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Negotiating Inclusion: Assessing the Adoptability of Power-Sharing in Syria and Yemen

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No man is an island,
entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
for I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
for whom the bell tolls,
it tolls for thee.

John Donne, *Meditation XVII*

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List of Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISIS	Islamic State in Iran and Syria
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties
KNC	Kurdish National Council
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
P5	Permanent members of the UN Security Council
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PLC	Presidential Leadership Council (Yemen)
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SDF	Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
STC	Southern Transitional Council (Yemen)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

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Introduction

The post-Cold War period saw a shift in the nature of war, transforming the peace and security landscape. Civil wars have lasted more, become more fragmented, as well as resistant to negotiated settlements. Contemporary conflicts, termed *new wars*, are characterised by a complex interplay of actors, asymmetric warfare, and with identity-based motivations largely fought within, rather than between states (Kaldor, 2012). Such transformation has challenged the traditional models of conflict resolution and underscores the necessity for new approaches to peace negotiations in divided societies.

Power-sharing has emerged as a prominent institutional formula to manage ethnic or sectarian divisions, exacerbated during the conflict, by institutionalising cooperation between former antagonised parties (Brancati, 2011; Caspersen, 2017; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013). Power-sharing is best employed as an umbrella term to capture «those rules that, in addition to defining how decisions will be made by groups within the polity, allocate decision-making rights, including access to state resources, among collectivities competing for power» (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003: 320). However, power-sharing is not a panacea (Caspersen, 2017); in some cases, it may lead to freezing the conflict rather than resolving it, or result in fragile states vulnerable to institutional collapse – as demonstrated by cases like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraq (Keil, 2016; Keil et al., 2024a; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022). A crucial but often unexplored question in the academic literature concerns not how power-sharing works after its adoption, but under what conditions it is adoptable in the first place (Keil et al., 2024b). The focus of this research is on the concept of *adoptability* of power-sharing systems in contexts of civil war, defined as the set of conditions at which parties agree to share power or come to perceive power-sharing as an acceptable solution to their conflict (McGarry, 2017). This thesis examines the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, where years of international mediation and repeated ceasefire attempts have failed to produce stable and inclusive political settlements. Although power-sharing has been proposed in both countries, it has yet to result in sustainable political arrangements. This thesis aims at addressing why.

Research Question

The research question is the following:

> Is power-sharing adoptable in Syria and Yemen?

The central question of this study is concerned with the adoptability of power-sharing systems, thus the conditions that allow, block or distort the discussion surrounding power-sharing during peace negotiations and its acceptance among domestic and international actors. Adoptability is a prerequisite for adoption, as it underscores the extent to which power-sharing is supported by the groups. It refers both to the coming-into-being of a power-sharing agreement, i.e., how the settlement is negotiated, designed and agreed upon, as well as the extent to which it is deemed acceptable by the communities involved (McGarry, 2017; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020). Different variables affect the adoptability of power-sharing. The present thesis addresses two. Firstly, it seeks to explore the evolution of the peace processes and the introduction of power-sharing in the debate. Secondly, it analyses the role of both domestic and international actors in supporting or not its adoption. Recent academic literature has given attention to the necessity of considering how the parties involved perceive the agreement, if they deem it acceptable, and how the provisions are implemented and perform – what McGarry (2017) referred to as the *adoptability criteria* (Keil et al., 2024b; Keil & McCulloch, 2021; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022). Peace agreements do not emerge in a vacuum, nor are they technical blueprints. They are political products, shaped by the interests, grievances and identities of the actors involved. How negotiations happen and which actor promotes the idea of a power-sharing system are pivotal questions in understanding whether there is adoptability for a power-sharing agreement in a society or not.

The following two sub-questions will be addressed to carry out the research:

- How and in which contexts is power-sharing introduced as an institutional tool to end protracted conflicts?
- What are the considerations made by domestic and international actors and how does their adherence shape the possibility of a power-sharing solution?

By a comparative assessment of Syria and Yemen, this thesis aims to reveal the dynamics of adoptability in divided societies and aims to contribute to broaden the understanding of how power-sharing can contribute to establish peace and stability.

Contribution of the research

Syria and Yemen are two of the world's most devastating civil wars. The Syrian conflict, started in 2011, has caused nearly 620,000 deaths and millions of displaced peoples, both internally and across borders. As of 2025, around 70% of the Syrian population is in need of humanitarian assistance (UNDP, 2025). Yemen has followed a similarly destructive trajectory. Currently in a civil war of 11 years, it has caused more than 230,000 deaths and two-thirds of the population currently requires humanitarian aid (UN News, 2025). The two conflicts have destabilised regional dynamics, facilitated the emergence of militia groups and terrorist cells, and produced one of the largest humanitarian crises in the post-Cold War period (UNDP, 2025). Understanding how peace might be established in these two countries is a matter of practical and humanitarian urgency. Though power-sharing can do little to provide humanitarian assistance or address basic needs, it can be the starting point in which human security can begin to be established and democratic politics can begin to take root.

The contribution of this research is also of a theoretical kind. A substantial body of literature exists on the performance of power-sharing, particularly addressing the consociational or centripetal approach (Brancati, 2011; Horowitz, 1985; Lijphart, 1977; Cochrane et al., 2018). An evolving body of literature is focusing on the conditions under which these institutions are considered viable and acceptable by the parties involved. Building on the works of McGarry (2017), McCulloch and McEvoy (2020), Keil, Aboultaif and others (2021; 2024a), this thesis claims that adoptability is a necessary – although not sufficient – condition for power-sharing. No institution can function if not agreed and owned by the actors that are called upon to cooperate.

The structure of the thesis is the following. The first chapter sets the theoretical foundations of power-sharing as a tool for conflict resolution, situating how it intersects the broader discourse on new wars, conflict resolution and negotiated settlements. The second chapter traces the peace processes that evolved in Syria and Yemen since the outbreak of the war, which issues were involved and how was power-sharing introduced

into the negotiations. The third chapter focuses on the position of the parties involved, looking into how their preferences and behaviour shape the adoptability of power-sharing systems. The last chapter provides a critical examination of the barriers to adoptability in the two countries.

CH1. Power-sharing and Conflict Resolution

This chapter will analyse the theoretical foundations of conflict resolution, peace agreements and power-sharing, with its recent development as a tool for conflict resolution. Literature on conflict resolution provides valuable insights on recent development of peace agreements, stressing the need to address and transform the deep-rooted sources of conflict during these processes (Brancati, 2011; Stedman et al., 2002; Roeder & Rothchild, 2005; Webel & Galtung, 2007). Wallensteen (2009) has emphasised such need to transform violent conflicts «into more constructive relations between states, peoples, and groups». The crucial tension in peace processes is the necessity to balance short-term security concerns on the one hand and long-term institution-building concerns on the other hand. There is growing recognition in the literature that durable peace needs to go beyond the cessation of violence, it requires instead a framework that allows former antagonist parties to integrate and collaborate at institutional levels (Brancati, 2011; Stedman et al., 2002; Roeder & Rothchild, 2005). The primary and immediate need during peace negotiations is to put an end to the conflict, although such negotiations are also the place in which conversations on the future constitutional design of the country needs to be introduced (Caspersen, 2017).

Power-sharing has emerged during peace talks as an institutional formula to allow for cooperation among former antagonised factions, whilst allowing political representation and group rights (Keil et al., 2024b; Hartzell & Hoodie, 2003; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013; O'Leary & McGarry, 2016). This chapter focuses on the recent developments in conflict studies, the new logic of war (Kaldor, 2012; Creveld, 1991; Duffield, 2014; Mello, 2010) and its implication for conflict resolution. In detail, it will assess how conflicts after the Cold War tended to end with a negotiated agreement among the parties, with parties addressing issues in three main clusters: territory, security and power (Caspersen, 2017). This research focuses on institutional arrangements that build integrative systems and group rights, thus addressing how power-sharing comes up as a viable solution in post-conflict societies (Keil & McCulloch, 2024; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013; O'Leary & McGarry, 2016).

1.1 Complexity of conflicts

A new reality of organised violence has emerged after the Cold War, that has been conceptualised by scholars under the term *new wars* (Creveld, 1991; Duffield, 2014; Kaldor, 2012; Münkler, 2004). According to Kaldor (2012), contemporary forms of violence do not fit the XX century models of interstate wars or civil wars, whose logic adhered to the Clausewitzan dictum of war as contest of wills (Creveld, 1991). New wars are characterised by the involvement of a network of state and non-state actors, where the distinction between public and private combatants is blurred, with the participation of warlords, criminal organisations and thugs (Kaldor, 2012). The goals of new wars are also different, they are fought in the name of identity, whether ethnic, religious or tribal[1], rather than for ideology or geopolitical concerns. The battlefields are characterised by new means of warfare, not just in the advanced military technology, but in the methods of seeking political control of the population, serving as the primary target (Hoffman, 2007; Snow, 1996). As Newman (2004: 175) puts it, «the spatial context of contemporary wars is generally within, rather than between states». Literature on conflict studies provides various other terms to conceptualise the nature of contemporary conflicts – hybrid wars (Hoffman, 2007), privatized wars or post-modern wars (Duffield, 2014). They all identify common patterns in contemporary conflicts that underline a novelty in the nature of war (Mello, 2010). The new factor serves as a research strategy to understand the logic that characterises these conflicts, instead of drawing a parallel with old wars on historical terms (Kaldor, 2013). As such, it is an ideal type of war, a logical model underpinning modern warfare, rather than a historical and empirical experience[2].

The key factors that changed the character of new wars are to be found in the consequences of globalisation, representing «the intensification of global

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[1] Kaldor (2012:7) defines identity politics as «the claim to power on the basis of a particular identity – be it national, religious or linguistic».

[2] Critics argue too much emphasis has been put on the novelty of wars, rather than on the scholarly approach to the understanding of war (Newman, 2004). Kalyvas (2001) and Fearon & Laitin (2003) question the validity of the distinction between 'old' and 'new' wars, arguing that it establishes an arbitrary dividing line where no fundamental difference exists. For the purpose of this research, such debate will not be addressed in this dissertation.

interconnectedness – political, economic, military and cultural – and the changing character of political authority» (Kaldor, 2012:4). On the one hand, interconnectedness increases opportunities for transnational crime, illegal transborder trade and development of new technologies (Newman, 2004), and it blurs the distinction between internal and external conflicts (Kaldor, 2012). On the other hand, the deterioration of state authority, caused by societal and economic factors[3] (Fund For Peace, 2024), is associated with the loss of its monopoly over the use of violence (Münkler, 2004; Creveld, 1991). The state is not able to use force unilaterally, and such erosion stems from two directions: externally, with the «transationalisation of military forces» (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2017), i.e., the military integration at global level, and internally with the blurring distinction between public and private actors in conflicts. National armies are no longer the main protagonists of conflicts, instead paramilitary armies, warlords, insurgency groups, and criminal gangs compose the plethora of new actors involved in conflicts (Newman, 2004; Kalyvas, 2001).

New conflicts are characterised by a «globalised war economy» (Kaldor, 2012:10), a form of decentralised economy and highly dependent on external resources, in contrast with the centralised and autarchic war economies of the two World Wars. New wars are financed through the logic of war itself, their gains derive from the continued fighting – plunder, hostage-taking, black market, trade in weapons and also humanitarian assistance. The self-perpetuating interests of new wars led to define new wars as a mutual enterprise, where «both sides need the other in order to carry on the enterprise of war, and therefore war tends to be long and inconclusive» (Kaldor, 2012: 218). As David Keen puts it, contemporary conflicts are «the continuation of economics by other means» (Keen, 1998: 11). The consequence of the entrepreneurial logic of war is that resolution gets complicated, firstly because the parties have no interest in concluding the war, and secondly because of the motives of conflict itself. As Kaldor (2013) notes, there is no underlying ideology or forward-looking projects on the

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[3] Fund for Peace (2024) points these factors are to be attributed to social factors – demographic pressures, movements of refugees; economic factors – regression, globalisation, proliferation of black markets; and political factors – the criminalisation of the state, loss of the monopoly of legitimate use of force, the rise of paramilitary groups and private armies

organisation of society that drives conflicts, rather, conflicts themselves are built on the construction of political narratives, inherently exclusive and tending towards fragmentation (see also Lederach, 2010).

1.2 Complexity of solutions

A successful achievement of the research agenda on the new war thesis was to draw attention on how the transformation of the logic of war has affected the models of conflict resolution (Mello, 2010; Kaldor, 2012; Lederach, 2010). As Mello argues (2010), international law regimes have not responded to successfully prevent and mitigate contemporary conflicts. The pursuit of peace in new wars is a multifaceted endeavour: top-down approaches, with either a unilateral win or an externally imposed ceasefire, are likely to fail in new war scenarios, precisely because of the new logic that drives them (Kaldor, 2012). Conflicts come to an end either by negotiation, unilateral victory, external intervention either as peacekeeping operation or military intervention, or stalemate (Wallensteen, 2023; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). The challenges that a post-war society have to face stem from the lack of trust among antagonised groups, the need to deal with a history of violence and inter-group conflict, the lack of functional institutions, respect of the rule of law and respect for human rights (Roeder & Rothchild, 2005; Stedman et al., 2002). In new wars, such challenges are boosted by the features of new wars themselves. First, the multiplicity of actors involved stresses the need to include in the resolution not only on the main violent actors, but all parties at stake (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Their interconnectedness necessitates a broad understanding of conflict dynamics, as any conflict can be influenced by and can influence other conflicts in the region or areas, and regional powers play an increasingly crucial role in its resolution (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018; Wallensteen, 2023). Lastly, the identity-based drivers of conflict further polarize the antagonised parties involved, leading to contentious issues not only over identities themselves, but also on the very roots of the conflicts (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018).

There is growing consensus in the literature for a multifaceted and integrated approach to conflict resolution, considering it as a hybrid process that combines ceasefires with talks on post-conflict institutional design (Caspersen, 2017; Lederach, 2010). Wallensteen (2023:3) defines conflict resolution as a process that transforms

violent conflicts «into more constructive relations between states, peoples and groups». Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2007) draw a distinction between what they define as «peacekeeping and war limitation», and a conflict resolution process, which aims at addressing and transforming the «deep-rooted sources of conflict». Conflict resolution is thus understood as a policy of decision-making, on how to resolve or manage conflictual situations, and suggest way to prevent further continuation or escalation (Bercovitch et al., 2008). The evolution of peacebuilding has posited the «need to put emphasis on handling structural causes and on pursuing post-conflict reconstruction» (Bercovitch et al., 2008:3). Thus, proposing an extension from peacemaking to pre-conflictual and post-conflictual practices, and the implementation of a peacebuilding agenda that addresses grievances, alienations and other causes of conflict. Literature on conflict resolution has explored what kinds of interventions are implemented and by which group, and the consequences of such interventions (Paris & Sisk, 2007; Newman et al., 2009; Stedman et al., 2002; Roeder & Rothchild, 2005). Contemporary theories on conflict resolution differ from traditional methods, in that they put emphasis on processes aimed at mutual gains of all warring sides, and on the role external intermediaries have in ending the conflict (Wallensteen, 2023). The initial account of conflict resolution on ceasing violence has evolved to focus on building the conditions for peace, through reconciliation processes, truth and justice committee, and transitional justice institutions. New practices of conflict resolution have affected the ways in which conflicts are conducted, contributing as well to the increase in peaceful settlements of conflicts (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018). Still, new wars keep challenging the peacebuilding model focused on the establishment of a market economy and an inclusive democracy (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

Fuelled by a «politics of exclusion», contemporary conflicts necessitate a different research strategy and policy response (Kaldor, 2012). An inclusive process of resolution is required, that includes diverse groups and considers debating on institutional arrangements already within peace talks, and not leaving them to post-settlement practices (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2017). The main debate on building the conditions for peace, or interventions focused on institution-building, participatory governance, public engagement (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018; Lederach, 2010), has focused on the post-settlement period. And although such initiatives are crucial to build

sustainable peace, they largely ignore the agreement that led to them (Caspersen, 2017). In fact, negotiated agreements are seen as «contextual or permissive conditions for post-conflict activity» (Selby, 2013:64). Recent literature has indeed pointed out how peace agreements are crucial to shape the trajectory and the potential success of the entire peace process and should therefore be the initial point in which such initiatives are discussed and implemented, and not only as opening the door for future talks (Bell, 2008; Caspersen, 2017).

1.3 Negotiated settlements

Bell (2008) highlighted a switch in the practice of conflict resolution from a unilateral resolution with the defeat of one warring party, to the negotiation of an agreement among them. Research conducted by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) found that one-third of the conflicts recorded after the Cold War were concluded by a joint solution on a peace agreement (Harbom et al., 2006). Remaining conflicts either deepened, were resolved by victory of one side over the other or by imposed solutions, or frozen by stalemates (Wallensteen, 2023; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). As shown in *Table I*, since the 1990s negotiated settlements have become the primary way to end armed conflicts (DeRouen & Chowdhury, 2013; Wallensteen, 2023), a shift that can be attributed on the one hand by structural reasons at global level, with the geopolitical constraints linked to the Cold War being lifted, therefore bringing to an end many interstate conflicts (Bell, 2008). On the other hand, there are two more explanations related to local agency. First, the acknowledgement that purely military solutions are costly and ultimately unsustainable (National Research Council, 2000). The complexities of modern conflicts, with deep polarisation and involvement of non-state actors, defy unilateral resolution by means of force (Arévalo, 2023; Kaldor, 2012). Stalemates on the battlefield and prospects for continued duration of violence or wider conflict escalation have encouraged warring parties to find negotiated solutions (Sisk, 1996; Wallensteen, 2023). Secondly, the negotiating practice to end conflicts has been increasingly promoted and facilitated by the international community, with international organisations, regional bodies, and individual states acting as mediators to aid antagonised parties to reach a negotiated compromise (Bell, 2008; National Research Council, 2000).

Table I. *Intrastate War Settlement types, 1990-2020 (Kreutz, 2021)*

Military Victory	Negotiated Settlement	Negotiated Truce/Ceasefire
Afghanistan, 1978-92	Angola, 1994	Azerbaijan, 1994
Burma, 1983-95	Bosnia, 1995	Chechnya, 1996
Central African Republic, 2002	Cambodia, 1991	Congo/Brazzaville, 1999
Central African Republic, 2013	Chad, 1996	Congo/Zaire, 1999
Congo/Brazzaville, 1997-97	Croatia, 1995	Croatia, 1992
Congo/Zaire, 1996-97	Djibouti, 1994	Georgia/Abk, 1994
DR Congo, 2008	El Salvador, 1992	Georgia/S. Oss, 1992
Ethiopia, 2019	Guatemala, 1996	Moldova, 1992
Ethiopia/Eritrea, 1974-91	Guinea Bissau, 1998	Morocco, 1991
Ethiopia/Ideology, 1974-91	Indonesia/East Timor, 1999	Myanmar, 2011
Iraq/Kurds, Shiites, 1991-91	Kosovo, 1999	India, 2000
Ivory Coast, 2011	Liberia, 1993	Myanmar, 2011
Libya, 2011	Liberia, 1996	Colombia, 2016
Malaysia, 2013	Mali, 1995	Peru, 2010
Mali (ATNMC), 2009	Mozambique, 1992	Iran, 2011
Mali (CMA), 2012	Papua New Guinea, 1998	Sri Lanka, 2001
Myanmar, 2009	Philippines/MNLF, 1996	Turkey, 2013
Nigeria, 2004	Rwanda, 1993	India, 2010
Peru, 1980-92	Sierra Leone, 1999	Georgia (South Ossetia), 2008
Rwanda, 1994-94	South Africa, 1994	Congo, 2016
Sri Lanka (LTTE), 2009	Tajikistan, 1997	India, 2010
Tajikistan (Forces of Mullo Abdullo), 2000	Nepal, 2006	Nigeria, 2004
Tajikistan (IMU), 2011	DR Congo, 2008	Niger, 2008
	Burundi, 2008	Syria, 2018
	Angola, 2002	Somalia, 2018
	Mozambique, 2014	
	Liberia, 2003	
	Indonesia, 2005	

Turkey (MKP), 2005	Mali, 2015	
Ukraine, 2014	Senegal, 2003	
Uzbekistan (JIG), 2004	Sierra Leone, 2001	
Yemen, 1994-94	Central African Republic, 2006	
	North Macedonia, 2001	
	Ivory Coast, 2004	
	Libya, 2015	

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to negotiate settlements in conflict situations. Form and content of peace agreements can vary significantly, and their legal status is not always straightforward (Bell, 2008). Indeed, peace agreements emerge from complex and politically sensitive contexts, leading to disputes over their content and wording (Bell, 2008). However, recent literature on peace negotiations has traced common patterns. Caspersen (2017) addresses peace agreements as packages, in which the interaction of the different elements that compose them is essential for the prospect of reaching a settlement, post-conflict stability, and for the kind of peace that they ensure. The successes of peace agreements have been assessed on time-factors[4], on the relative military strength of the actors involved, and on external interference and contribution to reach an agreement (Arevalo 2023). However, Caspersen (2017) argues there has not been sufficient focus in the literature on the content of the peace agreement itself. Rather than a focus on the context in which a resolution is agreed upon, or the process of the negotiation talks, Caspersen notes the need to address what is being brought up on the negotiation table, what is then decided and implemented. In her words, «the agreement, the institutions it creates and the actors it empowers, significantly constrains what is possible at a later stage» (Caspersen, 2017:4). «Soft concerns» on questions of governance, territorial autonomies, political inclusion and human rights, are often left to a later stage, for the prioritization of security concerns and resources allocation. However, the more an agreement addresses key grievances,

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[4] Zartman (2001) and Arevalo (2023) emphasise the concept of a "ripe moment" for peace.

whether territorially related, focused on security matters or resource allocation, the more it is likely to guarantee stability (Caspersen, 2017). Caspersen identifies three common arguments that are addressed in peace agreements: the inclusion of autonomy provisions, the centrality of security issues, and the prevalence of group-rights over individual rights, involving solely specific elites during the negotiation process.

Autonomy provisions would immediately be associated with intrastate conflicts that include a separatist faction, as actor preferences on pushing for autonomy concessions will be shaped on the reasons that led to the conflict itself. However, territorial solutions have come into play even in cases of non-separatist conflicts (Caspersen, 2017), as the Lusaka Protocol for Angola (1994) and the General Peace Agreement for Mozambique (1992), both of which including elements of territorial autonomy for rebel-held areas that although did not have a secessionist claim. Thus, intrastate conflicts may acquire a territorial dimension, with rebel groups shifting from seeking internal state reform to demands for a territorial separation (Caspersen, 2017). Moreover, territory is liked to power and identity, and for some groups, controlling a part of territory is essential to their continued existence, security and resource availability (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). Territory is also central to self-determination claims, defined as «the notion that ethnic groups have the right to determine their own fate» (Duffy Toft, 2012:584), although tensions between self-determination, territorial integrity and state sovereignty still persist (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2018). Autonomy has thus become a core feature of many peace agreements (Wolff, 2009; Brancati, 2011), either as a permanent or an interim solution, typically with provisions allocating territorially- and ethnic-based autonomy, defined as «empowering a particular group within a region» (Caspersen, 2017:187). Autonomy provisions cover a variety of solutions, from cultural autonomy, thus concerning self-rule over sectors like education, media, and linguistic rights, which is not necessarily linked to a territory and does not include legislative, executive and judicial powers. On the other hand, territorial autonomy can extend to establish autonomous regions with their own system of governance (Caspersen, 2017; Brancati, 2011). Different degrees of autonomy are between the two extremes, adapted and adaptable to the conflict situation. Territorial autonomy is more frequent in proposed agreements (Wolff, 2009), ethnically defined autonomy is criticised for intensifying divisions and further polarising antagonised

groups (Roeder, 2009), and «perpetuating the divisions it aims to manage» (Erk & Anderson, 2009: 192). Granting autonomy, especially to secessionist groups, has been denounced as a dangerous strategy that would generate an unstable system lurching between recentralisation and dissolution (Roeder, 2009: 208), and consequently fostering mistrust and renewed violence. However, literature suggests that failures are due more to flaws in the institutional design rather than to the ethnic basis of the system (Caspersen, 2017; Brancati, 2011). Considerations have to be made at the type of autonomy granted, the conditions and elements present in the agreement (Caspersen, 2017; Brancati, 2011; McGarry & O'Leary, 2009; Wolff, 2011), as «it is rather the lack of implementation of agreed provisions that poses a greater threat to such arrangements more than future separatist movements» (Caspersen, 2017:188). The autonomy arrangement envisaged has to fit the conflict context – including the depth of divisions, demographic balance and distribution, significance of the breakaway region – otherwise it will not prove sustainable (Wolff, 2011). Within certain contexts, extensive territorial autonomy may substitute for political power-sharing on the central government level, especially when regions differ for their access to resources or security institutions. The suggestion is therefore to look at different types of autonomy and institutions established, to assess the conditions under which they risk exacerbating the conflict[5]. Tensions that threaten the institutional stability, and eventually lead to the collapse of the agreement, can be traced to three factors: the excessive ambiguity of autonomy provisions, the lack of the capacity of the autonomous region, and the lack of inclusivity and recognition of diversity in the region (Caspersen, 2017). However, a peace agreement will also be affected by international pressures, intra-communal dynamics and elite motivations. And debates on autonomy provisions normally intertwine with other compelling issues such as security sector reforms, distribution of political and military powers, and guarantees of justice (Caspersen, 2017). The effectiveness and

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[5] Brancati (2011) conducted a case study assessing when and under what conditions decentralization is effective in conflict resolution, in cases of ethnic conflict where groups are territorially concentrated. His finding was that the strength of regional parties, more than decentralisation itself, could foster secessionist claims in the long term. Decentralisation on the other hand succeeds when the political arena is dominated by statewide parties that effectively integrate regional interests.

sustainability of a peace agreement are therefore tied to the intertwined relations between different compelling issues.

Since 2016, no comprehensive peace agreement has been reached to end a violent conflict, and constitutional transition in post-conflict societies has become more difficult (Keil et al., 2024b; Pettersson et al., 2019). The reasons are to be found in domestic dynamics, with parties believing in a unilateral military victory, or accepting the status quo of a divided country, either by willingness or inability to make a change. The high level of internationalisation of conflicts, associated also with the rising presence of regional actors playing a major role in intrastate conflicts has scattered the approaches to find a solution (Keil et al., 2024b; Pettersson et al., 2019). Recent literature has thus shifted from an analysis on the negotiation process and peace agreements, to address the content of such agreements, what are the solutions proposed, if they are supported by key actors, and if these solutions are likely to be implemented (Keil et al., 2024a; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; Keil & McCulloch, 2021).

1.4 Power-sharing and the adoptability question

An inclusive form of government is essential for post-conflict society, and power-sharing arrangements between different communities have emerged as a prominent solution for non-territorial conflicts involving different groups (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2018). Power-sharing systems have already been tested and were a key feature of comprehensive peace settlements signed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Burundi, and Iraq. There is general agreement in the literature to account for power-sharing institutions as the only alternative in post-ethnic conflict societies (Bieber & Keil, 2009: 338) and the «best system that can be hoped for» (Caspersen, 2017:65). Yet, political power-sharing either centrally or locally is only found in a minority of cases (Caspersen, 2017). An assessment is therefore needed on how power-sharing is even introduced as a solution to intrastate conflicts.

Power-sharing captures «those rules that, in addition to defining how decisions will be made by groups within the polity, allocate decision-making rights, including access to state resources, among collectivises competing for power» (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003: 320). Majoritarian democracy can exacerbate inequalities and grievances that led to the conflict in the first place (Horowitz, 2014). Power-sharing has thus

emerged as a crucial tool offering a framework that fosters cooperation among former antagonist parties whilst providing for some degrees of group autonomy (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013; O'Leary & McGarry, 2016). The context of both the conflict and the agreement impact on the chosen model for power-sharing, and cases show that political power-sharing is less prevalent than territorial and military autonomy (Caspersen, 2017). In separatist conflicts especially, both sides would rather avoid political power sharing, as it would mean accepting remaining part of the state by the separatist movement and operating significant reforms by the central government (Caspersen, 2017). Systems of power-sharing are not monolithic, there are different theoretical perspectives on how it should be designed and implemented[6]. Specific conditions are required for the establishment of political power-sharing, from the conflict context, the relative bargaining power of the groups, and third actors' involvement, all of which influence the peace that will follow. Power-sharing address many demands present in separatist conflicts, by recognizing ethnic demands, accommodating them and giving ethnic groups a share in power (Caspersen, 2017; Keil & McCulloch, 2021; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2024; O'Leary, 2013). However, the lack of comprehensive peace agreements including power-sharing provisions in most recent years encourages to understand the circumstances and the conditions that allow power-sharing systems to come into play as part of the peace settlement (Keil et al., 2024b; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022; McGarry, 2017). Power-sharing agreements may come into being by imposition or with strong external interference, as the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Burundi[7] (Keil et al., 2024b). A second modality would be a voluntary agreement of the parties, therefore raising questions on how such provisions enter the peace negotiation agenda and what leads to their adoption. McGarry (2017) conceptualised the notion of *adoptability* when referring to

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[6] Consociationalism (Lijphart, 1977) and centripetalism (Horowitz, 1985) are the main proponents, however, the literature has also focused on hybrid approaches (Caspersen, 2017; O'Flynn & Russell, 2005).

[7] For Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Keil (2013), McEvoy (2015), Merdzanovic (2017); for Northern Ireland see Kerr (2005), O'Leary & McGarry (2016); for Lebanon Kerr (2005) and Aboultaif (2019); McEvoy (2015) and Aboultaif, McCulloch & Keil (2024) for Burundi, Iraq, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

negotiations in Cyprus, defining it as the conditions under which parties come to see power-sharing as the acceptable solution to solve their disputes. It thus refers more to the motivational and situational elements that push elites and communities to consent to such agreements, more than their effective adoption. What is agreed upon at the negotiation table may not be what is later implemented; however, it is true that «adoptability is a prerequisite for adoption» (McGarry, 2017:17). Those elements may concern not only the form and content of a power-sharing institution, but involve micro social, economic, and political dynamics as well as factors at macro level, i.e., security matters, the political economic situation, or prior experiences with power-sharing (Keil et al., 2024b; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022). A collaborative project founded by the Swiss Network for International Studies recently investigated the criteria for adoption, implementation and durability of power-sharing systems in the Middle East, specifically Lebanon, Syria and Iraq (Keil et al., 2024c). As a result of their research, they developed three conditions, or dynamics, required for power-sharing systems to come into being. They referred to these three processes as *arenas*: domestic engagement, agreement by international actors, and commitment by key international actors and their domestic proxies to support power-sharing systems. When there is convergence across the three arenas, power-sharing agreements can not only emerge as a possible solution but can contribute to stability and durable peace (Keil et al., 2024b). Domestic actors have a key role in the adoptability of any power-sharing solution. The consent of domestic elites, their political willingness to find a compromise, and the inclusion of key constituencies in the negotiation process are essential elements to avoid the continuation of violence and not hinder the performance and the functioning of the system, as happened in Iraq (Keil et al., 2024b; McGarry, 2017). Horowitz (2014) addressed what he referred to as the «adoption problem» of power-sharing institutions among groups that are ethnically differentiated. In cases of grouping along ethnic lines, challenges concern also the polarization of identities, which although is not a key determinant for the lack of adoption of *interethnic* power-sharing (Horowitz, 2014; Brancati, 2011). Horowitz finds more the adoption problem as a «congeries of bargaining problems» (Horowitz, 2014:8), thus related to both domestic dynamics – asymmetric preferences, diverging interests, as well as to the negotiation process – negotiation styles and availability of alternatives. External actors, be it the UN

or a regional power or bloc of states, can influence domestic dynamics in the promotion of a power-sharing solution, and ensure the smoothness of the process, in the negotiation and in the implementation (Keil et al., 2024b). It is even more so when international actors are not playing as neutral arbiters, but supporting, either politically, financially or both, one of the conflicting sides. In such scenario, they can engage with their proxies to support and reach an agreement (Keil et al., 2024b; Walsh & Doyle, 2018; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2018). Thus, the success of power-sharing arrangements is strongly influenced by, and in turn influences, domestic and international dynamics. The three arenas operate interconnectedly and «need to reinforce each other to open the space for a peaceful solution towards power-sharing to become acceptable to the different parties in the countries and to the main international actors involved in the conflict» (Keil et al., 2024b). McCulloch and McEvoy (2020) introduced the lifecycle approach framework, that allows power-sharing systems to be viewed and conceived in light of how they evolve and change over time – *functionality*, and how they develop from tools of conflict resolution to an institutional framework – *endability*. What is adopted and how, whether with the support and acceptance of major actors involved in the peace process, influence the implementation and longevity of any solution (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; Keil et al., 2024b). Adoptability thus refers to the coming into being of power-sharing and how it is perceived by actors as a viable solution to conflict. Although there is a distinction between what is being brought up on the negotiation table, and what is later implemented. Even with a political willingness to support power-sharing agreements, the further necessary step is a contextual assessment on what institutions can be implemented and how such institutions could be amended or evolve according to the needs (Keil et al., 2024a; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; Keil et al., 2024b). The lifecycle approach is key as allows to link adoptability with adaptability, i.e., it sheds a light on the need to consider if the system agreed upon would really be implemented and malleable to changes (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022; Keil et al., 2024a).

Power-sharing is rarely the first choice. Rather, it arises when other options fail, either because of military stalemates – no side can impose a decisive victory – or because solutions have been tried but failed – such as ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Keil, 2016). Despite its flaws, power-sharing remains a

solution to ongoing violence, and is often without alternative. The other possibilities would be the instauration of an authoritarian regime or the continuation of violence. In Syria, for example, the Kurds and Druze minorities warn that if the HTS-led government should not guarantee their autonomy and political representation, a new civil war will be the alternative. Reaching a power-sharing agreement in protracted conflicts is not an easy task. Donald Horowitz (2002:197) referred to them as «arctic roses», given they are so rare, not only in their adoption, but also in their implementation. Having key constituencies and actors to participate in the adoption of the agreement, ensuring they stick to it, and allow for the inclusion of emerging actors is a vital challenge for power-sharing to work.

CH2. Power-Sharing Discussions in Syria and Yemen

Power-sharing arrangements address grievances of exclusion of ethnic, religious or political groups, by distributing governing powers among them and granting them political representation in the central government (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). However, not all divided or multicultural societies have adopted power-sharing mechanisms. The viability and the necessity of such settlements depend on many factors, among which the political culture of a society and the relation between the groups that compose it. In Chapter 1, it was argued that in deeply divided societies, or countries that are struggling with an internal sectarian conflict, power-sharing can be a tool for conflict settlement and contribute to positive peace in the long run. In contexts where mutual distrust is deeply rooted and there is a high risk of recurrence to violence, power-sharing offers an institutional formula to manage differences and disagreements, by creating a system of checks and balances in which no single faction dominates the political arena (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007; McEvoy & O'Leary, 2013; Aboultaif et al., 2024). However, researchers have come to the conclusion that in order to be viable and effective, power-sharing solutions require specific conditions. First, actors have to be willing to even talk about sharing power. Majority groups or the winning parties on the battlefield resist any negotiated deal, under the optimism that they will reach a unilateral victory. Thus, power-sharing is typically introduced as a last resort, when parties come at a mutually hurting stalemate, and are willing to engage in negotiations (Mabon & McCulloch, 2022). Second, the strength of the arrangement, its functionality and durability, depend very much on how it is agreed upon, the design of the peace process, what is included, and what are the parties' stances on the agreements (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; Keil et al., 2024b). That is the concept of adoptability as conceived by McGarry (2017). Two factors are therefore of key importance: what is talked about and the willingness of actors to talk. Power-sharing is usually introduced through peace negotiations, in conditions where democratic elections cannot be put in place and a government is needed to run the post-conflict situation (Keil et al., 2024b). Such arrangements can be proposed by political elites on a voluntary basis, by external pressure or coercion, or can be simply introduced in the peace negotiation agenda. In the Middle East, Lebanon and Iraq have been subject to enforced power-sharing implementation with the strong influence played by external actors (Aboultaif et al., 2024). Syria and Yemen, on the

other hand, have witnessed such discussions during the continuation of the civil wars, and the respective peace processes that were initiated.

This chapter will briefly outline the peace processes that were initiated in Syria and Yemen since the outburst of the civil wars, and how and in what circumstances the possibility of a power-sharing arrangement entered the debate. The goal of this chapter is not to evaluate the actors' preferences and acceptability of such a solution – which will be carefully analysed in Chapter 3 – but to understand why power-sharing is even talked about when considering stability and peace for countries like Syria and Yemen. The feasibility and challenges of such an agreement will be assessed in Chapter 4. By examining the historical evolution of the peace processes, this chapter will understand when and how power-sharing became a central, however contested, proposal in peace negotiations for the two countries.

2.1 Power-Sharing discussions in Syria

Before the Arab Spring, Syria was under the centralized authoritarian regime of the Assad family. The state apparatus was dominated by the monopolization of political power by the Ba'ath Party, a narrow elitist circle composed mainly of members of the Alawite and Druze communities, supporters of Assad. The party adhered to a policy of marginalisation of the opposition and minorities and systematically suppressed the dissent amongst Syrian multicultural society (Hinnebusch, 2019). Whilst the Syrian society is a mosaic of ethnic groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, Turkomans, alongside religious and confessional groups, such as Islamic Sunni, Alawites, Druze, Christians, jews and Yezidis (Aoyama, 2019), the 1973 constitution does not guarantee protection to any minority group, nor any group autonomy to organise their political and cultural affairs. Thus, Syrian institutional history has had little foundation of inclusive governance, on which to build a power-sharing system. The complete absence of a tradition of pluralist democracy or any form of decentralisation in the governance structure created a political culture that sees opposition as rebellion and autonomy as secession (Hinnebusch, 2019). Such legacy influenced the regime's approach to the conflict and its perspective in peace efforts. Since the civil war erupted in Syria in 2011, mediation efforts have been undertaken first by the Arab League and then by the United Nations, and along that, parallel tracks

dominated by regional powers were also present (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). However, efforts of conflict settlement in Syria had to face commitment problems of domestic parties, and the fragmented positions of international actors, results of the long histories of grievances and sectarian mistrust that has characterised the Syrian society (Lundgren, 2016). Four phases of peace efforts gave birth to the Geneva process, which was seeking to shape Syria's peace trajectory precisely by addressing those grievances. In 2017, a parallel peace process was initiated in Astana by Russia, backed by Türkiye and Iran, that although only selectively involved Syrian actors (Hinnebusch & Saouli, 2020). Initial peace efforts were hindered by the military optimism that a solution would have been found on the battlefield, thus parties were not in a position to even consider a negotiated settlement. The opposition strongly believed in the coming fall of the regime, but then retracted with the Russian military intervention in support of the regime. When the tides turned in favour of Assad, his position towards ending the conflict with a peace agreement thinned, and the regime's engagement in peace agreements became conditional on Russia's requests (Dagher, 2019).

Figure 1. *Distribution of Religious and Ethnic Groups in Syria (Robinson et al., 2018)*
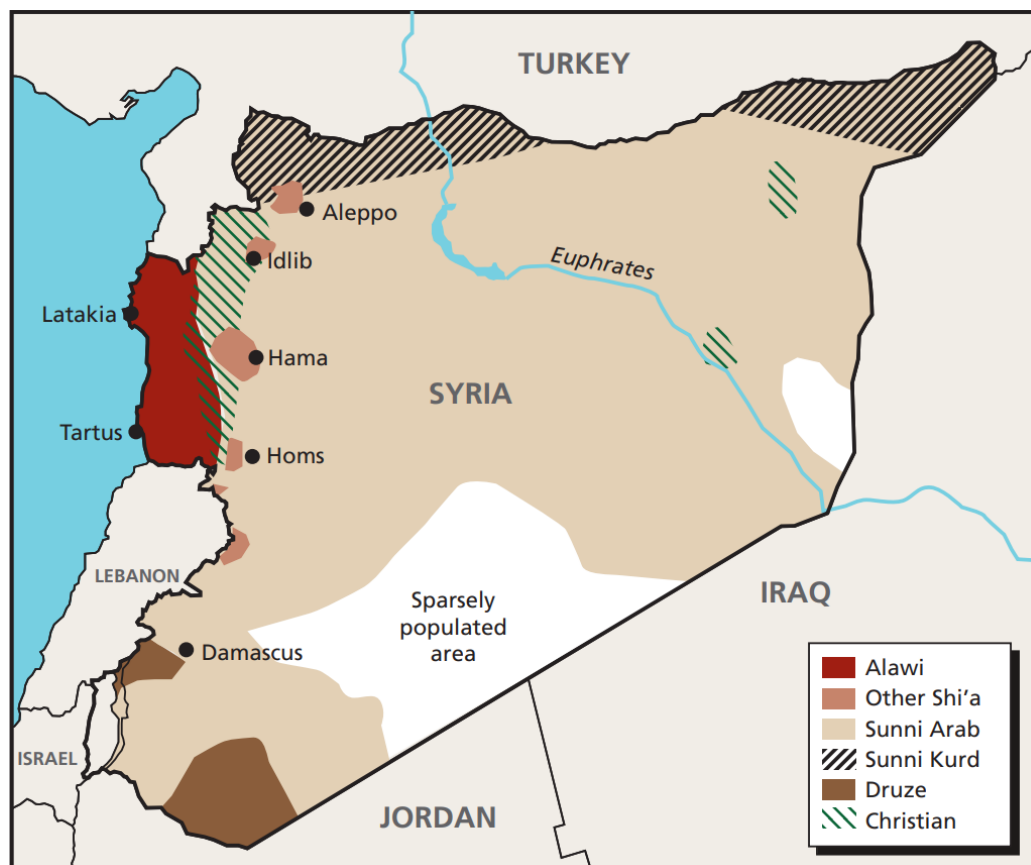
The Arab Action Plan was the first effort initiated after the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Pursued by the Arab League, it called for a ceasefire and the initiation of a national dialogue (Lundgren, 2016), although the project failed with the withdrawal of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which were explicitly calling for the deposition of al-Assad. Initial UN efforts faced challenges due to divisions within the Security Council (Hellmüller, 2022). The draft resolution presented by US, UK and France was favouring a regime change and later vetoed by Russia and China (Beaujouan, 2024). In 2012, with the appointment of Kofi Annan as the UN mediator in Syria, the Geneva Communique was issued thus setting the framework for a political settlement of the conflict (Costantini & Santini, 2022). However, the communique was purposely ambivalent on the future of the regime of Bashar al-Assad (UN, 2012), in that international actors were particularly divided on the matter. The US and Western countries supported a regime change, whilst Russia and Iran were on the opposite side (Costantini & Santini, 2022). Moreover, after the outburst of the civil war, the opposition refused to negotiate with Assad, under the belief that the Arab Spring would lead to the deposition of the Assad family regime (Hinnebusch, 2019). Annan's strategy was thus to first reach the cessation of violence through a ceasefire agreement, which would have later led towards talks for a broader political transition (Lundgren, 2016). However, al-Assad inclusion in a future political leadership for Syria has always been a contentious point, and it was eventually what led the Geneva process towards an impasse. Kofi Annan's mission never supported openly Assad's ouster, constrained by the position of permanent members of UNSC, and such failure prompted anti-Assad regional powers to increase their military assistance to opposition actors, thus exacerbating the conflict and undermining prospects for coexistence (Hinnebusch & Saouli, 2020). As the conflict intensified, the prospects for Assad's deposition or a democratic transition wavered, and the UN introduced the possibility for a power-sharing agreement between the Assad government and the opposition. In January 2014, the parties were brought back to the negotiating table in the Geneva II process, partly due to the renewed interest by the US and Russia after the rise of the Islamic State (Lundgren, 2016). Geneva II made little progress on a negotiated settlement for the civil war, although represented the first instance in which conflicting parties had direct talks between each other. In September 2014, Staffan de Mistura took over as UN Special Envoy for Syria and managed to hold

numerous rounds of talks between the regime and the opposition forces, represented by the High Negotiation Committee (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016). A moment of convergence of interests among the UNSC P5 members led to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2254 in 2015, which supported the framework of the Geneva Communiqué and provided guidelines for a «Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition» (UN Security Council, 2015). Until that point, the UN mediation processes prioritised conflict mitigation, seeking thus to minimize violence before reaching substantive reconciliation. While not referring to power-sharing explicitly, the resolution implied a path for a more inclusive political process, leading to a transitional executive, UN-supervised electoral process and new constitution. De Mistura was the first to move away from the previous top-down approach and include local parties to reach a negotiated settlement. However, his effort did not lead to any tangible results to settle the conflict (Hinnebusch & Zartman, 2016).

Given the UN stalemate, Russia initiated a peace process on a parallel track in Astana, Kazakhstan, with the support of Türkiye and Iran. The Astana process was mainly pushing for military de-escalation, but involving limited Syrian parties (Hinnebusch & Saouli, 2020). In contrast with UN's approach aiming for a liberal democratic transition, Astana was «primarily a space for military negotiations and not a space for political negotiations» (Hellmüller, 2022:557). Four de-escalation zones were created, that contributed to reduce violence and allow humanitarian access in the areas, but also allowed the regime to re-gain military control of three out of the four ceasefire areas, thus reducing its willingness to enter negotiations (Hellmüller, 2022). As a consequence, the Astana talks had de facto created fragmented territories governed by multiple actors and characterised by the emergence of forms of local governance and competing political authorities, particularly areas administrated by opposition forces where the regime had left a power vacuum (Kienle, 2019). In the Northeast of Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) imposed itself at the leadership of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The areas controlled by the opposition forces, including the surrounding of Dara'a in the South and Idlib in the North, saw the emergence of competing political powers, dominated primarily by non-state actors (Kienle, 2019; Beaujouan, 2024). Eastern parts of the country were ruled by the ISIS. While some areas developed quasi-autonomous administrations, like the

AANES, the Interim Government in the Northwest and the Salvation Government in Idlib (Beaujouan, 2024), others were characterised by warlordism and the influence of salafist-jihadist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra – today known as Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) – Ahrar al-Sham, and ISIS cells (Hinnebusch, 2019). The idea of power-sharing re-entered the debated in the 2018 Sochi Congress of Syrian National Dialogue, which led to the creation of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in 2019. The Committee was tasked to draft a new constitution, to set in place the political transition envisaged by Resolution 2254 and was composed of representative of the oppositions and the Assad regime, although was strongly influenced by Russia and Türkiye (Beaujouan, 2024). Finally, no concrete progress was made, as on the one hand, regime's representatives avoided taking commitments that would have undermined Assad's grip and, on the other hand, the opposition struggled to impose its agenda, due to its fragmentation and absence of leadership (Peri, 2018).

Looking ahead, the fall of the Assad regime presents a turning point for Syria. The peace process that began after the outbreak of the civil war has recognised the importance of political transition towards a more inclusive form of governance, although unable to set out concrete steps for such transition. Power-sharing has been proposed at different stages, either between political groups, the Assad regime and the opposition, or between the ethno-religious groups composing Syrian multicultural landscape: Sunni Arabs, Alawites, and Kurds (Mabon & McCulloch, 2022). However, the UN mediation process was undermined by the shifting of power balances during the conflict and by the fundamental disagreement over the role of Assad in the subsequent governance structure (Keil et al., 2024b). The takeover of rebel forces led by HTS has concluded the Assad regime that dominated the country for more than 50 years, it has not however, concluded the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria. Despite initial hopes about a new chance for an inclusive democratic governance for the country, with prospects of meetings with community and group leaders and the initiative to draft a new constitution (McCulloch & Keil, 2025; Al Arabiya, 2024), the transitional government installed by HTS and its leader and self-proclaimed president Ahmed al-Sharaa presented only a façade of inclusiveness. In the first few months of governance, HTS has restricted media and minority languages, allowing only Arabic and Turkish, excluded Kurdish-led SDF from the National Dialogue Conference, including them only

at a second moment after a ceasefire deal was struck between the Türkiye and the SDF-aligned militant organisation PKK (Michaelson & Ali, 2025). Moreover, the post-Assad context presents numerous challenges due to the many armed groups present in the country and the instability following the regime change. In the latest months, attacks were carried out in Latakia and other coastal cities where members of the Alawite community reside and in the outskirts of Damascus against members of the Druze community, associated with supporters of the Assad regime (Al Jazeera, 2025a). The crisis in Syria has not been put to an end, with continuous sectarian violence and risks for a security vacuum (SOHR, 2025). Whether this window would lead to inclusive governance or another outbreak of a civil war depends on how conferences on a new political governance will be carried out, as well as by the position of both Syrian parties and the international community.

2.2 Power-Sharing discussions in Yemen

Unlike Syria, Yemen has previously had history of power-sharing initiatives among its elites. The unification of North and South Yemen in 1990 marked the country's political culture and introduced the idea of power-sharing as a possible formula for conflict resolution. This section traces the development of peace processes in Yemen, examining the emergence and either institutionalisation or resistance to power-sharing arrangements across key stages of Yemen's protracted civil conflict.

The idea of federalism has entered the debate in Yemen since the unification of the northern Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1990. The two regions present historical and cultural differences, with the northern side being historically under the influence of the Ottomans and governed by the theocratic rule of Zaidi imams, followers of a branch of Shia Islam (Baron, 2015). The south, on the other hand, was subject to a century of British domination and scattered in many regions, sultanates and sheikdoms with different degrees of autonomy (Baron, 2015). The unification auspicated the inclusion of political elites of YAR and PDRY, however led to southern elites being systematically sidelined (Day, 2012). In 1994, a civil war broke out between the separatists in South Yemen and the unionists, ending to the consolidation of power in the hands of Ali Abdullah Saleh. The first civil war left a lasting mark, as many southerners interpreted

centralisation as marginalisation, whilst northerners remained wary of decentralisation as a threat to national unity (Day, 2012). The emergence of the Southern Movement in 2007, also referred to as Al-Hirak, provided a «forum for grievances», through which separatists kept calling for independence of the southern territories (Baron, 2015).

Figure 2. Historical division of Yemen until 1990 (Baron, 2015).
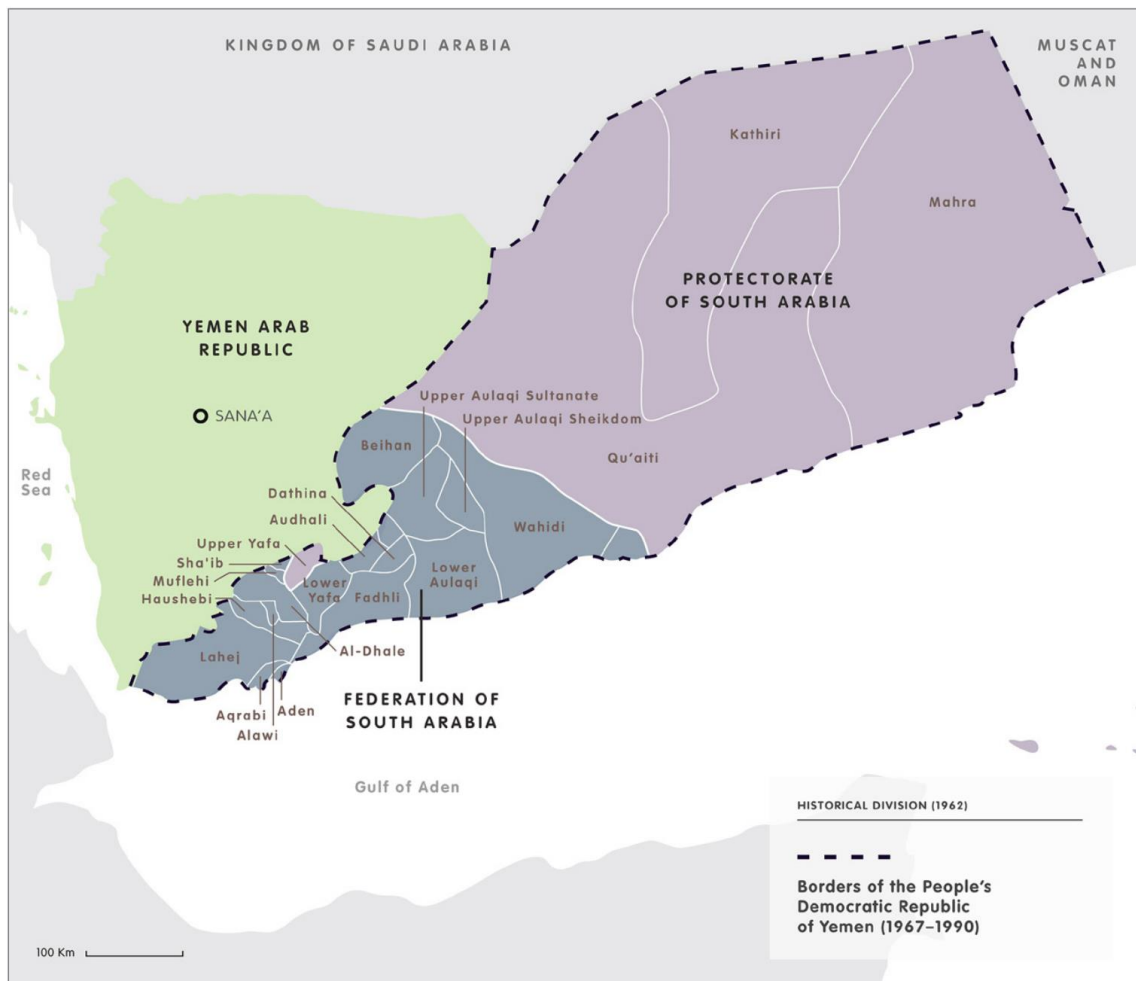

Yemen suffered many subsequent internal conflicts after its unification, in all of which a stark separation endured between the oligarchic regimes and the rural communities of the countries (Hamidaddin, 2021). The «divide and rule» policy of Saleh's presidency exacerbated the divisions across the areas and encouraged conflicts within and between groups and communities (Lackner, 2022). The civil war that broke out after the Arab Spring reshuffled Yemeni social fabric, putting an end to Saleh's regime and his allies but at the same time exacerbating those grievances and marginalisation narratives that were present since the 1990 unification of North and South Yemen. In fact, unlike Syria and other Arab countries, the Yemeni protests in the

wave of the Arab Spring led to the deposition of Saleh and a political transition supported by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the UN (Bennett, 2013). Such initiative, however, was defined as an «elite compromise», as it was allowing immunity to Saleh and its supporters in exchange for them to leave the country and cede power to the former Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (Alley, 2013:78). The transitional National Reconciliation Government envisaged by the GCC was composed of representatives from both the ruling party and the opposition, including the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the Nasirist Popular Unity Party, and Zaydi representations (Alley, 2013). Additional settlement mechanisms were included in the initiative, that focused on the reconstruction of national military forces, the establishment of transitional justice institutions, and the set up of a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) for drafting a new constitution (Bennet, 2013). This was a key moment for the discussion of an inclusive governance in Yemen, allowing the participation of previously excluded groups in the decision-making processes for a post-conflict political structure (Williams et al., 2017). Although the NDC, convened from March 2013 to January 2014, was trying to bring together representatives of political parties, civil society, military and political organisation present in Yemeni soil – including the Houthis and the Southern Movement (National Dialogue Conference, 2014) – it was mainly composed of UN experts, devolved to find an institutional solution to the civil war. The result was the proposal of a federal state composed of six regions, as showed in *Figure 3* (ibid.). All sides had agreed on federalism in principle, yet the perspectives of the participants on the delineation of the regions were different (Benomar, 2021). The Houthis opposed the proposal on the ground that it would have marginalised their base in Sa'dah in the northern side with no access to the sea. The Southern Movement and the separatists also viewed the process unsuccessful, as dividing the south in two regions and failing to meet their demands for greater autonomy (Williams et al., 2017). In spite of this strong opposition, the internationally recognised Hadi government still pushed for the NDC regional delineation and proceeded to the creation of a transitional government that however resembled its old composition, with the exclusion of the Houthis from the political sphere (Benomar, 2021). As a consequence, violence broke out again by late 2014, when the Houthis seized control of Sana'a and unilaterally installed the Supreme Policial Council with the

support of Saleh's former regime and the General People's Congress (Al Jazeera, 2015). Saudi Arabia, backing Hadi's government, led a military intervention on Yemeni soil starting on 26 March 2015, which quickly turned Yemen into a battlefield for an internationalised war (BBC News, 2015).

Figure 3. Federal division proposed by the NDC (Baron, 2015).
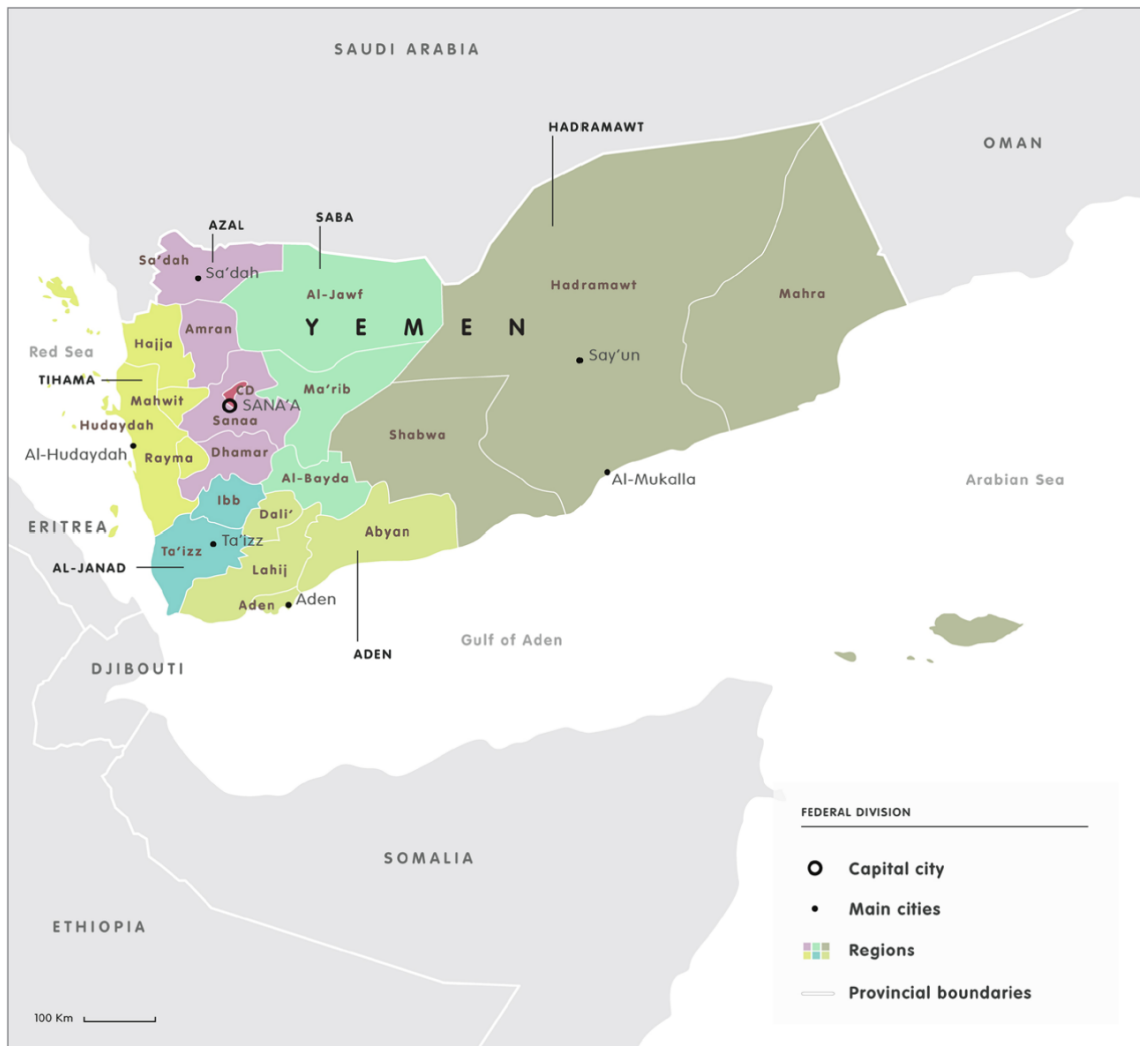
The collapse of the transitional government halted the track for the possibility of a post-conflict power-sharing arrangement. The international approach towards the resolution of the Yemeni conflict was framed by the Saudi-brokered UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which demanded the Houthis' unconditional surrender and the restoration of Hadi's government, in exile in Riyadh (UNSC, 2015). The Resolution was set on improbable terms, as the Houthis maintained a quasi-governmental authority in the western part of the country and controlled large parts of those territories, as showed

in *Figure 4*. It was unrealistic to expect their withdrawal without anything in return (Benomar, 2022a). Subsequent UN-sponsored 2016 Kuwait talks and negotiations in Stockholm in 2017, focusing primarily on humanitarian calls and military de-escalation, were both unsuccessful (Baron, 2016). The priorities of Houthis and Saleh alliance was first to find an agreement on a political settlement, whilst the Hadi government found the initiation of a political process subordinated to a first withdrawal of Houthis troops from the occupied cities and the de-militarization of the group (Barltrop, 2025).

Figure 4. Houthis expansion 2012-2015 (Baron, 2015)
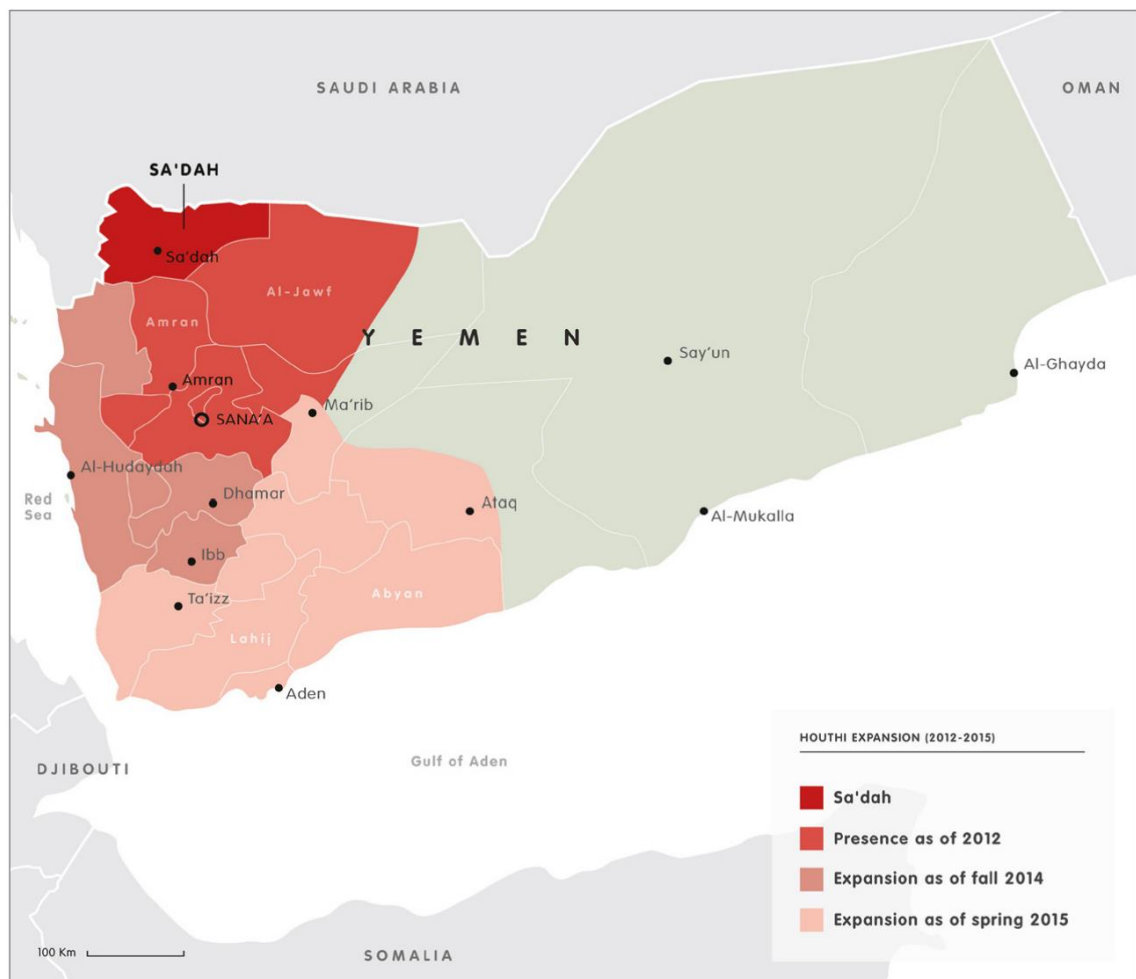
Proposals for an inclusive government were reintroduced by the Riyadh Agreement, reached in 2019, seeking to incorporate the Southern Transitional Council (STC) into Hadi's government. Formally, the two factions were ally with the Saudi-coalition against the Houthis, but the STC was an independentist movement seeking secession of the Southern region – thus clashing with Hadi's claims for authority (Alley, 2013). The agreement aimed at incorporating STC forces in both the political and

security landscape of the country (Al Jazeera, 2020). However, Houthi forces were completely excluded from the negotiations, and the agreement itself was interpreted as a measure to curb the dissipation of military resources and redirect efforts to solve the conflict with the Houthis (Riyadh Agreement, 2019). In 2022, President Hadi was removed from power by an operation supported by the GCC and backed by Saudi Arabia and UAE. The new government fell under the lead of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), composed of eight members from different factions among norther and southern governorates, united in their anti-Houthi front (Lackner, 2022). However, the PLC lacked unity and consolidation from the early start of its operations and socio-political conflicts are still present also in areas controlled by the formal government (Lackner, 2022). The protracted and continued conflict created a fragmented mosaic of de facto authorities. The northwest is dominated by the centralised control of the Houthis-Saleh coalition, the south by the STC, backed by UAE and pushing for a return to the pre-unification independence. The internationally recognised government is officially based in Aden and controls the majority of the territory but is operating from Riyadh. Throughout the country, tribal leaders, warlords, and factions like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) exert their influence on the territory (Cordesman, 2017). The country's political past certainly provides for stronger foundations for a power-sharing system, although the proliferation of regional non-state actors has fractured the political landscape and made the reaching of an agreement more complex. Although power-sharing remains central to build a sustainable peace in Yemen (Mabon & McCulloch, 2022; Benomar, 2021), the repeated efforts at reaching a deal and the consequent collapse of transitional frameworks show that the hard part of reaching a power-sharing deal is on the one hand ensuring that domestic actors abide by it and, on the other hand, making sure that such deal is able to accommodate new or shifting alliances. Such dynamics will be explored in the next chapter, which explores the interests, positions and involvement of key actors, essential for the adoptability of a power-sharing agreement.

CH3. Actors Assessment

The adoptability of power-sharing arrangements in pronged civil wars, with multi-faceted and deep societal division, hinges on the preferences and perceptions of the actors involved in the process – both domestic and external (Keil et al., 2024b). The specific institutional design certainly influences the functionality and durability of a political agreement, however, scholars agree that the adoptability of such arrangements fundamentally rest on the interactions, interests, and willingness of key parties to engage in them (McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022; Keil & McCulloch, 2021; Keil & Aboultaif, 2024). This chapter explores how these actors shape the conditions under which power-sharing becomes to be seen as a viable and acceptable solution to solve their conflicts, both individually and in interaction with one another. Building on the conceptual distinction between *adoptability* and *adoption* articulated by McGarry (2017), then further developed by McCulloch and McEvoy (2020), Keil and McCulloch (2021), and Keil and Aboultaif (2024), the previous chapter traced how power-sharing was introduced and framed during peace negotiations in Syria and Yemen, often as part of a broader UN-led or regionally brokered process. However, agenda-tracing and an analysis of the peace process evolution are not sufficient to assess the adoptability of power-sharing. As the academic literature argues, increasing attention is given towards the parties that take part in negotiations, on how they orient themselves and interact with each other to come to a conclusion. Indeed, the adoptability of a power-sharing solution is strong if domestic actors accept it as the way to resolve their conflict (Keil et al., 2024b; Keil & Aboultaif, 2024; Keil & McCulloch, 2021; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022). The following chapter examines how domestic actors positioned themselves towards a power-sharing deal in Syria and Yemen, and what role international mediation played in determining its success or failure. This analysis will be structured following the multi-arena model, introduced by the work of Keil, McCulloch, Aboultaif, Pergola and Ammar (2024c), who conducted collaborative research on the adoptability and

durability of power-sharing in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq[8]. They developed a framework that posits the success of the coming-into-being of power-sharing systems on the convergence of three interconnected areas, referred to as *Arenas*.

Arena 1: domestic actors and the political space must come to see power-sharing a credible and beneficial solution to their conflict.

Arena 2: the international sphere – multilateral organizations, regional or global powers – supports the resolution of the conflict in a power-sharing solution.

Arena 3: it refers to the vertical linkages between international actors and their domestic proxies, by which the former reinforce their commitment and leverage on the latter.

Arena 1 and Arena 2 focus on the horizontal dynamics amongst the actors, either domestically or at the international level, whilst Arena 3 focuses on the vertical interaction between international patrons and their domestic clients. The three arenas are deeply intertwined, decisions made in the international arena often rest on the interest to both secure support and influence domestic parties, whilst national elites adjust their positions reflecting the preferences of foreign sponsors (Keil et al., 2024b). Often, international parties do not solely act as neutral mediators but are involved in geopolitical rivalries, that can influence the prospects for any political settlement of the conflicts, as Hellmüller (2022) argues being the case for Syria. Indeed, in conflictual contexts like in Syria and Yemen, the three arenas are structurally interconnected and interact with each other in the adoptability process for a power-sharing solution.

While structural causes matter, for example weak state institutions, deep sectarian fragmentation, and geopolitical interests (Roeder & Rothchild, 2005), the focus of this chapter revolves around the *agency* of critical actors, i.e., how parties have approached, assessed, and reframed the idea of power-sharing over time, highlighting the importance of actors' perceptions in shaping power-sharing adoptability (McGarry,

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[8] The project "Power-sharing for Peace? Between Adoptability and Durability in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq" was carried out via interviews and focus groups with actors that participated in the negotiation, adoption and eventual implementation of power-sharing arrangements in the three countries.

2017; Keil et al., 2024b; Keil & Aboultaif, 2024; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022). Thus, the following sections investigate these arenas and focus on the roles played by parties in shaping the adoptability of power-sharing. The analysis will start by exploring the evolving position of domestic actors towards power-sharing (Arena 1); secondly, it will proceed by mapping the international actors involved in the conflicts, their alignment and positions on a post-conflict political settlement (Arena 2); and lastly, the relationship between external and local actors will be examined, especially in how it contributed in shaping preferences and direction of the negotiations (Arena 3). By centring the discourse around the roles of actors rather than the institutional design proposed, or the process of peace negotiations, this chapter contributes to a more grounded understanding of why power-sharing often fails to gain traction in contemporary conflict settings. It also sets the stage for Chapter 4, which will turn to the challenges that continue to block adoptability in both Syria and Yemen.

3.1 Arena 1: Domestic Actors

At the core of power-sharing adoptability lies the willingness and interest of critical domestic actors to recognise such a system as mutually beneficial and objectively a better option than a military loss or an externally imposed solution (Cochrane et al., 2018; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020; Keil et al., 2024b). Indeed, power-sharing negotiations take place «first and foremost between domestic actors and any subsequent power-sharing government requires their cooperation» (Keil et al., 2024b). Major stakeholders, such as domestic political elites, community or ethnic group leaders, and even rebel or militia leaders, should all agree to a negotiated settlement and on its content. What is crucial is not only the acceptance by political elites, but by different groups of the population, which not only increase the adoptability of a power-sharing system by ensuring internal legitimacy (Caspersen, 2017), but would also increase its implementation and functionality (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020). In both Syria and Yemen, domestic actors and elites have failed to unite around a shared vision of power-sharing, given by the perception of power-sharing being more a threat rather than an opportunity for peace.

3.1.1 Syria

When Assad was in power, it has never been an option for the regime to conceive authority to some other political parties or find a compromise for a more inclusive governance (Dagher, 2019). Mediators involved in the Geneva processes agree that on these grounds, any discussion of shared governance was largely symbolic, as was also clear by the regime supporters' slogan «Assad or we burn the country» (Keil et al., 2024b). Assad's response to the outbreak of the civil war has been to enforce military dominance to maintain his political authority. Rather than a real willingness to cede power, his offers or talks around an inclusive governance were more a façade to deflect international pressure (Dagher, 2019). Meanwhile, the opposition was largely fragmented across the country, lacking a unified leadership and a common vision on a post-conflict governance structure (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2013). Early optimism on the fall of the regime and the initial lead of the Free Syrian Army left room to internal rivalries and to the rise of new powers in the area, such as terrorist cells, further weakening the opposition's leverage in negotiation talks (Lundgren, 2016). A power-sharing solution was never really taken into consideration by the opposition, even more so in cases of military victories or territorial gains (Keil et al., 2024c). Such predisposition, accompanied by the lack of internal cohesion, severely undermined the opposition's ability to engage in negotiations and credibly commit to a ceasefire (Lundgren, 2016). The sole party that was pushing for a federal solution and for the recognition of its autonomy was the Kurdish-led AANES, given its long history of exclusion and isolation suffered by the Kurds during Assad's regime (Issaev & Zakharov, 2021). The UN has been the main promoter of a power-sharing agreement between the regime and the opposition, as will be discussed in . However, with most parties pushing for a military victory in the hopes for the other side's surrender, or too weak and scattered to push for demands that would change the status quo, in Syria there has been no space for serious discussions on how a power-sharing system could take place, and, most pressingly, who should take part in it (Keil et al., 2024b). The events of December 2024, with the collapse of the Assad regime and the takeover of HTS (BBC News, 2024), have opened the window for a new inclusive political process in Syria. A transitional government was established under the lead of HTS and talks over an electoral process and a new constitution have taken place (Al

Arabiya News, 2024). However, in the victory speech on January 29, Ahmed al-Sharaa affirmed the continuation of a centralised power, and despite his talks of participation of all Syrians in the transitional stage with the inclusion of men, women and youth, Syrian ethnic pluralism and the political inclusion of the various actors, militias or ethnic and religious groups were not mentioned (Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2025). The National Conference initiated on February 25 was meant to frame the inclusive process and chart Syria's future, though it was criticised as promoting a government of «one-color group» and failing the prospects of political inclusion and equitable governance, especially for the Druze and Kurdish communities (al-Assil, 2025). The interim constitution adopted on March 13 emphasises the unity of the Syrian territory and «criminalizes calls for division and secession» (Constitutional Declaration, art. VII). The interim constitution was rejected by the majority of Syrian Kurdish factions – including KNC and PYD – as not mentioning the political and cultural autonomy of the Kurdish community (van Wilgenburg, 2025). As a matter of military autonomy, the SDF has accepted to nominally integrate in the national army, however the Kurdish elites have not fully given up its autonomy, especially after the violence carried out against the Alawites and the insurgency of militias affiliated with the former Assad-regime (Zelin, 2025).

3.1.2 Yemen

In Yemen, no single actor currently holds decisive power over the others; on the contrary, multiple competing visions of statehood coexist. The internationally recognised government, first under the leadership of Hadi and since 2022 under the PLD as discussed in Chapter 2, has no decisive authority in the territory of Yemen, and have to face the presence of two other major political authorities – the Houthi movement and the STC, alongside smaller militias and terrorist cells. The formal government is the one that promotes a centralised federal model, but is currently operating in exile in Riyadh and has to struggle with internal divisions. The STC seeks the independence of the southern region of Yemen and a return to the pre-unification PDRY. Lastly, the Houthis control approximately 28% of Yemeni territory and advocate for a unitary Yemen administered by a central confessional government operating from Sana'a (International Crisis Group, 2020). Indeed, the domestic actors' position in

Yemen is on different grounds not only over the power-sharing arrangement that could be negotiated, but more radically on the type of country that is being negotiated over. Such incompatible projects of statehood have made the framing of a power-sharing solution to the protracted conflict difficult, if not sheer impossible. No actor has yet shown or detained the necessary legitimacy and coercive power to impose a post-conflict vision for any form of institutional settlement, even less so when discussing power-sharing. But what adds to the complexity is that not only the parties in question have divergent visions on a post-conflict Yemen; these visions are often in contradiction with each other. Whilst the STC and the formal government would be in favour of some forms of autonomy and/or decentralisation – at different degrees, the Houthis reject any kind of arrangement that might hinder the authority of a centralised theocratic government. Domestic politics in Yemen is fractured and decentralised in a multipolar landscape, unlike Syria where HTS heads the central government, although controls about 30% of the territory. Yemen's group divide falls mainly on religious lines, with followers of Shia Zaidism in the northern highlands, and Sunnis being in the majority in the rest of the country (Baron, 2015). There is no single actor in Yemen that is recognised as having political legitimacy over the whole territory, a number of local leaders administer small territories, and the political arena is so fragmented that it is unlikely to have one strong domestic actor unilaterally pushing for a power-sharing solution (Salisbury, 2017).

In both countries, Arena 1 demonstrates a fundamental difficulty of securing convergence among domestic actors on power-sharing. Conflicting visions of statehood, authoritarian past, and deep mistrust contribute to the position of the actors to resist any form of inclusive accommodation. In neither case is there significant pressure from domestic actors to support a power-sharing agreement.

3.2 Arena 2: International Actors

Power-sharing is often introduced during peace negotiations by international actors, whether states or international organisations (Sisk, 1996; Keil et al., 2024b; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2018). Oftentimes, the same external actors that supported the one or another faction in the conflict are the ones whose agreement is needed to solve the conflict (Hellmüller & Salaymeh, 2025). In Syria, Iran, Russia and Türkiye are

actors that intervened militarily in the conflict, and are also those that presented themselves as guarantors for the de-escalation of violence and a peaceful resolution with the Astana process. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia, UAE and the US tried to forge deals to end the war, although Iran's backing of the Houthi forces have complicated the process. In fact, not all actors that participate in the peace process share the same interests nor views about reaching a power-sharing agreement. Hellmüller and Salaymeh (2025:6) define peace processes as a political marketplace, in which peacemaking dynamics are marked by «weak institutionalism and bargaining around allegiances». They explain the trend in contemporary international mediation is to prefer bilateral over multilateral approaches, with the focus being less value-based and on the underlying causes of conflicts but more about securing political gains and influence in a regional area (ibid.). Short-term solutions are preferred rather than long-term institution-building efforts by pursuing a «power-peace», shaped by geopolitical and national interests of the international actors (Beaujouan, 2024). Syria and Yemen are two examples in which parallel peace processes were initiated by external actors to pursue their own interests and priorities, with the role of the UN being limited to a host or facilitator of short-term arrangements. In such contexts, power-sharing is not necessarily prioritised compared to short-term arrangements in favour of a cessation of violence and a post-conflict order in which societies remain fragmented (Abboud, 2021). Scholars argue for an increasing popularity of a form of authoritarian or illiberal conflict management, relying on state coercion by external actors rather than negotiations (Lewis et al., 2018; Keen, 2021; Abboud, 2021; Costantini & Santini, 2022). Beaujouan (2024:3) interprets the fragmentation of peace in Syria as a symptom of «a changing world order and fading liberal peace paradigm». The rise of new regional powers and multipolarity fragments the peace processes and practices, in a way that «while liberal peace promotes an ideal of long-term conflict termination, non-traditional mediators foster short-term conflict stabilisation and endurance of authoritarian regimes» (Beaujouan, 2024: 4). However, whether shared or not, the perspectives of international actors matter in power-sharing negotiations and have a substantial impact over their result (Keil et al., 2024b). This section will focus on the horizontal relationships between the external actors involved in the conflict in Syria and Yemen, and their perspectives over any power-sharing arrangement for the two countries.

3.2.1 Syria

In Syria, the UN initially played a role in framing negotiations, however it became clear that international and regional actors that were backing parties in the conflict were exploiting peace negotiations to advance their own interests (Keil et al., 2024b). Russia and Iran were the major sponsors of the Assad regime, especially after the Russian military intervention in 2015, and Iranian and Hezbollah troops intervening against the opposition of the regime in 2011 and 2012, when the regime was close to falling. Türkiye supported at first the Free Syrian Army (later Syrian National Army) and the opposition forces in Idlib, whilst mainly interested at pursuing its own security agenda in the north and northeast of the country against the US-backed Kurdish SDF and PYD (Hinnebusch & Saouli, 2020). The UN had consistently pursued a power-sharing agenda for peace on the framework set by the Geneva Communiqué (UN, 2012), although no other actor endorsed such a solution, for the main reason that they were satisfied with the status quo and the equilibrium of power (Keil et al., 2024b). Türkiye could control the Kurdish territories and prevent their violent uprisals, the opposition forces could take advantage of Turkish investments, the PYD were administrating almost autonomously the Kurdish territories within the AANES, Russia and Iran had established their influence in the Levant and the US lost ground after American troops started withdrawing from the territory, although never fully leaving Syria (Schmitt, 2025). However, the takeover of HTS have shuffled the positions of international actors. Russia has lost its leverage on the territory, partly due to its current military engagement in the war in Ukraine, and the same is true for Iran, engaged in a military support of its affiliated militias such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. Israel has emerged as a new actor in the internationalised Syrian conflict, by militarily seizing the area East of the Golan Heights, entering in the Syrian territory and destroying about 80% of Syrian military and strategic infrastructures (Sabbour, 2025). Türkiye came out as the primary regional winner of the HTS uprising, however its role in the prospective institutional framework of the future Syrian government remains uncertain. Ankara sees the stabilisation of Syria as essential and has stated the importance of ethnic and religious inclusivity (Adar et al., 2025). However, it is unlikely that Turkish President Erdoğan would endorse a model of loose federalism in Syria, or even any form of governance that would grant territorial or cultural autonomy to the

Kurdish region (Aydıntaşbaş, 2025). The ceasefire reached in March between Türkiye and the PKK suggests a potential easing of its grip over northeastern Syria. Despite being born an offshoot of PKK, it was not clear at first if the SDF would disarm and integrate into the Syrian armed forces (Michaelson & Ali, 2025). However, an agreement signed in March 2025 between Damascus and SDF foresees the integration of the latter into the Syrian army and the inclusion of SDF elites into Syrian state institutions (al-Ahmed, 2025). During Assad's regime, the lack of convergence in Arena 2 halted the negotiations over a power-sharing agreement, as it was hard to convince key international actors on power-sharing when they could not agree on Assad's legitimacy (Keil et al., 2024b). With the ousting of the former regime and the progressive international recognition of the current interim government, the central question persists over which international actor will step up in supporting an inclusive transitional process.

3.2.2 Yemen

Similarly to Syria, the international sphere in Yemen has been fractured, though on different lines. Saudi Arabia has long supported the Hadi government, treating political stability of Yemen as a matter of domestic security (International Crisis Group, 2020). While Riyadh focused on marginalising the Houthis in the north – driven by the concern that Iran would establish a proxy presence in Yemen – the United Arab Emirates prioritised an anti-Islamist agenda, fostering alliances with the separatist forces and the STC in the south. This divergence complicated the adherence of the two regional leaders over the contours of a post-conflict Yemen, however, both parties agreed on the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement for the establishment of a federalised state (Riyadh Agreement, 2019). Saudi Arabia's position on what constitutes an acceptable political settlement remains crucial. Whereas maintaining its support for a unified Yemen, Riyadh has acknowledged that a decentralized federal system represents a desirable long-term solution for the conflict and has recognised the necessity to engage in direct negotiations with the Houthis (International Crisis Group, 2020). The UAE, although at first joined the Saudi coalition with the main interest of conducting a counterterrorism campaign against AQAP and the Houthi forces, shifted its support to side with more aligned parties – the STC – given the affiliation of the Hadi government

with al-Islah, tied with the Muslim Brotherhood (Yaghi, 2022). Since the Stockholm Agreement, the UAE stepped out of the conflict and, although maintaining its local affiliates, it has reduced the military engagement and expressed in support of the Riyadh Agreement (ibid.). The third crucial regional actor in the Yemeni conflict is Iran, cooperating with the Houthis in light of their interest in weakening Saudi Arabia and bolster its influence in building the Axis of Resistance (al-Hamdani & Lackner, 2020b), and therefore focused on deepening its influence without particularly pushing for a political settlement of the conflict – except for the establishment of Houthi leadership. Since March 2025, the US has launched an airstrike campaign targeting Houthi positions and capabilities in response to the Houthis' attacks on Red Sea shipping (Chughtai & Hussein, 2025). Israeli forces have also conducted airstrikes against the Houthis in the past, responding to the repeated Houthis attacks targeting Israel during the latter's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Their intervention has contributed to a state of paralysis rather than incentivising political compromise, effectively dismissing any dialogue on power-sharing arrangements. As was the case in Syria during the Assad's regime, the international sphere appears to adhere to the current status quo and power balances in Yemen, remaining far from wanting to leverage its domestic clients to push for a power-sharing or any other political settlement.

3.3 Arena 3: Vertical Linkages

The engagement of international actors in peace negotiations is related to the kind of relationship they have with domestic actors. The prospects of reaching a power-sharing agreement are highly dependent on the influence that global or regional powers exert on parties to the conflict, and vice versa. This kind of vertical dynamic has become increasingly significant due to the rise of new wars, characterised by asymmetry as well as dependency between state or non-state actors and their external patrons (Kaldor, 2012). Increasingly, international actors provide military, financial, and diplomatic support to parties in conflicts to align their actions with their interests, thus shaping the direction of the conflict as well as its resolution. In their research, Keil, McCulloch, Aboultaif et al. (2024) have demonstrated how power-sharing emerges both from domestic input and from international actors' endorsement of such a solution. In fact, international actors can leverage the vertical relationship to bring domestic actors

to an agreement or even impose a solution on them (Keil et al., 2024b). However, leaving conflict management solely dependent on external intervention is likely to result in either short-term arrangements or solutions that require constant third-party involvement (Beardsley, 2008: 723). The three-arena model recognises that power-sharing becomes a sustainable solution when the three arenas converge: when domestic actors recognise the benefits of a power-sharing arrangement, when the solution is supported by international actors, and when those international actors can influence the former to be willing to compromise and adopt a solution. External actors are therefore key to overcoming the security dilemma that accompanies peace and ceasefire negotiations (Keil et al., 2024b)

3.3.1 Syria

Peace progress in Syria has been highly dependent on external leverage, with Russia intermediating with the regime, Türkiye and regional actors bringing the opposition parties to the negotiation table (Lundgren, 2016). The US worked closely with Kurdish groups and the PYD, while Turkey and Saudi Arabia gave their support to the opposition groups, and Iran and Russia sided with the Assad regime. From the negotiation processes, it was clear that international dynamics favoured the status quo rather than a political solution (Keil et al., 2024b). The unwillingness of Russia and Iran to agree to a peaceful settlement influenced the Assad regime and hindered progress toward a resolution of the conflict. Russia's military intervention in 2015 in support of the regime further bolstered the latter's stance, which, as previously discussed, had little interest in pursuing any form of power-sharing, perceiving itself to be in a position of strength. Consequently, its participation in any negotiation forum was driven primarily by pressure from Moscow. Similarly, Türkiye would halt any settlement that allowed autonomy for the Kurdish region, thus constraining the opposition from accepting any autonomy arrangement with them. Furthermore, the absence of a unified stance among international actors, as outlined in the previous section, resulted in a lack of substantive pressure on domestic parties to pursue a political settlement. Instead, local factions internalised the mindset of their respective international patrons, thereby reinforcing exclusionary patterns that hindered efforts to engage in negotiations or dialogues toward a power-sharing system.

3.3.2 Yemen

Saudi Arabia has been a key actor and supporter of the Hadi government, which later evolved into the Presidential Leadership Council. However, the emergence of local leaders and identity groups with state-like administrative powers has progressively weakened Riyadh's leverage over domestic politics (Mansour & Salisbury, 2019). An example is the STC, whose strategic alignment with the UAE has exacerbated the fragmentation of the anti-Houthi coalition (International Crisis Group, 2020). Emirati leaders were, in fact, reluctant to support the internationally recognised government due to its affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood (Transfeld, 2022). The Houthi forces, on the other hand, maintain a high degree of agency in their actions and decision-making. Although they benefited — and are still benefiting — from material support and endorsement by Tehran, the Houthi-Iran relationship is grounded in common goals but differing ideologies, which allows the Houthis to maintain a degree of autonomy, and Iran to pursue a military project to weaken its regional rival without excessive economic investment (Juneau, 2024). More than an Iranian proxy, the Houthi forces are recognised as partners to Iran, which, in turn, cannot directly control the Houthis' behaviour (al-Hamdani & Lackner, 2020a). What is agreed on is that if peace is to be made, the Houthis must be included in peace negotiations and in power positions as well. As one commentator puts it, «peace is made with enemies, not friends» (Benomar, 2022b). The Yemeni civil war has never been a conflict between just two factions; thus, any external attempts to end the conflict should leverage all domestic actors who have a stake in Yemen's future – including Southern separatists, Houthis, and al-Islah. However, none of the international actors are currently pushing for a power-sharing agreement, and although a ceasefire has been reached between the Houthis and the US and its Western allies over Houthi attacks in the Red Sea (Beaumont, 2025), no discussion over a political negotiation has yet taken place.

In Syria and Yemen, arena dynamics have shaped the negotiation processes and diminished the incentives for reaching a compromised solution. In both countries, Arena 3 has had several implications for the adoptability of a power-sharing system. Firstly, patron-client relationships create veto points, i.e., international actors may obstruct reaching an agreement if the compromise conflicts with their broader regional agenda. Secondly, domestic actors are less inclined to compromise if they are militarily and

financially supported by external actors. Therefore, in both Syria and Yemen, Arena 3 relationships have contributed to the emergence of a process in which external actors delegate and manage conflict through local allies, rather than seeking to solve it (Lewis et al., 2018). This has created a structure in which a continued conflict is preferred and perceived as serving more strategic interests than a negotiated peace. These challenges will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

CH4. Challenges for Power-Sharing in Syria and Yemen

To understand the adoptability of power-sharing arrangements in Syria and Yemen, Chapter 2 focused on analysing the context and the evolution of the peace processes in the two countries, in order to examine how power-sharing intersects with other post-conflict necessities, such as the security dimension and the distribution of resources (Caspersen, 2017). Chapter 3 explored how the alignment – or misalignment – of domestic and international actors has affected the adoptability of power-sharing solutions in Syria and Yemen, building on the three-arena model. This chapter makes the case that power-sharing should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by the preferences and interactions of critical actors (Keil & McCulloch, 2021; McCulloch & McEvoy, 2020). The previous chapter has examined how domestic actors (Arena 1) and international actors (Arena 2) were orienting themselves around a power-sharing system for Syria and Yemen. This chapter proceeds in three sections. The first section examines the lack of convergence of all the three arenas in the Syrian and Yemeni cases, identifying the factors that hindered domestic and international consensus. The second section addresses the present-day developments in the two countries, considering whether recent shifts in actor alignments and international interests have re-opened opportunities for a power-sharing system. Lastly, the final section considers the core challenges behind the implementation of a power-sharing system, with particular attention to the *adaptability* and *sustainability* of any agreement. These two dimensions are essential to ensure that a power-sharing system works, especially in post-conflict environments. By analysing the current political landscapes of Syria and Yemen, this chapter tries to provide for an explanation on how a power-sharing agreement would succeed or fail in the two countries. The chapter concludes by arguing that adoptability should be seen in light of adaptability and sustainability, and only when the three criteria are addressed together can power-sharing serve as a foundation for lasting peace.

Despite the different trajectories and roots of the conflicts, the two cases share a persistent absence of convergence across all three arenas. In Syria, the dominance of the regime and the obstruction by great powers have impeded domestic willingness to compromise and reinforced exclusionary politics. If one party can assert dominance over the others, a power-sharing compromise is more likely to be seen as a viable

solution to ensure stable peace. However, the Syrian example illustrates that when authoritarian regimes are backed by international support, they can resist indefinitely. International actors thus exert enormous leverage over the adoptability of a power-sharing solution. In Yemen, political fragmentation and the decentralisation of conflict into regional rivalries have shown how power-sharing adoptability can reach a deadlock in the absence of a hegemon power. Actor dynamics are central to explaining how power-sharing is likely to be attractive or strategically viable, more so than the negotiation agenda or the substantive institutional proposals. The three-arena model provides valuable insights in this regard, understanding power-sharing not solely as a form of constitutional design of executive powers, but as a negotiated process that requires the alignment of domestic actors and the willingness of international actors not only to sustain such an agreement but also to use their leverage to promote a solution to the protracted conflict and influence domestic actors toward such an agreement. Only when these sectors converge can the adoptability of power-sharing take place.

4.2 Convergence: what has gone wrong?

Power-sharing as a tool for conflict resolution has garnered significant international attention, as discussed in Chapter 1. The growing internationalisation of post–Cold War peace settlements—especially in the context of civil wars—has led to the emergence of power-sharing as a key component in negotiated agreements (McCulloch & McEvoy, 2021; Caspersen, 2017). Countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Iraq, and Lebanon have all integrated various forms of power-sharing to mitigate intergroup grievances and foster inclusive governance (Keil et al., 2024b). Most contemporary cases of power-sharing emerge as a result of post-conflict negotiations—that is to say, we find modern forms of power-sharing in states where different groups were in conflict with one another, and a negotiated solution was perceived as necessary to overcome a military stalemate or to avoid a wider escalation of the conflict, with further substantial deaths and losses (Sisk, 1996; Cochrane et al., 2018; Keil et al., 2024b).

Voluntariness is an essential feature for power-sharing to function effectively. As Matthijs Bogaards (1998) found, the key condition essential for any power-sharing solution to succeed is the voluntary nature of elite consensus, whose behaviour is more

decisive than contextual and structural variables (Boogards, 1998; Keil et al., 2024b). However, the latest cases of power-sharing reveal a shift from being voluntary in nature to imposition or pressure by external actors (Keil et al., 2024b). Cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Burundi have all experienced either an external imposition of power-sharing, or a strong interference of international actors in promoting its adoption (Keil et al., 2024b; Kerr, 2005; McEvoy, 2015). However, the momentum for peace agreements in the post-Cold War period has begun to decline (Caspersen, 2017). Notably, fewer and fewer comprehensive peace agreements are being adopted to resolve contemporary conflicts (Keil et al., 2024a; Pettersson et al., 2019), and the focus of those agreements often prioritizes a ceasefire and the cessation of violence over post-conflict institution-building. The reason behind this decline is explained by some authors as stemming from the shifting nature of war and the new logic of violence (Kaldor, 2012), in which conflicting actors and/or their international patrons have little or no interests in ending the conflict. The academic literature refers to the rise of *illiberal peace-making*, driven by the emergence of new actors on the international stage who are stepping away from the multilateral and liberal model of peacebuilding as a transition to democracy. Instead, they promote short-term solutions that envisage little or no future institutional stability for the country, aiming primarily to advance their own interests and enlarge their sphere of influence in the region (Beaujouan, 2024; Hellmüller & Salaymeh, 2025). The motivations for adopting a power-sharing system stem from international pressure, recognition of the worsening of the conflict, or internal input from domestic parties, either out of fear of erosion of the majority position, or of political participation of the minorities (Caspersen, 2017: 71; Cochrane et al., 2018). On the one hand, international adherence to power-sharing as a solution to intragroup and protracted conflict has begun to decline. This is not specifically due to the institution of power-sharing itself, but rather to the changes in conflict resolution approaches and the decrease in number of negotiated settlements (Keil et al., 2024b). On the other hand, domestic acceptance of power-sharing has remained a persistent obstacle in post-conflict scenarios (ibid.).

The analysis of the arenas dimension leads to two important considerations. First, arena dynamics can quickly shift, and Syria stands as a clear example of this. No

more than eight months ago, the dominant narrative was the consolidation of power by the Assad regime and the fragmentation of the opposition forces, which were too scattered and diversified to enforce their demands. Today, the political landscape of Syria has changed, and new space has opened up for a discussion on how to reconstruct a fragmented state without reverting into authoritarianisms. This brings us to the second consideration: the necessity for competing groups to cooperate remains constant. Even when dynamics shift, actors change or new ones enter the scene, the essential challenge remains how to ensure that formerly antagonistic groups can coexist within a single political space. There is no real other alternative to power-sharing: the division of the country is unlikely to gain acceptance from the international community and would threaten the existence of some domestic groups. Another possible outcome could be the imposition of a centralised authoritarian rule, which is not only politically unfeasible but also unacceptable to communities in the post-Arab Spring era. Power-sharing remains the only mechanism that ensures the recognition of a country's political and ethnic diversity while providing a framework for coexistence and cooperation (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). Even though power-sharing is neither easy to agree upon nor to manage, it remains the only alternative to a continuation of the conflict or authoritarian rule. Coming with the correct set of conditions that «allow them to adapt, evolve and incorporate dispute mechanisms that respond to their local context, they represent the most viable approach to political institution building available to deeply divided societies riven by ethnonational or ethnolinguistic cleavages» (Cochrane et al., 2018: 14).

Power-sharing was introduced in both Syria and Yemen by the international community during peace negotiations. In Yemen, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) of 2013, prompted by the Gulf Cooperation Council, introduced a six-region federal model as a compromise to end the Yemeni conflict (Bennett, 2013). However, this model was rejected by the domestic groups and militias, partly due to the perception of the constitution being as externally imposed. The federal solution and the delineation of the regions were drafted by an international committee, including members from the UN and Western diplomats (Benomar, 2021). As a result, both the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Houthi forces rejected the plan, given its limited representation of their interests and insufficient provisions for their autonomy (Williams et al., 2017).

In Syria, power-sharing was included in the Geneva Communiqué enacted in 2012 and in the subsequent UN SC Resolution 2254 (2015). The two initiatives were aimed at introducing a transitional government granted with executive powers and based on a power-sharing system (Hellmüller, 2022). However, none of the conflicting parties committed to the proposal: the opposition initially believed in an imminent regime collapse and as the tide turned in favour of Assad, the regime had fewer incentives to compromise (Hinnebusch, 2019). The Russian military intervention in 2015 allowed the regime to re-gain territories it had previously lost, and the appeal of a power-sharing arrangement diminished (Costantini & Santini, 2022). The Astana process on the other hand, marginalised civilian representation and focused on the military and security aspects of the conflict (Beaujouan, 2024). Consensus on power-sharing as a solution to settle the civil war thus declined in the later years of the conflict, and was viewed mostly as a placeholder during diplomatic talks rather than a real and viable solution on the ground (Keil et al., 2024b). In both cases, domestic elites remained convinced that power-sharing would neither serve their interests nor ensure their dominance in a post-conflict institutional setting.

4.2 Present day: where are we now?

As of 2025, the self-proclaimed president Ahmad al-Sharaa nominated a cabinet of 23 ministers, 4 of whom not affiliated with the HTS forces but coming from the Druze, Alawite, Arab and Christian minorities (Al Jazeera, 2025b), while the rest by HTS affiliates who also hold the most important ministries, such as foreign affairs, defence, justice and the ministry of interior. The distribution of power in the government and the provisional constitution offers some hope for an inclusive governance transition in Syria. However, as previously discussed, the transitional constitution lacks provisions that guarantee the autonomy of some groups or regions (such as the Kurdish-led AANES) and does not sufficiently ensure minority protection, rendering it difficult to establish a power-sharing model that would satisfy all actors (Issaev & Zakharov, 2021). Despite some outreach efforts, such as the consultations with the Druze and Kurdish communities, the concentration of power within al-Sharaa's affiliated circle is raising concerns over inclusivity and legitimacy (Wieland, 2025). Syria is still a patchwork of armed groups, including Assad loyalists, HTS forces, the

Türkiye-backed Syrian National Army, and the Kurdish SDF. Humanitarian needs remain high, as does the need for infrastructure restructuring and investments (OCHA, 2025). Upcoming frameworks for Syria should be based on constitutional guarantees for minority rights, decentralisation and political representation of the minority groups (Wieland, 2025). Secondly, armed groups that detain *de facto* territorial control, such as the Syrian National Army and the remnants of the regime forces, should be included in both militarily and institutionally with Damascus – as occurred with the deal signed between SDF and Al-Sharaa (al-Ahmed, 2025). At Arena 2 level (i.e., the international environment), the support around a power-sharing agreement has shifted. The US, the EU and the UN, historically the key promoters of power-sharing in post-conflict scenarios, have seen their influence wane in Syria. The US has scaled back both its military and diplomatic presence, being occupied with other geopolitical interests and reluctant to engage in a nation-building process. Whilst Washington has pledged to follow the EU in easing sanctions (Al Jazeera, 2025c), such move does not indicate a renewed commitment to a power-sharing agenda. The EU as well has pursued a policy of containment of migration and counterterrorism, rather than addressing post-conflict institution-building. The suspension of EU sanctions in transport, energy, and finance (Council of the EU, 2025) adopted in February 2025 seems to aim less at incentivising political pluralism or any nation-building scope than at paving the way to declare Syria a safe country in order to allow refugees to return to their homeland (Wieland, 2025). However, critics contend that easing sanctions is not enough to help reconstruct the Syrian economy and infrastructures (The Guardian, 2025). The UN, previously endorsing the Geneva process that proposed a power-sharing system for future Syria, was largely sidelined by the other regional actors and by the internal fragmentation of Syrian opposition. Its diminishing role is reflected both in the past failures and in the current developments of the country, with Türkiye and Gulf countries emerging as the main international players pursuing Syrian unity and stability (Wieland, 2025). The international recognition of the HTS, coupled with the initiation of diplomatic talks and growing engagement with the new transitional government by international actors, signals a potential opening for broader political negotiations and possibly a reconfiguration of the distribution of power in the government (Mousavizadeh, 2025; The Guardian, 2024). However, the opportunity for a unified political solution

incorporating a power-sharing deal for Syria is narrowing, and it remains uncertain whether such a framework will be introduced in future negotiation paths. If there is no guarantee of an inclusive government, further instability could create a power vacuum and allow other forces to take the lead, or provide external actors such as Russia or Iran the opportunity to reassert their influence (The Guardian, 2025). A renewed power-sharing deal for Syria would require not only an alignment of domestic consensus, but also a re-engagement of external actors. On the one hand, a mandate for the UN to focus on facilitating a national dialogue including all major stakeholders, and on the other hand, a commitment of some states – as Türkiye, Gulf countries and even Russia – to assume the role as co-guarantors of a future settlement.

If options for a power-sharing deal in Syria have re-opened, Yemen continues to suffer from a fragmented landscape. The formal government remains in exile, Houthi forces control Sanaa and significant parts of the northwest, and the STC continues to pursue secessionist ambitions. Despite peace initiatives and constitution proposals for an inclusive governance, there is still no single authority capable of implementing and advocating for such a framework. The failure of the NDC is particularly instructive, as despite its inclusive participatory framework and the international support it had, it ultimately collapsed under the weight of competing interests and the lack of domestic acceptance (Williams et al., 2017; Benomar, 2021). The inability of the NDC to create and sustain a durable political consensus among domestic elites rendered the framework unsustainable. Two lessons can be drawn from the Yemeni peace process. First, structural reform without the consensus of domestic and political actors is likely to trigger new cleavages rather than resolve existing ones. Second, regional interference can exacerbate the failure of federal or power-sharing proposals. The prospects for a unified state with power-sharing institutions were undermined by the split between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which initially aligned with the former in the support of Hadi but later diverged with the UAE backing the STC. External actors in the conflict still play a role in supporting opposing factions, with Saudi Arabia backing the PLC and Iran providing military and financial assistance to the Houthis (Lackner, 2022). The recent US-Houthis ceasefire marks a significant diplomatic achievement (Beaumont, 2025), which could signal the recognition of the Houthis as a political and territorial actor that should be included in talks around institution-building. However, no sign has

yet come from the American administration or other regional players that suggest the recognition of the Houthis as a party in the deal, however seen as an opportunity to broker a negotiations around a new institutional structure (al-Hamdani & Lackner, 2020b). On the domestic front, however, the inclusion of the STC in the PLC presented a major breakthrough, showing on the one hand the openness of the internationally recognised government to broader inclusion and the willingness of the STC to consider an arrangement that would guarantee some degrees of southern autonomy (Goodridge, 2024). However, the PLC has to engage in direct talks with the Houthis as well, as a compromise will have to come from all sides. The extent to which the potential for a power-sharing arrangement can be harnessed depends largely on convergence in Arena 3. If a new power-sharing deal were to be adopted today, the key challenge would be to isolate external veto players and establish enforcement mechanisms and third-party guarantees to secure the interests of domestic actors.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the crucial question of adoptability of a power-sharing agreement in Syria and Yemen. Drawing from the theoretical foundations on conflict resolution and on the academic literature on power-sharing, this research has examined the conditions under which power-sharing might emerge as a viable solution to protracted conflict, comparing two case studies of Syria and Yemen. The literature on peace agreements has expanded to consider not only the peace processes and their forms, but increasingly the contents of the negotiation and the contexts of its adoption (Caspersen, 2017). Understanding these factors has proven critical to establish whether a power-sharing could be adopted in Syria and Yemen. At its core, this study has argued that while power-sharing has emerged in the literature as a solution to ethno-sectarian conflicts, its practice proves that it remains a delicate solution and vulnerable to spoilers, that often comes in as a compromise rather than the preferred solution.

The starting point of this thesis was the recognition that intrastate conflicts in the post-Cold War period have ended mainly through negotiated settlements instead of unilateral military victories, and that power-sharing has been promoted by international actors as a prominent institutional framework for conflict settlement (Caspersen, 2017; Cochrane et al., 2018; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). However, in recent years there has been a decline of comprehensive power-sharing peace settlements, with Syria and Yemen being two examples. To address this question, this research has sought to assess the conditions that allow power-sharing systems to come into being. In order to do so, the scope of the research was narrowed down to the question of adoptability, rather than questions on the functionality or effectiveness of a power-sharing system. The main concern was not on the institutional design of such arrangements, but whether and how they might be agreed upon in the first place. The central question was: under what conditions is power-sharing adoptable in protracted civil conflicts? Taking as key studies the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the question was split into two sub-questions: what were the key moments of the peace processes that introduced power-sharing as a possible solution and did key actors in the civil war contexts, both domestic and external, come to see power-sharing as a viable solution to the conflicts?

In the following paragraphs, the main findings of this thesis will be examined.

Adoptability is contingent. Whether a power-sharing solution is adoptable or not is a matter of military stalemates, international involvement, elite positions, and broader regional interests. Positions within the three arenas can also quickly change, as demonstrated by the Syrian case. This volatility highlights the need to see adoptability as a dynamic process, shaped by the evolving interests and alignments of the actors involved.

Power-sharing is never the first choice. It does not stem from a commitment to forms of inclusive governance, rather it is often an option taken in cases of military exhaustion and the mutual recognition that no side can win without causing further devastation.

There must be convergence of the three arenas. Domestic actors are the primary gatekeepers of power-sharing and can obstacle its adoption even if those arrangements are promoted by international actors, as demonstrated by the cases of Syria through the Geneva process, and Yemen via the NDC. However, in both countries the leverage of international actors on their domestic proxies remained a critical factor. In conflicts that become highly internationalised, as those in Syria and Yemen, external actors are actively supporting specific parties, thus influencing their negotiation positions and shaping the negotiation process. The alignment across all three arenas, i.e., domestic consensus, international support and strong vertical linkages, is essential for power-sharing to emerge as a viable path to reach peace.

Design matters, but actors may matter more. This study underscores that the agency of actors plays a decisive role, and even the most technically sound and comprehensive arrangements are unlikely to succeed without a consensus among the actors to adopt and implement them. In Yemen, the NDC proposal was technically feasible but was ultimately rejected by the actors; in Syria, the Geneva process failed to gain traction because it was never endorsed by any actor. The two cases illustrates that the adoptability of power-sharing hinges more on the capacity and willingness of the key actors that will later need to collaborate and cooperate.

Limitations of the study and future research

The analysis carried out in this thesis draws upon academic literature and conceptual frameworks developed in the study of power-sharing, complemented by the outcomes of negotiation processes and policy documents One limitation of this study was that it did not address the wider set of issues and grievances amongst the ethnic and sectarian groups of both Syria and Yemen. The multi-arena framework, though providing for an approach that includes regional actors, non-state actors and elite group members, may still overlook on the grassroots dynamics and informal processes and interactions among the groups. Future research would benefit from a concern over the long-term impact of power-sharing and its feasibility rather than desirability.

Part of the challenge during peace negotiations extends beyond the framing of power-sharing arrangements, as a range of other critical issues must be addressed. Important concerns include how security should be managed, disarmament of rebel groups and militias, and the design of political institutions most appropriate for the specific society. The ability of power-sharing to ensure peace, stability and effectiveness is primarily contextual (Keil et al., 2024b). Future research should explore which institutional model fits best the determined society, keeping in mind that although power-sharing may be «the international community's preferred remedy for building peace and democracy after civil war» (Roeder & Rothchild, 2005:5), it is not a uniform model (Caspersen 2017: 87).

In conclusion, power-sharing remains a prominent formula for addressing post-war grievances and promoting political inclusion. Whether or not it is adopted is contingent on contextual factors, political traditions, historical moments, or ideological orientations. Such structural factors are often resistant to change and cannot be modified easily. What can be influenced is the question of adoptability, finding ways to align domestic and international actors to converge around and endorse a power-sharing solution. It is not enough to include power-sharing provisions in the peace agreements; such arrangements must also be perceived as legitimate by the actors responsible for their implementation. Until legitimacy and acceptability are secured, power-sharing remains more a normative aspiration than a practical reality.

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