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# POLITICAL PARTIES IN MENA
## An introduction

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### Introduction

How much do political parties matter for governance in MENA? Classic studies on parties, notably those in the structural-functional tradition, agree that they are absolutely crucial to good governance in an age of mass politics; they provide the key link between decision-making elites and citizens, enabling key functions necessary to the health of the political system to be preformed. Parties provide vehicles of elite–mass linkage that allows elites and masses to have some leverage over each other, but the balance of the two can vary considerably. Crucial to allowing the citizenry meaningful participation is the function of *aggregating interests* (Powell, 2007) into a limited number of alternative programs that, in competitive party systems, offer voters a choice and allow them to hold governing elites accountable for their delivery on these in periodic elections. But parties also perform functions – *political mobilisation and socialisation* – that allow elites to establish support in society while in legislatures party discipline provides support for stable government – both crucial to effective governance.

Modernisation theorists were convinced that as politicisation increased, in a fairly linear fashion from the upper classes to the middle classes and so on to mass level, parties not only would become more crucial to the functioning of political systems but they would also develop more complex organisational structures enabling them to perform elite–mass linkage functions, until high levels of inclusion were reached. We now know that in an age of financial globalisation subordinating government policy everywhere to the dictates of neo-liberalism, the ability of parties to perform their historic functions, appear to, varying and arguable degrees, been compromised: they may cease to offer major alternatives, and voters de-align and drop out (Cavatorta, 2010); in parallel, parties inclusionary capacity may decline, and they come close to becoming mere parliamentary factions as they had been when they were first born in the age of liberal upper-class oligarchy (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Kitchelt 2000; Gallagher et al. 2005; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014, Storm 2020). A the same time, there is a rising risk that the particularistic demands of special interests or media demagogues will fill the vacuum left by party decline, resulting in the debilitation of governance and the loss of trust in political systems, as multiple surveys suggest. The apparent results of party decline therefore actually make the point as to how pivotal parties are to good governance.

In regard to MENA there was scepticism even before globalisation as to the role parties played given the prevalence of authoritarian governance in the region. Parties seemed unable to fully perform the functions attributed to them elsewhere for multiple reasons: the dominance of the executive – presidents or kings – and the weakness of parliaments through which parties could try to hold them accountable; the scarcity of multi-party free elections, hence of the party competition needed for them to perform their accountability functions; the formalistic character of many parties, colonised by "traditional" practices, such as personal dominance of party leaders and lack of internal democracy or endemic factionalism based on "shillas" (small groups bound by primordial or personal ties), with party organisations "facades" for the "real" politics of clientelism; and the ability of about a third of the states in the region to do without parties, arguably more than anywhere else in the world. It is indisputable that all this weakens and debilitates the ability of parties to do what is expected of them. Symptomatically, few of the general texts on MENA politics have chapters on parties. But it does not follow that they do not matter.

## Parties in the Middle East and North Africa

### *Why parties matter in MENA*

Reasons for thinking that parties matter in MENA are multiple. First, organisations with a family resemblance to parties exist in two-thirds of Arab states and while their roles may be more marginal than in established democracies, similar *structures* are unlikely to perform wholly dissimilar *functions* in a political system. Second, that their role is intimately connected to real politics can be seen in the fact that they have evolved in parallel to political change in the region, both a reflection of this and affecting it: notably the expansion in politicisation has been accompanied by ideological and organisational development of parties, which, in turn, have been instruments of political mobilisation. Third, few regional polities have been able to do without parties once modernisation has advanced enough to politicise the middle class. They are absent only where exceptional conditions hold: small tribal societies where face to face links between ruler and people, consultative councils and the distribution of social entitlements enabled by large hydrocarbon revenues to small population ratios can substitute for parties. Fourth, even if parties have not been wholly effective in the functions expected of them, their existence has made a difference for who rules and how. The mass independence parties that made colonial rule too expensive, the sectarian parties that made consociational democracy operative in Lebanon and more recently Iraq; the single-party systems that consolidated authoritarian populist republics, and the dominant party systems that were instruments of authoritarian upgrading under post-populist republics; the pluralist party system under monarchical tutelage in Morocco, and the (near) two-party systems that were the pivotal instruments of democratisation in Turkey and more recently Tunisia all testify to the difference they make. This underlines the paradox that while parties are necessary to democratisation, they also appear to be crucial to the establishment, consolidation and resilience of authoritarian republics (Cavatorta and Storm 2018; Storm 2020): being legitimised on the basis of popular sovereignty, it is incumbent on the latter to provide vehicles of ostensible political participation. Yet, even monarchies that enjoy traditional legitimation, as notably in Morocco, are also not able to avoid permitting parties except at prohibitive cost, unless the special conditions noted above hold. Fifth, even to the extent to which parties are weak or ineffective, they matter since this can be seen as a major explanation for MENA's dysfunctional governance – lack of responsiveness to publics – and as such, a factor in their periodic de-stabilisation. The question therefore is not whether parties matter in MENA, but how much, under what conditions and to what effect.

## How do we know how much and how parties matter?

How do we assess, much less measure, the role of parties? Early structural functionalist approaches identified the functions that parties were expected to play such as interest aggregation and political recruitment, structuring political identity and constituting and supporting governments, and the structures and practices that performed these functions (Almond and Powell, 1966). This remains a fruitful approach; thus, we can measure how much parties matter by examining whether they have the structures needed to perform key political functions expected of parties and also whether instead alternative structures in the political system do this, for example, in authoritarian republics, does the military substitute for the party as the main recruitment channel to top elite positions, as in Nasser's Egypt?

Literature on the development of party organisations *over time* notably assessed if they became more elaborate and institutionalised as membership numbers grew, reflective of the expansion of politicisation and inter-party competition for support. Their complexity and institutionalisation are ways of measuring their efficacy at elite–mass linkage at different stages of politicisation; toward this end we might usefully assess membership size and type (notable, cadre or mass parties); degree of centralisation and hierarchy and the capacity to reach beyond the political centre and penetrate the peripheries to mobilise followers; financing modes (mass membership dues or big donors), possession of civil society auxiliary organisations, whether the parliamentary organisation is accountable to mass membership or not; party discipline in parliament versus factionalism. We can also explore the strategies of party elites in seeking to mobilise support, i.e. what mix of ideology/issue/programmatic orientation, patronage or personalistic appeals are made and ask what difference this makes for the performance of party functions (LaPalombara and Weiner 1966; LaPalombara, 1974).

The sociological-oriented literature focused more on state–society relations, asking how party systems reflected societal cleavages emergent as a result of "development crises," including independence struggles, the drive for state bureaucratic penetration of society, and industrialisation, as it gave rise to new classes; and how parties represented the clashing interests of different social forces and contributed to their resolution (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). This has been and can be done for MENA parties, too, notably asking how far they incorporate and represent constituencies in society, reflective of its main lines of societal cleavage (or seeking to bridge these), as countries encounter developmental "crises."

Institutionalist approaches would ask what difference the wider institutional set-up makes for the behaviour and efficacy of parties. Much of the literature in democracies focuses on *electoral rules* and what difference they make for parties, but comparing the impact of different *regime types* would be important in the MENA. Relevant to this, a literature has evolved assessing *party systems*, especially the difference made by the *number* of parties in the system for performance of functions, such as enabling inclusive representation. A central debate relevant to the MENA was how far single-party systems could be inclusive. Conversely multi-party systems have been seen as carrying a risk of ineffective or unstable coalition governments (Huntington, 1968). This debate remains relevant since in the MENA single-party or dominant-party systems have monopolised the political landscape and where they do not exist, the opposite, namely excessive party fragmentation, appears to be the norm; are these systems relatively ineffective at representation as well as at mobilising power compared to two-party systems? Indeed, can it be an accident that it has been the exceptional (near) two-party systems in the MENA that were associated with the exceptional democratic consolidation, namely, in Turkey and Tunisia?

The following sections will briefly explore some of these issues while adumbrating some of the major variations in parties and their roles in MENA.

## How parties develop with modernisation: from notable to mass parties

Parties are arguably more authentic to the extent they reflect the state of society, its cleavages and level of socio-economic development. Parties appear once traditional legitimacy is eroded and constitutions, parliaments and elections are permitted. Once this occurred, emergent elites in MENA adopted a new "political technology"–party ideology and organisation – in order to mobilise support for their agendas (Halpern, 1963). The earliest precursors of political parties appeared in the late Ottoman period when groupings of officers, bureaucrats or professionals formed to press for constitutional rule. In Ottoman Turkey and Iran parties were precipitated by the creation of parliaments where factions of deputies grouped together in "conservative" or "liberal" blocs supporting or opposing the government. In the early Iranian *majlis,* caucuses (maslaks) of royalists and liberals appeared. In the Arab world such proto-parties further developed where nationalist agitation spurred political mobilisation, into large-scale mass independence movements, such as the Egyptian Wafd, the Moroccan Istiqlal, and Tunisia's Destour Party. Their dependence on the clientele networks of notables plus their mobilisation of a socially heterogeneous base around the single issue of independence doomed most of them to fragment after independence when they tended to lose their intellectual activists (which formed opposition parties) and their mass bases, being thereby reduced to rumps of notables.

In the immediate post-independence years in the Arab world these *parties of "notables"* dominated; they were initially the instruments of small groups of wealthy local leaders (*ayan, zuama*), normally great landlords or merchants, whose extended families controlled certain urban quarters or villages. Linked more by personal ties than ideology, they were ephemeral and vulnerable to factionalism. Able to count on the dependents of the notables, such as peasants on their estates or clients in urban quarters, to win elections, notable parties had little need for party cadres or organisation. Classic examples of such parties were the Liberal-Constitutionalists of Egypt, the various royal parties in Morocco and Jordan, and the National and Constitutional blocs in Lebanon.

The main initial opposition to the upper-class notable parties grew as a still-small Westernised middle class emerged. New parties formed, led by intellectuals and professionals, subscribing to liberal or radical ideologies, often organised around a political newspaper. However, they lacked voter-mobilising machines, and could not access the mass voters embedded in the dependencies and clientele networks of the notables. However, these middle-class parties allowed individuals and groups to cooperate on a less asymmetric basis by comparison to the clientele networks of the notables.

This early party development reflected the main emergent cleavage in these societies, the new middle class versus the oligarchy. Politics still remained relatively limited to the upper and middle classes and seldom penetrated rural areas. But the accelerating spread of literacy, and some industrialisation and class formation propelled politicisation and the consequent development of larger-scale parties. The evolution of parties beyond the personal factions of notables took place via development of the party organisation needed to incorporate larger numbers of participants being politicised from ever further down in the stratification system: in the first stage, middle-class-led parties created branches in the provincial towns that were dominated by educated professionals and civil servants. The potential of the region's liberal oligarchies to make a democratic transition was, however, aborted because their party systems were too fragmented or polarised to widen participation and manage peaceful change simultaneously: to a considerable extent the failure of early democratisation was a function of lags in (multi-) party development. This opened the way for the emergence of single-party regimes, "the modern form of authoritarianism," (Huntington, 1968; Perlmutter, 1981) which consolidated

non-democratic regimes across the Arab world. At the same time, however, Turkey embarked on the transition to democracy via its two-party system. These single- and two-party systems would take party development to the next stage, becoming mass parties, with cells in factories and villages that brought in workers and peasants and a permanent staff at the centre. In parallel, as party recruitment widened from the upper class to include activists of middle- and then lower-class origin, the ideologies of parties came to appeal to wider constituencies, promoting more egalitarian and reformist programs, with indeed "socialism" widely embraced, thereby potentially changing the balance of social class power in the region.

## How parties consolidate and sustain authoritarianism: from single-party systems to dominant party rule in the republics and multi-party royalism

Institutional configurations matter, particularly the number of parties and amount of party competition permitted.

### *Single-party systems and Revolution from above*

With the rise of populist-authoritarian republics in the Arab world, parties came to matter for their mass incorporating capacity, hence the stability of regimes. Middle-class political leaders, variously originating in middle-class parties and/or the military, established single-party systems as an indispensable new "political technology" in the launching of "revolutions from above" that mobilised and organised large sectors of the middle and lower classes. Enver Koury (1970) traced the stages in development of such parties, beginning with intellectuals that devise the ideology, to the politicians who seize power, and the organisation builders.that consolidate single-party regimes.

According to Huntington, the single-party system originates in a bifurcation between the revolutionary regime and "traditional" society (or the old oligarchy), its function to both *concentrate* power in the hands of the revolutionary elite (and exclude the oligarchy from power) while *expanding* power by mobilising a mass constituency. The revolutionary struggle substitutes for party competition in keeping the party dynamic and the ruling elite responsive; where there is little such struggle, the single-party tends to be weaker and as conflict with the old oligarchy declines, so does the party's responsiveness to its mass constituency. Indeed, as, at a later stage, the party elite becomes part of a new upper class, the party starts to change from an instrument of revolution into a patronage machine through which clients seek favours and careerists pursue upward mobility (Huntington, 1974). Authoritarian republics that did not develop an effective ruling party proved unstable, such as North Yemen and Iraq from 1958 to 1968. To be sure, party association by itself proved unable to consolidate these states and the resort of leaders to small group solidarity and clientelism as a supplementary political cement inside or parallel to formal institutions tended to curtail political life within ruling parties.

Single parties aspired to be mass parties penetrating the peripheries and organising the masses, but they varied widely in their ability to do so. What Roger Owen (1992) called "rallies and unions" were relatively weak parties established by military leaders from above (such as the Liberation Rally and National Union in Egypt, and the Arab Socialist Unions (ASU) established by military leaders in Egypt, Iraq, Sudan and Libya). In these parties, ideological commitment was unimportant and nominal membership was extended to virtually the entire population except for active opponents of the regime. This made these organisations vulnerable to infiltration by many contradictory vested interests, diluting their mobilisational

capacity (Harik, 1973). Stronger single-party regimes resulted when the party, through a history of grassroots struggle, acquired a cadre of militants and some roots in the population prior to the assumption of power; thereafter party leaders normally adopted a "Leninist" strategy of party building from top down, in which ideological militants recruited from plebeian strata established party cells in villages, factories, and schools, while creating or taking over labour, peasant and youth unions. The ruling party acquired a full time professional apparatus, and a pyramid of congresses – partly elected, partly co-opted – linked base and centre. The party might share power with a charismatic leader and/or the military, but the sign of its "strength" was its greater centrality in the performance of political functions than in the "rally" form of single party. Thus, the party organisation was a major ladder of recruitment into the political elite and its top congress, representing the regime elite assembled, had some role in policy making. The party normally subordinated and supervised the government bureaucracy in the implementation of policy and, at the local level, party militants played a key role in social reforms, notably land reform.

But what would citizens get out of involvement in single parties? This would vary according to the basis of mobilisation. For more ideological parties, the ideology and programme could attract activists, particularly when the party was out of power. Once in power, however, this was invariably mixed with careerism since membership in stronger ruling parties was a channel to elite status, while for many in local constituencies, patronage and privilege were the attraction, and the main one in the weaker less ideological parties (Hinnebusch, 1983). In the populist period when resources were being redistributed downward or expanded by modernisation, ruling parties had some capacity to deliver both policy and patronage. In the post-populist era when this ended, parties' functions shifted.

### *Post-populist limited political liberalisation*

In the next phase of development beginning in the seventies, the region was dominated by post-populist republics or monarchies under which a dominant president or monarch allowed limited scope for political pluralism. Such states were associated with two main types of party system, the "dominant party system" (in which the ruling single party permits small opposition parties) and the "palace-dominated multiparty system."

The dominant party system was an outcome of the liberalisation in the authoritarian republics beginning in the seventies. As the populist consensus that accompanied single-party rule collapsed and rulers began to economically liberalise against the resistance of statist interests while populations threatened by this turned to political Islam, regimes sought to mobilise social forces favourable to liberalisation, find ways to co-opt opposition, and trade limited participation rights for public acceptance of the gradual abandonment of the populist social contract. Their strategy, a limited pluralisation of the party system was, arguably, an adaptation to the ideological pluralisation of the political arena.

Egypt after Nasser is the best case of the dominant party system in the Middle East. As Egypt's Nasserite consensus dissolved, the all-embracing ASU was disbanded in 1976 and some of its fragments or the remnants of pre-revolutionary parties allowed to constitute themselves as "loyal" opposition parties. While the presidency remained the centre of authoritarian power and the ruling party never failed to win a large parliamentary majority, opposition parties were allowed to compete in elections, not for governing power, but for *access* to power (e.g., parliamentary seats). While the government party sought to straddle the centre of the political spectrum, opposition parties flanked it on the left and right. More an appendage of government than an autonomous political force, the ruling party enjoyed little loyalty from its members,

had few activists, hence only a primitive organisation. This reflected its lack of interest in mass mobilisation; if anything, its function was to enforce demobilisation. As such, it had to depend on village headmen and local notables to bring out the vote. An array of opposition political parties seemed to give expression to different interests and values than those of the ruling party. More than personalistic factions, they either revived some pre-Nasser political tradition or were rooted in a major societal or issue cleavage, hence the rough correspondence between their ideologies and their social bases. The representative potential of a dominant party system required opposition parties become "parties of pressure" representing constituencies left outside the ruling coalition in order to pressure the government to adopt parts of their programs. The potential for such a system in Egypt peaked in the most open and competitive elections of 1984 and l987 in which opposition parties won substantial numbers of parliamentary seats although never enough to challenge the majority of the ruling dominant party. While the government majority remained unchallengeable, liberal and Islamist interests emerged as a significant opposition presence in parliament where, however, instead of combining against the government, they first advocated economic and political liberalisation and the second won Islamisation concessions from the secular regime. Moreover, the regime stopped short of allowing (and even reversed) the political freedoms needed to expand party pluralisation to the level of the mass public needed to make the opposition parties effective parties of pressure. In general, thus, the pluralisation of the party system actually reinforced the regime: elections functioned to co-opt and channel political activity that might otherwise have taken a covert, even violent, anti-regime direction into more tame, manageable forms. Additionally, the divisions in the opposition generally allowed the regime to play off secularists against Islamists, left against right (Hinnebusch, 1988; Kassem, 1999).

A second type of limited pluralism was the palace-dominated fragmented party system. The palace pluralism practiced by monarchies in Morocco and, intermittently, in Jordan and Kuwait, allowed multiple party competition arbitrated by a monarchy "above" partisan politics (Lust, 2001). Parties competed for parliamentary seats but if they challenged royal authority – notably to pick and dismiss governments – the king had the option to dissolve parliament, even to close down party politics and assume "personal rule." Monarchic pluralism was most authentic in Morocco where the main parties had programs, organisations and substantial constituencies. The king, however, retained considerable executive powers and party pluralism actually sustained royal power by dividing and forcing parties to compete for his favour. To be played off against the urban-centred opposition parties, there was always a party of the "king's men" recruited from the high bourgeoisie and the traditional rural tribes. Ironically, the main parties fragmented precisely over whether to play the king's game, with the Nationl Union of Progressive Forces (NUPF) splitting from the Istiqlal party over its refusal to play and it itself later eclipsed by breakaway elements that were willing to do so (which formed the Socialist Union of Popular Forces). Under this system, the parties did have a role in providing the ministerial elite and in mediating between the king and people. The king tolerated this limit on royal sovereignty because he found the narrowing of his support under personal rule invited instability (attempted coups), and because limited pluralism actually helped, as Zartman (1988) argued, to consolidate the regime. Their participation in the system not only co-opted the party elite but, because their inclusion required that they moderate the demands of their constituencies, it tended to weaken their societal support to the king's benefit. Yet, parties have regularly demonstrated sufficient electoral support that the king has felt obliged to include them in government or, alternatively, to take the wind out of their sails by co-opting their demands as his own; in this sense they function as "parties of pressure" serving as crucial safety valves by ensuring some responsiveness to interests outside the establishment. The system allows enough

party pluralism to satisfy participatory pressures without challenging royal authority (Cavatorta and Storm 2018; Storm 2020).

In short, the regions' experiments in controlled party pluralism were exercises in "authoritarian uprading" (Heydemann, 2007) that produced hybrid regimes – competitive authoritarianism – that, rather than being a transitional period on the road to democratisation, were a substitute for it.

## How parties can make, break or reverse the transition to democracy

The rare transformation to democracy in Turkey was dependent on the emergence of two relatively equal parties sufficiently close in ideology for each to accept democratic electoral competition over power (Penner Angrist, 2004). Additionally, democratisation depended on the emergence of a mass-incorporating multi-party system and was threatened first by the fragmentation of the party system in the period between the 1970s and the 1990s and currently by its seeming decline into a dominant party system.

### *Mass Competitive Party Systems and Democratisation. The cases of Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt*

In the Middle East's most "advanced" and recognisably "democratic" societies, Turkey and Israel, mass incorporating competitive party systems have played central roles. The alternation in power of ruling and opposition parties is central to the formation and accountability of governments and the party configuration is crucial to their effectiveness. After the Arab Uprising, it looked as if democratic transitions would take place elsewhere, notably Egypt and Tunisia and party development both reflected and helped explain whether this was sustained.

Turkey's transition from a single to a two-party system in the 1950s remains the prototype for democratisation in the region. Each of the two rival parties that emerged on the eve of transition from single-party rule incorporated distinct social constituencies: the formerly ruling Republican Peoples Party (RPP) centred on retired military officers, urban bureaucrats and intellectuals, while the new opposition Democrat Party (DP), led by businessmen and rural notables, appealed to the rural majority. Competitive elections made a difference, for example, in allowing peasant voters to force governmental responsiveness to formerly neglected rural interests. Societal and parliamentary support enabled the majority DP to sustain stable government for a decade (Karpat, 1959).

The two main parties proved remarkably institutionalised, surviving leadership and ideological changes and forced reconstructions during periods of military intervention. The RPP survived the transition to a two-party system, a long period in opposition in the fifties, and a transformation in its leadership to professionals and intellectuals and of its base to urban white- and blue-collar workers, becoming, under Bulent Ecevit, a social democratic party. The Democrat Party, although mutating into several new incarnations, notably the Justice Party (JP), could be said to have survived several leadership changes while still representing the same broad business–rural coalition.

After 1960, the two-party system evolved into a multi-party system, reflective of the deepening mobilisation and polarisation of society, with smaller more radical parties emerging on the left and right and speaking for those dissatisfied by the two main centrist parties. In addition, periodic military interventions that briefly banned and forced parties to reconstitute themselves, weakened the parties. After the 1960 intervention, the Islamic National Salvation party, mobilising imams and religious students as grass roots activists, built an effective

organisation that incorporated a constituency among small businessmen and artisans, becoming the third largest party. The National Action party, an authoritarian nationalist, Pan-Turkist party with some middle-class and youth support exercised disproportionate influence owing to its pivotal role in making up centre-right coalitions in the seventies. In this period, the JP and RPP alternated pluralities but the JP was more successful in forming governing (centre-right) coalitions. After the 1980 military intervention, the party system became increasingly fragmented. The centre-right split into the Motherland party (neo-liberal, Anatolian based) and the True Path party (descendent of the Justice party). The centre-left was divided by rival personalities between the Democrat Left Party of Ecevit, Erdel Inonu's Social Democratic Populist Party, and Deniz Baykal's Republican People's Party. Thus was ushered in another period of weak coalition governments, increasingly discredited in public eyes, which ended in the implosion of all the parties except the Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) (descendent of the Islamic Salvation, later the Refah Party) that decisively won the 2003 elections. Its successful formation of a government, in the face of the Islamophobia of the military, was a test of the power of durable parties.

The Turkish party system had been notoriously weak for decades, producing fragmented parliaments and coalition governments that allowed the military to dominate until the AKP won majorities in several successive elections in the 2000s. The causes of AKP success was its conservative yet democratic version of Islam, combined with neo-liberal policies such as privatisations of state owned enterprises, that appealed to a cross-class constituency, linking the Anatolian capitalist class to the pious provincial middle and lower classes. Economic growth after several economic crises consolidated the party's position as a dominant party within a multi-party system.

The consequence were in one respect positive for democracy: government that could govern and enjoyed popular support, but had, nevertheless to face regularly accountability to the electorate; and the ability of a strong ruling party to marginalise the endemic military intervention in politics. On the other hand, the party leader, Erdogan gradually assumed a majoritarian notion of democracy in which he interpreted electoral mandates as enabling him to curtail opposition criticism, liberties, and press freedoms. Turkey increasingly seemed to slide into electoral authoritarianism in which the ruling party abused its power.

The 2011 Arab uprisings opened the door to unrestricted mass political participation in a number of countries across the region and notably in Tunisia and Egypt where genuine processes of transition to democracy began in earnest following the demise of presidents Ben Ali and Mubarak. Both processes of democratisation followed the path that many other democratising countries had been down and political parties, marginalised under previous authoritarian structures, became the protagonists of the institutional game. Parties that had been legal under the previous regime participated in the construction of the new political system, while previously banned movements were quickly legalised, making the political arena highly competitive. The sudden rise in the number of political parties applying for legal status testifies to the vitality of both societies and the willingness on the part of many citizens to take part in the political life of the country. Parties belonging to many different families emerged, from Islamists to Salafists to socialists, national-modernists and liberals. In fact the whole of the ideological spectrum was represented in addition to a number of newly created personalistic parties. In the Tunisian case, political parties managed to set aside their considerable ideological difference and diverging policy preferences to approve a new constitutional text providing for the new rules of the game by which all parties agreed to abide. In the Egyptian case such consensus was not reached and eventually the political crisis led to the military's intervention and the return of authoritarianism. Political parties therefore played a crucial role in determining

the institutional fate of their respective countries. Although a genuine competitive party system survived only in Tunisia, the participation of large sectors of the population in elections and formal politics more broadly in contexts where parties were supposed to be marginal actors testifies to their relevance (Storm 2017).

As the cases mentioned above demonstrate, during significant political openings in authoritarian regimes, political parties take centre stage. The 2011 revolts brought about the end of a number of authoritarian regimes and very quickly political parties filled the void and began negotiating the new rules of the game. In Tunisia this worked reasonably well and political parties managed to construct a liberal-democratic system, while in other countries parties failed to do so. This has sparked a renewed interest in political parties with a number of studies attempting to understand why Tunisian political parties were able to negotiate a transition while Egyptian, Libyan, and Yemeni ones were not. This meant focusing once more on organisational capacities, ideological tenets and linkages with society, but very often within the theoretical constraints of the paradigms of democratisation and authoritarian resilience.

## Political parties beyond democratisation and authoritarianism

The debate about the singificance of political parties across the Middle East and North Africa has been revived following the Arab revolts. With some notable exceptions (Catusse and Karam, 2010; Hinnebusch, 2017), research on political parties in the Middle East and North Africa has traditionally been rather narrow and intimately linked to the paradigms of democratisation and authoritarianism (Lawson and Ibrahim, 2010; Storm, 2013), with the focus often on Islamist parties. It followed that both paradigms informed much of what we have come to know about Islamist parties, by far the most contentious and problematic parties in the region for scholars, policy-makers and citizens alike. Both before and after the 2011 uprisings we have therefore works examining the history of Islamist parties in search of what it may tell us about their democratic potential or, alternatively, authoritarian tendencies (Wegner, 2011; Wolf, 2017). The same can be said about their ideological tenets (Schwedler, 2006; Schwedler 2011; al-Anani 2012; Kandil, 2015). We have also a number of works looking at their electoral strategies (Hamid, 2011; Pellicer and Wegner, 2014; Masoud, 2014) and their policy proposals (Kienle 2013; Resta 2019), with both sets of studies attemtping to demonstrate how Islamists conceived of governance – whether democratic or authoriatrian. While such studies have certainly contributed to a much greater knoweldge of political parties in the region, analysing them simply though the lenses of democratisation or authoritarian resilience limits the scope of what we can discover about political parties and party systems. First, focusing on the link between democratisation, authoritarianism, and Islamism has led to the negelct of non-Islamist parties such as leftist parties, the fate of formerly single ruling parties in more competititve electoral environments and that of new parties emerging from processes of tentative political liberalisation. Second, there are very few analyses of the interactions among parties beyond the ones looking at the benefits and pitfalls of cross-ideological cooperation. The latter studies do not capture the complexity of interactions because parties are not solely ideological and operate in a much more complex space where other cleavages exist and might be important. Fourth, the near-exclusive focus on Islamism prevents scholars from linking developments in party politics across the Middle East and North Africa to similar developments occurring elsewhere. A recent study (Cavatorta and Storm, 2018) has demonstrated, for instance, that some of the problems affecting political parties in established democracies resemble the difficulties parties experience in the region such as diminishing trust among citizens.

## Moving beyond the traditional literature: the contribution of this book

This book attempts to build on and move beyond the previous literature on parties in MENA surveyed above and, in doing so, to demonstrate their continuing if changing relevance (Willis, 2002). It does so through five broad themes that correspond to different sections (Parts) of the book. Part 1 explores in detail party families, ensuring therefore that Islamist parties are not the only actors under scrutiny. There are important insights to be gained for instance by analysing leftist parties and the reasons behind their lack of appeal despite a context within which the socio-economic demands of wealth redistribution and equality are the overwhleming priority of citizens in the region (Teti et al., 2019). The same can be said about the role former single-parties play and how they have fared in a more competitive environment, albeit an often semi-authoritarian one. The arrival of *salafi* parties, tradtionally confined to Kuwait, has affected the way in which mainstream Islamists operate and have added an extra dimension to the Islamist–secular divide in a number of countries. In addition, personalistic parties have always been present across the region, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, and they have managed to retain a significant role even in democratising settings.

Part 2 focuses on the way in which political parties operate under severe authoritarian constraints and how they might be organising differently from in the past given the considrable socio-economic and political changes that authoritarian Middle Eastern and North African regimes have undergone. This is most clearly illustrated in the increasing relevance of proto-parties in the Gulf, and also the way in which proto-parties' electoral competition is structured in Iran. The Arab uprisings and their aftermath have also underscored the importance of the military as a political actor and it is therefore useful to look at the way in which political parties interact with the regime and with each other in military-dominated regimes. Finally this section examines what it means for parties to operate in places under international tutelage or occupation such as Palestine and Iraq. How do the constraints international powers put in place affect party political dynamics?

Part 3 examines party politics in democratic or quasi-democratic settings. Although only Tunisia has transitioned successfully from authoritarianism to liberal democracy, there are other countries where party politics takes place in a reasonably pluralistic if at times unstable environment. This is the case for Turkey and Isarel, but also for Lebanon and Iraq where consociational arrangements, whether formal or not, prevail.

Part 4 examines the cleavages that characterise party politics in the MENA such as the rural/urban divide or the class one. The section also looks at the engagement in party politics of specific social groups, explaining under which conditions their participation occurs or does not. Although we have some studies for instance looking at the role of women in Islamist parties (Schwedler and Clark, 2003; Dalmasso and Cavatorta, 2014), we know very little about their political engagement more broadly. The same can be said of youth's particpation in formal political parties and the way in which confessional belonging matters. Again we know very little for instance of how Christians mobilise, if at all, through political parties.

Part 5 studies the policy prefereces of political parties. The comparative politics literature on parties has revealed much about the way in which they set forth policy preferences and how they go about ensuring that they are implemented; there are, for instance, countless studies relying on analysts' coding of electoral manifestos to identify where parties stand on a number of different issues. Despite improvements in the collection of electoral data and data on individual attitudes in MENA, there are only a few studies attempting to shed light on how the offer of parties matches voters' attitudes and preferences. Althought clientlism and patronage networks are often seen as crucial to explain how parties operate and voters respond in the

MENA, particularly during elections, some studies have found that there is a rather surprisingly high level of programmatic voting in the Arab world (Wegner and Cavatorta, 2019). This finding should therefore encourage scholars to look at what the policy preferences of different parties and how they are formed. The fifth section explores this in some detail.

In short, the contention of this project is that political parties matter and are worth investigating. Political parties are important in their own right because of the functions they have regardless of the type and nature of the regimes within which they operate and the MENA is no exception. Little has been written on MENA political parties in such a broad comparative perspective, and several of the themes are hitherto under-studied, yet crucial if we are to understand the intricate dynamics of regional politics past and present.

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