“Consociational Trash: 
Mobilization Dynamics and Challenges to Mass Protests in Lebanon”

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The Local Politics of Protest Movements:
Implications from the Arab Uprisings to the European Indignados

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Introduction and Research Questions

Lebanon did not witness mass uprisings that swept other parts of the Arab region in 2011. Instead, the Lebanese system continues to exhibit strong path dependence on a model of consociational democracy that bases representation in government and politics on a formula of sectarian power-sharing. Mobilization dynamics in Lebanon are complicated. The country boasts civic and political freedoms that have allowed it to maintain a reasonable number of political parties and civil society organizations compared to its size. The most recent numbers point to 14 active political parties currently represented in the Lebanese parliament and over 9,000 registered nongovernmental organizations.¹ Unlike other parts in the region, Lebanon has held frequent parliamentary elections with female suffrage since 1943 and a plethora of media outlets. A closer look however at mobilization dynamics outside of elite political spheres reveals a different side of the country.² Although political parties exist they have a sweeping majority homogenous membership belonging to one sect. Elections are far from being competitive and result in a skewed representation in the favor of political elite. Lebanese politicians that emerge as its power-brokers are either former war-criminals or financiers of the economic system dominated by networks of clientelism. The last elections of 2009 resulted in a parliament voted upon in the highest recorded bribes in Lebanon’s history and that same parliament has postponed its mandate twice and cancelled parliamentary elections that were supposed to be held in 2013. Lebanese public administration remains under-staffed and under-financed since before its pre-civil war era that ended after 17 years in 1989.³ Lebanese politicians continue to be backed up by competing foreign powers including but not limited to Iran, Saudi Arabia, France and the United States. Lebanese citizens do not have civil status laws and as such their private matters are handled by religious courts.

Within this perspective the Lebanese system, hailed as a model of co-existence, has managed to upgrade itself displaying similar traits of authoritarian upgrading rather than democratic reform. In fact, the Lebanese state has evaded key political and civic reforms to allow for greater political inclusion and has instead exacerbated sectarian identities at the expense of the prospects of a

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national shared identity. To the extent that clientelism and corruption are rampant, accountability of political elite, who granted themselves amnesty after the civil war, is almost completely absent. The lack of access to information laws and the confinement of politics to sectarian elite has resulted in powerful extra-institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution and weak public institutions that are incapable of advancing reforms in the absence of political will for reform. The absence of reform has in turn provided a compelling evidence against any meaningful role for civil society organizations. Despite the presence of a large number of civil society organizations and their dynamic role in service provision, awareness raising, and response to crisis, such groups have been thus far unable to influence much needed reform processes to push the country in the direction of greater democracy and instead have been part of the narrative of upgrading and enshrining the consociational tradition.

This paper aims at capturing and analyzing a series of protests led by a group of citizens that were overtly against the Lebanese system and overtly not part of political parties. Typical mobilization dynamics before these protests had been confined to partisans being called to protest or pay tribute to demands of political leaders. Such rallies for example re typically called for by the March 14 coalition (named after the date of the mass uprising in 2005 that ousted the Syrian regime) or by the pro-Syrian faction of March 8 to support Hezbollah demands or to show support for March 8 demands. Mobilization from outside of party politics and elite demands has often been limited to a few hundred protestors demanding reforms such as civil marriage, women’s rights, and electoral reforms. Juxtaposed to the ‘regular’ scene of having a handful of civil society protestors the summer of 2015 brought a wave of protests triggered by a trash crisis that was described by the protestors as a crisis of governance. The objectives of this paper are to present the ways in which mobilization by civil society actors has taken place and the constraints they faced stemming from the grip of the consociational regime (that I refer to as an octopus with tentacles). The main questions I address are: how do protest mobilization dynamics help explain the constraints of Lebanon’s consociational system? In what ways does the consociational system limit mobilization dynamics? What do local level patterns of mobilization reveal about the Lebanese political system? In doing so, I present this research in the following sections. First I explain the evolution of

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Lebanon’s consociational system. Second, I present findings on how the trash crisis of summer 2015 that lasted for over eight months was a crisis of politics and is an indicator of continued path dependence on sectarian political elite. Third, I explain how the Lebanese system was able to evade changes in its environmental policies despite public outrage using eight mechanisms of threat and co-optation (tentacles). Fourth, I present evidence that local level mobilization can be a challenge to the status quo but also remains hindered. Lastly, I draw conclusions for future research on the trap of mobilization within a consociational system.

This research is qualitatively oriented. I use semi-structured interviews with activists that founded and led the movements and protests as well as with decision makers and experts on the trash crisis. I also conducted an in-depth study of official reports, newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, websites and blogs and published interviews covering the summer protests. Findings from media outlets was validated in participant observation and in discussions with tens of activists that took part in the process. The research still needs the triangulation of results for focus groups planned in summer 2016 with organizers of the local movements and with representatives of municipalities in the three areas that local movements took place in namely Shouf, Akkar and Bekaa. The significance of this research is three fold. Firstly, it sheds light on the way that the consociational system operates in the face of mass demands and protests. This area of research remains under-theorized and overshadowed with normative accounts on whether power-sharing is appropriate for fostering elite cooperation. This study will show how a consensus-based system can just as well result in prolonged periods of deadlock and of evasion of key reforms. Second, the research is among the first to document and analyze the mass protests that framed an environmental crisis as a political and governance crisis. It does so in a relational framework that studies the interaction between politics, the state of Lebanon and the protestors. In that way, I advance an interactive approach to unpacking the nexus between mobilization dynamics and the political system. Thirdly, the research has strong practical implications that may interest both the scholarly community as well as actors on the groups facing comparable settings and mechanisms of threat or cooptation in the Arab region.

Understanding Lebanon’s Political System
This paper proposes a relational framework for studying how protest movements are constrained by elements stemming from Lebanon’s political system. Insofar as movement dynamics are
Concerned the main objective is to also delineate the mechanisms of how political elite can coopt and threaten local level or central level movements. To do that, I first present how the Lebanese political system has evolved and then conclude this section with an approach to viewing the protest movements.

Power-sharing or consociationalism per se is not a pejorative term in political studies. A range of countries including Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Belgium, Burundi and Iraq have opted for a consociational agreement as a means to end a conflict and to bring conflict political elite into a cooperative governance framework. Ever since Arend Lijphart coined the term in the late 1960s, power-sharing or consociational democracy has been put forward as a model of maintaining democracy in a divided society. Lijphart’s work demonstrated that power-sharing in divided or conflict-ridden societies provided an incentive for elites to cooperate. The initial enthusiasm for power-sharing however has dampened down over the years. Whilst veto power that secures the representation of minorities encourages representation for pluralistic societies, when majority and minority define themselves as ethnic or religious groups, veto power paralyses the ability of public institutions to oversee the political process and manage public resources. Rothchild and Roeder also explain that; power-sharing and consociationalism, which presumes consensus-based agreements as the foundation of stable political, order make citizens completely differential and allows for secrecy in decision-making which in turn can fuel discontent from both masses and minorities. According to Horowitz, ethnically or religiously divided societies are more negatively affected by a power-sharing agreement since it encourages ethnic or religious-based voting thereby reinforcing polarization and communal tensions rather than moving towards reconciliation and democratic reform. Three intricacies are important to be noted and are explain in my relational

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9 Consociationalism is a form of power-sharing and is used interchangeably to indicate a similar arrangement that confines and guarantees representation and veto powers to predetermined groups that are politically, ethnically or religiously homogeneous. See Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy: Power-Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge. 2008).

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framework: sectarian representation, nature of political leadership and reactions to civil society protests.

Constitutionally the Lebanese political system through its parliament and electoral law, is based on the acquiescence of sectarian religious groups. Parliamentary decisions require a process of consensus-building among sectarian leaders whose groups enjoy almost complete autonomy afforded to them by the Ottoman millet system and maintained since. Election to office takes place through an electoral system where sectarian identity is the basis for candidacy, voting, and representation. Civil service appointments, Members of Parliament, and promotions in the public sector, are based on sectarian belonging of the individuals. Political parties have always existed but most politicians do not belong to political parties and party competition only takes place between parties with a homogeneous sectarian membership.

I depict the evolution of this system along five phases in which the pillars of the Lebanese system have remained entrenched. The first phase laid the foundation of sectarian power-sharing under the Ottoman Empire and French Colonial era manifested in the 1926 Constitution; which institutionalized a millet system and gave power to political elite that were self-proclaimed leaders of the major religious communities. The second phase of the system was through establishment of the National Pact in 1943 and the destruction of parliamentary politics before the eruption of the civil war in 1975.

During the build-up to the civil war Lebanese government could not withstand the regional and internal pressure emanating from internal divisions and exacerbated by the presence of armed forces.

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Palestinian organizations and internal compromise became harder to achieve.\textsuperscript{16} This led to the breakdown of state institutions and the extension of parliament’s mandate for three decades. The Lebanese Civil War lasted 16 years, during which 170,000 perished, twice as many have been wounded or disabled.\textsuperscript{17} The end of the war marked the start of the fourth phase of the power-sharing agreement which was characterized by the hegemony of Syria’s regime over elections and government institutions. Lebanese deputies reached an agreement in October 1989 and the resulting treaty was known as the Ta’if Agreement or the National Accord Document and represented the outcome of political reconciliation among the Lebanese, supported by the Syrians and the international community.\textsuperscript{18} The settlement of war in Lebanon by the Ta’if Accord was based on the reaffirmation of the principle of sectarian power-sharing.\textsuperscript{19} The Ta’if Accord was breached in many ways, not the least of which was the long-lasting role of the Syrian military, leadership and intelligence services in Lebanon’s legislative affairs.\textsuperscript{20} The fifth phase of the power-sharing agreement takes place in post-Syrian Lebanon during which no political reforms, even those stipulated in Tai’f, were undertaken. The withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon did not usher a new era in Lebanese politics. The consociational agreement meant that no economic, social, security, or political reform could happen without the consensus of sectarian leaders. Those same leaders who had been involved in the civil war – 12 out of 14 political parties currently represented in parliament existed as wartime militias \textsuperscript{21} could not arrive at a consensus that served their interests, and therefore political deadlocks and civil strife became frequent in post-2005 Lebanon.\textsuperscript{22} Prime Minister Hariri’s assassination plunged Lebanon into intense polarization, but this polarization did not end the basic power-sharing agreement.

\textsuperscript{17} Khalaf, \textit{Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon}, 4.
\textsuperscript{19} Salem, “Framing Post-war Lebanon.”
\textsuperscript{21} Geha, “Role of Lebanese Youth in Elections and Political Parties.”

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On March 8, the Hezbollah-led factions organized a demonstration to ‘thank Syria’ and display their loyalty to the Assad regime. On March 14, one million protestors took the streets to demand Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon chanting slogans accusing the Assad regime of Hariri’s assassination. The two factions came to be known as “March 8”, comprised of pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian blocs, and “March 14”, comprised of anti-Syrian and pro-US blocs. This clash between March 8 and 14 factions, after the 2006 war with Israel, crystallised with the resignation of pro-Syrian Shi’a ministers from the cabinet in December 2006, followed by the initiation of a massive year-long sit-in by the 8 March camp in downtown Beirut which did not end until the Hezbollah-led armed insurgency in the capital during May 2008. This led to the Doha Agreement, which split the electoral districts once again among sectarian groups and signalled a new era of the deep enshrining of sectarian representation.

At present, the Lebanese parliamentarians are those elected in 2009 who have extended their mandate twice between 2013 and 2014. The influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon and rise in security incidents have given parliamentarians the perfect ‘alibi’ for not holding the elections that were meant to take place in Spring of 2013. To date, the parliament failed to elect a president and missed the constitutional deadline. Parliament has renewed its mandate for a further 17 months in May 2013 and has not agreed on an electoral system to this day. I argue that at present although the March 8 and March 14 factions are divided and continue to polarize the country along two competing narratives, they are in acquiescence about the system and collaborate actively on mechanisms to coopt or threaten mass protests.

The evolution of this system depicts three aspects of relevance to this study. Firstly, the aspect of sectarian politics that results in polarized citizenry having to support one or maximum two leaders of a sectarian community thereby decreasing the prospects of an independently organized civic movement. Secondly, the aspect of political leadership highlighted above as a form of patronage

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exhibited in leaders known as zu’ama (plural for za’im) who provide political patronage, protection, and services to citizens. Zu’ama enjoy two bases of support: from religious leaders at the national level and from sectarian supporters/constituencies at the national and local level. These sectarian bases of power make state institutions the primary loci of contest among sectarian leaders who claim that these institutions have a duty to cater for their constituency.\(^{27}\) There are ‘high level’ sectarian zu’ama who are leaders of major political parties and who have representatives in political office. These ‘high level’ zu’ama perform all the functions traditionally ascribed to statesmen. They have their own foreign ties and external patrons, attend international conferences and represent Lebanon, propose and support legislation, as well as sit at the National Dialogue table, which is the main platform to resolve political conflict and build consensus. In addition, there are local-level zu’ama providing services and patronage at the local and municipal level. The approximately 1,010 municipal councils at the local level are under-staffed, lack financial resources, and cannot carry out their basic mandates such as the cleaning and lighting of streets.\(^ {28}\) These gaps in municipal functions are replaced by local-level zu’ama who can cater for the basic health, education and employment needs of citizens in their localities.\(^ {29}\) Third, the aspect of non-partisan civil society led protests that perform the function of political lobbying and/or articulation of demands unmet by current zu’ama. Traditionally, civil society protests were symbolic moments of calling for specific rights or services not granted by the state. But the summer protests of 2015 went beyond these symbolic movements to create an intra-communal intra-confessional series of protests that mobilized tens of thousands of citizens in an unprecedented matter. The framework below presents this relational approach between protests, political system and zu’ama.

\(^{29}\) Melani and Issar, “Bricks and Mortar Clientelism.”
The framework reveals a trap in mobilization dynamics being constrained by the two aspects of the nature and longevity of the consociational system as well as the role of zu’ama in constraining mass protests. The following section furthers this analysis by showing how a crisis of trash is inherently a crisis of politics and how protest movements were unable to contribute to a change in picking up trash despite a prolonged deadlock in the trash crisis for over eight months.

Trash as a Political Crisis

Summer of 2015 in Lebanon was grim. It was the fifth year into the Syrian conflict and more than 1.8 Syrian refugees had already been registered in Lebanon. The Lebanese government had still not devised an official strategy for dealing with the refugee crisis and instead had opted for a no-policy towards the conflict in Syria. Hezbollah fighters had already joined the protracted conflict in Syria plunging Lebanon into an “elephant in the room” situation. Refugees were informally hosted by local communities with municipalities and NGOs bearing the main grunt of the crisis supported by an array of international organizations and UN agencies. In tandem, a deteriorating socio-economic situation prevailed with a rise in housing, education and health costs. Continued electricity cuts in the midst of a heatwave were already harming the tourism industry. By July images of mounting trash had already taken over social media. In the summer of 2015 waste piled up in the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon filling major highways and smaller alleyways in an already over-populated city. Trash piled up suddenly because residents close to the Naameh landfill protested and refused to enter garbage dumpsters into their area. The Naameh landfill had been inaugurated in 1997 as the emergency and temporary solution for a crisis that had shaken Beirut and Mount Lebanon back then. The solution, supposedly an interim one, was still in place almost two decades after its elaboration despite numerous smaller protests of the close by residents over the years. A video trending on social media reported that every household in Naameh had at
least one victim of a form of cancer caused by the fumes and chemicals from the landfill. This time local residents refused to cave and with some media attention succeeded in the closure of the landfill in July 17th, 2015. Simultaneously, the contract of the private companies Sukleen and Sukomi assigned with collection, sweeping and treatment and disposal of the waste in the greater Beirut area (GBA), had expired. To environmental experts, this was not sudden nor surprising since environmental NGOs had been advocating for alternatives to dumping for more than a decade. The complete lack of planning and strategy by the Lebanese government meant that trash accumulated into mountains on the streets of the GBA.

Naameh residents this time had created enough noise and generated sufficient frustrated by residents in the GB. This transfer of disgruntled citizens from Naameh as a periphery area into the capital Beirut led a group of independent citizens to gather under the slogans of “You Stink.” “You Stink” organizers were quick to place the blame on the government and its inadequate efforts to address the waste management crisis. “You Stink” identified the garbage crisis as a crisis using direct actions to make their claims heard. They claimed that political corruption was so bad that it was starting to stink of the stench of garbage and staged marches towards government agencies throwing bags of garbage across security barricades. Immediately thousands of people began rallying with “You Stink” as the movement resonated not only with demands to clean the streets but also to ‘clean’ government from sectarian leaders. Riad al-Solh Square in downtown Beirut transformed into the gathering point for nightly protests, which would later increasingly become the site of violence between police forces and protestors.

“You Stink” arose with the stated goal of finding sustainable solutions to the crisis like municipality collection and a national recycling program. At the same time, the discourse was that of frustrated citizens blaming politicians for sectarianism and zu’ama for being greedy and caring only for their own interests. On July 25, the first protest was held with about 1,000 people in attendance. The subsequent protests attracted and encouraged the creation of other groups and platforms that joined the protests and added their demands into an enmeshed array of citizen grievances ranging from: socio-economic grievances mainly embodied by the “We Want Accountability” (badna nhaseb) protestors, political grievances mainly held by the “To the Street” (al share3), and mass grievances held by tens of thousands of self-identified independent activists.

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that simply stated that they had had enough of this political class and were outraged that political leaders have even failed to find a solution to trash in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{31}

By late July, several efforts to find temporary landfills had failed after protests from local residents. By July 30, several protesters had been arrested and “You Stink” organized a march to liberate the said protesters. August 8 marked the first major protest, with thousands of protesters gathering in Martyrs’ Square. Ministers were meeting during this period, with little success (or interest in) finding a solution. On August 19, the first instance in a long string of violence occurred when a brawl broke out between protesters. On August 22, a major protest at Nijmeh Square resulted in police and army use of water cannons, tear gas, guns, and batons to deter protesters. Over 100 people were injured.

“You Stink,” at this point, was demanding resignations in several cabinet positions including Environment minister and Prime Minister. In response to violence on August 23, police erected a concrete barrier in downtown Beirut. The largest protest that this movement succeeded to organize was on August 20\textsuperscript{th}. Media reported more than 150,000 citizens for the first time in Lebanon’s history took the streets. Protestors were remarkably non-partisan and insisted to claim this whenever being interviewed by media reporters. In fact, scores of citizens claimed they were either Muslim or Christian or Druze but that they were taking part as true Lebanese nationals who believe that the government has failed at the simplest task of picking up the trash.

By September 1, cabinet meetings had not solved the problem and “You Stink” criticized harsh tactics and illegal detention of protesters. On that day few dozen You Stink protesters staged a sit-in at the Environment Ministry, as the 72-hour deadline the group set for the government to meet its demands expires. They called for the immediate resignation of Environment Minister Machnouk. By the evening, a couple thousand protesters gather outside the Ministry of Environment until late evening when in riot police forcibly removed the last remaining protesters.

Throughout September and October, smaller-scale protests and occasional government meetings marked the trash crisis, but this crisis to date appears diffused with no resolution in sight.

Three key issues marked the 2015 summer of protests. First, for the first time since 2005 mainstream media was polarized with channels like NewTV and LBC playing an active role in

supporting the movements and other agencies closer to March 8 and March 14 actively trying to destroy the movement and the reputation of its organizers. Second the level of force used by police and army against the protesters is unprecedented since the era of Syrian tutelage over Lebanon indicating that the movement really posed a threat to the interests of political leadership. Third the longevity of movements over more than 12 weeks and level of citizen mobilization that peaked at more than 150,000 protestors was also unprecedented for a citizen-led movement in Lebanon especially after 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>Complex – anti-politicians and anti-dumping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Social media, mainstream media, activist circles</td>
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<tr>
<td>technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demands</td>
<td>Broad but framed as resulting from trash crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>12 weeks of mass movements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Private and semi-organized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manifestation</td>
<td>Beirut and local peripheries</td>
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Figure 2: Mobilization dynamics of trash movement

In tandem, politicians were quick to react by leaking stories that protest organizers were financed by foreign countries and had hidden agendas. On the ministerial level, the Minister of Environment Mohammad Machnouk was the official responsible with finding a solution to the ongoing crisis. However, he soon came under attack by mass protesters and was forced to withdraw from a committee assigned with finding solutions. Consequently, Akram Chehayeb, Minister of Agriculture, chaired the garbage crisis committee established by the end of August 2015. 32 Soon after being tasked with chairing the committee, Chehayeb delivered a new trash plan to Prime Minister Tammam Salam. The plan had two main components: an interim solution of 18 months and new dumping sites. It is the latter that thwarted local level movements to emerge opposing dumping garbage in their own backyards and citing Naameh example as a two-decade failure of what was meant to be a similar interim plan. Residents in Shouf, Akkar and Bekaa, the planned

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areas for new landfills, refused to take the trash of the GBA area and were quick to announce their support of “You Stink” demands.33

“You Stink” as the main symbol of the anti-trash movements helped reinvigorate political activism after almost a decade of only small-scale mobilization. At the same time, the movement in itself was not the only united front that was seeking to rally citizens. By August, rumors of internal squabbles and divides between “You Stink” and other groups led to widespread criticism of what seemed to be disgruntled and inexperienced youth. In essence however, this was a tactic by pro-government supporters to portray the movement(s) as a threat to the status quo. When violence would emerge in the protests and marches, protest organizers claimed that they were being infiltrated by armed youth sent to destroy the peaceful nature of the protests. In return Machnouk supporters among others accused protestors as being sent to destroy the business and political heart of the city of Beirut.

Not surprisingly government was unable to reach an agreement on a solution for the trash crisis. Blurry lines between the interests of politicians in specific waste management contracts and government’s official policy coincided with this deadlock. The crisis continued for eight months Sukleen was asked by the government to resume its services of waste collection by the end of the summer. In March 2016, another contingency-solution, similar to the one for Naameh 1997 was endorsed by the Cabinet. The trash committee agreed on opening landfills in Costa Brava, south of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, northeast of the capital and the temporary reopening of the Naameh landfill.34 By then the protestors could not keep up mobilization and residents of GBA had had enough and were desperate for a solution, any solution, even if it meant returning to the status quo, or worse.

Mobilization and the Octopus’ Tentacles
Mobilization against the political system guised under the pre-text of opposing landfills and showing discontent for the absence of a waste management policy failed. The continued

mobilization and use of multiple forms (sit ins, marches, protests) may have succeeded in generating renewed political activism amidst a paralysis of politics in Lebanon but they did not help improve neither the trash nor the political crisis in Lebanon. These mobilization dynamics however help us answer how protest mobilization dynamics can help explain the constraints of Lebanon’s consociational system. This section explains in what ways the consociational system limits mobilization dynamics. Why would demands as simple as finding a solution to waste be treated so negatively by political elite? To help answer this question, I return to the relational framework that identifies a key aspect of consociationalism that is rooted in the very nature of the relationship between citizens and their political leaders (zu’ama). The absence of accountability stemming from the confinement of Lebanese politics to sectarian elite makes citizens subservient to these elites. Inherently, politicians are not in power to please citizens or address demands but the other way around is true. Citizens are a pillar of support for zu’ama from which zu’ama derive their legitimacy. To that end, the largest protest where citizens expressed socio-economic grievances and setting aside their sectarian affiliation awoke tentacles within the sectarian ‘octopus’ which is the Lebanese political system. This section captures eight mechanisms (tentacles) that political leaders have employed to stifle citizen-led movements that range from co-optation to outright threat. I divide these mechanisms under two sorts of headlines comprising the sectarian system’s octopus tentacles.

Co-optation Mechanisms/Tentacles

Co-optation here is used as a purposefully negative term indicating that the power-sharing system coupled with weak state institutions renders it possible for political elite to coalesce in adopting superficially a movement’s demands without responding concretely to these demands. In adopting such demands as eradicating sectarianism or removing garbage off the street, the political elite are able to re-shift the balance of power to their interest and claim that they too care for what the protestors are seeking. This causes their own supporters to develop ownership over the demands at the expense of having an independent non-partisan voice. Partisans in summer 2015 suddenly became environmental experts claiming that their leaders are pushing for eco-friendly solutions and that the protestors are derailing that process. I note below for key co-optation practices evident in the 2015 experiences:

- Co-optation through discourse: The 2015 summer protests blaming the government for the trash crisis created a ripple effect among politicians and Ministers who expressed equal
dismay at the situation. At the same time, no legal, political, regulatory or policy measures were taken to address the issue. In a political rally called for by the Free Patriotic Movement the Lebanese Minister of Energy even went to the extent of complaining from electricity cuts, a major government portfolio under his same authority,

- Co-optation by infiltration: The 2015 protests saw partisan supporters, mainly youth, join the movements and make statements in support of the movements. At the same time, we did not see any party leaders taking action to address these demands. Infiltration of the movements meant having partisan supporters join the protests and make claims on behalf of their party leaders despite the organizers of the protests insistence on not belonging on any of those party leaders.

- Co-optation in media: Mainstream media being overwhelmingly financed by high level zu’ama in Lebanon will, even when providing coverage to the protests, harbor the interests of sectarian leaders. In 2015, the high media coverage of the summer protests contributed to mobilizing citizens but also to diffusing the voices of protest organizers transforming one movement into many loosely organized groups and then abruptly decreasing coverage and analysis of events.

- Co-optation through dialogue: National Dialogue is typically set up to address strategic issues lead to overshadowing the demands of citizen-led movements or to burying these demands deep under conflicting national interests and endless attempts at consensus-building. The most recent National Dialogue table in 2015 addressed Presidential elections leaving behind mounting piles of garbage as few hundred protesters tried to block the roads of politicians headed to dialogue. Dialogue gives the impression that political leaders care about the movements’ demands without having to address them through action.

**Threat Mechanisms/Tentacles**

Threat here is used to indicate a direct attempt at harming or insinuating harm pertaining to or addressed at protestors in citizen-led movements. In threatening protestors political elite trap civil society actors in a situation where the continuation of their use of the streets would pose a direct or indirect threat on themselves or on the country. This causes protestors or sympathizers to fear joining the movement and even to fear the movements’ demands might destabilize the country.
rendering it ‘safer’ to go back to the status quo. I note below for key threat practices evident in the 2015 experiences:

- Threat of violence: Salient over much of the protests was the threat the violence can erupt at any time. In 2015 political statements went so far as to say that some protesters were disguised as militants. Additionally, political parties can deploy supporters who instigate violence, though this matter remains a claim to be verified. This causes the movement to appear weak and less appealing to citizens and decreases the mobilization prospects of the movement.

- Threat through arrests: The Internal Security Forces arrested and threatened to arrest dozens of protesters. In 2015, more than 46 organizers of the movement were detained for an entire day rendering the movement leaderless and instigating fear among supporters and protesters. Although this strategy has backfired by eliciting sympathy and support, it also contributed negatively to the ability of the movement to mobilize sustainably over long periods with the imminent threat of arrests lurking.

- Threat to co-existence: Demands to shake the foundations of the sectarian system are almost consistently met with counter demands to maintain the consociational system. Politicians use direct and indirect threat that protesters demanding radical change can lead to the breakdown of the state. This was especially evident in 2015 political leaders threatened the fall down of Lebanon’s system as a potential outcome of the protests. Citing the Syrian war next door, Lebanese partisans would claim that continued protest would result in unrest.

- Threat to economic interests: Given weak state institutions, high level zu’ama in Lebanon have political control over economic interests and benefits for citizens. As the main service providers and employers, politicians simply need to send a sign to their supporters not to take part in any independent citizen-led movement for that movement to fail. They can similarly threaten the interests and reputation of protestors and constrain them from maintaining decent jobs if they higher their ceilings of demands.

Local Mobilization Dynamics
Perhaps the most impactful outcome of the 2015 protests was their manifestation in local-level politics. The fact the Naameh residents were the initiators of opposition against environmental
policies by the government helped the movement escape the trap of being urban based within the GBA area. Naameh residents’ images on television opposing the landfill helped empower other local level actors to mobilize against political elite within their own communities. Coupled with a more national level movement that was taking place in Beirut, the decision to return to dumping triggered three main groups in the Shouf, Akkar and Bekaa area. While Beirut-based protests had to deal with high level zu’ama mechanisms of threat and cooptation, the local level scene was slightly different and much less aggressive than the one in central Beirut district. Three aspects of these local movements are worth consideration when it comes to the relational framework proposed here.

Firstly, local level movements indicated that resentment against political elite was widespread. While central Beirut had always witnessed some level of political activism the peripheral areas were generally more stable. The areas of Shouf, Bekaa and Akkar are the stronghold of high level zu’ama that support and place local level zu’ama in charge of local affairs. This was very much the case in handling Syrian refugees; to make up for the absence of official state policies zu’ama had deployed local leaders to mitigate conflicts and to organize informal settlements with the help of municipalities. The trash crisis however was different. It touched upon the lives and health of residents in already impoverished areas. Local residents could visibly see the way that security forces oppressed protestors and refused to be silenced and receive trash from GBA in their own backyards. But the dismay of local actors was not confined to trash. They too saw the crisis as a political crisis. Politically the fact the Hezbollah controlled areas in the South did not witness such activism is a telling sign. Jumblat controlled Shouf and Hariri controlled Akkar and Bekaa however did not withstand the pressure from local citizens. Hirak Al Jabal (the movement of the mountain) in the Shouf area was formed to oppose landfills and to blatantly accuse Jumblat of having a hand in the corruption of the waste management sector. Several groups in Akkar formed under the guide of Akkar Manna Mazebleh (Akkar is not a dumpster) staged sit ins and social media activities against dumping. Similarly one gathering (tajamo’) of the Bekaa area accused Hariri Ministers of failing to reach a solution. This connectedness between trash and consociational politics indicated heightened levels of awareness among citizens at the local level and indicated how the piling of trash was causing a national uproar against an obviously incompetent and unavering political elite.
Secondly, local actors were not ‘newcomers’ to the scene. Many of them were seasoned civil society activists who had taken part in the movement in the Beirut area. They were similarly openly not partisan. In fact in towns that had some political divisions such as some Shouf districts, local organizers sought to appeal to competing factions. They were self-proclaimed independents who cared about the interest of their towns and not for any political leader in particular. They organized in two fashions: they brought busses of protestors to Beirut to join the activities of “You Stink” and they staged positive actions at the local level. Positive actions included proposals to assist the municipality in the collection and sorting of waste, actions to encourage recycling, and actions to clean up spaces where garbage had been dumped. This is one key distinction that the locals did that was different from Beirut-based activities; they were less antagonistic to local leaders but equally perseverant in refusing the government’s decisions. The social and political fabric at the local level is very familial and this perhaps could have contributed to making the local organizers less keen on insulting leaders and keener on cleaning up their areas. They shared the anti-government agenda of Beirut-based protestors but they framed their approach more collaboratively. Indeed at the local level the organizers movement succeeded in halting the interim dumping decision, albeit temporarily.

Thirdly, schisms among movement organizers in Beirut especially between the “You Stink” and the “We Want Accountability” groups did not help local level actors. Instead these schisms and perceived squabbles weakened the ability of local groups who were counting on Beirut-based protests to amplify their demands. The weaker the central level actors were the less capable local actors were to make their demands more national. For fear of local backlash perhaps the local organizers preferred to rally protestors in Beirut than in their own towns. It is not a coincidence that local groups succumbed to dumping trash at the same time as the central level protests coming to an end. Silencing Beirut movements stripped the organizers from faces that were becoming more and more popular in the media. Local level movements could not on the one hand stage large protests and on the other hand could not attract sufficient media attention as did the organizers in Beirut.

Conclusions and the Trap of Consociational Politics
This paper has sought to answer the following questions: how do protest mobilization dynamics help explain the constraints of Lebanon’s consociational system? In what ways does the
Consociational trash

Consociational system limit mobilization dynamics? What do local level patterns of mobilization reveal about the Lebanese political system? In doing so the paper proposes a relational framework for viewing the interaction of protest movements with political elite (zu’ama) and with the Lebanese political system. The research has brought evidence on an under-theorized area of research namely the perils of consociational democracy that is based on communal, that is sectarian, representation. In effect the consociational agreement itself may not be entirely blamed for the trash crisis and the inability of Lebanese politicians to undertake sufficient measures to address the environmental crisis. But the point of the research here is to argue that the consociational agreement gives way for political leadership to exploit public institutions for partisan gain.

The situation of the summer protests was driven by an array of complexities. In part, the movement itself could not generate and maintain sufficient mobilization over a required timeframe of eight months. Arguable the protraction of the trash crisis may be an additional tentacle for co-opting such movements. By delaying a solution and then returning to the status quo of using dumping and of contracting Sukleen, the Lebanese government ruled by political elite outweigh the patience and resilience of protest organizers. For how long can protestors be expected to persevere in the face of paralysis – especially with the advent of winter and polluted acid rain? While the duration of the crisis may not be the main topic of this paper, the eight tactics outlined above certainly help answer the research question. I derive three main conclusions from this paper.

Firstly, there is a need to revisit the study of similar movements of contention or protest within their political context. While the schisms and limited resources within the movement may account for some of the challenges faced, the main limitation stems from the system’s absence of accountability and perpetual cycles of deadlock. As the evolution of the political system portrays sectarian zu’ama continue to be able to enshrine a system in which citizens are subservient towards the interest of political elite. Even on a matter as simple as picking up and processing trash political elite appear threatened when faced by mass protests.

Secondly, local level actions appear to be able to generate more plausible responses and to appear more positive and collaborative. While this may have saved local protestors the threat of being harmed or arrested, it is questionable whether such an approach would succeed in generating greater mobilization or whether it only serves to upgrade the existing system. By appearing less antagonistic organizers locally created some form of mobilization but did not solicit direct threat
from local zu’ama. This may be because they could not create enough pressure and had they caused more pressure they may have faced similar security responses as in Beirut.

Thirdly, greater attention needs to be given to the trap of consociational politics. This paper contributes partially to unpacking the tactics used to limit mobilization dynamics that are outside partisan spheres. It has outlined eight mechanisms of threat and cooptation but further research into the pillars that support these mechanisms is needed. A greater understanding of how Lebanon’s consociational system works will help generate insight for comparable cases that exist or may emerge in the Arab region as the model of consociationalism continues to be propagated as a way of bringing conflicting parties to share power. But insights from the case of Lebanon reveal that the sharing of power is not the same as dividing scores of political interest among political elite. The former may instigate cooperation but the latter enshrines coalescence against the interest of citizens, from something as simple as picking up the trash to greater more political issues such as the holding of elections and the provision of basic services to refugees and citizens alike.