Democratization experiences: Patterns and standards

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This paper will not investigate in democracy's meanings, concepts and judging standards; yet, it treats democratization paths, especially that our Arab region is living a pangs since the start of the Arab Spring Movement that many consider as a good sign to democracy.

Our region was absent from the democratization movement for decades. This led some intellectuals to the simplified analysis using the argument of the "Arab exception" reductive. If we can talk about democracy standards and universal patterns as a political regime, democratization experiences cannot be stereotyped and have no static or unified standards. However, each experience has its own context and specific standards; we have a good illustration of this in the transitional Arab experiences in the recent few years. For instance, the Tunisian experience is different from the Egyptian one, and Yemeni experience differs from the Libyan or the Moroccan ones. Actually, differences between these experiences are more than similarities.

Democratization movement has become a universal political phenomenon especially in the last quarter of the 20th century. In less than thirty years, many areas in the world has witnessed deep changes within the so-called, in democratization

literature, the "third wave"[1]. This latter started in the mid-seventies (70's) of the 20th century with the dissolution of the residual dictatorial systems in southern Europe, followed by the collapse of many military systems in Latin America. In addition, some areas in Southeast Asia and Africa have witnessed a number of democratization transitions. Basically, the most prominent stage in this wave is the collapse of the communist ruling systems in Soviet Union Republics and their collective transmission into democracy. As a result, by the end of the 20th century the world has already been witnessing the widest democratization movement in history, which has included more than thirty countries. Theoretically, a large specialized literature about democratization has been available; It tried to understand what happened, and It gave contextual explanations to those transitions.

This paper introduces a brief presentation of the principle democratization approaches: **modernization approach, transition approach, structural approach, and cultural approach**. Next, it discusses the role of the international factor in democratization, being supportive or impeding. Finally, the paper ends at some notes based on the experiences of Arab spring countries democratization and the resulting patterns and standards that may enhance our understanding of the democratization paths.

1-   Democratization Theories: A Critical View

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[1] Huntington, S. P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

Modernization approach focuses on social and economical factors since they are essential for democratization. Even though there are roles of other factors, the level of social and economical growth remains the most prominent standard adopted by this approach. Seymour Lipset article "*Some Social Requisites of democracy*" (1959) has been the starting point of the literature that forms the theoretical framework of the modernization approach.

Lipset's thesis is summed up: the most democratic countries are those making higher rates in the social and economical factors. Actually, his famous saying "…Whenever the physical status of the country was better ; its ability to switch to a democratic system became larger."[2] derives from here. According to this perspective, we cannot imagine that democracy could be achieved in non-modern societies or those where economic and social indicators have not reached the required levels.

For its part, structural approach emphasizes on long-term paths to historical transitions, and consider first degree to the change that occurs at the level of power structures, since they are multiple and work differently in the various social, economic, and political contexts. In some cases, structural transitions may lead to establishing liberal democracy; yet in some other cases, they may lead to some absolutely contradicting regimes.

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[2] Lipset, S. M. 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1959, p. 75

Barrington Moore is considered as a classical theoretician in the field of connecting between democracy and dictatorship and their social origins.

In his book *"Social Origins of dictatorship and democracy"*[3], Moore attempts to uncover the linking circle between the changing shapes of power structures and the political regimes patterns generated by those changes. He studied this in eight countries: England, France, USA, Japan, Germany, Russia, China, and India. Because the change of power structures happens over a long time, Moor's study scanned three centuries and half a century (350 years), from the early 17's to the middle of the 20th century.

The study finds that there is a particular pattern of the relationship between four types of power structures (Farmers, Landowners, Bourgeoisie, and the state), which has led to democracy in England, France, and USA. However, Another pattern has led to fascism in the cases of Germany and Japan. Russia and China, differently, has transmitted to communist systems.

The transition approach has shifted the area of focus from structure to elites' interaction and dynamics of change of regime in a short-term. The role of elites in the political change path is cosidred as a basic standard in the transition approach. Rustow Dankwart differentiates between four transitional stages before the democratic regime stabilizes and takes its final shape.

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[3] Moore, B. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Beacon Press, 1966).

In the first stage, appropriate circumstances should be available for national unity in which a common political identity would take shape. In the second stage, the political active elites arise to take part in a complicated political conflict which leads in its own to the third stage, for the elites become convinced that divergence and multitude of opinions is an undeniable truth. As a result, these elites decide to confirm it through establishing the suitable institutional frames. Next, the fourth and last stage comes in which everybody becomes familiar with democracy practices. As time goes on, these rules become firm and citizens adopt them increasingly. Then, democracy transformed to a system with complete substructures[4].

Later studies has preserved Rustow's general frame, but it slightly modified in its stages in terms of number and nature. The writers of "*Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*"[5] differentiate between two basic phases of "transition" from authoritarian rule, which is characterized by a certain degree of openness and liberalism, and the phase of "establishing" experience when democracy becomes "the only game in town"[6] as said by Ling and Stepan.

Unlike the previously presented democratization theories, in which there is no mention of the Arab world, we notice a remarkable presence of Arabs and Muslims in the political culture approach.

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[4] Rustow, D. A.'Transitions to Democracy', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 1970) pp. 337-363

[5] O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P. C. and Whitehead, L. (eds) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (four volumes), (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[6] Linz, J. and Stepan, A.*Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p. 5

"Political culture" has become a widely used concept in the existing discussion of political change theories after the publication of the book entitled "*The Civic Culture*" for Almond and Verba (1963). They define political culture as "The Particular distribution of patterns of orientation among the members of a nation toward political objects"[7], they distinguish three patterns of culture, and each of them goes with a particular political structure: the primitive culture, the subjugation culture, and the participant culture. The pattern of primitive political system corresponds to traditional political structures as those prevailing in tribal societies in Africa. The pattern of political subjugation culture corresponds to central political structures with authoritarian nature. Finally, the participant political culture is found in societies ruled by democratic political structures.

Brynen, Korany, and Noble identify three trends reflected in three attitudes towards the utilization of the cultural argument in the debate about democratization. The first trend, in general, views that Arabic and Islamic culture do not agree with the principles establishing democracy. The second trend adopts a more complicated attitude that considers that the Arabic and Islamic political culture is characterized by plurality and continuous change, and that authoritarian and participatory tendencies are parts of the same culture and are in continuous junction. Yet, the third trend has a critical attitude towards both the first and second trends. For the

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[7] Almond, G. and Verba, S. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (Sage Publications, 1989) p. 13

supporters of this trend, the cultural factor is not a determining factor in the explanation of democratization; however, democratic culture and behaviour do not only influence political events, they also are affected by them[8].

In my opinion, unlike what precedes, we can talk about two major trends, one rejects any causal connection between culture and democratization and the other sees that culture has a crucial role in this operation. Proponents of this trend agree that the explanation of democratization using the cultural factor, in both cases of presence and absence, lacks proof and statistical data. Theoreticians of the transition approach, for example, view that transition is a result of rational choice and consensuses between elites in order to reach compromise. For structuralists, democratic change is the result of some other transitions in political, economic and social structures and not a result of cultural factors.

The second trend involves two contradicting attitudes, even if they agree that political culture is an explanatory standard in the operation of democratization. The first attitude theoreticians share the same orientalist theoretical frame with its main characteristics as determined by Edward Said, that it is "the absolute demarcation between east and west"[9]. Bernard Louis, one of the most prominent theoreticians with this attitude, sees that the political experience of Arabs and Muslims is totally contradictory to the western experience. Islam, as he says, "gives us the

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[8] Brynen, R., Korany, B. and Noble, P. (eds.) *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World, Vol.1 Theoretical Perspectives*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995) pp. 6-7

[9] Said, E. W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (Penguin Books, 1995) p. 39

worst frame to establish a liberal democracy"[10], Along the Islamic political history, Louis has found no model that looks like "Athens consultants council, or Romanian council of senates, or any of the parliaments and councils established in the Christian world[11]. Briefly, Louis considers that the two worlds, Islamic and Occidental, have developed two totally different political regimes. Islamic regime lacks the mandate principal and election of people's representatives, while in the west "the elections and making the mandate circle wider" are of crucial importance[12]. For his part, Huntington uses cultural analysis to find out that Islamic culture explains the democratic failure in Islamic world[13]. He claims that as Islam has never been accepting democracy, historically speaking, political participation has always been a strange concept[14].

On the other hand, proponents of the second trend reject the claims that the prevailing culture in the region is contradictory to democracy principles, that is, Islam, which plays a decisive role in the shaping of Arab and Islamic societies political culture, has offered to us multiples rich experiences that should never been reduced in only one picture[15]. This tendency of multitude has been translated through history of Islam to the emergence of the four famous Fikh schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafaï, and Hanbali) that they acknowledge each other, and all Muslims recognize them.

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[10] Ibid., p. 89
[11] Ibid., pp. 89-98
[12] Ibid.
[13] Huntington, S. P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (Simon & Schuster, 1998) p. 29
[14] Huntington, S. P. 'Will More Countries Become Democratic?' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 2, 1984, p. 208
[15] Halliday, F. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, (I. B. Tauris, 1995) p. 116

Discussion of the role of culture in democratization in the Arab and Islamic world has generated a great deal of Literature, but the complicated nature of culture in general and its political role in particular require that we deal with it and with its suggested problematic issues carefully. One of those issues is taking the Arabic culture as a single item with no precise understanding of the differences and intersections that cross it. Many elements, in different historical contexts, has contributed in the forming of what is called Arabic/ Islamic culture in different countries. We cannot explain people's orientation towards political regimes types only by classifying their culture to be corresponding or contradictory to democracy.

Moreover, Islamic and tribal affiliations are not adequate to explain the diversity in the Arab and Muslim societies attitudes towards democracy, whether they are accepting or rejecting it. For instance, David Pryce-Jones tries to explain democratic failure of Arabs by the political culture based on tribal heritage of Arab societies. He claims that this heritage has contributed in perpetuating absolute authoritarian rule in all parts of the area. On one hand, supporters of this claim would be surprised knowing that Arabic elections, that were the most competitive before the Arab spring, were in countries where the tribal system still plays a more influential role than any other social or political structure, such as Yemen, Kuwait, and Mauritania. On the other hand, not all Arab societies are tribal. For example, in Tunisia, where modernization and social engineering have deeply influenced the social structures, Authoritarian rule pattern has been dominating social life even if tribalism had disappeared since decades. Because of the absence of the intermediary social structures that used to play an essential role in

traditional Islamic communities, the Arabic and Islamic state has adopted some properties making it more tyrannical and authoritarian[16].

Concerning the religious factor, it is never less complicated. Even though Islam is a determining factor in the formation of Muslim communities that converted to democracy (such as Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, and now Tunisia), still the rule is authoritarian in other countries.

2-   The International Factor and Democratization

In the 29th of September 1991, a military coup took place in Haiti against the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In the 2nd of October 1991, organization of American states (OAS) issued an unanimous resolution in which it called its members to take the necessary measures to isolate the coup plotters and return the elected president to his position to practise his legitimate authority[17]. After a week, UN organization unanimously adopted a resolution that demanded that Aristide returns to authority and constitution rules again[18]. The military rule stayed till September 1994 when international pressure intensified against it, and obliged the generals leading the coup to leave the rule.

In the 31st July 1994, the Security Council (SC) issued a decree (N° 940) that authorized the member states to use all essential

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[16] Pryce-Jones, D. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*, (Ivan R. Dee, 2002) p. 26
[17] see the OAS resolution supporting Haiti's democratic government: OEA/Ser.f/V.1/MRE/RES.1/91, (Oct 3, 1991).
[18] see the UN resolution: A/RES/46/7, (Oct 11, 1991).

measures to facilitate the military leaders' leaving of Haiti and the immediate restoration of the legitimate president[19].

This resolution allowed the US army to invade Haiti in an operation called "Legitimacy Restoration Operation", which continued from September 1995. The reaction of international forces in this example demonstrates how important is the role that the international factor can play in supporting and solidifying democracy. However, in the Arab world, it seems that the international factor play a different role.

In the 11th of January 1992, i.e. after about three months of Haiti's coup, a coup against the nascent democratic experience in Algeria took place. It overthrew President Benjedid and canceled the second round of parliamentary elections. Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) has gained 47% of the voices in the first round and all indicators has shown that it will gain the majority of voices in the second round. Rather than completing the electoral operation and giving authority to the democratically winning party, FIS Leaders and thousands of its audience were imprisoned. Consequently, Algeria entered in a state of anarchy and bloody violence lasted for a decade.

Though there is no substantial difference between Haiti and Algeria coups, since they both have come to overthrow an elected president or to divert a democratic course, the international attitude variance is never questionable. The reactions of the international

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[19] see the Security Council resolution n° 940: S/RES/940 (July 31, 1994).

community to the coup in Algeria have indicated an obvious confusion concerning what democracy means in reality and not in speech. The speech of the US Assistant Secretary of State, Edward Djerejian, has shown a big confusion when he emphasized in the 2nd of June 1992 that his department has a frank attitude to "support those aiming to widen the political participation circle in the middle East"[20]. However, he contradicted himself in the same speech when he said, talking about Algeria, that they "do not support one man, one vote and one time democracy[21]". James Baker, a former US Secretary of state, has confirmed this confusion when he said: " when I was at the department of state, we pursued a policy of excluding the radical fundamentalists in Algeria, even as we recognized that this was somewhat at odds with our support of democracy"[22].

Unlike the Haitian example, the Algerian one illustrates an instance of what some calls "Western hypocrisy" and the use of "Double standards". More seriously, it negates the credibility of western efforts to spread democracy in the area. If we go far in comparison, we may consider the international attitude towards the Egyptian coup against the nascent democratic experience two years ago and its disastrous effects.

3-   Arab Spring and Democratization Standards in the Revolutionary Paradigm

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[20] Djerejian, E. 'The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World' (Address at Meridian House International, June 2, 1992), in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, June 8, 1992.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Baker, J. A. 'Looking Back on the Middle East', *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994.

Democratization theories, which we discussed their most prominent ones in this paper, do not seem to be capable of understanding the Arabic dilemma with its various dimensions and its complex contexts, being social, economic or cultural. The political quake caused by the Arab Spring opened a large debate concerning Arabs relation with democracy and the possibility that peoples of this area succeed to establish democratic regimes.

Arab Spring shock waves still are moving from one country to another, and it seems that the movement of change started from Tunisia five years ago is still at the beginning. It is true that Arab Spring has surprised theoreticians, analysts and observers of the middle east issues, the Arab area in particular, but actually it is no more than an advanced link of the series of accumulations that has characterized the long struggle of Arabs for democratization. Despite all Arab Spring countries similarities, which have made the change operation looks like the fall of domino pieces; the variance in paths during the transitional phases has been ruled by some historical, social and strategic considerations and properties of each country in isolation.

There is no ready recipe for a successful democratization, and what we deduce from our reading to the experiences and their comparison is served only as a lesson from which we learn. Arab Spring experiences have taught us that transition patterns, paths, and ends are shaped by dynamics of the vital reality and not by ready recipes. Tunisian transitional path, that has recently gained symbolic appreciation represented in the Nobel Peace Prize, is different to the Egyptian course, which is differ also for the Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian course. Those experiences taught us that the way of directing the relationship between

the following factors is playing a crucial role in directing the transitional phases and determining the nature of transition and its end:

A.   The Relationship between Elites Released by the Revolution

After the collapse of the authoritarian regime, the political elites find themselves moving in a new space that allows them a nearly absolute freedom. Usually, under an authoritarian rule, those elites would be prohibited from activities or have restricted their movement. Moreover, the relationship between them would be characterized by reciprocal ignorance, fear, and sometimes hostility derives from the absence of communication opportunities and the system's policy of utilizing some elites against others. The way of directing their relationship, being co-operational, competitive, or contrary, plays an essential role in the democratization course and the pattern of ruling established after the revolution.

B.   The Relationship between the Old and the New Regimes

Since the revolution in its early phases do not execute the old regime completely, and primarily change the head and highest levels of the system, the body and major joints of the regime remain in their positions. These would secretly or apparently activate and wait for an opportunity to return and take the lead. The relationship between the new elites and the old regime remains in vital and critical areas, as the administration, security, judiciary, and media, identifies basically the pattern of democratization and the size of the challenges it confronts.

C.   The Relationship between Political and Civic Communities

There is no stereotyped relationship between the political community and the civic one in the transitional situations; it differs with the variance of experiences. It is not the same in the countries that live a certain level of openness and those where authoritarianism do not leave any role or movement space for the political and civic communities, like the case in Libya for instance. However, the collapse of a regime, in all cases, opens an area for the emission of the political community and the reformation of the civic space. Then, directing their relationship towards cooperation and coordination and collective work is a basic condition for a successful democratization.

D.   The Relationship between the Military Institution and the Civic Area

The paths of Arabs' revolutions have also varied according to the pattern of relationship that links between the civic movement and the military (security) institution, and to the position of that institution in the revolution and its attitude toward the change movement and its scope. In the countries where it has stayed neutral or supported the civic movement, the change operation goes on with a minimal cost, like in Tunisia and Egypt at the beginning. And where it has chosen to support the ruling regime and stand against change, or has been divided into two groups, the change operation has been interrupted and the cost was really high, like in Libya, Yemen and Syria. Neutrality of the military and security institutions is a crucial standard in a successful democratization.

E. The Relationship Between Electoral Legitimacy and the Other Power Balances

Elections are often an essential stage in democratization, to fill the constitutional and institutional vacuum left by the collapse of the system. However, unlike in the normal conditions, the legitimacy that elections offer to the elected authorities is not adequate to the practice of real authority. The centers of authorities related to the old system (being in state bureaucracy or in security, military, financial, or judicial institutions, or even in civic community organizations) remain powerful and capable of impeding the transitional governments work and stability of their institutions. Indeed, the nature of the relationship between electoral legitimacy and reality legitimacy identifies the nature of the transitional phase and make it either successful or unsuccessful.

F. The Relationship Between Civic and Armed Action

All Arab revolutions have started peacefully, yet the reaction of the ruling systems led some of them to become military as in Libya and Syria. While the course of Tunisian revolution remained peaceful till the end, and democratization operation has led to the establishing of the so-called Second Republic institutions, the conflict continues to exist in the other countries on both the civic and military levels. Even though it is difficult to predict the shape of the ruling regime that will be in the end as well as the extent to which are its institutions democratic, it is sure that it would be influenced by that conflict and that relationship between civic and military.

G. The Relationship Between Media, Revolution forces and the Counter-revolution

As we indicated in the theoretical part of this paper, democratization theories have not taken the role of media into consideration; yet, the experiences undertaken by Arab Spring revolutions with their different paths confirm that media has a crucial role in democratization. It may be supportive or impeding for democratization depending on whether it supports revolution forces or belongs to counter-revolution and old system. Samir Deelo, Minister of Human Rights and Transitional Justice in the Tunisian Troika Government, reduces this equation saying "in shade of a counter-revolution media, we found ourselves in a war, fighting with no air cover".

H. The relationship between local, regional and international dimensions

In a world continuously connected by means of accelerated globalization, current events are no more a local concern that stands in isolation of regional and universal impacts. In fact, the impact of regional and universal dimensions on the transitional paths that followed the collapse of Arab Spring countries is not hidden. This impact has distinctly emerged during the shock wave witnessed by the area, as in the Egyptian, Yemeni and Libyan cases. The Syrian case, however, represents an instance where all dimensions condense and interact. Taking these cases into consideration, it is obvious that democratization gets more complicated and has bigger challenges when the regional and international role is bigger, and vice versa.