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POLITICAL PARTIES DEVELOPMENT IN ARAB COUNTRIES

The article addresses the concept of political parties and gives a review of the development of political parties in the Arab countries from the moment of emergence in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century of Committee of the Union and Progress. It considers the major stages in development of parties in the Arab countries from this event to the uprisings of the Arab spring of 2011. It also tracks the status of party systems in various Arab countries, paying special attention to the period after the Arab spring. Classification of the Arab political parties on the basis of their ideological orientations and extent of their distribution in the Arab world is investigated. The nature of the ideologies accepted by them and the purposes which these parties set before themselves are distinguished.

Keywords: political parties, Arab countries, Committee of Union and Progress, party's development, ideological orientations, political party system.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in researching and discussing issues of political parties, their role in democratic transition of Arab countries. These parties since their inception have struggled to develop coherent identities, establish an effective supportive network, and build sustainable constituencies. But most of these political parties' experiences have faltered, and many of them failed to achieve the slogans and goals they promised. Since their emergence, Arab political parties have been affected by the change of ideological waves that the world and the Arab region witnessed in successive and historical stages since the beginning of the twentieth century until the present time. This article traces party development over several stages which are: the era of liberal oligarchy, Nationalist revolution, post-Nationalist authoritarianism, and Arab Uprising.

The purpose of this article is to explore the development of political parties in Arab countries since the Ottoman empire until recent Arab Spring 2011. We'll focus on the studies done by some western scientists like M. Duverger, H. Constant, J. Devlin, R. Muirhead, P. Chhibber, and other authors who expressed different approaches to the concept of political parties, their establishment, and studied political parties of the Arab world.

It's well known that political party is a group of people who have the same ideology, or otherwise the same ideas or interests' weather it is political, economic or social interests. They are a defining element of representative democracy¹.

The political party tries to elect its candidates for elections in an attempt to implement the party's agenda by controlling or influencing the government policy and actions. The political party has an organizational structure that gathers its leaders and members, and it has a supportive administrative apparatus through which it always seeks to expand the circle of its supporters among people.

Many approaches have been made for the definition of a party. The main approaches are:

- a group of people sharing the same ideological views. H. Constant
- an organization which acts in the state system. M. Duverger
- an organization that specializes in running candidates in its name in the elections. Harold Laswell
- Anthony Downs: a political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election².
- Giovanni Sartori: any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office³.

¹ Muirhead, R., Rosenblum, N. (2020). The Political Theory of Parties and Partisanship: Catching Up. *Annual Review of Political Science*. <<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041916-020727>>. (2020, July, 11).

² Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 52.

³ Sartori, G. (2005). *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 62.

Political parties are considered to be one of the tools of political development in the modern era. Parties and party systems express the degree of political development in the political system, and political parties have preserved their importance despite the development of civil society institutions, some of which have acquired a prominent position on the external front.

Modern political parties are considered to have emerged around the end of the 18th century, appearing first in Europe and the United States. What distinguishes political parties from factions and interest groups is that political parties use an explicit label to identify their members as having shared electoral and legislative goals¹. The transformation from loose factions into organized modern political parties first occurred in the United Kingdom and in the United States, with the United Kingdom's Conservative Party and the Democratic Party of the United States both frequently called the world's oldest political party.

In Arab countries, the emergence of political parties began since the end of the twentieth century. The development of events in the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the twentieth century until its fall in 1919 after WWI indicates the existence of conditions that contributed to establishing the foundation for the emergence of an Arab cultural, intellectual and political movement. These conditions can be identified as the following: first, the arrival of Committee of Union and Progress -CUP- which has been influenced by Turkish nationalism to political power in 1908 and underwent by the impact of the so-called "Turkification" policies of the Ottoman empire in the Arab provinces. Second, the events of the WWI and its effects on the Arab region.

The CUP gained power after the success of Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Some contemporary Arab commentators like Philip Khoury remarked that the CUP's Turkification of administration directly contradicted its spoken ideology of Ottomanization². The CUP's notion of an Ottomanism was based on Turkish rather than Ottoman nationalism, and on secular state. It denied political representation on a religious-communal basis, denunciation of decentralization, and its inflexible attitude toward the demands and organizational initiative of different races in the empire. Arab deputies played a leading role in the Moderate Liberal Party, established in November 1909. This party constituted itself as a conglomeration of national groupings and as a parliamentary opposition to the CUP. But the moderate liberal party as well as Peoples party, which also included several Arab members, failed to constitute an ideological alternative to the CUP and did not offer a meaningful opposition. The key role that these parties played is construed as an effort by Arabs to assert themselves politically as a national group. There was no ideological basis to this mobilization that would substantiate an Arab political movement.

During Sultan Abdul Hamid II's rule, supporters of the CUP were given new political privileges and positions at the expense of Arab individuals seen as loyal to the Sultan (Khoury, 1983). This fact affected negatively on the power balance between the Arab local notables and the Ottoman center. According to William Miller (1913), the CUP had a "plan of reducing the various races and regions of the empire to one dead level of Turkish uniformity"³.

The manifestations of the disintegration and erosion of the Ottoman empire, the increase in Turkification measures, and the rise of Turkish nationalism tendency in it were motives for Arabs to begin a new political phase. Arab Nationalist activity was significantly increased in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, especially in Syria. Arab activists in the empire started to establish Arab national organizations -such as Al-Ahd party- in order to defend the rights of the Arabs in the empire. Most of these organizations were considered illegal by the Ottoman authorities such as Ottoman Party for Administrative Decentralization in 1913 which aimed to decentralization of power and functions of the Ottoman provincial administration for Arab provinces⁴. Although none of these parties or organization succeeded in spreading their ideas to the wider Arab population before the outbreak of the First World War.

Before the ottoman defeat in WWI 1919, the victories allies of the war– France and Britain– signed a secret agreement in 1916 called Sykes-Picot Agreement. Early in the course of World War I they defined their mutually agreed spheres of influence and control in an eventual partition of the Ottoman Empire⁵.

¹ Chhibber, P., Kollman, K. (2004). *The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States*. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1-6.

² Khoury, P (1983). *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 51-52. [in English].

³ Miller, W (1913). *The Ottoman Empire, 1908-1913*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 495.

⁴ Sorby, K. (2005). Arab Nationalism After the Young Turk Revolution 1908-1914. *Slovak Academy of Sciences, 19, 813, 64*. <doi:https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/031212022_Sorby_Jr.pdf>. (2020, July, 22).

⁵ Berdine, M. (2018). *Redrawing the Middle East: Sir Mark Sykes, Imperialism and the Sykes-Picot Agreement*. London: I.B.Tauris, 70-74.

This agreement contradicted the promises made by Britain to Sharif Hussein to establish an Arab kingdom from Syria to the Arabian Peninsula. The partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after the war led to the domination in the Middle East of Western powers such as Britain and France, and since 1911– of Italy in Libya. All these events contributed to the creation of the modern Arab world.

The collapse of the Ottoman empire and dividing the region into small states led to a proliferation of oligarchic parties in the Arab region. From the period 1920s until mid of 1940s, parties of Notables dominated on the Arab political scene¹. These parties were the instruments of small groups of wealthy local upper-class notables, and they were linked more by personal ties than ideology, which made them ephemeral and vulnerable to factionalism.

These parties were precipitated by the creation of parliaments where deputies grouped together in conservative or liberal blocs supporting or opposing the government without having the ability to carry it accountable. Examples of such parties were the Liberal Constitutionalists of Egypt in 1922, and the Constitutional bloc in Lebanon in 1934.

With the expansion of the middle class in Arab countries, new parties were formed by intellectuals and teachers such as Al-wafd party in Egypt 1919, National bloc in Syria 1928, and Istiqlal party in Morocco 1937. These parties adopted liberal or radical ideologies and they were the main opposition to upper-class notable parties. They were able to influence notables and students, and mobilized large-scale demonstrations armed with nationalist ideology. With the increasing popularity of these parties, they managed to win parliamentary majorities. However, these parties were based around one single issue which was independence of their countries from European occupation. Most of these parties were doomed to fragment after independence as they began to lose their intellectual activists and mass bases. The only exception was Tunisian Neo-Destour party since 1934 which has been renamed to Socialist Destourian party in 1964 and renamed again to Democratic Constitutional Rally in 1988. Its charismatic leadership and exceptional organizational capacity enabled it to make the transition to a ruling single party in Tunis.

The period of the forties to sixties was characterized by the proliferation of Arab nationalist political parties bearing the slogans of nationalism, populism, socialism and Arab unity and they managed to fill the vacuum left by the decline of notable parties. They also managed to develop formal organization with branches in the provincial towns and in different Arab countries². These parties include Arab Socialist Al-Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq, Socialist party of Egypt, the National Democratic party in Iraq, the National Socialist party in Jordan, and Syrian Social Nationalist party. Although there was a wide spread of Socialist parties in Arab countries in the period of 1950's and 1970's, but these parties committed themselves to socialism along the lines of Arab socialism which is known as a political ideology based on the combination of pan-Arabism and socialism (Dawn, 1988). It's not related to the ideology of orthodox Marxism.

Communist parties represented a major force in Arab countries, they emerged and had temporary successes in Syria, Egypt, Sudan, and Iraq. But they were quite vulnerable to ideological factionalism and were harshly repressed by the state³. In Egypt they were banned from running elections until the overthrow of president Hosney Mubarak in 2011 and in Syria since 1972 they were allowed to work only in coalition with the National Progressive Front parties until recent days. The Sudanese Communist Party in Sudan came back to participate in Sudanese politics after the overthrow of president Omar Al-Bashir in 2019. Iraqi Communist Party managed to back to elections after the fall of Saddam Husain in 2003.

The experience of Muslim brotherhood which emerged in Egypt and represented pan-Islamic ideology, showed its ability to widely migrate beyond the borders and spread its ideology in most of Arab countries since 1940s. Despite their success in building a well-organized mass base which attracted people from different social layers, they suffered decades of brutal repression and exclusion in Arab states which made it hard for Islamists to establish a political party at the beginning of the Islamism Ideology spread in Arab region.

Another reason might be considered for not establishing a political party is that Muslim Brotherhood was split on the issue whether to formally take part in parliamentary politics. There was the legacy of founder Hassan al-Banna, who saw multipartyism as a “device which has given legality to the appetites

¹ Dawn, C. (1988). The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 20(1), 67-91. <doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800057512>. (2020, July, 24).

² Kaylani, N. (1972). The Rise of the Syrian Ba'ath, 1940-1958: Political Success, Party Failure. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3(1), 3-23. <doi:http://www.jstor.org/stable/162353>. (2020, August, 13).

³ Feliu, L., Brichs, F. Francesc, S. (2019). Communist parties in the Middle East and North Africa. *Research Gate*. <doi:https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780367134464/chapters/10.4324/9780367134464-1>. (2020, August, 17).

of the rulers and the tyrannies of authority”¹. However, Islamists were not allowed to establish a political party in Arab countries except in Morocco since 1970's, Jordan since the end of 1990's, Lebanon with its sectarian political system, and Iraq since 2013 after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Algeria had some short time experience, were the Islamic Salvation Front which been established in 1989 won the elections of June 1990, but a military coup dismantled the party and banned it two months after the elections which led eventually for 10 years of a civil war.

In the Palestinian territory, the Hamas movement, a branch of Muslim brotherhood, entered for the first time the legislative election in January 2006 and managed to win the elections. In 2007 a Presidential decree abolished the constituency seats with all seats to be elected from a national list. The parties, which did not acknowledge the PLO's right, represented the Palestinian people -specifically Hamas- are prohibited from contesting the election (“Abbas announces amended electoral law”, 2007)². An opinion poll made by Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research³ suggested that a majority of Palestinians supported the change, while Hamas called it illegal. This led to military clashes that began between Hamas and Palestinian National Authority for five days, eventually ended with two governments, one in Gaza ruled by Hamas and the second in the West Bank ruled by the Palestinian National Authority.

In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party which been established in 2011 topped the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections by winning 125 out of 395 seats and is still in power since 2017. Other examples are Islamic Action Front in Jordan, the largest, most powerful, influential and numerous of Jordanian parties in terms of membership. Ennahda Party in Tunis, which came in the lead with 52 seats making it by far the strongest party in the legislature.

Focusing on the after Arab spring period, one can mention that the status of political party system varies from country to country in the Arab region. Countries like Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunis, Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Mauritania and Palestine allow political parties to compete in elections. But in Morocco for example, the government prevents some parties such as the Justice and Charity Group from fully participating. Also, in spite of the fact that Morocco has a multi-party system, the King of Morocco is the one who appoints the post of Prime Minister and other four main government ministers, thereby giving them a political force that allows him to control the state policies.

Lebanon has numerous political parties, and party candidates compete for seats in parliament. But the Lebanese political system relies on the sectarian quota system -Confessionalism- in the distribution of ministerial tasks in the government.

Kuwait had a hybrid political system which is divided between an elected parliament and appointed government. The constitution in Kuwait expressly supports political associations and trade unions, but political parties remain illegal as no law has arisen to define and regulate them.

Syrian constitution in 2012 introduced multi-party system based on the principle of political pluralism. Nevertheless, Syria is still considered as a one-party state, and only candidates and parties approved by the Ba'ath Party are allowed to run for political office, and so far, no Islamic party has been allowed to participate in politics. In Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates all political parties are illegal but candidates are running for seats in the House of Representatives with limited powers.

In several Arab countries, political parties can operate openly and participate in general elections. Although they have limited influence, it indicates a political life that has a degree of competition that is not enough for deliberation. Also, these parties do not have the freedom and fair conditions that allow obtaining a majority for any competitor. Parties that are able to compete, influence and achieve a majority are not allowed to work in politics -case of Freedom and Justice party in Egypt 2013- or they are prevented from obtaining its fair share in the elections.

Conclusion.

Arab political parties were not born in the womb of democracy, nor was democracy in turn was the focus of their interests. Challenges and objectives of these parties' experiences occupied an important place in the literature of the pioneers of the Arab Renaissance who contributed to the advent of the association stage, which in turn represented the embryonic stage of modern Arab political parties. In several Arab countries, there are established political parties that operate openly and participate in general elections.

¹ Mitchell, R. (1993). *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 261.

² Abbas announces amended electoral law (2007). *Xinhua News Agency*.

<http://www.china.org.cn/features/mepp/2007-09/03/content_1222959.htm>. (2020, August, 28).

³ Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No.25. (2007). *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*. <<https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/230>>. (2020, August, 28).

Although they have limited influence, they indicate a political life that has a degree of competition that is not sufficient for deliberation. Influencing and achieving a majority does not allow them to work or prevent from obtaining fair share in the elections.

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