

Confessionalism (politics)

Confessionalism (Arabic: *مخاصصة طائفية* *muḥāṣṣah ṭāʾifiyah*) is a system of government that is a *de jure* mix of religion and politics. It typically entails distributing political and institutional power proportionally among confessional communities

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Debate

Proponents of confessionalism cite it as an effective way to secure the peaceful co-existence of diverse religious and ethnic communities by empowering each according to its "weight" in the region. However, critics point out that such a system may actually deepen conflict between ethnic groups. They argue that whichever group holds the most political power may use government to favour itself at the expense of other groups, or even to oppress rival groups. Also, as demographics change, the positions and power held by a particular group may no longer appropriately reflect the size of that group.

Debate over confessionalism raises similar issues to those facing consociationalism, of which confessionalism is one kind.

The Levant

The repartition of assembly seats on a confessional base in the Middle East was inaugurated by the Ottoman Empire (e.g. in the Ottoman Parliament) and went on in several post-Ottoman countries with reserved seats for non-Muslim (Christian) minorities (Syria, Jordan, Iraq), or for all religious communities including Muslim subgroups and Christian churches (Lebanon). A similar system prevails in Iran for the Armenian, Assyrian, Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities.

Lebanon

Although it was meant to be a temporary solution "Until such time as the Chamber enacts new electoral laws on a non-confessional basis",^[1] more than eighty years later confessionalism is still the system of government implemented in Lebanon. All posts in government and seats in the legislature are apportioned amongst different religious groups according to a political agreement, as the relative demographic weight of those groups is unknown.^[2] The constitution of 1926, amended after the Taif Agreement of 1990 and the Doha agreement of 2008 specified that there should be 54 Christian deputies and 54 Muslim deputies (in practice there are 64 deputies each).^[3] Within those two groups also seats should be shared according to the demographic weight of each community.^[4]

The Lebanese constitution also guarantee segmental autonomy to 18 recognized communities in the country in domains such as education.^[5] Lebanon also presents other characteristics of confessionalism. Since 2005 Lebanese politics has been polarized around two trans-religious coalition^[6] with the majority never able to govern alone. There is however another section of the constitution that addresses the development of outside parties not represented by popular support.

Netherlands

In the politics of the Netherlands the term "confessionalism" refers to any political ideology based on religion.

Dutch parties usually labelled as confessionalist are the Christian Union and the Reformed Political Party, both exclusively Protestant. Less often seen as confessionalist is the Christian Democratic Appeal which has also several Muslims among its elected officials, and does not make mention of God in their stated core principles^[7] or their 2012 election platform,^[8] only mentioning their Christian roots.

There are also minor Dutch Muslim parties, e.g. the Dutch Muslim Party^[9] that has many common programmatical aims with the Christian Union^[10] and the local (The Hague) party Islam Democrats (*Islam Democraten*).^[11] In January 2008, the creation of an Islamic Democratic Party (*Islamitische Democratische Partij*) was announced, but it appeared after a few days it was a hoax, its programme was actually an adapted copy of the programme of the Protestant fundamentalist Reformed Political Party.^{[9][12][13][14]} The only Muslim parties with political representation in the Netherlands are Islam Democrats and its splinter group Party of Unity, each with one councillor in The Hague municipal council.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

See also

- Multiconfessionalism

References

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