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ABSTRACT

Since the rise of the Arab Spring, a series of social movements have led to a deterioration of political stability in some Arab countries. In the past decade, ordinary people in Arab countries have generally increased their aspirations to express their own political opinions in the public sphere. When viewed from the consequences of contemporary political reforms, the degrees of political participation of different national parliaments are eventually influenced by the transition from authoritarian rule and are characterised by their polity. While before the Arab Spring, the performance of religious affiliated political parties in every nation's parliament was not prominent, but the democratisation reform provided these religious affiliated political parties with important political opportunities to even overtake their secular opponents. Religious traditions are dominant cultural in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The political participation of religious affiliated political parties plays a directionally representative role on the current development of political and religious relations in this era. By comparing the political performance of Islamic political parties in the parliamentary elections in Arab countries since 2010, this essay attempts to theoretically explore the role of religious affiliated political parties in the process of social integration and the political modernisation after the democratisation revolution, and explains the intervention of deeply-rooted religious tradition into public politics. Religious affiliated political parties in the Arab countries are strengthened on the one hand by internal initiative and on the other hand by catering to external needs. However, at the same time, the political participation of religious affiliated political parties has triggered concerns amongst secularists about theocracy, and its true effectiveness is also severely constrained by the degree of progress in the political modernisation process of the host country.

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, a lot of changes in the relations between the nation's politics and religions in the Arab countries can be observed. Judging from

appearance, the Arab Spring is a bottom-up social movement, in which civilian forces, dissatisfied with the ruling government, were at the forefront of civil-resistance. With the local political unrest, religious forces with profound civil foundations have also gained the opportunity to participate in the reform. In the process of political change, religious affiliated political parties are important participants in promoting the changes in the state-religion relationship in Arab countries. Their modes of action present certain types of characteristics based on different political systems.

This paper aims at not only exploring the role and status of religious affiliated political parties in changing political structures theoretically, but also compares the development of Islamic parties in the parliaments of Arab countries that have held general elections since the Arab Spring. Then, it argues that religious affiliated political parties in deeply-rooted religious traditions could not only experience an opportunity for their own development but also face some doubts. Finally, it focuses on the regional realities of religious affiliated political parties operating in the Arab world.

1. Religious Affiliated Political Parties and the Political Reforms

Institutional religions all have transnational characters. Religious groups are organised to spread their beliefs more widely, while domestic political parties are introverted political units aiming at participating in elections, entering parliaments and gaining power. A religious affiliated political party is a political party that incorporates religious creeds and canons into the party's programme and charter. Its party members have distinct religious attributes. Religious parties in the era of globalisation have also strengthened their transnational character with a wider agenda, for example building a bounded, whole, mono-religious community with the ideology of pan-Islamism.[1]

Under the political system of secular democracy, religious affiliated political parties belong to a dialectically organised form that is ambiguously combined of both politics and religion, and they are a dialectic unity of politics and religion. This does not just mean that the religious identity of voters can be exchanged for the general support of parties with a common religious preference.[2] The ability that religious affiliated political parties have in order to play an effective role in secular politics needs to meet the two prerequisites of the general public's acceptance or tolerance of their beliefs and citizens' positive consensus on party politics simultaneously. Whenever the political system changes, value conflicts are one of the important influencing factors of political conflicts. Religion is always a cluster of traditional morality and ethics and it plays the role as a value defender in accordance with religious concepts in the conflict of values. Under a changing political system, the multi-party system has a chance of transparency, soundness, improvement and consolidation through political reforms. At the same time, religious affiliated political parties which were excluded by the government have thus regained an important opportunity to participate in power decentralisation.

[1]Z. Liu and P. Fan, 'Islamic Factors in Inter-State Cooperation of the OIC Members,' Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies 12(1), (2018), p. 2.
[2]D. Campbell, J. Green and G. Layman, 'The party faithful: partisan images, candidate religion, and the electoral impact of party identification,' American Journal of Political Science 55(1), (2011), p. 51.

1.1. The Ambiguous Relationship between Church and State and the Breakout of Religious Affiliated Political Parties

The politico-religious relationship can be roughly divided into two main dimensions: the religionisation of politics and the politicisation of religions.[3] The politicisation of religions refers to religious vocabulary containing faith, security and political connotations, which are mainly concentrated in the religious field. The politicisation explains that the political and social fields are mixed with religious meanings, religious terms and symbols . It is notified by religious ideology that attempts to legalise its specific political organisations or policies by using a quasi-religious semantic system. For example, Israel expelled Hamas supporters on the grounds of eliminating the threat of fundamentalism.[4] Specific to the executor level, it can be refined into the concept of the politico-religious relationship between the elite and the public, the political status of religious affiliated political parties, the power arrangement of religious factors in the country, the protection of religious rights and interests in the political order. The stability of the country's political order structure is reflected by the level of how different groups of people's recognition and acceptance of religious intervention in the administrative, legislative and judicial systems.

As the political parties are closely related to the modernisation, political scholars generally affirm the important role that political parties played in the modern society's competition. In the western context, proponents believe that political parties play a decisive role in the direction of social modernisation.[5] Different from small political groups and interest groups with separate and weak competitive characteristics, modern political parties have four dominant characteristics.[6] First, modern political parties are committed to moving forward together as a whole, not just the developing of elite groups in the parties. Second, modern political parties specialise in election strategies due to regarding successful election and entering parliament as their primary goals. Third, party leadership should not be a dictator but influenced by the party members as their positions and opinions may not be consistent. Fourth, modern political parties need to understand public opinion and adjust the strategy according to public requirements to obtain support. In short, modern political parties include four core roles: group development, engaging around the core of the political campaign activities, generating power, listening to public opinion and reacting immediately until it is submitted to the executive.

Before forming large-scale political parties, religious groups were more involved in public life as religious organisations, for example congregations. In terms of types, according to the degree of dispersion, politics tends to classify political parties as groups that the members meet regularly, while the churches are regarded as long-distance groups. Another type of classification was based on organisational foundations. Accordingly, a church is classified as a mandatory group (meaning organisational

[3]P. Hatzopoulos and F. Petito, 'The return from exile: an introduction,' in P. Hatzopoulos and F. Petito, eds., Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.
[4]M. Juergensmeyer, 'Antifundamentalism,' in M. Marty and R. Appleby, eds., Fundamentalism Comprehended (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 354.
[5]D. Apter, The Politics of Modernisation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), Chapter 6.
[6]A. Orum, Introduction to Political Sociology (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), Chapter 8.

members have to join specific religious groups under family or community pressure), while political parties are voluntary groups of people.[7] Judging from the degree of coordination between similar groups, both political parties and the churches have a kind of independence, as there is no coordination between religious-religious and political-political groups, there is a possibility of competition. But competition between religious groups could not be regarded as a political activity, in the meanwhile religious interests of religious organisations cannot be systematically protected through legitimate means by religious organisations themselves. Religious affiliated political parties that are voluntarily formed and based on common beliefs could cross the religious barrier, and ordinary believers could break through the compulsive monopoly in the clergy's elite organisation, and engage in political activities to maintain their religious claims legally and even win an election or become the governing party.

Religious affiliated political parties witnessed the reconciliation of the co-existence of religious influences and secular representative democracy as the product of the compromise between religious traditions and secular democracies. Unlike the affiliation between believers and religious organisations, members of a religious party do not have to be loyal to a particular religious party although they share the same religious identity. The existence of religious affiliated political parties is a dialectical unity of traditional forces, conservative forces and political modernisation.[8] In those societies where political activities are less common, religious communities are mainly manifested as religious associations that conduct collective religious activities. The emergence and activity of religious affiliated political parties cannot be explained only by the awakening of the political consciousness of religious groups, but should be examined more accurately under the guide of structural changes in the expansion of political participation and the modernisation of the political system.

1.2. The Changing Political Environment Triggered by Protests

Starting in Tunisia in late 2010, the Arab Spring has affected the entire Middle East. Socio-political turbulence has lasted for more than eight years and has profoundly affected the future trends of Middle Eastern politics. But in terms of the subversiveness of ideology and political structure, changes in regional politics are focussed on making up for the democratic faults of previous political developments. The Arab Spring should not, therefore, be seen as a kind of revolution, but a social movement.

A changing political environment is different form a revolutionary one, and actors in the former situation care more about innovation and reform. Revolution means violent changes in all aspects including ideology, political system, social structure and governance, while reform means relatively modest changes. Reform is to adjust the existing political order and political structure. The basic direction of reform is to 'restrain the power of existing privileged groups and improve the status of unprivileged groups.'[9] Compared with the revolutionaries, the political path of the reformers

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[7] Z. Jin, 'On religion and politics,' Religious Studies 116(3), (2017), p. 252.
[8] J. Haynes and E. Wilson, 'Introduction: political secularism and religious difference in Western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa,' Politics and Religion 12(3), (2019), p. 430.
[9] A. Hirschman, Journey toward Progress (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), p. 263.

faces three structural difficulties.[10] First, the revolutionaries need to locate the fastest way to expand their support base, so they could identify friend or foe in a relatively simply way; while reformers in a changing political system need to take into account the interests of both the conservatives and the revolutionaries. Second, revolutionaries can tolerate drastic changes or even chaos; while reformers need to take into account both changes and stability, or more succinctly, prosperity and stability are as important as the political reforms themselves. Third, the goal of the revolutionaries is to expand the power of political participation as quickly as possible, so as to turn the simple slogan-type politics to a solid power, so the reformers need to sort out the priorities, as arranging a specific timetable for reforms, which requires the reformers to not only focus on the decentralisation of power, but also the required concentration of power.

Parliamentary elections are at the core of representative systems, and political parties are the key to mobilising participation. Studies of mainstream political parties in the second half of the last century suggested that parliament and elections do not equate to a modern political system.[11] Living without mature parties, elections are likely to simply give legitimacy to the original traditional political structure. But a strong political party that can participate in elections has the ability to effectively mobilise more voters, institutionalise the expansion of political participation and truly achieve the goals of political modernisation and political development. A political party system that can assimilate emerging political forces in a changing society is the prerequisite of political stability. Before 2011, there were no shortage of elections in the Middle East, and some countries had also achieved multi-party systems such as Jordan and Iraq, but simultaneously, as authoritarian politics led by strong political figures prevailed in the Middle East, party politics was not as strong as authoritarian politics.

Political parties are important political actors in any given regime. According to the classification of Charles Tilly, judging criteria from national ability and democracy, there are four crude types of democratic regime: low-capacity undemocratic, high-capacity undemocratic, high-capacity democratic and low-capacity democratic. Tilly believes that historical polities were concentrated in the low-capacity undemocratic range and there were not many regimes categorised as high-capacity democracy or low-capacity democracy.[12] According to Charles Tilly, Iran is in the diagram of high-capacity undemocratic, Somalia is low-capacity undemocratic, Norway and Japan are high-capacity democratic and Belgium is low-capacity democratic. Judging from the consequences, what happened in the Arab Spring actually caused regime transformation from a generally high-capacity undemocratic regime to a low-capacity undemocratic or low-capacity democratic regime and, for the latter, violent political participation is not rare. Actually, most of the countries which could survive the social movements and maintain relative peace are those high-capacity undemocratic ones, excepting the notable exception of Tunisia.

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[10]S. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 280.
[11]Ibid., pp. 336–350.
[12]C. Tilly, Democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 18–19.

1.3. The Development of Party Politics and Religious Affiliated Political Parties' Political Participation

When a political structure gradually accepts a diversified party system, it means that the changing political system has a certain willingness to democratise, so it can be incorporated into modern politics or into the context of modernisation. In the context of party politics, religious and political participation are reasonable and legal as they involve the compliant use of religious belief by political parties, but without the religious forces interfering in politics directly. In the MENA, a traditional society with a deep-rooted religious culture, the public is less vigilant about religious political participation than a society that has undergone a reform of separation between religion and state.[13] In a society with a high degree of secularisation in the political field, although enjoying a large number of faithful and devout groups, the tradition of separating politics from religion will maintain the majority of voters as rejecting religious factors highly profiled involved in politics. In a secular society where politics and religion are separated, religious affiliated political parties, even if they could exist, tend to become universally intermediary parties. When the degree of secularisation of society is limited, there is still a tendency for religious affiliated political parties to polarise to marginal minority parties.

A secular democratic regime that allows strong religion-rooted parties to win seats in parliament has obvious differences from theocracy or so called 'religious democracy.'[14] Take Islamic Parties that espouse Islamism as ideology attending legislative elections in a republican polity as an example. The Iraqi Islamic Party received 7 (out of 329) seats in the 2018 Iraqi legislative election.[15] Despite competition among political parties, neither the country's internal powers nor external powers worry about Iraq's political experience slipping towards Islamism.

The relationship between a religious affiliated political party and religion is reflected in the fact that the party members join the party because of their religious identity, and religious content is included in the party's programme and reflected in the issues raised by this party. These issues are mainly reflected in the emphasis on religious preferences, incorporation of religious values, protecting religious interests and paying attention to religious affairs. In view of the above functions, religious factors can thus help religious affiliated political parties to mobilise more supporters in a traditional society. Although the so-called Arab Spring was initially a large-scale social movement organised by liberal grass-roots groups, the strong mobilisation capacity of Islamic organisations in the Arab countries later made political forces with religious background gradually replace secular opposition to become a more active political opposition in various countries.

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[13]A. Roberts, 'The Fate of the Arab Spring: Ten Propositions,' Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies 12(3), (2018), p. 282.
[14]H. Haidar, A Theory of Religious Democracy: A Shia Islamic Theory of Religious Democracy for a Modern Shia Society (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Publications, 2006).
[15]A. Aboulenein, 'Iraqis voting in first election since Islamic State', Reuters, (10 May 2018).

2. Political Performance of Islamic Parties in Arab Countries in General Elections since the Arab Spring

Islamic parties in the Middle East have experienced periodic changes in the success of their political participation. In the eight years since the beginning of the Arab Spring, parliamentary elections have been held in 16[16] Arab countries. Most of the Islamic political parties participating in the parliamentary elections have been able to obtain a certain number of parliamentary seats, and some even have become the largest party in the parliament.[17] The Arab Spring has brought opportunities for Islamic parties to gain popularity in politics. However, the strong mobilisation ability given to religious affiliated political parties by religion could not be regarded as the same as the strong ability to govern the country. Over time, even if religion could bring competitive advantages to Islamic parties in elections, Islamic parties will still have to face more specific and realistic tests from secular parties who have similar governance as theirs.

2.1. The Increasingly Active Islamic Parties

The experience of Islamic parties in the Middle East can be divided by time period, and they have roughly gone through four historical stages from the beginning of their existence up to the Arab Spring. The first stage started after World War II. It is the initial stage of religious affiliated political parties developed in the Middle East. At this stage, Islamic parties were mostly opposition parties, their participation methods were not completely peaceful, as they did not abandon the use of violence, and they tended to be extreme. The second stage started in the second half of the 20th century, some Islamic parties began to participate in domestic elections and the development of religious affiliated political parties entered the second stage. Islamic parties could participate in the government even if they were still opposition parties. However, Islamic parties at this stage put too much emphasis on bringing Islamism into government operations. They were neither able to independently govern the state nor stay in coalition government for a long time.[18] Turkey's Prosperity Party has an anti-secular performance, which can also be traced back to the source of certain religious affiliated political parties, but the Turkish Justice and Development Party is not an Islamic party. In the third stage, after entering the 21st century, most Islamic political parties gradually increased their support among the people by reducing their violent tinge and increasing their democratic and pragmatic strategies. On the contrary, the pragmatic Islamic political parties actually began to enjoy the political dividends brought to them by religious factors. Some Islamic political parties, such as Hamas in Palestine, actually had the ability to win an election and not be a marginal party any more.

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[16]Arab countries that have held parliamentary elections since 2011 are: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia, Oman.
[17]A. Reda, 'Determinants of Arab public opinion on the Caliphate: Islamist elites, religiosity and socioeconomic conditions', Middle Eastern Studies 55(5), (2019), pp. 818–819.
[18]M. Ahmad, 'Islamic political theory: current scholarship and future prospects,' in M. Ahmad ed., State Politics and Islam (IN: American Trust Publications, 1986), p. 4.

The Arab Spring effected the fourth historical stage. Since the Arab Spring, in fact, Islamic parties have ushered in new but unexpected historical opportunities. At this stage, a large number of Islamic parties emerged and registered or regained their legal status. The landmark event was the Egyptian Islamist political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, with the connection to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood winning a majority in parliament. Religious affiliated political parties in the Middle East entered into an unprecedentedly prosperous period.[19] The paradox is that the Arab Spring was a secular social movement, but the new election law and new party law brought by the movement provided political conditions and legal support for the establishment of Islamic parties which were founded by Islamic organisations with enough public support. Since the Arab Spring, Islamic parties have learned from the experience and lessons of their development in the first three stages, maximising the social capital that religion could bring and adjusting the emphasis on Islamic principles in party programmes and issues, thereby finding their own space for survival and development in the changing political system.

2.2. Differences in Political Performance of Islamic Parties

Affected by the Arab Spring, Arab countries can be roughly divided into five types of countries by the indicators of concentration of power and form from absolute authoritarian to federal republic regime, with social stability as the secondary indicator. These five types are: strong monarchies that have not changed very much, relatively stable monarchies where the royal family is facing reform demands, countries where the original regime was overthrown but did not cause subsequent revolution, semi-republic countries caught in internal disputes and chaos, and abnormal states caught in civil war.

Since the Arab Spring, the relatively more successful Islamic parties in parliamentary elections have been concentrated in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Among them, the original regimes in Egypt and Tunisia were overthrown, but there was no disruptive revolutionary turbulence in general. The Liberal and Justice Party of Egypt became the biggest winner in the parliamentary elections in late 2011, but it was forced to step down after a year in power, and its governing capacity was not good enough. The failure of Islamist parties, as happened in Egypt has a devastating effects on a country's democratic transition.[20]

Since 2011, Jordan, Morocco and Bahrain, which are all constitutional monarchies, have undergone moderate and gradual reforms and have been liberalised to a certain extent. Candidates for the government's opposition Islamist political parties won more than 10% of parliamentary seats in the 2016 Jordanian parliamentary elections.[21] Previously, Islamic parties in Jordan simply participated in politics as opposition and refused to participate in parliamentary elections. The gradual reform which was led by

[19]E. Karakoç, T. Köse and M. Özcan, 'Emigration and the diffusion of political salafism: religious remittances and support for Salli parties in Egypt during the Arab Spring', Party Politics 23(6), (2017), p. 732.
[20]S. Hamid, Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 206.
[21]F. Zakaria, 'Arab Spring's hits and misses,' The Washington Post, (30 January 2013).

the Jordanian royal family is still effective in maintaining a peaceful situation and avoiding turmoil in the short term. Jordan's relative stability is also related to the Jordanian people's recognition of the special religious status of the royal family of Jordan and the fact that tribal politics still retain their sphere of influence. There was nearly no voice calling for the overthrow of the constitutional monarchy during periods of frequent demonstrations in Jordan. The King appoints all the highest government leaders and ministers of Jordan, and traditional forces limit party mobilisation. So it is clear that Jordan's Islamic parties are dissatisfied with the existing political reforms. The Islamic Action Front controlled by the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has always believed that the King still retains too much power, and that is the reason why they have repeatedly restricted the parliamentary elections.[22] Unlike Jordan, where the cabinet did not come from the parliamentary majority, the new draft constitution adopted by the monarchy in Morocco in 2011 provided for greater decentralisation by the King. The Prime Minister of Morocco is selected by the largest party in parliament. The prime minister has many important powers such as dissolving the parliament, appointing ministers and government administration. If an Islamic party wins parliamentary elections, it can form a government. But a modest reform model can still lead to a rather slow political development process.

Government authority in Iraq has faced long-term challenges since the Iraq war. Most Middle Eastern countries have adopted a single administrative division, but Iraq, which chose to adopt a federal system after the war, has always been threatened by internal divisions. Internal violence in Iraq is frequent and sectarian conflicts continue to be seen. The appearance of ISIL in 2014 worsened the internal situation in Iraq. In the 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections, surprisingly, Shia parties led by religious nationalists won the ballot. Afterwards, they experienced confusion in recounting and forming a coalition government to nominate key candidates, which further worsened the domestic sectarian contradictions. Syria is an unstable state in civil war. Prior to the Arab Spring, Bashar Al-Assad in Syria's Allawi dominated other ethnic groups and organisations through the ruling Ba'ath party. After the Arab Spring, Syria fell into a long civil war, which in turn evolved into a proxy war due to external intervention. Syria's new 2012 constitution stipulates that the People's Assembly hold elections every four years. Although the government held parliamentary elections in controlled areas on schedule during the civil war,[23] the opposition resisted the 2012 and 2016 Syrian parliamentary elections. In both parliamentary elections, the National Progressive Front led by the Ba'ath Party won a majority of seats.

In those countries that were less affected by the Arab Spring, the strength of the original ruling power has become a key reason to resist turmoil. The Algerian opposition Islamic Salvation Front was declared illegal by the military in the 1990s and the Arab Spring did not shake the military's foundations of rule. Of course, in the course of resisting Islamist opposition, the existing regime itself also emphasised the Islamic characteristic of its power in order to maintain the legitimacy of both the ruling and

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[22]R. Sweis, 'Muslim Brotherhood's political arm wins seats in Jordan's parliament', The New York Times, (23 September 2016).

[23]'Assad's party wins majority in Syrian election', France 24, (17 April 2016), available at: https://www.france24.com/en/20160417-syria-bashar-assad-baath-party-wins-majority-parliamentary-vote.

religious legitimacy of the regime. Another type of country that is relatively stable in responding to the Arab Spring is an absolute monarchy that has no general elections at all and where all parties are totally banned, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia.[24]

2.3. Reasons for the Rise of Islamic Parties

The Arab Spring was a crisis made of the rationality of the political system and economic and cultural dissatisfaction, as all these factors simultaneously led to crisis. On the one hand, the rise of Islamic parties after the Arab Spring is related to the strong political elements in Islamic culture. From the perspective of the cultural environment in which Islamic parties were born, in the Islamic cultural circle in the Middle East, believers have a high acceptance of political units containing religious elements. On the other hand, the Arab states in the Middle East, no matter whether nominally federal, parliamentary or constitutional monarchies, are actually closer to authoritarian political culture.

The polarisation of the rich and the poor along with authoritarian politics and severe corruption have caused grassroots people to be dissatisfied with the governance of the dominant elite over a long period. In recent years, the level of economic development in the Middle East has generally been low, which has led to a crisis in the reputation for integrity and cleanliness of authoritarian rulers and elite ruling groups. The country's main power and economic interests are concentrated in the hands of very few people. Young people with large population bases and facing unemployment problems do not have enough opportunities for political participation. When they still have faith in democracy, they desperately need new representatives substituting corrupt former elites to fight for and protect their own interests, such as creating more jobs through legislative procedure. Compared to secularised political parties that have lost their support, a revival of Islamist parties calling for fairness and justice seems to be a rational choice.

The political participation breakthroughs sought by those who are trying to influence politics have two dimensions. One is a completely westernised way, and the other is an Islamic way that is more familiar to locals. From the perspective of young people in the Middle East at present, the caliphate of Islamic culture in history represents power and strong self-confidence. Superficially, study of the West in the modern Islamic world does not necessarily bring expected prosperity, and Western society saw a marked increase in Islamophobia. The number of people in the Middle East who have a negative attitude towards the Western model has increased significantly.[25] Young people who are unwilling to copy the Western model actively choose those burgeoning Islamic parties as representatives of their own interests.

Elections are not the be all and end all of party politics. After 2011, a large number of Islamic parties had the opportunity to enter parliament, and Tunisia's[26] and

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[24]In the Gulf, Islamists believe both Islamic parties and Islamic movements can bolster their political statures. As a political instrument, a political party is not that important compared to their MENA neighbours. C. Freer, 'Exclusion-moderation in the Gulf context: tracing the development of pragmatic Islamism in Kuwait', Middle Eastern Studies 54(1), (2018), pp. 1–2.

[25]A. Ameer, 'From Islamophobia to Westophobia: the long road to radical Islamism', Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, 3(1), (2016), pp. 1–2.

[26]J. Fox, 'The secular-religious competition perspective in comparative perspective', Politics and Religion 12(3), (2019), p. 530.

Morocco's Islamic parties became the largest parties in parliament in 2016. However, in terms of the number of seats, they are not eligible to form a separate government according to the Constitution as they did not get half of the total parliamentary seats. Although these Islamic parties have won the parliamentary election, they still have to face the test of forming a coalition government with other sectarian parties and other secular parties. Religious affiliated political parties can not only mobilise political parties before and after parliamentary elections to actively contribute to political integration, but they will also face the real dilemma of political games.

3. Motivations for the Development of Religious Affiliated Political Parties

In the process of participating in politics, religious affiliated political parties with religious belief as their ideology, need to not only act in accordance with moral and ethical interpretation in the religious sense, but also meet the needs of political functions in participating in political elections. Religious affiliated political parties have a positive role in political integration in consolidating identity, improving the quality of life and maintaining traditional cultural status. On the positive side, during the period of change, legalised religious affiliated political parties within the new regime regulated social culture, expanded their participation in politics and increased the benefits of religious groups.

Judging from the effect of the participation of Islamic parties in the elections in the Arab countries since the Arab Spring, religious affiliated political parties have strengthened themselves and promoted externally to make up for the differences between religions and customs in society and to expand the cooperation between religions and politics with secular parties and religious affiliated political parties, thus providing political integration with a promising future. Religious political parties in Arab countries is rooted deeply in religious soil. On the one hand they strengthened themselves internally and on the other hand they actively catered to external needs, in line with the demands of political reforms issued by the MENA civil society.[27]

3.1. Internal Motivation

Religious organisations inherently have the advantages of natural networks and discourse mobilisation. Taking the Christian Church as an example, in the sense of mobilisation, the Church is able to mobilise other social organisations such as 'sectarian funds, long-lasting formal and informal relations, social legitimacy, religious and secular leaders, and common discourses and beliefs.'[28] These are potential resources that cannot be easily used by other social organisations. Compared with religious organisations, although the voice of religious leaders has become weakened, most of the resources from religious organisations can still be used by religious affiliated political parties to help religious affiliated political parties expand their influence. Religious

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[27]J. Doyle, 'Civil society as ideology in the Middle East: a critical perspective', British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 43(3), (2016), p. 408.

[28]H. Swarts, 'Setting the state's agenda: Church-based community organisations in American urban politics,' in J. Goldstone, ed., States, Parties and Social Movements (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 78.

affiliated political parties could rely on religious social networks, take elections as the threshold of competition and build national political agendas with religious issues, trying their best to influence the implementation of relevant government policies.

3.2. External Reinforcement

In retrospect and from a global perspective, religious affiliated political parties also have the advantages of promoting building the community. In theory, ideally, neither the state nor external political forces should interfere in the development of religious institutions. The state should be neutral towards religious phenomenon.[29] In Europe's Christian cultural circle, the Christian Democrats have played an active driving force in the process of EU unification.[30] Taking the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious group with the purpose of reviving Islam, as an example, the long-term goal of the Brotherhood is to establish an Islamic community that does not distinguish between countries and ethnic groups. While at the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood has established branches in many countries in the Middle East to form Islamic parties to directly participate in parliamentary elections, to participate in party politics and parliamentary politics, and to gradually promote the revival of Sunni Islam. Of course, although the 'Ummah' system recognised by Islamism is a religious-secular community that transcends ethnics and national boundaries, it is undeniable that at present the construction of an EU-like political community is not yet possible at the level of the of Arab governments. Most Islamic political parties in Arab countries place more emphasis on safeguarding the relevant interests of their peoples, ethnic groups and denominations.

Political changes in the Middle East often fail to avoid the influence of key external forces. In the field of religious affiliated political parties, on the one hand, regional powers and international hegemonies always selectively support specific political parties that support the interests of their own strategies. On the other hand, due to long-term suppression by external forces, young people who have no or little power are pushed to choose Islamic parties. Instead of choosing those mature secular parties, the Islamic party was chosen as a platform for political participation, thus forming an anti-psychological choice. People who support Islamic parties not only feel anger about the western interference in Middle East affairs, but also look forward to the road of political modernisation in line with their own cultural characteristics.

4. Conclusion

The important function of a political party is to accept, gather and then pass public opinion to the political leadership. In other words, political parties operate as intermediaries that connect society and government. The evaluation of the quality of a political party structure cannot be to simply resort to the criterion of a one-party system, two-party system, or multi-party system. Closely aligned political parties and parties with internal factions can both be part of a democratic party system. The traditional

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[29]A. Wold, Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 99.
[30]D. Hanley, 'The future of Christian democracy in Europe', in D. Hanley, ed., Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective (London: Pinter Publishers, 1996), p. 212.

multi-party system also has institutional defects. For example, in the typical multi-party western countries, it can often be seen that the debates hindered the passage of proposals, or absence and some other technical means deliberately creates negative consequences of inefficient parliamentary decision-making. In addition, European and American societies, based on their low confidence in their own democracy and tired of the dispute over the interests of political parties, have gradually seen the emergence of 'party apathy.'

Religious affiliated political parties emerged after World War II. The study of religious affiliated political parties in academic circles mainly includes two perspectives: the hierarchy perspective and the class perspective. That is, the establishment of religious affiliated political parties is a union of bourgeois political activists and religious groups, which aims to use religious influence to expand the strength of political parties. Political activists cooperate to participate in the political practice of contemporary society in disguise to achieve religious goals.

Due to the lack of political experience, although entering the parliament, Islamic parties may face a situation where if they do not actively emphasise religious issues they will fall into a situation where policy and economic propositions are similar to other parties, including secular ones. It is hard to say whether 'party apathy' in the Middle East would not be quite similar to the European and American society.

It should be acknowledged that the existence of political parties[31] 'presets' a political atmosphere towards democracy. Political parties in the principle of representativeness are the key intermediate variables in political integration. Compared with other social organisations that are also involved in political integration, the difference between political parties is that political parties can generate political power. In reality, the mobilisation ability of religious affiliated political parties and the effectiveness of religious affiliated political parties on political integration are related to the degree of local political modernisation and democratisation. Prior to the Arab Spring, many Middle Eastern countries did not actually have a multi-party system. There was no party law, or laws prohibiting party activities, and no parliamentary elections.

Take Egypt as an example. Prior to 2011, Egypt officially advocated 'non-participation party politics' and 'non-democratic election politics.' Both political parties and elections could not compete with political strongmen. Because of insufficient preparation for transition, party groups after the Arab Spring are often regarded as an extension of tribal politics and elite politics, rarely could large emerging parliamentary parties form a government independently. Since the Arab Spring, the parliamentary general elections in Arab countries faced the dilemma that there is a lack of supporting system. Although some countries have held the first parliamentary elections hurriedly, the date of the next elections is still far away.

Since the Arab Spring, the increasing political participation of Islamic parties has shown a trend of political change in which moderate Islam plays an increasingly important role of social integration. As explained by the liberal media: Arab states are[32] 'civil states,' different from secular states, so citizen states in the Arab world should not separate religion from public life. To avoid possible conflicts between

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[31]S. Neumann, Modern Political Parties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 395.
[32]'Jordan: Islamic or secular?' Al-Ghad, (16 October 2016).

extreme secularism and Islamism, the political future of domestic political parties in Arab countries is to build a governing coalition of Islamism, liberalism and secularism.[33]

The religious affiliated political parties are participants in reconciliation for the coexistence of religions and customs, which helps political integration. And party politics, in fact, is the premise of democracy and is presupposed. Any country's move to true party politics means that public opinion and popular will can be systematically transmitted to the ruling level through political parties, and the political atmosphere of the country is democratised. In a deeper sense, the political construction attached to the state-form of the nation-state, even if it is based on fanatical religious identity, attempts to establish a new state through division and is still a 'worldly' process other than divinisation. In this sense, religious political parties participating in parliamentary elections, forming a government or coalition government, protecting the national economy and the people's livelihood, promoting political modernisation, and maintaining Islamic culture and national culture are all political activities that depend on nation states, so no matter how religious affiliated political parties use their religious voice on ideologies and party platforms, they are essentially secular parties.

The political participation of religious affiliated political parties has caused secularists to worry about religious administration. In fact, its real effectiveness is also heavily constrained by the degree of progress of the political modernisation process in the host country. The transformation of political participation and mobilisation made by religious affiliated parties makes the future of democracy in MENA nations 'less pessimistic'.[34] The turbulent Middle East region will still face long-term difficulties in national reconstruction such as post-war reconstruction, curbing extremism and preventing political corruption. For the people living with the threat of insecurity, and in the changing political system, which party can really solve the problem of people's livelihood and achieve prosperity and stability is the real destination of the votes in their hands.

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[33]O. Sharif, 'The secular-Islamist divide deepens in Jordan', Middle East Institute, available at: http://www.mei.edu/content/article/secular-vs-islamist-divide-deepens-jordan.
[34]M. Mufit, 'Democratiztion potential of the 'Arab Spring': some early observations', Government and Opposition 50(3), (2015), p. 394.