Arab ‘Parliamentarisation’ in the Arab Spring context

The normative vs. the practical



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I. Introduction

The analysis to ensue here has a threefold agenda: 1) a critical assessment of Arab democratisation; 2) an examination of the travails of newly-founded 'parliamentarisation', the process by which new parliaments and parliamentary institutionalisation form in the context of the 2011 uprisings. This discussion touches on theoretical questions regarding dilemmas of practical and normative nature; and 3) an empirical note to end the analysis, generating a reflective portrait of parliamentary capacity building in Arab Spring states. The article examines how 'parliamentarisation' is the new game in town, as it were, in fledgling democracies. This discussion is framed by a discussion of the theory of human institution and the tension between theory and practice, and between the normative and the practical. Parliamentary capacity building is a critical issue at a time when the deep state, old and new feuds, centrifugal forces, and a lack of shared values seem to be crippling the body politic in most Arab states. For sustainable democratisation to be consolidated, the set of rules, laws, procedures, and processes must all be democratically legitimate in order to inhibit reverses and breakdowns. Behind this lies the key question in the age of the Arab Spring: whether elections are providing a supporting system that enables a stronger parliamentary culture to emerge.

II. Arab democratisation and the field of knowledge

The Arab uprisings of 2011 represent a 'game changer' in terms of the ontology, epistemology and methodology that underpin the study of good governance in the Arab Middle East (AME). The whole paradigm of 'democratic transition' in this historical moment calls for interrogation, if not a 'revolutionising' of the way it is narrated, written and spoken about academically. This goes to the heart of what I have elsewhere called the sphere of 'democratic knowledge.'[1] Ontologically, discussing what 'democratisation' is (whatever that should mean today) and how to exist should caution against the excesses of praising Eurocentric templates and standards, which are under critical scrutiny in the West. Epistemologically, never before has the need for normativisation of democracy required local input, i.e. tapping into the local repertoire of indigenous ideas and practices. Methodologically, whatever permeability Orientalism[2] and its ideational traces of the 'civilising' zeal with its attendant processes (colonisation, nationalism, globalisation, democratisation) and agents (Colonists, Orientalists, etc.) still hold must be resisted. In this context, the challenge ahead is how to transcend the explanatory tools of both Orientalists and Occidentalists across disciplines that tend to transpose or superimpose knowing from without.

Hence, the enterprise to reframe the problematic of democracy and/or democratisation in the AME is more urgent than ever before. Democracy and democratisation have for the greater part of postcolonial history been sidelined in the 'imagined communities'[3] that nationalist elites (military, traditional, or bourgeois) have formed. The discussion of parliaments – 'parliamentarisation' – as an associate of democratic institution building, is awash with the de-imagining and re-imagining of communities. These are processes spawned by the Arab uprisings that begun in Tunisia in January 2011. Grasping their substance, even tentatively, calls for careful assessment. The handicap of a short-time span compromises a longitudinal reckoning or analysis. This is one caveat to keep in mind.

Moreover, the relationship of the AME with democracy and democratisation (and by implication the 'West') since the advent of European colonialism in the mid-1800s has been fraught with ideational tension.[4] Dialogic interaction is somewhat 'suspended' by epistemological tension, if not rivalry. From the outset, the Arab-Western encounter was not going to be easy. The 'West' (European colonists and much later the US) has arrogated to itself the role of an all-knowing agent in all matters of organising politics. This is particularly true of matters related

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1 Sadiki, *Towards a 'democratic knowledge' Turn? Knowledge production in the age of the Arab Spring*, 2015.

2 Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.

3 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2006.

4 Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 2004.

to the art of government. For Orientalists (formulators of anti-Arab or anti-Muslim constructs) hold the Western experience, especially after the Enlightenment, to be nothing less than an exemplary democratic foundation worthy of emulation by an 'Orient' bereft of civic cultures and practices.[5] They hold this to be the yardstick for measuring the degree of modernity and tradition, transition and stagnation, and democracy and autocracy.

By contrast, Occidentalists (those who formulate anti-Western constructs) mount a defence against this position, noting that the indigenous mind is not a tabula rasa. The conceptual and epistemological ground for organising the political should be local political know-how, history, culture, and religion. Neither line of argument is fully compelling. Perhaps both narratives, being equally 'ethnocentric' and 'Culturalist', tend to distract from the normative crux of democracy as an ethos of pluralism and equality. Going beyond both narratives and their exaggerated sense of 'self-exceptionalism' is vital in order to reframe the parameters of a new line of inquiry on Arab democratisation and, today, of the study anew of Arab parliaments. To this end, the constructs of both narratives produce calls for a brief comparative discussion in order to revisit the postulates of each. This is vital for any serious undertaking to 'problematise' or recast the question of Arab parliaments and democratisation. Thus, contextualisation of Arab democratisation is in order.

III. Contextualising Arab democratisation

Until very recently, democracy had been considered largely irrelevant to the Arab context. 'Democracy' and 'Arab' as a pair often feature as an oxymoron. Michael C. Hudson rejects this 'exceptionalism', the by-product, inter alia, of the genre of Orientalist literature that excludes the AME from the study of democratisation, for instance. An extension of this Orientalist bias is the assumption of incompatibility between Islam and democratic practices. But there are counter-arguments. The prejudicial view against Islam has roots in an adversarial history with Christendom. Knowledge-making and practices in the study of Arab politics are not neutral: They are embedded in the historically biased attitude of Euro-American ideas towards Islam and Arabism. The corollary is that many Western misrepresentations become 'knowledge' of the AME, as Edward Said would put it. Generalisations about Islam and Islamists and their assumed hostility to democracy aside, Islamic and Western democratic values share a number of foundational concepts and values of equality, justice, and good government.[6] The post-1945 democratic model, filtered through American pluralism, defies reproduction in the AME. This is not to argue either that democracy should be 'occidentalised' as exclusively Western or that an Arab democratic model will be sui generis. At least in theory, the common denominator already exists. Islam's concepts of consultation (shūrā) and consensus jostle for recognition as equal to and compatible with democracy's most basic principles of participation and contestation.[7] Islam's principles of equality and justice, claim many Muslim scholars, have analogues in Western democracy.[8]

The intellectual artefacts diffused by transitologists and Euro-American students of good governance do not yield the same resonance in the AME. Once deracinated of their temporal and spatial contexts, they struggle to germinate as intended by their original inventors or 'exporters'. Similarly, a fledgling 'Arab transitology' mimetically engaging with its Western counterpart fails to transfer the democratic knowing and knowledge-making decoupled from time and space. Thus the problematic of discussing Arab democracy and democratisation stumbles from the outset upon fundamentally conceptual and theoretical problems. Democracy and democratisation have tended to resist transition to the Arab setting as much as the AME's political and civil societies and establishments have resisted transiting to democracy and democratisation.

Conceptually and theoretically, Western theoretical frameworks and concepts do not always explain Arab peculiarities. This is despite the wide usage of neologisms such as 'dīmuqrāṭiyyah', 'damaqraṭah', or 'taḥawwul dīmuqrāṭi' (respectively the Arabic terms for 'democracy', 'democratisation', and 'democratic transition'). The nature of the intellectual engagement with this problematic remains wanting in rigour, continuity, cumulative knowing, and in an enriching empirical milieu. The Arab engagement with the problematic cannot mimic its counterpart without a local democratic knowledge of its own to supplement whatever comparative learning can be gleaned from global examples. This local democratic knowing re-

[5] Gellner, *Muslim Societies*, 1989.
[6] Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy*, 2004, 30-42.
[7] Esposito and Piscatori, *Democratization and Islam*, 1991, 430-436.
[8] Abou El-Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, 2004, 21-25.

mains either limited, under-developed, or unsupported by an empirically didactic setting. On the whole, democracy and democratisation are weighed down by superficial electoralism, as shall be explained below, introduced in the contemporary AME no more than thirty years ago in Egypt.[9] The twin ills of conceptual/theoretical borrowing and empirical paucity furnish limited material for enquiry into the problematic of democracy and democratisation in the AME. Furthermore, Orientalist-Occidentalist sparring has continuously shaped and marred the crux of the discussion. This sparring records a longstanding history of mutual exclusion. The vestiges of this mutual exclusion have not facilitated a sober dialogue – or dialogical disputation. This has been at the expense of mutual accommodation and an exchange of learning beneficial for strengthening parliaments and building democratic institutions in the AME.

Analytical paradigms created with special reference to European and North American contexts will no doubt defy transposition to different settings. The democratisation paradigm must be fluid, flexible, and sensitive to linguistic, historical, and cultural factors in the AME. Democratisation ought to be defended and instituted in the AME. However, the danger of homogenising meanings of how parliaments are strengthened and built and how democratisation is institutionalised lies in the attempt to enclose them in a single framework (such as 'third wave') to the point that they cannot speak to a different setting. For such meanings are trapped in a single way of understanding the world. A paradigm that speaks with the singularity of 'truth' requires reassessment of its basic precepts. Attempts by Laurence Whitehead and Thomas Carothers to critically reassess the 'status' not only of 'third wave' democratisation, but also – with their whole paradigmatic edifice of democratisation – provide food for thought for any serious study of how democracy and democratisation fare outside their Western settings.

Thus Whitehead[10] correctly notes that "if 'democracy' is viewed as a contested and to some extent unstable concept, anchored through the invocation of practical knowledge and a deliberative filter or collective deliberation, then democratisation can only come about through a lengthy process of social construction that is bound to be relatively open-ended."

Supplementing this is Carothers' critique:

> "It is time to recognise that the transition paradigm has outlived its usefulness and to look for a better lens…[T]he almost automatic assumption of democracy promoters during the peak years of the third wave that any country moving away from dictatorship was in 'transition to democracy' has often been inaccurate and misleading. Some of those countries have hardly democratized at all. Many have taken on a smattering of democratic features but show few signs of democratizing much further and are certainly not following any predictable democratization script."[11]

Only a form of 'minimalist democratic transition' seemed to be in the offing throughout the AME in the revolutionary period of 2011. This democratic minimalism is for now being 'manufactured' via electoralism and seems to be sufficient enough for the region to be 'slotted' into the so-called global 'march of democracy'. These revolutions nevertheless happened in diverse polities for different reasons and according to various political rules and rationales. Perhaps for the populous and impoverished states electoralism was perhaps calculated to qualify them for the 'affection' of the global donor community – the EU, US, IMF, and World Bank, etc. For countries with petro-dollar largesse, bar Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, which increasingly found itself under a US security umbrella, elections were minimum concessionary mechanisms aimed at managing vulnerability to American patronage and tutelage (democracy promotion). For others, the age of material 'providence' has long passed. Neither state coffers nor the entrenchment of the 'Washington consensus' permit subsidies. Thus the state's distributive function has changed since the early 1990s changed: from a distributor of bread to a distributor of democracy. But this shift in distribution does not mean regulation is 'democratic'. Regulation remained largely coercive – but with some improvement in juridical regulation in some parts of the AME. Also, electoralism was one medium by which EU Arab 'clients' could secure the sponsorship or good will of political benefactors – for instance, France, Germany, and Spain for Arab regimes with Euro-Med associations (e.g. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's Tunisia, and Hosni Mubarak's Egypt).

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[9] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 2009.
[10] Whitehead, *Democratization*, 2002, 30.
[11] Carothers, *The End of the Transition Paradigm*, 2004, 168; 176.

For students of democratic transition, analysing parliamentary institutions and procedures as well as electoral data can be one method of verifying the occurrence of democratisation. The figures and numbers produced by every election in the pre-Arab Spring AME have dazzled researchers. However, elections are still imperfect and new, including in the new Arab Spring geography today, and may be partly cosmetic if not sustained with additional democratising processes in the future. Like all numbers, they did lend themselves to manipulation. The mathematical logic of one plus one equals two in these elections does not 'add up'. Two elections equate in the 'transitology' of gurus of democracy like Samuel Huntington with a certain transcendence of a democratic threshold.[12] Kuwait has had four elections in the past four years. Egypt had more than a dozen between the late 1970s and the January 25 Revolution of 2011. Iraq has had seven since 2003. For now, the only number that comes to mind when adding elections to democracy is cipher (the Arabic word for zero).

Despite being awash in elections, and what I call 'election fetishism,'[13] parliaments have neither strengthened nor weakened executive authority, have not held rulers to account, and nor have they resulted in effective parliamentary oversight. To be precise, the ubiquity of elections has not translated into democratic practice. Indeed, it is apt to talk about 'election fever' in the AME. More than a decade ago, elections were infrequent. Today they take place with regularity. However, in the ten years prior to the political 'tsunami' that engulfed the Arab region, not a year passed without at least half-a-dozen elections. They happened in Arab monarchies and republics, in secular and religious states, in oil-rich and less prosperous countries, and in political realms with and without rigid ideologies. It is against this backdrop that 'parliamentarisation' must be understood. Likewise, the context of the Arab Spring is no less important.

IV. Parliamentarisation: The normative vs. the practical

Parliamentarisation is taken here to be a twofold process. It consists of 1) an institutional component, namely the machinery and the attendant technical know-how that operate as a logistical support system for the facilitation of parliamentary function (quasi 'infrastructure'); and 2) the set of values and legal-rational system (quasi 'superstructure') that is constitutive of the diverse capacities for legislative duties dispensation. Generally, Arab parliaments have – with very few qualified exceptions – neither functioned autonomously nor upgraded their capacity building in ways that could limit executive excesses, hold rulers to account, represent the people, make, revise, and change laws as befits time and space, and align with the 'common will'. The salient feature of most Arab legislative bodies (Majlis Al-Umma, or National Assembly; Majlis Al-Nuwwāb, or Council of Deputies, Majlis Al-Shūrā, or Consultative Council; and Al-Majlis Al-Waṭanī, or the National Assembly, among other appellations) tended to be cosmetic and deferential, and an Arab parliament hits its nadir as a rubber stamp institution. Almost invariably, the pre-2011 revolutions period is littered with examples of such functional ill-disposition towards sound parliamentary performance. In their chequered history as institutions labouring under the duress of authoritarian regimes, Arab parliaments amounted to a necessary 'decorum' to brandish as proof of good governance by omnipotent rulers, national-secularist and traditional, in whose hands the means of all power fell – executive, legislative, and juridical. As a result, coercive power was deployed without the checks of due process and parliamentary oversight. Arab authors documenting the functions of the three powers in Arab systems agree on the blurring of boundaries between the executive and legislative powers.[14]

The irony of course is that pilloried systems such as in Lebanon (with its divided confessional polity) and Kuwait (with its discontinuous legislative life due to a brand of electoral politics noted for "progression and retrogression" resulting from dissolutions of the elected legislature)[15] boast some of the most interrogative and interactive parliaments.[16] The mix of political ideologies, sects, and alliances very often put sessions at a boiling point, erupting into cacophonous and wild scenes and causing ruckuses over all kinds of seemingly perennial disagreements. Both countries' parliaments suffer from ephemeral paralysis. Note the Lebanese parliament's dysfunction of late; a dysfunction that verges on illegality and perhaps unconstitutionality. It acted twice to extend

[12] Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 1991.
[13] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 2009.
[14] Al-Tamawi, *Al-Sulutāt al-Thalātha fī al-Dasātir al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'āṣira wa-fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 1996, 20-67.
[15] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 2009, 108-115.
[16] Al-Maqata', *Al-Istijwāb al-Barlamānī lil-Wuzarā' fī al-Kuwayt*, 2002, 5-19.

the incumbent president's mandate in office: 1) on 31st May 2013, deputies extended his mandate for an additional 17 months; 2) and on 5th November 2014 it did the same, leaving the president in office and unelected until June 2017. Similarly, agreement on when new legislative elections should take place has eluded parliament. The last elections were held on 7th June 2009. What one takes from this is one key observation. Thus far the paucity of writings on Arab legislatures has not favoured a line of historical investigation that captures the oddity that parliamentary atrophy (to which polities descend, as in Kuwait) often results from the exercise of holding ministers accountable and enforcing parliamentary oversight. So many years were written off from the life of Kuwait's National Assembly when Emiri decrees suspended the work of parliament given that exercising parliamentary oversight stood at odds with the political interests and preferences of the ruling Al Sabah family – in the 1960s, in the 1980s, in the 1990s, and more recently. I have elsewhere rehearsed these cycles of democratic "progression and retrogression" with reference to Kuwait, among other Arab countries.[17]

It was this very intent to unleash parliamentary oversight and the questioning of government negligence or ministerial incompetence that set off the widespread 'you stink' protests in the summer of 2015 in Lebanon.[18] Note how these protests changed from a single issue campaign to a campaign enveloping a wider political agenda. Thus the 'you stink' protests in Beirut took a leaf from the book of young rioters in Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Tunisia by demanding not just the resignation of the environment minister for failure to recycle trash. They went further, demanding the resignation of the entire government on grounds of corruption and lack of accountability.[19] Note how 'electoral reforms' occupied a central theme in such protests. One placard from the protests in a photo in the article by Martin Jay reads "you recycled the parliament, now recycle the trash."[20] It is a 'gem' worth a thousand words. It captures public disaffection against the illegal extension of the mandate of parliament without elections – hence the reference to 'recycling'. Two points transpire from the above. The blurring of boundaries when rulers act as a system above the system, such as in Kuwait, dents the legitimacy of the legislature and weakens the dispensation of parliamentary duties. It is a deeply-rooted disequilibrium in most Arab political systems whereby the legislative becomes accountable to the executive.[21] This reverses the 'democratic' pyramid on its head. Applying parliamentary oversight has not necessarily failed in Arab legislatures; it is a capacity that has engendered all kinds of struggles, but not without a huge political price: the suspension of parliament in Kuwait and its near dysfunction in Lebanon.

Thus it is perhaps presumptuous to issue sweeping generalisations that, in its commitment to discharge of the legislative function and to oversight of the executive branch of government, make it sound as if parliamentary capacity is lacking. Rather, the parliamentary function has been tattered by the excesses of either executive power (e.g. Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, and Algeria) or the overwhelming stranglehold over its reins, such as in Kuwait, where a ruling house happens to be the pivot of the entire political system. This applies almost invariably to most other Arab monarchies. This observation calls for a more nuanced evaluation by scholars 'profiling' the standards of parliamentary function in the Arab region.

Indeed, the Eurocentric view that proposes Euro-American history and practice as the standard bearer must not lose sight of the trying conditions under which 'decorum parliaments' operate. Not many would quarrel with the definition of parliament as tasked with measuring up to these standard Euro-American benchmarks: representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable, effective, and engaging with the global community – as versus closed.[22] However, how realistic it is to universalise these as standard reference points? This is where the need to relativise is most imperative. This goes to the heart of the theory of human institution. This harks back to a classic but rather ambiguous division or tension between 'what is' and 'what should be' – i.e. the descriptive versus the normative.

Normativising parliamentary good practice, in terms of institutional strengthening and deepening the aforementioned values, cannot defy the rules of temporality and spatiality. It is an inevitable straightjacket. The normative is itself

[17] Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization*, 2009, 120-125.
[18] Naylor and Haidamous, *Trash crisis sparks clashes over corruption, and dysfunction in Lebanon*, 2016.
[19] Jay, *Speaking to the organisers of Beirut's stink group*, 2015.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Hassan, *Al-Tawāzun bayna al-Sulṭatayn al-Tashrī'yya wa-l-Tanfīdhiyya*, 2006.
[22] Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century*, 2006.

socially constructed, created and incubated if not in specific time and space then definitely in a social world of ideas, culture, language, and political dynamics that inform constitution, institution, and identity. That is, in political terms the distributive looms large and this is what parliaments vie for across boundaries of geography, history, language, and culture: the regulation of distribution of power by an association of ideally representative people who make laws and are concomitantly governed by them. In politics, then, distribution is intrinsic to the vocation of practitioners, parliamentarians included. Harold Laswell's classic conceptualisation of politics in non-esoteric and practical ways exudes a definite sense of distribution: "who gets what, when, and how."[23] In theory, parliament is the ideal channel for regulating the distribution of public benefits and deprivations in any functional polity. Distribution is about representing the diverse differences[24] in the course of distributing power through legal means.

In the same vein, David Easton adds another challenging claim on the theory and practice of politics of relevance to the normative activity of what parliaments are meant to do in a democracy: "the authoritative allocation of values for a society."[25] The operative words here are 'allocation' as in distribution, 'authoritative' as in legally-binding, and 'values', which refer to any material and immaterial 'good' deliverable by government action. This theoretical drive – which touches on the normative side of the political with its implications for the function of distribution, in which parliamentarians should function as legal enforcers – is a red herring, a logical fallacy. Distribution of power is still in its infancy in most Arab polities and parliaments are yet to be tasked with anything akin to distribution. Authoritative government activity that is meant to be governed by lawmakers in parliament in the overseeing of implementation of legislation on the allocation of any kind of value tends to be the exclusive bastion of powerful individuals, parties, or families that cannot be kept in check by parliamentary oversight. Attempts to do so, as in Kuwait, often result in political crisis and/or the closure of legislature.

It is fallacious, however, to argue that there is a single and fixed scale that can be universally used to measure sound parliamentary practice. In the diverse society of nation-states, nations are not equal in terms of development, socio-economic conditions, colonial legacy, capitalist penetration, diffusion of globalising forces, and overall stock of social capital that inform political identity and civic disposition,[26] including affective influences that nurture nepotistic relations and patronage client networks. It is said that people often get the government they deserve. By the same token, people will always get the parliament they deserve – with factors like these without a doubt defining the shape and form of legislatures. Lindberg[27] has reason to believe that even elections may be means to cultivate neo-patrimonial relations. The Arab world is no exception. Vote-buying is commonplace in elections in Egypt and Kuwait.[28] The scale used by the UNDP, which presents a quasi-esoteric understanding that correlates sound parliamentary work with 'good governance,'[29] is difficult to pin down across the board, universally, with precision. Specificity matters. Perhaps only the reasonableness of commitment to legislation, defence, protection, and revision of the communal common good (however it is defined in time and space) presents one ideal that may be commensurable with 'sound' parliamentary practice.

IV.1 Human institution: practical and evaluative issues

This takes us to Kelley's point about the purposes of an institution: figuring out the purposes of a given human institution – in our case parliaments – and evaluating them on the basis of implementing and committing to those purposes.[30] This, Kelley has noted, should blur the boundaries between the descriptive and the normative, presenting social science theorists with a "theoretical predicament"[31] on how to strike a balance within a coherent and "scientific theory of legislation" that bridges the gap between theory and practice: between the descriptive (what is – the practical side of things) and the normative (what should be – evaluative aspects). To resolve

[23] Laswell, *Politics*, 1958.
[24] Sadiki, *The Search for Citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia*, 2002.
[25] Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis*, 1965, 96.
[26] Putnam et al., *Making Democracy Work*, 1994.
[27] Lindberg, *It's our time to 'chop'*, 2003.
[28] Al-Jasser, *Accusations of Vote-Buying Ahead of Kuwait Elections*, 2013.
[29] Johnson and Nakamura, *A concept paper on legislatures and good governance*, 1999.
[30] Kelley, *Theories of legislation and statutory interpretation*, 2009.
[31] Ibid. 121-122.

this predicament, Kelley turns to the methodology of Australian legal scholar and philosopher John Finnis – as outlined in his book *Natural Law and Natural rights*.[32] A human institution or a given legislative process is identifiable by "its practical point or basic objective," according to Finnis.[33] The objective refers here to the sum of "actions, practices, discourse" constructed by those active in that institution. Referring to Finnis, Kelley states the following:

> "Anyone attempting to formulate an adequate scientific theory of human institution must therefore adopt the internal point of view of once concerned to act within that institution, and, using that internal point of view, identify the practical point of that institution."[34]

Thus the predicament is presented, which Finnis defuses based on a two-pronged approach: firstly, "one should identify the focal or central case of the institution"; and secondly, "one should adopt the internal point of view of a practically reasonable person concerned to act within the institution, and hence use basic principles of practical reasoning to test proposed answers to the basic theoretical questions."[35] This one reason specificity matters – context not just 'text', i.e. the 'theory' of what parliaments are supposed to do and how they should perform, which must be of paramount importance in understanding what capacity building should mean in a given Arab country. Theories exported from the 'West to the rest' are not universally applicable. The search for 'one size fits all'-type solutions and theories defy the realities in which parliaments operate. So in resolving the proposed predicament, Kelley, again, relies on Finnis's reasoning that "once one has identified the practical point or basic objective of an institution, the next step in the analysis is necessarily an evaluative question: how well or to what extent does this institution achieve its objective? Thus, any adequate descriptive social science theory will also be normative or evaluative to a certain extent."[36]

Kelley finds value in the utility of Finnis' methodology in developing a theory of legislative process. He believes that this methodology explains how the legislative process may be found to be commensurable with the 'common good', even if this may be generally contested and indeterminate.[37] He refers to Finnis as understanding the common good "from the standpoint of the practically-reasonable-person."[38] Here, the common good "may be understood as the set of conditions that enables or allows each member of the community to participate in the goods he or she chooses."[39] Such 'goods' include desiderata ranging from the pursuit of knowledge to other types of fulfilment: leisure, freedom, security, religion, life, etc.[40] Finnis has three tests of the common good of relevance to the legislative process in theoretical and practical terms: 1) the "practical reasonableness" that each of these values are "good for any and every person"; 2) inclusive in that "it can be participated in by an inexhaustible number of persons in an inexhaustible variety of ways"; and 3) "a set of conditions" that commands communal cooperation whereby "members of the community have reason to collaborate with each other (positively and negatively)" in society, in the pursuit of such good.[41]

In light of Finnis's methodology, as elaborated by Kelley, part of the inquiry into Arab parliaments must be geared towards exploring the internal objectives of legislatives processes. This should address both practical and theoretical issues. Practically, parliamentary know-how must tilt towards obeying local demands within the constraints of time, space, and political exigencies and circumstances. Theoretically, instead of overdoing the application of external scales in measuring parliamentary practice, it is far more useful to devise evaluative methods commensurate with local legislative objectives. The rise of parliamentarisation is an opportunity to think anew and de rigeur to enable more autonomous reification of local know-how and scales. Strategies to reify theories of legislation and parliamentary practice

[32] Ibid. 122.
[33] In Ibid. 122.
[34] Ibid. 122.
[35] Ibid. 122.
[36] Ibid. 122.
[37] Ibid. 123.
[38] Ibid. 124.
[39] Ibid. 124.
[40] Finnis quoted in Ibid. 125.
[41] Finnis in Ibid. 125.

cannot be undertaken in monolithic ways that ignore specificity.

The challenge is to shift emphasis towards grounded theory that derives its learning outcomes from context-specific examples. Local know-how will be inefficient and not equipped to cumulatively upgrade and improve if it does not in the first instance herald a serious and systematic practically-oriented drive with two intertwined aims: firstly, to work towards internal practical objectives as required by the exigencies of time and space. For example, parliament building in Arab Spring states undergoing revolutionary tumult, and torn between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary currents, will require sensitivity in the devising of practical plans that are appropriately tied to meeting local challenges: a constitutive assembly vs. a national assembly or parliament. Under the circumstances of revolution, the 'common good' itself tends to be minimalist and geared towards conflict resolution, bargain politics, and practicality. This partly explains the success of the methodical transition in Tunisia, whose Constituent Assembly, elected in 2011, was tasked with drafting a newconstitution.[42]

The second objective is one of empowerment through participation in the generation of evaluative scales that change power relations of domination and dependence. Parliaments are by nature constructed to reify self-governance, and as 'power houses' they are in a position to do more than the practical side of making laws or oversight.[43] This is where social scientists come in handy, bringing to bear their methodologies in order to give concrete and evidence-based know-how of diverse parliamentary practices, such as in the Arab Spring milieu. Such undertakings facilitate comparisons within and between them as well as opening them to wider exposure. Alternative practices may necessitate cross-cultural fertilisation, dialogue, and exchange. For 'revolution' is not specific to the Middle East and North Africa, nor is 'democratisation', 'parliament strengthening', the 'common good', 'oversight', or 'equality before the law'. The rationale to valorise the local is not in any way intended to close off openness to other possibilities. No one gains by creating rigid compartments of obliquely opposed 'local' and 'external' knowledge practices. But the departure point is always a kind of 'reality check' guided by context-specific parliamentary situations. It is a strategy to restore relevance to diversity and nuance – and to issue a word of caution against adopting monolithic methodologies.

V. Parliamentary evolution and dissolution: The Arab Spring context

Elections are an important democratic institution, but democracy is not merely reducible to periodic electoral exercises. Elections are a positive step in the right direction as can be gleaned from the Arab Spring setting (see Table 1). Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia have collectively held seven parliamentary elections, including two for Constituent Assemblies (Libya 2014; Tunisia 2011) tasked with drafting democratic constitutions. In a three-year time span, Egypt, under the Muslim Brotherhood-led government and the regime that ousted it in July 2013, held two parliamentary elections (2012; 2015). Morocco comes closest to an example of an Arab state that has experienced at first hand the demonstration effect of youth-led Arab Spring protest movements (e.g. 20th February Movement). Moreover, in terms of electoral breakthrough (the parliamentary elections of 2011), the political landscape has become more plural, with the Islamists gaining a foothold (with the King's blessing) for the first time in the country's history. Never before had the region experienced such vigorously frequent polling. It is a political watershed. In theory, such regular frequency in elections should benefit parliament building and strengthening.

Elections do not only invigorate politics with new blood through the recruitment of new representatives into parliament. They also, and more importantly, 'habituate' voters into the art of participatory politics, peaceful contest of power, the ethic of dialogue and consensus building, and the affirmation of civil and political rights to representation and accountability through elected deputies. Hence, one inevitable question is whether the flurry of Arab Spring elections such as in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco deepen democracy through the deepening of a parliamentary culture. In the case of Morocco, there is prima facie evidence to suggest the production of a kind of 'demonstration effect' (see Table 1). Elections and resulting parliaments must not be turned into 'demonstration events' – PR exercises aimed at external consumption. The EU or the US, as major stakeholders in Arab democratisation, must not throw money at parliament-strengthe-

[42] Völkel, *The Surprising Success of the Tunisian Parliament*, 2014.
[43] Salih, *African Parliaments*, 2006.

ning programmes without accounting for the local terms of reference, the type of 'common good' and shared agendas, whatever they may be – such as breaking the political monopolies of dominant ruling parties and ruling houses as well as enabling forms of transitional justice. In particular, weakening the current status quo whereby parliament and parliamentarians seem 'under siege' by narrow short-term goals:

1) Khadamāt: (doing favours to individuals or groups through service provision: documents such as passports, exemption from national service, or securing business deals or employment). Most Arab parliaments experience varying degrees of this mediatory role linking parliamentarians and citizens. There is an 'affective' aspect of this function that reduces the work of the average Arab parliamentary representative to that of an 'instititionalised go-between figure' and in some instance a 'political entrepreneur' – or wāsit. This approximates a 'surrogate' lobbying in settings where Arab political cultures are bereft of 'lobbying' on behalf of narrow interests.

2) Tafwīdh: (a kind of 'delegatory deference' whereby parliaments rubber-stamp ruling cliques' political preferences). This has downsized Arab legislatures to 'decorum parliaments', meaning that instead of rulers delegating power to parliaments, the reverse is what actually happens.

Elections do not translate into robust parliament-strengthening exercises. In 2009 four elections took place: parliamentary elections in Lebanon and Kuwait as well as provincial elections in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqis voted again in early 2010 to choose parliamentary representatives. However, six months later the Iraqis failed to form a government, or more to the point parliament did not facilitate harmony. Nouri Al-Maliki, the then-incumbent and defeated prime minister, and Iyad Allawi, a former prime minister whose coalition won two seats more than Al-Maliki's Shiite bloc, disagreed for eight months on who actually won the elections and who had a 'mandate' to rule. Elections did not generate democratic attitudes or the necessary ethical capacity to share power and accept defeat at the polls.

Yemen's parliamentary elections scheduled for 2010 were delayed until 2011, while Egypt's two-round elections of November 2010 produced the most rigged and, consequently, least representative parliament. The country's formidable Muslim Brotherhood, which won 20 percent of the seats in 2005, did not win a single seat in the first round due to violence and fraudulence, forcing it to withdraw from the second round. Elsewhere on the Mediterranean coast, Algeria's April 2009 presidential elections gave Abdelaziz Bouteflika a third term after the National Assembly removed a constitutional provision in November 2008 that limited tenure to two terms. In October 2009 Tunisians went to the polls to elect a new parliament, and returned Ben Ali to the presidency, institutionalising lifetime tenure in office in pre-Arab Spring Tunisia.

This is why the question ought, again, to be asked about the utility of elections. The AME is not a monolith. The diversity of time and space points to a diverse tapestry of electoral experiences that produce different parliamentary experiences. With a vast political landscape from Egypt to Yemen, the risk of generalising about elections and parliaments in the context of the Arab Spring is real. There are no 'neat constructs' of how to analyse elections and resulting parliament-building efforts in these states, and given the short-term span it is difficult to arrive at any meaningful, generalisable value within the Arab Spring context. After five years of revolutions and counter-revolutions the state of play has yielded no more indeterminacy. Democratic transitions therefore remain historically situated, flexible, contingent, fragmented, nuanced, non-linear, and variable. At this current historical juncture, 'democratic transition' within the Arab Spring geography (as measured by the four states in Table 1) displays election-active polities but not necessarily irreversible transitions, or for that matter stable parliaments that aid in the process of democratic transformation.[44] Parliaments are, like the polities that host them, torn between strong currents of revolution and counter-revolution. What is conspicuous are the contradictory pull and push factors: pushing them away from the old monopolies of power and singular organisation of politics, and towards democratic legitimacy and elected parliaments. Nonetheless, breakdowns in Egypt and Libya (Table 1) have made parliamentary dissolution outweigh evolution, unlike in Tunisia and, to an extent, Morocco.

By stating that dissolution outweighs parliamentary evolution, the idea is not underesti-

[44] Barkan, *Emerging legislatures*, 2004.

mate the political gains of the Arab Spring. The point is to stress that the quality of transformation has not matched the various publics' expectations. Egypt and Libya illustrate the point very well.[45] Both revolutions ousted two strongmen and regimes noted for entrenched 'deep state' apparatuses. They crashed badly, generating spectacular revolutions, especially in Egypt. Expectations matched the revolutionary spectacle, which ousted powerful regimes: radical change and total rupture with the past, which is what a revolution is, in theory. Quwaydar talks about 'irādat al-taghayyur' (the quest for change) in Libya. He captures the country's revolutionary sentiment by explaining the agency invested in the revolutionary moment. Five years later, the elections held in both countries were a mismatch with the sentiment of deep transformation.

V.1 Egypt

In Egypt, two parliamentary elections (not to mention three referenda on the constitution and two presidential elections) were held. It is not an exaggeration to state that there is today electoral fatigue in Egypt. The last parliamentary election of 2015 is a case in point; the voter turnout confirms both disillusionment and fatigue.[46] The electoral committee thereafter introduced a fine, the equivalent of 57 US dollars, to punish non-voters. Thirty-five years of parliament building in Egypt has not prevented dissolution – much less military meddling and coups, as in July 2013. This is why there is an ontological aspect to how parliaments come to exist (and to what end they do so if and when they fail to rise to the occasion when it matters most), inhibiting the usurpation of power by narrow interests acting against elected institutions.

Country	Parliamentary Election	Consolidation	Breakdown	Major trend
Egypt	Dec-Jan 2012	Held	July 2013 coup Dissolution of elected parliament	Rise of Islamists
	Oct-Nov 2015	Held	Secularists' comeback	Voter indifference
Libya	7th July 2012 General National Congress	Held	Dissolved 4th Aug 2014	
	20th February 2014 Constituent Assembly	Held	Violence and discord	Win of Nationalists and Liberals
	25th June 2014 Council of Deputies	Held after delay	2013 election delayed 13th July 2014 Libya Dawn Coup Nov 2014 election results cancelled	Fragmentation: Tobruk-Tripoli rivalry Civil war and UN mediation
Tunisia	23rd Oct 2011	Held	Null	Rise of Islamists Troika alliance: Islamist-Leftist alliance
	26th Oct 2014	Held	Null	Secularists' comeback Islamist-secularist power-sharing
Yemen	27th April 2011	Delayed	Onset of violence	Fragmentation
	February 2014	Delayed	Violence	Civil war and national dialogue
COUNTRY MOST AFFECTED BY ARAB SPRING: DEMONSTRATION EFFECT				
Morocco	25th Nov 2011	Held	Reactionary: response to Arab Spring protests	Rise of Islamists Alliance of King and Islamists
	7th Oct 2016	Held	Islamists confirmed in power	Rise of Islamists

Table: 1 - Arab Spring elections: Parliamentary evolution and dissolution.

[45] Hardy, *Egypt Protests*, 2011; Quwaydar*, Lībyā*, 2011.
[46] Völkel, *Why almost nobody participated in the Egyptian parliamentary elections*, 2015.

Egypt has had bicameral parliamentary system (the People's Assembly, i.e. the lower house; and the Shūrā Council, i.e. the upper house) since the time of Anwar Sadat, who was instrumental in its restoration in the late 1970s. The new constitution of 2014 created a unicameral parliament: the People's Assembly became the House of Representatives, to be composed of 596 MPs, and the Shūrā Council ceased to exist.[47]

Elections have not prevented political sclerosis from ruling in Egypt in the absence of strong parliaments that provide credibility and justification for frequent legislative polls.[48] At the core of the paralysis is the paradoxical blend of the politics of Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, which defines the new system. In Egypt today, the resulting tensions and contradictions are a salient feature of a system defined by atrophy and incompleteness. Egypt's January 25 Revolution, which ousted Mubarak more than five years ago, vies for attention with the language, agents, and claimants of another uprising, the June 30 Rebellion (Tamarrud – or revolution).

On paper, Mubarak and his former National Democratic Party (NDP), dissolved in April 2011, have vacated their positions of power and privilege. In practice, dozens of former NDP deputies have made a comeback to the parliament – as voted in 2015 – and its committees through a quasi-'surrogate' NDP mechanism, the current regime's 'For the Love of Egypt' list. Nearly three years since the 13th July 2013 removal from office of its democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, and the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt is in the throes of multi-layered crises, some of which helped spark the January 25 Revolution – sluggish economic growth, corruption, injustice, marginalisation, authoritarianism, exclusionary politics, and excessive executive power.

Above all else the new makeup of the House of Representatives does not at this historical juncture bode well for institutionalising a strong parliamentary culture. Note that Egypt has had a 150-year history of elected councils. The dissolution of one parliament and the cancellation of the results of an elected legislature dents the credibility of the entire political system. This is in spite of the fact that the new constitution adopted in 2014 grants the House of Representatives, at least in theory according to Articles 101 to 138, powers to endorse ministers appointed by the president, discuss the state budget, and revise laws and policies. In theory, the new powers should weaken presidential excesses, turning Egypt (like Tunisia) into a presidential-parliamentary system.

V.2 Libya

Libya's General National Congress (GNC) was elected in July 2012 to form a Constituent Assembly (CA) tasked with drafting the constitution, and failed in its mission. Later, as Libyan politicians disagreed and dithered, the governing National Transitional Council (NTC) opted for direct election of members of the CA. This indeed took place on 20th February 2014 despite a raging civil war. The elections held in 2012 and the two in 2014, including the June 2014 election of the 200 members of the Council of Deputies, divided rather than united Libyans, and the voter turnout of 18 percent confirmed this. This meant that the resulting institutions amidst a state of civil war were not effective at all and failed to perform the tasks assigned to them, especially in terms of institution building and the completion of constitution drafting. Instead of a stable parliamentary structure, Libyans are ruled by a bifurcated system. The losers of the 2014 elections were the claimants of power rallying around the dissolved and now self-proclaimed GNC (made up mostly of Islamist forces led by Noury Abu Sahmayn of the Muslim Brotherhood, and its ally, Construction Party members), which was voted to steer transition in 2012. On the other side, there is the Council of Deputies elected in 2014 – the polls in which Islamists lost. Both sides have military backing (such as that of retired General Haftar and Central Shield in Tripoli respectively), both local and international, which render the elected institutions, new or dissolved, rather farcical.

Electoral figures both capture the success and the failure of Libya's democratic debut. Out of a general voting population of nearly three million, 1.1 million voters missed registration. This

[47] At 596, the number of representatives is the highest in the country's parliamentary history. Only 120 are elected on party lists. The bulk, which is the 448 deputies, will be elected as independents. This to an extent will weaken the influence of political parties in the new House of Representatives. The president can appoint 28 MPs, and according to Article 102 of the constitution has full discretion to appoint whoever he sees fit amongst public figures to be parliamentarians. One condition is that up to half of the number of MPs chosen by the president should be women.

[48] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, *Legislative Politics in the Arab World*, 1999.

is understandable in a country that was in the throes of a violent war with its ousted regime as well as within itself – a regional and tribal settling of all kinds of disputes. The time given to prepare for the elections was sufficient neither for the purpose of wider inclusiveness nor for the nascent civil and political societies to get organised and publicise their programmes properly, or organise and mobilise for the electoral test properly. The exception is the coalition Mahmoud Jibril was able to put together well before the electoral campaign began, and this to an extent explicates the success of Tahāluf al-Quwāt al-Waṭaniyya (National Alliance Forces), which received the highest share of seats of the 80 allocated to political parties.

Major Parties	Votes	Percentage of Vote	Number of Seats
National Forces Alliance	714,769	48.14%	39
Justice and Construction	152,521	10.27%	17
National Front	60,592	4.08%	3
Union for the Homeland	66,772	4.50%	2
National Centrist Party	59,417	4.00%	2
Wadi Al-Hayah Party	60,566	4.07%	2

Table: 2 - Share of Vote & Seats by Major New Parties or Coalitions in the July 2012 National Congress Elections.

Fluidity characterises the polity and the process mediated by interim laws, institutions and, still to come, the constituent body to be tasked with constitution framing (expected to have sixty members, twenty for each of Libya's three main regions: Barqa or Benghazi (Cyrenaica) in the East, Tripolitania in the west, and Fezzan in the south. Not only does the substantial number of registered voters add to this fluidity, but so does the above average voter participation of 62 percent. This is partly due to the election boycott in Benghazi, estimated at 70 percent in the country's east. Moreover, since the liberation of Tripoli at the hands of the Shabāb or thuwwār (the army of youth staffing the various rebel militias), the country's Touareg have been subjected to indiscriminate violence, not to mention exclusion from all aspects of reorganising political association and participation in Libya. The absence thus far of a coherent and credible transitional justice process to work in tandem with electoral contestation, participation, and institution building has partly marred the relative success of the Libyan elections of July 2012. In particular, the process of political renewal – with its twofold dimension of participation and contestation – has proceeded without heeding the plight of thousands of Touareg families subjected to violence in Dereg, Ghadames, and Misrata, forcing huge numbers to flee to Algeria for fear of reprisals and acts of violence.

The only success to be claimed by the Libyan elections (see Table 2) was the return to participation and contestation at a historic moment of 'civic explosion', reflected in the high number of political parties that took part in the elections. However, the long-term future of these newly-found political formations remains uncertain. This has been a common feature of the elections in the Arab Spring geography: the proliferation of political parties whose share of the total vote is minimal, fragmenting polity. In the case of Libya, the seats contested on the basis of individual representation produced a huge number of independents who owe their seats to tribal and regional patterns of voting, and are rarely tied to the existing partisan clusters such as the National Forces Alliance or the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party (Ḥizb al-'Adāla wa Al-Binā'). Sixteen parties have obtained one seat each; three received two seats each; and third in rank behind Jibril's Alliance (37 seats) and the Justice and Construction (17 seats) comes the National Front with three seats, with the plum job of National Congress Speaker going to its president, Mohammed Al-Migariaf.

The ten-percent quota for women was abandoned in the original electoral plan, and according to results published by the country's electoral observatory and watchdog, the National High Commission for Elections, the newly elected Congress has 33 women. The 16.5-percent seat allocation in favour of women is a plus for the democratic process and promising for a country noted for wide observation of religious orthodoxy. This proves the point that religious observation does not necessarily translate into victory for Islamist parties or for low representation of women in parliament.

V.3 Yemen

Yemen never held the elections scheduled for 27th April 2011, which were intended to 'consummate' its legal-rational 'entry' into the Arab Spring. Nor were they held in parallel with the presidential elections of February 2014. Yemen is one election-less Arab Spring state. Similarly, however, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) mechanism has acted as a surrogate parliament in the absence of an elected National Assembly. Yemen is equally constitution-less. A new constitution was actually drafted and submitted in early 2015 by the constitution-drafting committee for approval by feuding politicians (Saudi- or Iran-backed and funded), voting by referendum and approval, but this has not this far taken place. In the absence of a representative body, the entire decision-making process is lacking in coherence and consensus building, with foreign meddling and the war in Yemen aggravating the situation. For example, all representatives on the so-called National Authority refuse to agree on, much less implement, the outcomes adopted by the NDC.[49] Elections and the approval of the NDC outcomes are delayed indefinitely. The Yemeni miasma is a good example of failed institution building due to local lack of consensus-building capacity as transnational 'sponsors' wrongly pit Sunni against Shiite, thus making decision-makers operate outside the reach of legal-rational institutions of democratic representation as well as traditional institutions of consultation and reconciliation grounded in territorially defined politics.

V.4 Tunisia and Morocco

Tunisia and Morocco (Table 1) seem to be the exception to the rule in the context of the Arab Spring. Both have instituted durable and reproducible electoral processes that have generated thus far stable parliamentary processes. In both, elections and resulting parliaments have led to enhancing the sharing of ideas. Parliaments have evolved into shared forums for synergising experiences and good practices via parliamentary channels, committees, debates, and themes and areas of legislation. In the case of Tunisia, the democratic constitution of 2014 bridged a huge gap between leftists, secularists, and Islamists – mediated by the 'Troika' government. In the same vein, the Moroccan system showed resilience through a kind of skilful 'shock absorption' of Arab Spring reverberations. Like in Egypt and Tunisia, in their first parliamentary elections, Islamists gained visibility and electoral endorsement through legal means (see Table 1). From this perspective, parliaments shifted from rubber-stamping institutions to training grounds for capacity development of parliamentary know-how, including compromise, plurality, equality, and reciprocity. These newly found experiences create an opening for making good use of ethical and practical potentialities that diverse voices and convictions bring into parliament for the purpose of overall capacity building in fledgling democracies.

The second legislative election, of October 2014, was significant, but not for the results it produced. Rather, it indicated that Tunisia's transition had entered a phase of consolidation: deepening parliamentary culture, and building on existing democratic gains and reforms introduced since 2011. The most obvious result in the October 2014 election was the complete change in the landscape of the political parties in parliament and at the level of the state. With 69 seats, the Islamist Nahda Party came second to Nidaa Tounes. Nahda's troika partners, the CPR and Ettakatol, respectively with 3 and 1 seats, had a devastatingly poor showing. The two parties disintegrated due to internal disarray and infighting well before the 2014 election. More importantly, the troika parties suffered a collective defeat: their combined number of seats stands at 73, 12 seats fewer

[49] Baron, *Yemen's 'national dialogue' ends in violence, no election scheduled*, 2014.

than Nidaa Tounes, which won 85 seats. The volatility of power in the 2011-2013 period did not help the troika parties.

Voters punished Nahda and its junior partners for failing to deliver on social justice, for readmitting former regime figures into politics, for the deteriorating security and economy, for its overall poor leadership and political inexperience, and for the rise of religious extremism and violence. The World Bank is of the view that the pre-revolution economic failings in job creation, improving exports, and reducing regional persist. Partly, the strong showing of the troika parties in the 2011 National Constituent Assembly election is attributable to a sympathy vote element, especially in the context of the aftermath of the revolution. What makes the consolidation theme an important one for future studies of Tunisia's democratic transition is the unique opportunity to strengthen parliament, which now has fully elected rather than appointed members. The Islamist Nahda lost in the legislative elections to Nidaa Tounes in October 2014. These outcomes are unique to the Arab region and for the first time there is the twin process of transition-consolidation being played out in Tunisia through free, fair, and democratic elections.

VI. Conclusion

Parliamentarisation is today torn between evolution and dissolution trends as well as between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary currents. Elections seem to have gained in frequency, especially in the Arab Spring geography. In the case of both Tunisia and Morocco, the entry into parliament of Islamists and leftists formerly excluded from power has not only solidified formal channels of governance and power-sharing, but has also multiplied informal structures and forums for reconciling former political foes. In the context of the Arab Spring, reformist undertakings have differed in terms of pace, content, depth, and breadth. Only in Tunisia can one say that there is a clear direction towards democratic consolidation after two legislative elections (2011 and 2014), and to a lesser extent the two rounds of the presidential elections that in December 2014 gave Tunisia its first democratically elected president since its independence from France in 1956, who is today working with a democratically elected parliament under the aegis of a democratic constitution. The scale by which this brand of parliamentarisation ought to be appraised must be realistic and favour local aspirations, whatever they may be.

Understanding processes of parliamentary consolidation and democratisation in the Arab Spring geography requires the benefit of a longer time span as well as middle-ground theories that reconcile the normative and the practical. Political scientists must devise methods and theories of parliamentary capacity building that are sensitive to these new experiences and perhaps the study of local discourses and practices would be one step in the right direction. Comparative studies and analysis of success and failure in parliamentary capacity building based on Arab Spring legislative processes are imperative. As in all social sciences enquiry, our claim to 'truth', however defined, will depend not only on middle-ground theories, but also on the interpretation of context- and case-specific empirical tests.

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