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We agree with Timothy M. Meisburger that the choice of an electoral system is a key step in the constitutional development of an emerging democracy. Beyond this, there is little in his essay with which we can concur. Meisburger's advocacy of majoritarian (chiefly first-past-the-post) electoral systems for the fragile polities of the Arab world rests on a weak foundation, both in the criticisms that he launches against proportional representation (PR) and in the claims that he makes on behalf of single-member-district (SMD) elections.

In a nutshell, Meisburger accuses PR of being bad for democracy. He argues that PR systems sharpen and politicize differences of ethnicity and culture, that PR has been less successful than SMD elections in heterogeneous societies in the developed world, that PR empowers existing elites and unsavory elements in democratizing states, and that majoritarian systems do a better job of ensuring effective representation. In our estimation, the weight of the evidence—from nations actually going through democratic change, as well as from the scholarly literature that tries to understand such change—points to just the opposite conclusions. The evidence that we have from a series of waves of democratization is that majoritarian election systems can be deeply problematic, and that proportional systems, while not solving all the problems by any means, are a better option in most contexts.

Meisburger is particularly concerned by the lack of strong party systems in the Arab world, stipulating that "parties with clear ideological profiles, well-defined platforms, and democratic internal-governance rules" are "key prerequisites" for democracy to function under PR. If

these are lacking, he claims, SMD elections are better, for they are supposedly "more flexible than PR and hence more likely to aid the development of democratic attitudes and the emergence of fully democratic parties and states." Meisburger makes sweeping statements about bad outcomes "in many PR countries," but rarely points to specifics. He nods at times to Northern Europe as a region where PR is appropriate, but ignores its success in many other environments. Make no mistake, we think parties in the style of Northern Europe's, complete with detailed platforms and well-established procedures designed to guarantee internal democracy, are lovely. Were they to develop in the Arab world, we would be pleased. But setting Danish parties up as a necessary precondition for workable PR is a distraction, not a serious argument. Nor does it comport with the successful experiences of many newly established PR democracies from Southern Europe in the 1970s to Latin America in the 1980s and Eastern Europe as well as parts of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s.

Meisburger's insistence that fully developed party systems must precede PR echoes the arguments of autocrats (Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and King Abdullah of Jordan, to name two) who fear PR as a threat to current elites and resist it publicly on the grounds that parties in their countries are too young or corrupt, or that party politics is simply culturally unfamiliar and inappropriate. Meisburger clearly does not share their autocratic motives, but we are not sure on what basis he thinks SMD elections do better than PR at fostering democratic attitudes and party development. The SMD experiences of nineteenth-century Latin America or postindependence sub-Saharan Africa seem inauspicious to say the least. Unfortunately, we cannot evaluate the historical basis of Meisburger's claim because he does not provide any.

For Meisburger, a chief virtue of SMD elections is the link that they forge between voters and individual representatives. We concur that politicians' accountability to citizens matters, but maintain that in post-conflict situations, it must be married to substantial proportionality—preferably in moderate-sized districts with open lists. We are adamant that individualism must not come at the cost of abandoning collective accountability altogether, as Meisburger's antiparty position would have it. There are no vibrant democracies, new or old, with purely individualized and nonpartisan forms of electoral competition. There are many cases where the electoral system is designed to preclude or suppress parties and to privilege independent candidates. The most notable modern examples are Afghanistan, the Gulf states, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. In these cases "no-party" elections are thin veils meant to hide electoral authoritarianism and executive dominance.

Some of Meisburger's claims for the virtues of SMDs go beyond contradicting the empirical evidence and contradict his own claims elsewhere in his essay. He asserts first that PR works only when politics is

structured around the kinds of coherent ideologies that the Arab world lacks, and then appeals to the logic of the median-voter theorem to contend that SMD will encourage a more moderate Arab politics. But the median-voter theorem plainly hinges on competition along a dominant *ideological* dimension.[1] What is the dimension along which Meisburger thinks SMD competition will find a "median" if he also believes that "in most developing democracies, political ideology is not very important"?

In our view, the broader Middle East has too many complex dimensions of conflict for median-voter logic to take hold. But this does not mean that ideology is lacking or insignificant. On the contrary, the first thing that a visitor notices in Egypt, Libya, or Tunisia is the enormous importance of competing views about how best to organize state and society—in other words, ideologies. Politics in those places is more than just a tribal scramble for power, and is colored by questions of political economy, regionalism, nationalism, and religiosity. Do Arabs want parties? It depends on whom you ask. Old-regime holdovers do not, but many others do.

Meisburger rightly acknowledges that in the Arab world majoritarian systems will preclude virtually all women and minorities from representation. He agrees with us that list PR provides a space for women and minorities to be elected, but argues that such elected representatives are just "tokens" beholden to party bosses. There is a grain of truth to the point that MPs from reserved seats can be weakly attached to the group they purport to represent, but there is a wealth of empirical evidence showing that many women and minorities elected by special mechanisms, or indeed through simple PR lists, can have a significant and positive impact on gender and minority rights.[2] Because Meisburger refuses to countenance proportionality as a means of achieving balanced representation, he proposes to fall back on the dubious practice (common in the United States) of rigging district boundaries in order to artificially create "majority-minority" districts.

PR in Tunisia and Egypt

The case of Tunisia tells strongly against Meisburger's objections to PR. In 2009, elections under a mixed but mostly majoritarian system handed President Ben Ali's ruling party every contested seat in the sham legislature. After Ben Ali's fall, Tunisians understandably felt that including all significant voices in their new parliament was the *sine qua non* of successful democratization, so they chose to use PR in moderate-sized districts. That system worked exceptionally well in the 23 October 2011 Constituent Assembly elections—undoubtedly far better than the old (or any new) majoritarian system would have.

Hizb al-Nahda (Renaissance Party), a Muslim Brotherhood–inspired Islamist formation, was the plurality winner in every one of the 27 geo-

graphical constituencies within Tunisia, as well as the half-dozen constituencies for Tunisians voting from abroad.[3] Of course, had Tunisia relied on SMDs to fill the 217-seat Assembly, there would have been many more, smaller districts with individual contests. Support for candidates other than al-Nahda's would likely have been concentrated enough for some non-Islamists to win. Yet the results from Tunisia strongly suggest that, had the elections been held under majoritarian rules, al-Nahda could have won 90 percent or more of the seats instead of the 41 percent (only slightly above its vote share) that it actually did win. It outpaced all its rivals, but it still needs to form a coalition with smaller partners. In Tunisia, PR has allowed multiple alliances to win Constituent Assembly seats, and prevented complete one-party control.

Tunisia in 2011 is reminiscent of South Africa in 1994. The success of South Africa's transition to democracy rested on the inclusiveness of its first PR-based election system. South Africans from Nelson Mandela on down argued that the spirit of respect and of allowing everyone a voice that was so crucial to that first postapartheid government was underpinned by a strongly proportional election system. Without it, black and white minority voices would have been silenced and things could have taken a very dire turn. Meisburger notes that in the early 1990s, one of us strongly supported a PR system for South Africa, but he goes on to say that "by 2000, even [Reynolds] had realized that the lack of geographical representation had seriously compromised accountability." Meisburger's error speaks to more than his lack of familiarity with the literature. In fact, Reynolds had warned from the very beginning that large-district, closed-list PR was problematic for South Africa. In a book published in 1993 (even before the first elections) and again in the pages of this journal in 1995, he urged a more accountable form of smaller-district, open-list PR for that country. The more general point, which we feel Meisburger misses throughout, is that one need not sacrifice the crucial benefits of proportionality on the altar of close geographic representation.[4]

Meisburger speculates that PR elections in Egypt would hand the Muslim Brotherhood something like a fifth to a quarter of seats, whereas SMD elections would produce an assembly of individualistic "local notables." Given that Meisburger acknowledges the Brotherhood as the largest, best-organized party throughout Egypt, it is unclear why he does not expect that its candidates would win almost all the seats if elections were held under SMD. As the biggest single force in the country, competing in district after district against fragmented opposition, the Brothers could readily be expected to win a solid majority. In any event, Meisburger prefers the "local notables" outcome, confident that the notables would lead Egypt more responsibly than a majority coalition that either: 1) included the Brotherhood's 20 to 25 percent plus representatives from other parties and movements totaling an additional

25 to 30 percent of seats, or 2) consisted of *non*-Brotherhood representatives totaling more than 50 percent in a disparate coalition that left the Brotherhood in opposition.

Our own recommendations are not based on a preference for the Brotherhood to win or lose or join or not join a government. We leave those matters to Egyptian voters. But we do favor electoral rules that award representation to parties and alliances in accord with the level of support that they enjoy among voters. In environments where there is great uncertainty among leaders and voters about the relative strength of different movements and alliances, SMD elections are likely to produce severe anomalies between votes and seats. Some groups that win narrow victories will reap vastly outsized seat bonuses. Other groups that lose narrowly will wind up with sizeable vote totals but no seats. The fortunate winners will be in a position to consolidate power, rewriting constitutions to lock in their early gains. PR, by contrast, lowers the stakes of that first free election and thus makes free elections likelier to continue. It will tend to produce constituent assemblies that are more balanced if less decisive—at least initially, until majority coalitions can form. These seem like reasonable tradeoffs, and as we have stressed, choosing an electoral system inevitably means making tradeoffs.

NOTES

1. Duncan Black, "On the Rationale of Group Decision-Making," *Journal of Political Economy* 56 (February 1948): 23–34; Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

2. See, for example, Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook, "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation," *Political Studies* 56 (October 2008): 725–36; and Andrew Reynolds, *Designing Democracy in a Dangerous World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch.6.

3. In one district, Sidi Bouzid, another list won but suffered partial disqualification when the electoral commission sanctioned it for illegal campaigning.

4. Andrew Reynolds, *Voting for a New South Africa* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1993) and "Constitutional Engineering in Southern Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (April 1995): 93–94.