perceptions vis-à-vis displacement have been largely shaped by parties' sectarianized stances toward the Syrian conflict, with refugees evolving into trump cards in the context of "strategic sectarianism" (Fakhoury 2019b, 12). Second, we show how its politics of reception consist of *fragmented* policy positions whereby elite cartels squabble over refugee policies in the hope of deriving their own benefits. Finally, we demonstrate how a politics of *procrastination* has manifested across a multitude of policy areas and through various forms. In the context of elite wrangling, governing powers have delayed making decisions on refugee matters. Procrastination also manifests in the contesting of, and

reneging on, international commitments, deployed as a delaying tactic to deflect accountability over refugee rights.

In so doing, we illuminate three potential *mechanisms of immobilism* that shape refugee governance outcomes in consociations. These mechanisms — *ethnicization/ sectarianization, fragmentation,* and *procrastination* — constitute well-established traits of consociational decision-making. Yet, within the broader literature on consociationalism, little case study research has so far tested how they interact with refugee governance outcomes and how they feed into and compound one another. Crafting asylum policy is often contentious. Indeed, in the last decade, refugee issues have deeply polarized majoritarian party systems, including in the United States and across Europe (Morsut and Kruke 2018). However, we anticipate that the consociational state apparatus, as a form of thick institutional complexity, generates additional challenges in the making and implementation of effective refugee governance policy. By prioritizing ethnic or sectarian identities, it adds "a further complexified layer" toward "newcomers" (Murphy and Vieten 2019, 176; Mikhael 2021).

To further these insights, we rely on a dialogical approach (Rule and John 2015), which seeks to generate "a knowledge encounter" (Jovchelovitch 2007; quoted from Cornish 2020, 140) between consociational theory and the politics of refugee reception. Lebanon is an apposite case for this investigation, given its framing in the literature as one of the country-cases that has helped build consociational theory (Lijphart 1977), as well as its history of refugee reception. There is a growing literature highlighting how the Lebanese state's proneness to sectarianization, procrastination, and fragmentation shapes asylum policymaking (Mourad 2019; Stel 2020). While this literature does not necessarily frame its contributions under the umbrella of consociational theory, it provides a rich terrain for furthering our knowledge on how consociations craft their asylum policy.

We use a triangulated multi-method approach that combines literature review, policy analysis, interviews, and participant observations. To understand how Lebanon's particular form of consociationalism governs in the realm of displacement, we survey and juxtapose the plethora of academic articles written on Lebanese consociationalism with the literature on its model of asylum governance. With a few exceptions (Fakhoury 2017; Geha 2019a; Mourad 2019; Mikhael 2021), these strands of literature remain disconnected though they have important bearing on each other. The scholarly work on refugee politics in Lebanon helps us to put in dialogue the different research streams on consociational governance and refugee governance and helps us to triangulate our field observations and statements. To understand how the Lebanese state stalls and reneges on its refugee commitments, we further rely on an extensive media and narrative analysis of official statements adopted by Lebanese and international policymakers and practitioners. Our analysis is also informed by longstanding fieldwork carried out in the country by one of the authors. This includes observing more than thirty policy discussions and workshops on asylum governance in Lebanon and carrying out more than fifty interviews with Lebanese policymakers, supranational organizations (e.g., European Union [EU] and United Nations [UN] agencies), scholars researching Lebanon's refugee politics, and civil society activists dealing with refugee rights between 2011 and 2022. Policy interactions, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations provide a backdrop against which we have been able to identify how sectarianization, fragmentation, and procrastination have shaped refugee governance out-

comes in Lebanon. One of the author's participation in The Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement since 2016, a community of civil society actors, NGOs, academics, and journalists whose mission is to bring research evidence on Lebanon's refugee governance into policy, has helped to validate how these mechanisms have interacted with and compounded one another across time.

The paper is organized accordingly: We first review the extant literature on consociational power-sharing, finding that its focus on macro-political indicators of security and political stability tends to overlook how decisions made between often-reluctant power-sharing partners in the policy-making arena redound to the micro-level, affecting the lives of citizens and non-citizens alike. This attention to the effects of policy decisions for individuals—in this case, displaced individuals—allows us to then specify the set of mechanisms that can immobilize policymaking on contentious issues. Turning to the case study, we assess the extent to which these mechanisms of immobilism can be observed or not in the period under investigation (2011–2022). Here, we consider the implications of these mechanisms for refugees in Lebanon, with an eye to articulating possible policy lessons. Finally, we consider the implications of the empirical findings across three levels: refugees' lived realities, Lebanese politics, and for advancing our understanding of policy dynamics in power-sharing systems. By way of conclusion, we outline future areas of research.

Our paper makes two key contributions. Through a dialogical interaction (Rule and John 2015; Cornish 2020) between consociational theory, refugee governance, and the case study of Lebanon, we introduce a new analytical vocabulary for elucidating how consociation "works" in times of crisis and in the face of contentious issues, allowing us to both more carefully specify the complex impulses that can give way to immobilism both generally and in relation to displaced individuals, and to demonstrate how Lebanon's consociational model casts aside the "refugee other." In so doing, we hope to initiate, through the lens of the Lebanese case study, an encounter between the disparate strands of research on consociational governance and refugee politics. Second, our analysis illuminates policy implications in the realm of refugee governance, both in terms of how policy frequently fails asylum seekers and in terms of what might be done to avoid such policy failures in the future. Refugee governance poses key dilemmas of coordination across multiple layers of authority within consociational systems. It also brings about various dilemmas for actors seeking to maintain competing ethno-national agendas. These dilemmas yield consequences. They not only derail multi-level coordination within a consociation, but also affect refugees' rights. Such a bridging of perspectives, we argue, generates new insights for scholars seeking to understand how "the disorderly universe of consociationalism" (Halpern 1986) interacts with the ethics of refugee protection.

Getting Things Done—and For Whom?

Consociationalism is a leading strategy for the resolution of ethnic conflict and for the introduction and consolidation of democracy in divided societies (Hartzell and Hoddie 2020). It has been adopted in a range of diverse places, including Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Burundi, and Iraq. It entails the concurrent adoption of four institutions (grand coalitions and other forms of executive power-sharing, proportionality in the legislature and civil service, segmental autonomy, and mutual veto rights) (Lijphart 1977, 25). Its intention is to extend decision-making access to ethnic or religious minorities who, in majoritarian systems, would risk exclusion. When adopted as part of a peace settlement, it has a strong track record at ending protracted violence and supporting peace-building (O'Leary 2013; McGarry 2020). Consociation can also help stabilize intergroup politics; as parties learn how to cooperate and to govern jointly on matters of common concern, this can help to normalize relations between groups, alleviating intergroup mistrust (McGarry 2003, 295).

Despite benefits in the realm of security and stability, recent scholarship has raised two broad concerns with how consociation works: one related to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and one related to government performance. The first line of inquiry—dynamics of inclusion and exclusion—questions the extent of inclusion in consociational systems, suggesting that consociation's emphasis on *ethnic* inclusion misses the full range of ways by which citizens identify and participate in the political realm and risks creating pockets of exclusion for those who do not identify with the dominant included identities (see Nagle 2016; Agarin, McCulloch, and Murtagh 2018; Stojanović 2018). By viewing "all politics as ethnic politics," consociation may make it difficult for new civic forms of political participation to emerge and find political representation (Murtagh and McCulloch 2021, 535). Indeed, studies have shown how women, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and other newcomers find it difficult to gain representation in such systems (e.g., Byrne and McCulloch 2012; Mikhael 2018; Nagle and Fakhoury 2018, 2021). We argue, in line with Serhan (2019) and Mikhael (2021), that displaced individuals should also be considered in this category and call for further engagement with refugee governance from a consociational perspective.

The second line of inquiry relates to government performance, which suggests that consociations are prone to deadlock, ethnic outbidding, and a stalled legislative agenda. Horowitz (2014, 12) refers to this as consociation's "immobilism problem" whereby "stalemate, inability to get things done, and serious immobilism" are all possible outcomes. Nagle (2020, 138) labels this "zombie power-sharing," whereby "it is almost impossible to change, reform or accommodate new policies, especially for non-sectarian issues and identities." Consociational theory is not unaware of this risk of immobilism. Lijphart (1969, 219) suggests that "decision-making that entails accommodation among all subcultures is a difficult process, and consociational democracies are always threatened by a degree of immobilism." As such, he identifies "a relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus" as a favorable factor for consociational functionality (Lijphart 1969, 219). From this, we may infer that a consociation's capacity for effective and responsive policymaking will be particularly challenged by exogenous shocks, those political events that throw routine procedures off-kilter and require urgent cooperation between power-sharing partners.

Refugee governance is at the intersection of these lines of inquiry. Yet, as mentioned, consociational literature has not engaged substantively with this scholarship. Consociations are often thought of as refugee-producing, rather than refugee-receiving, states. The kinds of organized violence to which consociation typically responds—ethnic cleansing, war, and genocide—are the same forms of violence that frequently induce refugee flows. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, half of its population was uprooted during the 1992–1995 war. Yet, the focus of study in Bosnia has remained on how refugee return affects the *implementation* of its consociational arrangement, specifically whether it has served to

disincentivize the return of citizens to areas where they may now be in the ethnic minority (Wise 2014). Burundi has experienced multiple refugee flows, including the displacement of more than 330,000 individuals in the wake of the controversial 2015 presidential election. Yet, refugee issues are primarily studied from the perspective of land scarcity, with second-generation refugee return adding strain to an already-vulnerable power-sharing arrangement (Kamungi et al. 2005; Schwartz 2019). Thus, while consociations are no strangers to refugee governance, the focus of the study is typically oriented toward the return of its own citizens, with less known about how consociations craft asylum policies to deal with incoming refugees.

From the literature on inclusion and exclusion, we might infer that refugee issues, unless they directly affect the sectarian balance of power, will not make it to the top of the policymaking agenda. Power-sharing partners will be tempted to pursue a kind of "calculated policy inaction," that is, "doing nothing [in order] to avoid compromising other goals" (McConnell and t'Hart 2019, 650), in this case, maintaining the security and stability of the system. From the scholarship on government performance, we might anticipate refugee issues to be prone to "imposed policy inaction" or "policy paralysis through stalemate" (McConnell and t'Hart 2019, 650), stemming as much from the tendency to view political issues through a sectarian lens as from the institutional channels through which policy decisions must filter. Both strands of the literature, then, anticipate that consociations would be poorly equipped to develop effective, responsive, and inclusive refugee and asylum policy.

Consociation's Policymaking Capacity: Mechanisms of Immobilism

While there is an emerging consensus that consociations are prone to immobilism, the concept remains under-conceptualized. Some scholars treat immobilism as a fait accompli or a necessary consequence of consociationalism writ large (Dixon 2020). Others see it in systemic terms, that is, immobilism understood primarily as an inability to reform the system or to permit the entry of new kinds of actors (Salloukh 2019; Nagle 2020). Others point to minority vetoes as the main source of policy gridlock (Horowitz 2014). Immobilism is both more complex and more contingent than this would suggest. Vetoes do not always lead to gridlock, indeed in some places, they are hardly used at all (McCulloch and Vandeginste 2019); some consociations have undertaken significant constitutional reforms, even moving away from consociationalism altogether (McCulloch 2017); and on some issues, the consociational state has proven itself to be agile, rather than immobile (Baumann 2023). Consociationalism, that is, has produced varied outcomes, sometimes leading to compromise and other times to immobilism.

In order to clarify the pathways by which immobilism manifests in policymaking activity, we identify and conceptualize what we refer to as mechanisms of immobilism. Immobilism, we suggest, is not an inevitable feature of consociational decision-making, but each mechanism can, independently or together, push toward this outcome. In specifying the causal impetuses for immobilism, we seek to consolidate varied and disparate understandings of the concept into a unified analytical vocabulary. Empirically, this helps to isolate root causes of policy failures, the processes by which they occur, and the effects they have on people's lives. This also helps to refine our theoretical assumptions about im-

mobilism in consociations and introduces a degree of contingency to the relationship.

How and why does immobilism obtain? First, consociation may ethnicize/sectarianize the policymaking process by facilitating a "culture of ethnic representation" (Murtagh 2015, 554). Ethnic veto rights, group autonomy, reserved seats, and other institutional mechanisms may encourage parties and their voters to mobilize on the basis of ethnicity or sect. These institutional incentives intersect with a prior disposition, in the context of deep division, to "look after one's own," that is, for parties to campaign to be "the most robust defender of the [group] cause" under conditions of group insecurity (Mitchell et al. 2009, 403). We define sectarianization here as the deliberate politicization of a contentious issue for the furtherance of sectarian leaders' positions. When this occurs, rather than governing for all, ethnic/sectarian parties seek to govern for their community only. Policy issues will be seen through the prism of ethnicity as parties compete to maintain or expand their share of power (Horowitz 2000; Nagle 2016; Nagle and Fakhoury 2018; Murtagh and McCulloch 2021). Evidence for the ethnicization/sectarianization mechanism may be found at the level of rhetoric (e.g., how parties speak or campaign on particular issues and the kinds of public pronouncements they make, including how issues can be framed in terms of a group's vital interests or as an issue facing all citizens) and in terms of their legislative and policymaking behavior (e.g., a party's voting on specific issues and inclination to use their veto rights, including whether parties representing the same ethnic community cohere and align or whether alliances form across group boundaries).

Second, consociation risks fragmenting the policymaking process. This relates to the nature of grand coalitions, where the absence of common ground makes for "lowest-common-denominator" policymaking. Given the need for—and the difficulty in reaching—consensus, policymaking will be designed to satisfy the power-sharing partners but may not be robust enough to adequately address the issue at hand. Evidence for this fragmentation mechanism includes a lack of coordination between the center and the units or across government departments, rapid shifts in policy pronouncements or in "solo runs" whereby ministers make policy statements that bolster their party's popularity amongst their core constituency, but which may be inconsistent with the coalition's program for government (Gray and Birrell 2012; McEvoy 2017, 221). Policymaking may also fragment if the government devolves policy down to local NGOs or upwards to international organizations without effective coordination and consultation between the state and non-state actors (Fakhoury 2019a).

Third, consociation engenders a slow pace of policymaking. As with fragmentation, it does so by bringing together disparate power-sharing partners, who are divided not only by ethnicity but by ideology as well, into coalition. Almost by definition, grand coalitions will find it more challenging to reach consensus than majoritarian single-party governments. Anticipating the difficulties of co-decision-making, Lijphart (1969) recommends a reasonably light decision-making load for power-sharing governments. Keeping to a light decision load can help to consolidate security and stability, particularly in the immediate post-conflict period as the new power-sharing partners learn to cooperate. Parties may then agree to a gradual expansion of the legislative agenda over time, with each new decision seen as further evidence of their ability to work together. Alternatively, coalition partners might remain unmotivated to make decisions they do not consider "safe" and will leave difficult issues to

Ethnicization/
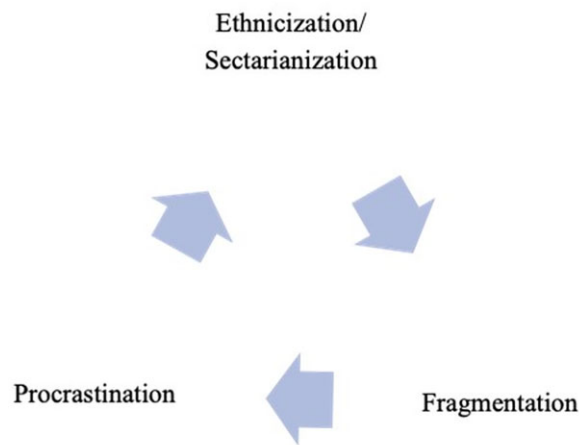Sectarianization

Procrastination

Fragmentation

Figure 1. Mutually reinforcing mechanisms of immobilism within consociations.

the side or delay taking action until the last possible moment (McCulloch 2022). Evidence for the mechanism of procrastination comes from policy inaction or the absence of decision-making on salient political issues. This may include parties declining to make public pronouncements on the issue or purposively not putting it on the policy-making agenda. It may also include omitting it in their party platforms, failing to sign or ratify domestic or international law in the area or failing to reach agreement on the topic in coalition negotiations. Decisions may well be taken on issues subject to procrastination, but they come after much heel-dragging, buck-passing, and inaction.

Before turning to the case study, we note that these mechanisms of immobilism should be seen as generalizable phenomena, rather than specific to refugee governance. That is, these are possible manifestations across the whole policymaking arena. In the specific case of Lebanon, for example, sectarianization, fragmentation, and procrastination have also characterized the government's response to infrastructural reforms (Geha 2019b) and health crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Di Peri 2020). Second, the causal linkages between, and any temporal sequencing across, the mechanisms can vary according to the issue-area. We nonetheless posit that the recognition of ethnic, linguistic, or territorial cleavages risks leading to fragmentation and procrastination (Deschouwer 2002, 83–4). The mechanisms can also be understood as mutually constitutive and reinforcing, with parties capitalizing on fragmentation and procrastination to push their sectarian interests. The more they fragment and procrastinate on policy items, the more they incentivize ethnic outbidding and/or decision-making along communal divides. In other words, fragmentation and procrastination flow from the propensity to accommodate ethnic divides. Consequently, the three mechanisms end up intensifying each other's resounding echo, producing a set of mutually reinforcing ties (see figure 1).

Finally, while consociations are more prone to experience mechanisms of immobilism, all systems—especially on contentious issues and in the face of exogenous shocks—may experience challenges of this nature. Nonetheless, the effects are likely to be more pronounced in consociations: not only will these mechanisms be encountered across more policy domains simultaneously, but higher stakes are also attached. Mounting policy gridlock not only risks system destabilization at the macro-level, but it also redounds to the

micro-level, affecting public goods provisions. As consociational systems tend to operate in highly turbulent policy environments, they are more concerned with accommodating existing divides than promoting policy effectiveness. As a result, such systems are less likely to integrate mechanisms that induce policy congruence and resilience and are less interested in correcting and revising policy flaws (Bogaards 1998, 485).[1]

How might the three mechanisms of immobilism affect asylum policy in a consociational context? (see table 1)? We argue that:

- An *ethnicized/sectarianized* asylum policy sees asylum-seekers and/or displaced individuals in terms of their "ethnic recruitability" and in their potential to yield geopolitical gains that reinforce the status of ethnic/sectarian groups: The ease with which they may be coopted into existing ethnic communities or by which they will be seen as a "fifth column" threat or a potential geopolitical asset (Fakhoury and Raad 2018; Mikhael 2018).
- A *fragmented* asylum policy is characterized by inconsistent policy choices, dramatic U-turns in policy directions, contradictory statements made by the power-sharing partners, and by "outsourcing" refugee governance responsibilities to non-state actors.
- A p*rocrastination* approach would be evidenced by "agenda denial" (Cobb and Ross 1997, 20) or "policy inaction" (McConnell and t'Hart 2019, 646) and by the adoption of delaying tactics in asylum policy and legislation, contestation of and reneging on international legal obligations, and the reticence of the government to make clear pronouncements on their policy perspective.

The Nexus between Lebanese Consociationalism and Refugee Governance

In the wake of the French mandate, Lebanon's political elite agreed in 1943 on a power-sharing pact that devolved state power and authority among key sectarian constituencies (Lijphart 1977). In this pact, *Al Mithaq Al Watani* (The National Pact), the Lebanese president is a Christian Maronite, the speaker of parliament is a Shia, and the Prime Minister is a Sunni. Following an internecine 15-year conflict (1975–1990), this pact was slightly updated with a view to allocating equal seats to Muslim and Christian communities in the legislature and making the Cabinet as the key site for executive power, weakening the President's grip on political decision-making. All political parties gave up their weaponry, except for Hezbollah, the Shiite party entrusted with fighting the Israeli Occupation in Southern Lebanon. Notwithstanding these changes in the consociational pact, the country's politics of sectarianism became increasingly immune to reform and accountability and escaping institutionalization with informalized governance and "hybrid sovereignties" (Fregonese 2012) coming to describe the guiding principles of political rule. Governmental leaders have increasingly acted as informal "sectarian barons" (Miur 2020) in terms of dispensing services to their communities and facilitating access to opportunities. Seen from this perspective, governing powers have strengthened the existence of the Lebanese state as a set of "shadow institutions" manipulated by patrimonial networks (Mouawad 2022). This has made the politics

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[1]Interview with Theodor Hanf, Byblos, August 2005.

Table 1. Mechanisms of immobilism and asylum policy: core features

Features of ethnicization/sectarianization	*Features of fragmentation*	*Features of procrastination*

– Framing asylum-seekers and/or displaced individuals in terms of:
  – "Ethnic recruitability"
  – Geopolitical assets that reinforce the status of ethnic/sectarian groups
– Closing the space for their access to rights
	– Inconsistent policy choices
	– U-turns in policy directions
	– Contradictory statements made by power-sharing partners
	– Outsource key decisions on refugee governance
		– "Agenda denial" or policy inaction over refugee issues
		– Adoption of delaying tactics
		– Reneging on international commitments

of sectarianism not only pervasive but also extremely resilient.

Despite various episodes of popular mobilization ranging from the 2011 anti-sectarian protests to the 2019 nationwide October uprising (*thawra*), change has been inhibited for various reasons. First, the sectarian quota-based system encourages the formation of adversarial elite cartels that are supposed to coexist under the guise of national unity. Governing powers, an amalgam of disparate and reluctant power-sharing partners, spend their time processing conflicts rather than implementing reforms. Second, by entrenching fragmentation, the political system enables the "sectarian state" to supersede the "civic state," prioritizing sectarian interests over national reforms. Sectarian gatekeepers dispense jobs and welfare to their followers. In turn, these followers perceive their leaders as providers of safety nets. Such patronage networks reproduce the rule of sectarian leaders. Within this context, the latter have vested interests in the "hollowing out" of state institutions to legitimize their presence. Cases in point include the government's reaction to the country's unprecedented 2019 financial crash and to the port explosion in 2020. In both situations, governing powers resorted to deliberate inaction to avoid relinquishing power (Nakhoul and Bassam 2020). Thirdly, the system invites external interference, making homegrown attempts to change the system easily "hijackable" (or capable of being hijacked) by outside powers. Historically, sectarian parties have sought external backing as geopolitical leverage to reinforce their position (Assi 2018). In the context of Syria's 2011 civil war, for example, despite Lebanon's proclaimed disassociation policy, contending parties have supported different external allies from whom they have hoped to derive strategic payoffs. Fourthly, Lebanon has witnessed in the last decade a significant democratic backlash. In the wake of the Syrian civil war, governments have prioritized geopolitical and security concerns, postponing parliamentary elections twice and sidelining draft laws looking into citizens' rights (Fakhoury 2019b; Geha 2019b).

Against this background, Lebanon's style of refugee governance has come to refract or mirror the dysfunctional dynamics of its sectarian politics. We show how Lebanon's response to Syrian displacement reproduces mutually reinforcing patterns of sectarianization, fragmentation, and procrastination. As we demonstrate, these mechanisms of immobilism build upon each other in a mutually reinforcing dynamic, forming complex nodes of governance that are difficult to disentangle.

The Politics of Hosting Displaced Syrians

Formally, Lebanon defines itself as a no-asylum country, in which incoming others would upset its fragile sectar-

ian equilibrium and strain its capacities (Janmyr 2017). Almost a decade after the 1951 Geneva Convention, Lebanon adopted the 1962 law, which regulates entry, stay, and exit from the country. This law foresees Lebanon as a transit country that may grant a pass to stateless or displaced individuals only to reach the countries to which they wish to go (Article 19 of the July 10, 1962 Law). Informally, however, and in the context of the region's refugee-producing conflicts, Lebanon has hosted various displaced communities for prolonged periods.[2] This seemingly open-border stance is built on a policymaking paradox. Political elites have celebrated Lebanon's hospitality and attachment to human rights norms in a turbulent region while also consistently portraying refugees as temporarily displaced individuals whose "settlement" would threaten the very foundations of the power-sharing system (Serhan 2019, 241). In this regard, sectarian leaders draw on the historical example of armed Palestinians in Lebanon to illustrate that newer refugees could similarly mobilize (Fakhoury and Raad 2018, 48). Indeed, the 1989 Ta'if Accord excludes the possibility of a permanent settlement for Palestinians in Lebanon. Politicians have recurrently drawn on this notion, deployed initially to allude to the Palestinian context, to refer to the newly displaced (Janmyr 2018). Rejecting incoming others is seen as a consensus-building strategy around Lebanon's sect-based power-sharing formula (Serhan 2019, 241).

Within this climate, the government has delegated key competencies at the core of refugee services and protection to international actors such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Paradoxical positions and actions vis-à-vis displacement are to be situated in the context of Lebanon's divided politics on the one hand (Fakhoury 2017) and the state's reliance on external funds as rent-seeking behavior on the other (Tsourapas 2019). Long before Syrian displacement, Lebanon's political elite found themselves divided on the question of hosting displaced Palestinians. By 1975, Palestinian displacement in Lebanon has evolved into a highly polarizing issue, pitting political coalitions against each other (El Khazen 2000). Almost two decades later, in the context of displacement from Iraq during the Second Gulf War, Lebanon first opened its borders, only to adopt harsher policies restricting displaced Iraqis' access to services and employment. Still, as the country evolved at the time into a site for humanitarian funding, politicians have undoubtedly come to perceive displacement as a matter of economic advantage.

Since the outbreak of Syria's war in 2011, Lebanon's politics toward displaced Syrians has reproduced the aforementioned patterns of asylum policymaking. Since the beginning of Syria's anti-regime uprising, the country has taken

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[2]See the Law of July 10, 1962 concerning the entry and stay in Lebanon as well as the exit available from https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/39234/97115/F1369890137/LBN-39234.pdf.

in more than one million displaced individuals. Early on, the government adopted a loose policy of border regulation, framed as the "policy of no-policy" (El Mufti 2014). At the time, some political parties, which later became averse to welcoming Syrians, stressed Lebanon's humanitarian duties in the context of a ravaging war. Soon, however, a securitized politics of refugee containment replaced the open-border approach. Governing actors from various sects rallied around the argument that Syrian refugees, who are mostly Sunni, constituted a threat to Lebanon's power-sharing balance and to the economic interests of already "burdened" communities, including the poorer Sunni community (Geha and Talhouk 2018, 653; Mikhael 2018). In 2015, the government ordered the borders to be shut and asked UNHCR to stop registering refugees. In 2016, as soon as the Syrian regime re-established its authority on Syrian soil, various political parties started lobbying the international community for refugee return, stressing Lebanon's overstretched infrastructures. One year later, the government went on processing applications for return. More recently, the government has imposed harsher "policies of exclusion" (Kikano et al. 2021), severely curtailing Syrian access to livelihoods. Armed forces have destroyed refugees' shelters in the name of violations, and security forces have intensified their crackdowns on Syrians working in the formal and informal labor markets. In April 2022, in the context of Lebanon's own compounded crises, the Inter-Ministerial Committee informed UNHCR that it can no longer manage "the large number of refugees in the country" (UNHCR 2022). Cited reasons point to insufficient international funding and crumbling infrastructures. Later that summer, the Ministry for Displaced People announced a plan to return 15,000 Syrians per month, arguing that Syria has mostly become safe. Indeed, return operations, framed as "voluntary," resumed in October 2022 (Amnesty International 2022) following a pandemic-induced hiatus. Push factors, such as denial of rights, have coerced Syrians into searching for alternatives, including "desperate" boat departures.

Ethnicization and Sectarianization

Policy fragmentation and procrastination are key to understanding the nexus between Lebanon's consociational system and its refugee governance style. Still, it is important here to explore the initiating drivers behind these mechanisms. At the heart of this lies the necessity of understanding how governing actors draw on displacement both as a threat to the sectarian-based consociational pact and as an avenue to buttress their interests and geopolitical alliances, turning refugee governance into a site of sectarianization. Long before Syria's civil war, Lebanon has portrayed incoming displaced individuals such as Palestinians as "strangers" that do not fit "the administrative state categories of consociation" (Serhan 2019, 240). In this logic, the integration of displaced individuals and the recognition of their rights would disrupt the ordering structures and infrastructural resources that undergird Lebanon's model of politics.

With the onset of Syrian displacement, politicians and religious leaders have expanded this narrative, portraying refugees as security and economic threats, and especially as threats to the power-sharing arrangement, which rests on safeguarding the so-called balance of power between Christians and Muslims (Karam 2018; Abi Raad 2019). Through their affiliated media channels, some governing partners have capitalized on the narrative of Palestinian camps in

Lebanon's civil war to portray "newer" refugees as agents of destabilization (El-Behairy 2016). The electoral landscape in Lebanon relies on sectarian gatekeepers' capacity to safeguard cohesion in their constituencies, and politicians' refusal to grant displaced individuals access to rights and resources serves as an avenue for boosting their communal popularity (Geha and Talhouk 2018, 2019). At important junctures, such as the lead-up to elections or the post-2019 economic collapse, politicians have reaffirmed their categorical rejection of Syrian refugee stay.[3]

To understand the sectarianization of refugee governance, it is fundamental to go beyond the portrayal of displaced Syrians as threats and intruders. As Lebanon's politics of sectarianism is tightly interwoven with geopolitical allegiances, ruling incumbents have drawn on the Syrian refugee issue as a matter of political calculation and leverage (Assi 2018). The aim is to consolidate their predominance over their followers and to reinforce their alliances in a rapidly changing post-2011 regional order (El-Gamal 2019). In this instance, sectarian leaders have perceived Syria's civil war as a turning point that would affect their domestic and regional positions.

Leveraging and contesting the stay of Syrians goes beyond the alleged demographic threat. It is tightly interwoven with the dependence of the consociational formula on geopolitical (re)alignments. In 2005, following the contested departure of Syrian military troops from Lebanon, ruling parties polarized around a so-called anti-Syrian versus pro-Syrian cleavage. The anti-Syrian coalition, comprised of Lebanon's dominant Sunni party, the Future Movement, core Christian groups, including the Lebanese Forces, and the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party, has maintained a critical stance against the Syrian regime and further sought to strengthen its alliances with Western powers. Moreover, the coalition's dominant party, the Future Movement, has longstanding ties with Saudi Arabia. In 2011, it perceived the outbreak of Syria's lethal conflict as an opportunity to weaken the hold of the Syrian regime and that of its regional allies (namely Iran) in Lebanon. In contrast, the pro-Syrian coalition, which has brought together the main Shia parties, Amal and Hezbollah, the dominant Christian Maronite Free Patriotic Movement as well as various smaller Sunni factions, has persistently advocated for strengthening ties with the Syrian regime, and in 2011, condemned the popular uprising (Fakhoury 2021, 167).

In this context, those allied with the Syrian regime took vehement stances against refugee stay and pushed for the return of the displaced to government-controlled areas that they framed as "safe."[4] This should be read as a strategic measure to boost the tarnished reputation of the al-Assad regime (Yusof 2018; Yahya 2019; Şahin-Mencütek and Tsourapas 2023). Rebutting the argument that conditions in Syria are not yet ripe for refugee return has lent credence to the narrative of a now victorious and "stabilised Syria" (Yusof 2018) able to welcome back its citizens and normalize ties with the world. A case in point is Hezbollah's refugee return diplomacy. The Shia party, which is heavily dependent on the Syrian regime, and which has tirelessly worked toward its survival since the early years of the conflict, has been pushing for refugee return to consolidate ties with the regime and spread the narrative of its victory. In some of his statements, for example, Hassan Nasrallah, the party's leader, and Syria's most staunch ally, linked Syrian refugee return to the military victories about to come in Syria (Reuters 2018).

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[3]Interviews with researchers and civil society activists, Beirut, 2017–2020.
[4]Interview with party official from the pro-Syrian coalition, Beirut, 2019.

In November 2020, the Lebanese government, dominated at the time by pro-Syrian factions, was one of the few to attend the Refugee Return Conference initiated by the Syrian regime under the tutelage of Russia and boycotted by almost all the world's powers.

Conversely, notwithstanding their position that Syrians ought to return at some point in time, some governing parties, who were hoping for the Syrian regime's defeat in the context of the civil war, have acquiesced to the international community's continued funding of refugee stay in Lebanon (Haboush 2017).[5] The Future Movement has lobbied against normalizing ties with the Syrian regime and has shown support to donor countries' stance that refugees should only return when the conflict is over. It has also cautioned against returns to a war-wrecked Syria in which returnees would face severe hardships.[6] Similarly, the Lebanese Forces, antagonistic toward both the Syrian regime and Hezbollah, have warned against using the Syrian refugee issue to normalize ties with the Ba'athist regime.[7] Walid Jumblatt, the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, has emphasized that refugee return diplomacy would not succeed as long as refugees harbor deep-seated fears of rejection by the incumbent regime (Naharnet 2019).

Such competing positions reveal how the issue of refugee governance has been entangled within the wider sectarian machinery through which governing cartels compete for predominance and geopolitical backing (Fakhoury 2021; Şahin-Mencütek and Tsourapas 2023). Indeed, as our interviews with various party officials reveal, conflicting stances hold much more than discursive power. They illustrate how rival actors have transformed Syrian displacement into an issue of "strategic sectarianism" set to reinforce their alliances.

Fragmentation

While Lebanon's sectarian leaders have turned the refugee issue into a matter of leverage, asylum policymaking, or the set of regulatory procedures over refugees' arrivals, documentation, and access to rights, has been largely incongruent and highly fragmented. The last decade has seen erratic, informalized, and highly incoherent policies regarding refugees' status and rights (Mourad 2017; Sanyal 2017; Kikano et al. 2021).

From the outset of displacement from Syria, the government has adhered to a very loose policy of coordination on refugees' access to services and livelihoods. Non-decision and non-coordination have encouraged informality, leading to a situation in which a multiplicity of actors with no recognized jurisdiction in refugee affairs have stepped in. Informal intermediaries, framed as the *Shaweesh*, have acquired increasing competences to organize agricultural labor for displaced Syrians and to regulate order in refugee settlements (Zuntz and Klema 2021). Municipalities imposed curfews and restrictions limiting refugees' access to mobility. This has led to a paradoxical policy situation of "open borders" versus "local closures" (Mourad 2019). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, certain municipalities adopted their own policies of refugee confinement, allowing displaced individuals to circulate only between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. (Azhari 2020). In the wake of the financial crisis, municipalities particularly affected by refugee influx took matters in their own hands, adopting circulars that impose limits on how much Syrians can earn daily (Ramadan 2021).

Refugee access to housing is also subject to contestation. Some authorities have warned against building refugee camps in the fear that the latter would become conflict enclaves. Others have argued that building UNHCR-led camps would help to better locate their needs, thereby draining fewer local resources (Fakhoury 2017, 686). In yet another perspective, political parties, such as the Free Patriotic Movement, have lobbied European countries such as Germany to create refugee accommodation centers on the Lebanese–Syrian border, stressing that Lebanon cannot achieve stability if the refugee influx continues (Naharnet 2014a). In light of these polarizing debates, informal settlements have proliferated. This has provided a rationale for security forces to dismantle the so-called "illegal" makeshift shelters. Over the years, policy fragmentation over refugees' access to shelter coupled with broader politics of refugee containment has had many implications for refugees' lives. More households have had to "settle" in non-permanent informal settlements (UNHCR 2021).

With the securitization of refugee policy after 2015, fragmentation in administrative bureaus and procedures became even more pronounced (Stel 2020). Refugee documentation is an example. General security services process refugee registration applications inconsistently from district to district, leaving many Syrians in a state of protracted illegality. Local actors, such as the *Mukhtar* or the notable in charge of residents' affairs, have intervened at times to issue refugee documentation (Norwegian Refugee Council 2013). Though Lebanon agreed to waive the refugee registration fee of 200 USD by 2017, the fee waiver policy has been applied incoherently. Unable to pay the onerous fee, many Syrians remained undocumented. In this context, rates of refugee legal residency started declining year after year (UNHCR 2021). As several civil society platforms have highlighted, rising rates of illegality have not only hampered Syrians' mobility on Lebanese soil but also interfered with their ability to return to Syria through official border crossings.[8]

Refugee return is another fragmented policy field, with multiple actors seeking to devise programs on refugee repatriation though they have no administrative competencies to regulate such processes.[9] In addition to the government's initiative to facilitate returns in coordination with Syrian authorities, some political parties crafted their own initiatives. Both the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah opened refugee return committees, either to give out information to potential returnees or to process applications (Mhaissen and Hodges 2019). In 2017, following cross-border military altercations with Islamist rebels, Hezbollah supervised a large-scale return operation without the government's intervention (Atallah and Mahdi 2017).

In an attempt to devise a unitary plan over refugee return, as our interviews highlight, Lebanon's coalition cabinets have fallen prey to internal divides largely dictated by their sectarian affiliations.[10] This had emboldened certain ministers to submit their own party proposals, which fell short of garnering support (Fakhoury 2021, 168). In 2020, amid the country's compounding crises, the cabinet adopted a vague refugee return plan, which has fomented divisions over its feasibility as it lacked a time frame for implementation (Topalian 2020). At the time, speculation was rife that the policy document was adopted at a time of cri-

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[5]Interview with party official from the anti-Syrian coalition, Beirut, 2019

[6]Interview with official from the Future Movement, Beirut 2019.

[7]Interview with official from the Lebanese Forces, Beirut, 2019.

[8]Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement's community meetings and discussions, 2018–2019.

[9]Interviews with scholars and practitioners, Beirut, 2018–2022.

[10]Interviews and conversations with analysts, Beirut, 2019–2022.

sis, deflecting attention away from the core issues derailing governance in the country.[11] Later, in July 2022, the government approved a return plan seeking to repatriate 15,000 Syrians per month. The plan grounds its logic on the fact that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention and that Syria has become largely safe. In practice, the plan raises several doubts over its viability in the context of internal divides over donor funds and external pressure from the international community (Sewell 2022). At the time of writing, though return operations have taken place, the government's ability to return 15,000 refugees per month is nowhere near the declared pledge.

Procrastination

Crucial to understanding the nexus between Lebanon's consociationalism and its refugee governance style is the recurring pattern of procrastination. When it comes to the (no)-asylum policy, we define procrastination as an ensemble of strategic delaying tactics and elusive policymaking as well as an inbuilt reluctance to comply with international commitments. As previously illustrated, Lebanon has lapsed into inaction and stalling over several refugee policy areas (Mourad 2017). In the context of wrangling in both the parliament and the council of ministers, it took successive governments almost 4 years to agree on the adoption of the 2014 policy paper on Syrian refugee displacement, which regulates access to residency visas. Despite escalating rhetoric, it also took successive cabinets and ministries several years to agree on a refugee return plan whose implementation remains highly contested.

Governmental stalling over refugee issues has several drivers, one of them being incompatible preferences and logics of governance. Beyond this, however, procrastination, framed as deliberate and strategic ambiguity (Carpi 2019, 83; Stel 2020) serves broader functions.[12] First, procrastinating on a unitary style of decision-making has allowed multiple actors to step in and assume refugee competencies, thus consolidating the very patterns of how Lebanon's political system works in fragmenting public policies and policy cycles. Second, procrastination has allowed the state to dilute accountability over refugee protection. As many actors have been involved in refugee affairs (e.g., documentation, livelihoods, and return) assigning responsibility over policy failure to one actor becomes almost impossible (Fakhoury 2021, 693).

Moreover, as our policy analysis and field observations show, procrastination consists not only in policy inaction nor is it merely the outcome of policy incoherence. It is also about deploying an array of delaying strategies in order to avoid making clear pledges on refugee protection. Strategies range from highlighting Lebanon's overburdened capacity to contesting international actors' stances on refugee stay to reneging on refugee-related commitments over time.

In key bilateral, regional, and international refugee forums, policy officials have recurrently stressed Lebanon's overburdened capacity as well as the detrimental consequences of hosting refugees for prolonged periods (National News Agency 2022). Here, they have sought to redefine Lebanon's international refugee commitments, seeking to shift the gaze from refugee suffering to Lebanon's incapacity to deal with such an exogenous shock (Naharnet

2014b, 2014c; National News Agency 2022). Such utterances have built a strategic backdrop justifying Lebanon's withholding of commitments on refugee rights.

Patterns of engagement with actors funding refugees' stay arise as another revelatory example of *procrastination* as a complex process of withholding, delaying, contesting, and backtracking on commitments. Interactions with the EU and the UNHCR are a case in point. Lebanon and the EU have consolidated their partnership over displacement since 2011, agreeing in 2016 on the Compact (2016–2020), a refugee instrument that allocates funding in the areas of job creation, infrastructure, security, and civil society aid. In return, the Lebanese government pledged to facilitate refugee temporary stay and access to employment (EU 2016). After the adoption of the Compact, the government agreed to facilitate refugee access to legal residency and to certain labor sectors, such as agriculture. In practice, it has defaulted and stalled on implementing their commitments (Lavenex and Fakhoury 2021). A consistent theme emerging from our interviews is that the gap between the government's proclaimed achievements in international fora and harsh refugee realities on the ground has deepened over time.[13] With increasing crackdowns on refugee labor and with only 20 percent of displaced Syrians in possession of legal papers, most of the Compact's proclaimed objectives remain elusive (Human Rights Watch 2017). Against this backdrop, policy officials have perceived the EU's approach of sustaining refugee resilience for encroaching on Lebanon's sovereignty and labor laws.[14] They have furthermore contested the UNHCR's and EU's positions on voluntary refugee returns that would occur when a political settlement in Syria is in place (Geha and Talhouk 2018; Houssari 2018). Here, key government representatives have argued that international actors' funding of refugee stay and stance on refugee return endangers Lebanon's stability (Wintour 2019). At the Sixth Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" organized by the EU, Lebanon called on the international community to "repurpose" the funds invested in refugee stay in Lebanon to instead rebuild infrastructure in Syria's safe areas (National News Agency 2022). Concurrent to the return operations organized by the state in October 2022, General Security Director Abbas Ibrahim blasted the so-called "pressure" that the international humanitarian sector is imposing on Lebanon regarding refugee stay (L'Orient Today 2022). Tactics of procrastination and contestation, coupled with policy ambiguity over international obligations toward displaced individuals, have allowed the government to implement what Cobb and Ross (1997) frame as "agenda denial."

Understanding procrastination in terms of blurring accountability additionally requires a deeper look into how the Syrian refugee issue intersected with governing coalitions' policy activity throughout Lebanon's post-2019 financial meltdown.[15] Ruling powers have used the Syrian refugee issue as a trump card to divert attention from their policy failures. In October 2019, nation-wide protests erupted, calling for the fall of the sectarian regime accused of ruining the state's treasury. Reacting to such accusations, governing powers have sought to externalize the problem, either by pointing the finger to the economic strains that Syrian refugees have brought along (Abdel el Samad 2022) or

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[11]One of the authors' conversations with civil society actors and academics, Beirut, 2020.

[12]Interview with researcher, Beirut, 2020.

[13]Interviews with researchers and civil society activists, Beirut, 2021–2022.

[14]Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Beirut, 2019.

[15]Conversations with analysts and scholars, Beirut, 2019–2020.

to the insufficient refugee funding earmarked for Lebanon (Malmvig and Fakhoury 2020). Resorting to such tactics allowed the sectarian elites to perform policy inaction over the country's collapse.

Conclusion

How does consociational governance interact with refugee politics? And what can we learn from the Lebanese case? The literature on refugee governance in Lebanon has established recurrent patterns of sectarianized, fragmented, and convoluted policymaking in the context of Syrian displacement (Mourad 2017; Stel 2020; Kikano et al. 2021). While this literature may not frame these patterns in terms of consociationalism, these policy patterns nonetheless resonate with the wider literature on consociationalism, which flags the need for a "relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus" (Lijphart 1969) in order to offset the risk of immobilism. Through a knowledge encounter between this case-based literature and the wider consociational scholarship, and supplemented with case-specific fieldwork and policy analysis, we have highlighted the ways in which specific features of consociational policymaking shape refugee governance outcomes in Lebanon. Introducing a new unified analytical vocabulary for the study of consociational policymaking, we have shown how displaced individuals are caught between the three mechanisms of immobilism, with Lebanon's refugee policy showing mutually reinforcing patterns of sectarianization, fragmentation, and procrastination. Governing powers have sectarianized the refugee issue, turning it into a battleground for domestic and geopolitical leverage. By reifying sectarian groups as core political units, authorities cast refugee others as threats to group cohesion and balance of power, drawing on the logic of consensus around sectarian power-sharing as a trump card justifying non-asylum. Continual patterns of fragmentation and slow and contradictory policy interventions have manifested across various asylum policy fields, with governing coalitions ensuring that policy fragmentation on shelter, stay, and return serves a wider logic of containing and excluding the incoming other. Through mutually reinforcing mechanisms of immobilism, elite cartels have channeled *policy action* into *inaction*, *non-decision*, or *elusiveness* in the face of rights-based refugee governance.

For refugees in Lebanon, the state's refugee policy has meant a precarious trajectory for more than a decade (Deutsche Welle 2020). Displaced individuals experience complex precarious trajectories, which have manifested in diminishing livelihoods, illegality, and feelings of "stuckness" (Dagher 2021). Amid Lebanon's multiple crises—from the financial crash to the COVID-19 pandemic—more than 75 percent of Syrian refugees have fallen below the poverty line (in contrast to 50 percent in 2019) (Khoder 2020). Rates of refugee illegality have increased, constraining access to health, employment, and decent shelter. Shrinking livelihoods and the impossibility of a dignified life constitute key push factors spurring Syrians either to brood on return, engage in both official and unofficial return initiatives, or embark on dangerous boat journeys in the Mediterranean.

Our findings have implications for external donors, aid agencies, and humanitarian workers on the hurdles that face refugee humanitarian projects, including those generated and magnified by governance networks inherent to consociational decision-making. Funding actors, such as the EU and the UNHCR, remain unable to identify focal sites of authority amid multiple and changing policy interlocutors (Lavenex and Fakhoury 2021; Al Jondi and Byrne 2022).[16] As one respondent stated in a survey on migration partnerships between the EU and Mediterranean countries, "the EU is lost among the complicated Lebanese rules pertaining to refugees" (Al Jondi and Byrne 2022, 105). Given that ministerial portfolios frequently rotate in order to accommodate various sectarian demands, administrative bureaucracies shift their refugee policy in accordance with the minister's sectarian affiliation.[17] This can create radical policy shifts in ministries' readiness to cooperate with INGOs and external funding institutions.[18] Amid such fragmented governance networks, it is important to engage in a probing examination into how humanitarian aid can achieve its desired impact.

Our analysis also conveys broader insights into consociational policymaking. Consociationalism, as a theory of conflict management, prioritizes security and stability between contending ethnic/sectarian communities but in so doing, poses challenges to the development of a full policy agenda, which is central to inclusive governance. The nature of executive power-sharing means that there are multiple lines of cleavage that can frustrate the policymaking agenda. By taking the sectarian divide as the primary ordering principle for political decision-making, it compels parties to cast political issues through a sectarian lens and to consider how their own group fares vis-à-vis other communities represented in the power-sharing government. It also means that there are systemic pressures to squeeze out or delay policy issues for "non-core" groups, such as refugees and asylum-seekers. In the face of such interlocking mechanisms of immobilism, consociations may encounter difficulties not only in formulating but also updating and correcting policies. As the Lebanese case shows, the three identified mechanisms make it extremely challenging for the *policy state* to adapt to various "foreseeable futures" (Howlett 2019, 28), especially when it comes to revising policy and legal flaws.

A unified analytical vocabulary, such as that developed here, has wider comparative value. First, it helps to elucidate the nature of policy-making in Lebanon. While we have focused on how these mechanisms intersect in the refugee and asylum policy fields, such interlocking processes are neither specific to Syrian displacement nor to refugee governance. The mechanisms we identified are also embedded in complex fragmented relationships developing between actors and across policy sectors from electricity, political appointments, humanitarian aid provision, the governance of health crises such as COVID-19 to gender equality (Fregonese 2012; Carpi 2019; Geha 2019c; Di Peri 2020). From this standpoint, patterns of immobilism arise as particularly sticky traits of consociational governance, offering important insights into how Lebanon's consociation "works" in times of crisis and, most importantly, how it redounds to the lived realities of people and to the state's capacity to affect inclusive and responsive policy for all.

Second, beyond the Lebanese case, this dialogical approach could extend to other consociations that have displayed trends of ethnicization and fragmentation in the context of forced displacement (Carlá 2022; Murphy and Vieten 2019; Mikhael 2021). Further research could draw on the mechanisms of immobilism we identified to explore

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[16]Interviews with EU and UN officials, Brussels, 2021; Geneva, 2022; interviews with civil society activists and scholars, Beirut, 2012–2022.

[17]Interview with analyst, Beirut, 2022.

[18]One of the authors' conversations and interviews with ministries' employees, civil society and NGOS, Beirut, 2017–2020.

how consociations in different world regions—whether in Burundi, Iraq, South Tyrol, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or North Macedonia—assess and negotiate their obligations toward refugee admission, and whether and if so how, states could balance, under power-sharing rules, between the rights of "refugee others" and the identities accommodated in the consociational state structure. Indeed, consociationalism poses key challenges not only because it risks crystallizing ethno-religious divisions but also because it inhibits "the space for other ways of being" (Finlay 2011; Byrne and McCulloch 2012). It creates what Murphy and Vieten (2019, 181–83) frame as an ethnic or sectarian "omnipresence" that conditions "expectations of relationships," reifying a tenacious boundary between existing communities and newcomers. In so doing, it may incentivize the state to safeguard the ordering structures they have created toward existing communities at the expense of the "new" others (Mikhael 2021). In addition to case study research, we call for more research through methods such as process tracing on how the three mechanisms of immobilism we have identified feed into and amplify each other. Research could delineate how they couple and compound policy problems in the field of asylum on the one hand, and how they converge, shaping agenda-setting, formulation, and implementation of the asylum policy process on the other.

Third, the unified analytical vocabulary could be extended to the study of how the mechanisms of immobilism we have identified may frustrate other policy domains. This entails broadening the research lens to include the comparative analysis of bread-and-butter issues (e.g., healthcare; education; infrastructure), issues connected to the legacies of conflict (e.g., arms decommissioning, national symbols, etc.), and issues brought about by exogenous shocks to the system (e.g., global financial crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic), both in Lebanon and in other consociations. Bosnia and Herzegovina's inability to agree to much-needed constitutional reforms in the wake of multiple rulings from the European Court of Human Rights, for instance, is one such domain ripe for an analysis of how the three mechanisms of immobilism have manifested, interacted, and compounded one another. This comparative research agenda would not only have broader theoretical implications for how consociational systems work in times of crisis but would also help to advance our understanding of policy streams, dynamics, and outputs in consociational systems more broadly. This kind of comparative work will help to elucidate the causal relationship between specific consociational institutions and the mechanisms of immobilism we have identified across a range of policy fields and to explore how their impact can be minimized or alleviated to ensure effective, efficient, and inclusive policymaking for all.

Funding

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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