

Comparative study of the electoral systems politics essay



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A democracy cannot exist without elections which represent the will of the people, and elections cannot function without an electoral system that sets fair and transparent rules that govern the structures of elections. The study of electoral systems is a field of research that aims at analyzing the different electoral systems used in the world and how they put democracy into practice by making the different voters of the country represented in the parliament. A voting system can simply be defined as “ the procedures by which we cast votes and elect our public officials,”[1]or “ that part of the electoral law and regulations which determine how parties and candidates are elected to a body as representative.”[2]However, the importance of the electoral system lies in its consequences on the political scene of the country especially when choosing one type of electoral system over another, because electoral systems are, according to Sartori, “ the most speci→ ĩ c manipulative instrument of politics.”[3]

In general there are twelve electoral systems that fall under three categories: majority, proportional representation and mixed systems. First, the voting systems that fall under the majority system are: first past the post, block vote, party block vote, alternative vote, and the two round systems. Second, under the proportional representation lie two systems: list proportional representation (List PR) and single transferable vote (STV). Third, the mixed system includes two systems: mixed member proportional and parallel systems. Finally, three other voting systems cannot be classified into one of the three systems mentioned above, there are: single non-transferable vote (SNTV), limited vote and borda count.[4]“ The main concern [of electoral systems] is [the] balance between decisiveness of

government and representation of various minority views.”[5]And sometimes, if not always, governments have to choose either one of these because of the difficulty of encompassing both those strong government and full representation in one type of electoral system. Regarding my thesis the two electoral systems that are important for my study are: list PR which is used in both Morocco and Algeria and SNTV which is used in Jordan.

According to Samuel Huntington, the world has experienced three waves of democracy, the first one on the eve of the twentieth century until 1926; the second one emerged with the end of World War II until 1962 and the third one started in 1974.[6]The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) seems to be one of the few areas of the world where democratic waves did not arrive, or to be more accurate did not flourish, as there are few countries who are ranked by the Democracy Index of the Economist as either hybrid systems and many as authoritarian regimes. In the MENA region, few countries hold free and fair elections, among them are Morocco where proportional representation is used to elect the members of the parliament, Jordan, where the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system is used and Algeria where proportional representation is used in parliamentary elections. However, in all these three countries the elections were characterized by low turnouts, invalid votes and boycott in addition to producing fragmented governments.

The choice of those three MENA countries has to do with their similarities in terms of geography, culture, religion, language and their relative free and fair elections, according to international observers. On top of that, Having two kingdoms and one republic makes my comparison more interesting with <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-study-of-the-electoral-systems-politics-essay/>

Morocco at the focal point sharing similarity with Jordan in terms of the regime type and with Algeria in terms of the voting system. The objective of my thesis is to test two hypotheses: a) electoral systems in the MENA region are manipulated to produce fragmented governments and b) the geographical concentration of the vote for pro-regime parties in rural areas in contrast to the opposition base in urban areas. My thesis will compare the components of the electoral systems of the three countries and come up with patterns regarding the political party structure, the electoral reforms requested by the political parties and the elections results.

Literature Review

According to Andreas Schedler in his article “ The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections,” electoral law can be used “ to prevent an eventual loss of votes from translating into a loss of power.”[7]The major aim of the manipulation of the electoral system is the containment of its uncertain outcomes, therefore fair and free elections are allowed as long as the results can be predicted or controlled. In his book Rethinking Arab democratization: Elections without Democracy, Larbi Sadiki invented the terms “ electoral fetishism”[8]and “ routinization”[9]to describe the elections in the Middle East because their outcomes do not translate into major changes in society. However, even the manipulation of the voting system is not enough to guarantee an unsurprising outcome from the ballots as exemplified by the elections of 1991 in Algeria and 1989 in Jordan. The two cases of Algeria and Jordan show the autonomy of institutions exemplified by the electoral system that produces results that can either empower or weaken the candidates. So if the election results cannot be controlled they

can at least be maneuvered to prevent a landslide victory of the opposition. Refraining from cancelling the result of elections is explained by the need of the regimes to obtain foreign aid and avoid international criticism. According to the author "electoralism, being the creation of regimes, has become another state resource that the ruling elites use for legitimation purposes within and without." [10] The term electoralism refers here only to one of the three requirements of democracy; therefore having an election is not enough for democracy to emerge. Therefore, the election's main goal is to legitimize the regime and provide a way for the opposition to participate in the political life of the country but of course after guaranteeing its fragmentation. Moreover, according to Lise Storm, a democracy is based on three core elements: holding free and fair elections, respecting civil liberties and strengthening the power of the elected government to govern. The aim of my study deals with the first core of the democratic principles, the free and fair elections which are instituted by the electoral law. Lise Storm stated that a country that provides for one of the three principles can still be deemed to be a democratic country, however if none of the principles is available then the country is authoritarian.

Concerning the literature on the comparison of electoral systems in MENA, Ellen Lust-Okar and Amaney Ahmad Jamal analyzed the electoral systems in MENA, in their article "Rulers and Rules: Reassessing the Influence of Regime Type on Electoral Law Formation." by differentiating between monarchies that prefer PR system in order to balance the strength of parties and republics that opted for plurality system in order to prevent the opposition from being elected. I will add the regime typology and election

mode to make a pattern on the MENA that monarchies prefer proportional system while republics passed laws to enable the pro-regime parties to win a landslide victory. The article`s findings do not explain the use of PR in Morocco with more laws being passed to raise the threshold that will hinder small parties or the Jordanian change from a proportional system of plurality (bloc vote) to SNTV, which means one man one vote, which is supposed to reduce gerrymandering but did not.

Many authors used the new institutionalism framework to analyze electoral systems. The theory is advanced by J. G. March and J. P. Olsen in their article "The New Institutionalism: Organized Factors in Political Life". The theory is used in the field social science such as sociology and political science to account for the crucial rules of institutions in influencing the behavior of individuals based on norms, prohibitions or simply because an alternative does not exist. The basic aim of the theory is to prove that "the organization of political life makes a difference,"[11]which entails that those institutions are endogenous entities that benefit from an autonomy to exert its influence on individuals either by empowering them or confining their power. The institutions can be reinforced by third parties to exert actions that protect their interest without being in power.

Andreas Schedler applied the theory of new institutionalism on the authoritarian regimes so that instead of ruling with coercive and undemocratic means; authoritarian rulers can use institutions to survive. The new institutionalism can be observed in four major ways: imperatives, landscape, containment, ambivalence. Regarding my study I will focus on the containment area regarding the electoral system and political parties.
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According to Shedler the electoral system can be manipulated by disempowerment or excluding sensitive areas from the hands of the elected officials; supply restriction which limits the choice available to the voter by banning, subverting or fragmenting certain parties; demand restriction by restricting the opposition access to the media; suffrage restriction by controlling the voting age ; preference distortion through the use of both violence such as intimidation and money such as vote buying; and vote distortion and rigging under the supervision of biased institutions.

[12]Regarding the legislative the manipulation includes disempowerment, agent control by directly appointing members of legislature and fragmentation.[13]

My study will include the categorization made by the author and apply them to the three countries. The theory of new institutionalism will be useful to analyzing the electoral system in all the three countries and how the system influences the behavior of both the voters and candidates. The electoral system and constitution are institutions that have an immense influence on individuals. Who decides the winner from the loser in elections is not the regime nor the elections but rather the electoral system which has autonomy but it still can be manipulated.

In the case of Morocco, George Joffe, in his article ““ Morocco’s Reform Process: Wider Implications,” argued that the aims of the political reforms introduced by the regime were not due to external pressure or the triumph of the opposition to insert them, but rather to ensure the survival of the dynastic rule of the ruling family. As a result, the multiparty political system was adopted since the first constitution of 1962 to induce the political

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fragmentation in the country culminating in the hegemony of the palace over the political process of the country. Another interesting view of the Moroccan electoral system is by Andrew Barwig who argued, in his article "How Electoral Rules Matter: Voter Turnout in Morocco's 2007 Parliamentary Elections," that the lower voter turnout in the election of 2007 was not only due to sociological factors but also to the electoral system as it produced an "artificial and highly fragmented political landscape regardless of who wins the largest share of the national vote." [14] He pointed also to the aim of a multiparty system for the regime to divide and rule by preventing the emergence of a strong opposition, in addition to the role of the Ministry of Interior in controlling the electoral process since 1958 instead of assigning it to an independent commission. Third, John Grumm, the author of the article "Theories of Electoral Systems," stated that the electoral system used in Morocco prevents a landslide victory of any party. The author identified that the combination of largest remainder formula and gerrymandering induced a fragmented government and a situation whereby parties ended up with fewer seats compared to their amassed votes especially the major parties.

In the case of Jordan, Glenn E. Robinson stated, in his article "Can Islamists Be Democrats? The Case of Jordan," that the fear of the opposition, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, had motivated the king to have an electoral system that favors tribal affiliation rather than partisan one. Moreover, the same scholar in another article "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," affirmed that the new electoral system adopted in 1993 benefited the tribal areas, mainly Eastern and Southern Jordan at the expense of urban areas, mainly the region of Amman-Zarqa which is Palestinian-dominated.

The author's conclusion is that electoral systems can be managed and controlled to prevent undesirable outcomes.

In the case of Algeria, Aylın Güney and Aslihan Celenk, in their article " ' The European Union's Democracy Promotion Policies in Algeria: Success or Failure?," stated that the Algerian regime passed a new electoral system before the election of 1991 by increasing the number of seats and districts in rural areas. The basic aim of the changes was to allow the pro-regime party, FLN, to win the elections but ironically the electoral system benefited the Islamist party of FIS instead. Mohand Salah Tahı, in his article " Algeria's legislative and local elections: Democracy denied" (1997), identified the Algerian military as the institution in control of the political life exemplified by the creation of parties such as RND and introducing changes to the constitution and electoral system that would not challenge its authority. For instance, to pass an amendment to the constitution the opposition needs the vote of three quarters of the upper house, in which one third directly appointed by the president. These laws exemplify the fear of the regime from creating the same outcome of 1991, therefore passing some amendments both to the electoral system and the constitution allowed the regime to be in a position to control and manage the outcomes of elections without the need to annul them.

What emerges from the literature review concerns the criteria that define the fairness and freedom of election, having international observers and abiding by the electoral law make it apparent that the elections are transparent but what if the issues that undermine the fairness of the elections relate to the electoral system itself. The literature reviewed above <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-study-of-the-electoral-systems-politics-essay/>

shows that Jordan and Algeria introduced two electoral systems in the early 1990s believing that they would be suitable for making the pro- regime party the obvious winner in the case of Algeria and tribal candidates in the case of Jordan. However, the outcome of the elections persuaded the two countries to adopt different electoral system: PR in Algeria and SNTV in Jordan.

Regarding the case of Morocco the shift from Plurality into PR in 1997 did not produce surprising results therefore the electoral system was kept. So the question here is why did three countries diverge in terms of the electoral system used, especially regarding Jordan and Morocco?

There is huge body of literature written about electoral systems arguing about the list PR as the most propositional system in terms of allowing smaller parties to be represented in the parliament, the high turnout due to the absence of the wasted vote phenomena in contrast to the plurality system, more representation for women and a higher proportionality between seats and votes. However, from the elections results in both Morocco and Algeria the PR did not produce the same results expected of the system exemplified by the low turnout, high invalid votes, a high threshold that prevents small parties from gaining seats in the parliament while the negative outcome of PR which is a fragmented government seems to be present in both cases. In the case of Jordan, the resentment of the SNTV system pushed many parties to ask for a reform debate with Islamic Front Action (IFA), an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, asking for PR system and other parties asking for a mixed system. My thesis will analyse the abnormalities of the three systems that generated much discussion about the ineffectiveness of the voting system and the need to reform it.

According to Andrew Reynolds , Ben Reilly and Andrew Ellis, the electoral system is the easiest political institution to be manipulated and the choice of the electoral system determines the winners. However, the usual distinction between Plurality and Proportional systems as the former encourages two party systems while the other induces multi-parties is not always accurate as many examples contradict these findings such as Spain, Namibia, South Africa and India.[15]This has to do with many variables besides the electoral system used such as the socio-political context of the country. Therefore, The electoral system cannot be seen in isolation of other political institutions such as the constitution, the political parties among other socio political variables, thus a PR system can have two different outcomes in two countries . The case of the three countries of Algeria, Morocco and Jordan have quasi-similar political context so the outcome of particular voting system will have the same effect based on the elections results in 2003 and 2007.

Theoretical Framework

According to Gallagher and Mitchell: “ Government is representative government, in which the people do not govern themselves directly but rather delegate the task of political decision-making to a smaller set of public officials. In democratic societies these representatives are elected.”[16]In order to understand how governments are elected, we need to understand the system that allows them to be elected which is the voting system: “ The set of procedures that determine how people are elected to office. These procedures include how the ballot is structured, how people cast their votes, how those votes are counted, and how the winners are decided.”[17]The

electoral system does not only determine how people are elected to the office but also serves as a link between the voter`s preferences and the policies of the government; at least, theoretically speaking, the majority of the voters will have their opinion respected in terms of the parties and candidate they elected.[18]

Based on these two quotations, the electoral systems are accurate examples to assess democracy, because electoral systems can tell more about the country. Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis divided the different aspects represented by electoral systems into four categories: geographic representation, which means that the different regions of the country are represented in the parliament; ideological representation, which implies that all the different political doctrines are represented in the parliament and at least the minor, ones, can compete in the elections; party-political situation which denotes that power is not in the hand of one party while excluding other parties from participating in the elections;[19]and descriptive representation, which entails that its different ethnic, linguistic, religious and gender components are represented; or, as Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis put it, serves as the “ mirror of the nation.”[20]My thesis will include those four categories to analyze electoral systems of the three countries based on the parliamentary elections held after 2000. On top of that, I will also use the theory of new institutionalism with the framework of Andreas Schedler which will be useful in identifying the reasons behind choosing a particular type of electoral system and targeting the areas that were manipulated.

Aims of the Study

My aim is to explain that it is possible to have free and fair elections but that does not mean that the country is democratic as the elections are based on the choice of the electoral system that produces fragmented government through the use of such policies as rising the threshold, gerrymandering and requiring difficult measures to pass an amendment to the electoral law.

My thesis will analyze the electoral systems in MENA region by identifying three case studies: Morocco, Jordan and Algeria. My aim is to study the development of electoral systems in those three countries; the reason behind choosing those three countries has to do with their similarities. All of those countries are newly-formed democracies that gained their independence or emerged as a state in the second half of the twentieth century: Jordan in 1946, Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962. All those three countries share geographic, linguistics and religious similarities. According to the findings of Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2009 Survey, the only free country in the MENA is Israel, while only 6 countries are qualified as partly free: Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon and Yemen and the rest of the MENA is classified as not free. Another index that ranks countries in terms of their democracy is the Economist Index of Democracy which ranked Jordan, Morocco and Algeria as authoritarian regimes. Based on these indexes, I chose two monarchies: Morocco and Jordan and adding one republic: Algeria. On top of that, while Morocco and Jordan share the same political regime, Morocco and Jordan share the same voting system.

I want to prove that the lack of democracy in MENA is not due to cultural, religious or colonial history but rather to the manipulation of the electoral

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system to prevent a certain group from gaining majority, this manipulation is driven by the fear from the rise of the opposition such as the leftist and Islamist parties. My hypothesis is that the lack of democracy is not only due to the falsification of the election results but also by the manipulation of electoral systems. Therefore, even if the elections are organized in a free and fair environment with the presence of international observers, the electoral system used will prevent a group from attaining a majority. This hypothesis will back up my second hypothesis regarding the concentration of the pro-regime parties-vote in rural areas. The second aim of my thesis is to find the rationale behind the selection of a particular election mode by those three countries and the reasons behind its change, in addition to analyzing the different amendments passed to the electoral system and reforms that are pressed for? Finally, my thesis will compare between the three countries to find if there are similarities in terms laws that fragment or exclude the opposition, the geographical concentration of the vote, the election results in terms of winners and losers, the turnout, the categorization of parties.

The electoral system used in both Morocco and Algeria is PR (Proportional representation) while the SNTV is used in Jordan. The chart below identifies the different components of the electoral system of each country:

Morocco

Jordan

Algeria

Electoral System

Plurality

PR in 1997

Block Vote inherited from Britain

SNTV in 1993 by a royal decree

Absolute Majority Run-off in 1999

PR in 1997

Threshold

2% in 2002

6% in 2007

N/A

7% in 1997

5% in 2007

Quotas

10% women: 30 seats

6 seats for women, 9 for Christians, and 3 for the Circassian and Chechen minorities.

Turnout (Latest Legislative Election)

2007 election

37%

2007 election

54%

-80% in rural areas and 28% in some constituencies in the capital

2007 election

35%

Invalid vote and blank vote

2007 election

19%

2007 election

15%

Parliamentary System

Bicameral:

-The Chamber of Counselors: 270 seats.

-The Chamber of Representatives: 325 seats.

Bicameral:

-The Assembly of Senators: 55 seats

-The Chamber of Deputies: 80 seats

Bicameral:

-The Council of the nation: 144 members, 96 members elected by communal councils and 48 members appointed by the president.

-The National People's Assembly: 380 seats.

Political System

Monarchy

Monarchy

Republic

System of Counting the Votes

Largest Remainder

N/A

Hare Formula

Electoral Districts

2007: 95

2007: 45 districts

-3 closed tribal electoral districts.

2010: 45 districts divided into 108 sub-districts

1997: 56 electoral districts : 48 and 8 for the Algerian Diaspora

District magnitude

Between 1 and 5

1

Ballot structure

Nominal/categorical

Nominal/categorical

Reforms of the electoral law

-2009: law number 9: from 110 to 120

Addition of sub-districts

Constitution

-1962

-1970

-1972

-1980: article 21, 43 and 95

-1992: increasing the seats of the parliament from 306 to 333

-1996: bicameral systems, 162 seats for the upper house indirectly elected,
81 by chambers of commerce and 27 by trade unions

The 325 for the lower house directly elected.

-1952

-1963: single party system

-1976: socialism

-1986: free market reforms

-1989: multi party system

-1996: banning parties formed under religious, regional or linguistic criteria

-12 November 2008: article 74 amendment and giving more rights to women

Political parties categorization

-Pro-palace: RNI, MP and UC

-Conservative: PI

-Leftist: USFP and PPS

-Islamist: PJD

-right:

-Leftist: JCP

-Islamist: IAF and MCP

Pro-regime: FLN and NRD

-Right: FNA

-Leftist: PT and FFS

-Islamist: MSP and MRI

Voting Day

Friday

Tuesday

Thursday

Voting list

closed

N/A

Closed

Electoral reform asked for

-Rising the threshold

-changing the highest remainder formula

-two systems: plurality in rural areas and PR in urban areas

-PR

-Mixed system: 2 votes one for the district and one for the bloc

Number of independents

-2002

-2007

-2003

-2007

-2010

-2002

-2010

Women representation in the lower house

-34/10. 5% (2007)

-13/ 10. 8% (2010)

-30/ 7. 7% (2007)

By-elections

The Design–Methods and Procedures

-Analyze the recent legislative election results of Morocco, Jordan and Algeria in 2002 and 2007.

-Identify electoral systems as the independent variable while the outcomes are the dependent variables in addition to using correlation analysis to see if there is a relationship between those two variables. This will be helpful in testing the theory that PR systems produce fragmented governments and plurality systems produce strong governments.

-Since my data is mostly qualitative, I will use nominal level of measurement.

-do a simulation of the three recent elections using different electoral systems

-count the wasted vote

Hypotheses

Voting systems are manipulated to produce fragmented government

Votes supporting pro-regime parties are geographically concentrated in rural areas in contrast to the opposition which is based in urban areas

Research Questions

What are the differences and similarities between the electoral systems of Morocco, Jordan and Algeria?

How representative are electoral systems in MENA?

Is there a relationship between government type and electoral system?

Is there a relationship between the electoral system and the turnout?

Is there a relationship between the electoral system and the number of parties?

Can we make some conclusions based on the case studies and apply them to all Arab countries?

What is the electoral system that best suits the region of MENA?

How is the dilemma of Strong and Well-represented government dealt with?

Why is the lower turnout and invalid vote prominent in urban areas in contrast with rural areas?

Partition of Thesis

My thesis will be divided into five chapters; the first one will be about an introduction about the electoral systems and their importance in sustaining democracy. The second chapter will be devoted to the electoral systems in Morocco and the analysis of its recent legislative election in 2007. The third chapter will include the analysis of Jordan's electoral system and its recent legislative election in 2007 and 2010. The fourth chapter is devoted to the electoral system in Algeria and its recent 2007 legislative election. The fifth chapter will serve to connect the three case studies by comparing their similarities and differences and making some concluding statements on the relationship between the type of electoral system, government type and democracy.

Data Collection

Primary Data Sources:

The constitution, electoral law and the amendments passed in the three countries.

The Moroccan and Algerian 2007 legislative election results and the Jordanian 2007 and 2010 legislative election results

Geographical maps of the elections results

Secondary Data Sources

Interviews with some political parties in Morocco

-analysis of interviews conducted with politi