

The Role Played by International Election Observation in Managing North African Elections

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Abstract:

Currently, international elections observation plays a pivotal role in the promotion of democratic practices. It is considered that elections observation contributes strongly to improve the electoral process. If operated legitimately and efficiently, it will help to avoid any fraud or violence that may trouble elections. The main goal of elections observation is to sustain elections in nations suffering from anarchical political system and the abuse of power of incompetent leaders, attempting to democratize their governments. In 2011, North Africa witnessed a period of revolutionary movements led by African people. This article tries to examine the role of international elections observers in those countries and show their participation to democratize the electoral process.¹

Keywords: International elections observation; North Africa; democracy; political transition; political protest.

الملخص باللغة العربية: تلعب المراقبة الدولية للا انتخابات حاليا دورا بالغ الاهمية في تطوير الممارسات الديمقراطية حيث انها تساهم بقوة في تعزيز العملية الانتخابية و اذا تم تشغيلها بشكل مشروع و فعلي فسوف يساعد ذلك على تجنب اي احتيال او عنف قد يعرقل السير الجدي للا انتخابات . ان الهدف الرئيسي لمراقبة الانتخابات هو دعم الدول التي تعاني من الانظمة السياسية الفوضوية واستبدال القادة السياسيين محاولة اصفاء الديمقراطية في حكوماتها. منذ انتفاضات عام 2011 شهدت منطقة شمال افريقيا حركات ثورية قادها سكان هذه المنطقة حيث يحاول هذا المقال دراسة دور مراقبي الانتخابات الدوليين في اصفاء الطابع الديمقراطي على العملية الانتخابية

¹Rodrick Henry,Guardians of Peaceful Elections? Revisiting the Role of International Election Observers in East Africa, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45341741>, Dec 2017.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المراقبة الدولية للانتخابات, غرب افريقيا, الديموقراطية, التحول السياسي
الاحتجاج السياسي,

INTRODUCTION

The current wave of democratization started the last fourteen years in many places in the world where people were enduring the tyranny of the autocratic system as in Ibero-America and part of Africa and Asia. Consequently, the protest against the dictatorial regime led to political transition that introduced multi-party elections as a resolution to this conflicting situation.

It is important to note that election is one of the fundamental indicator of democracy especially when it is held with fairness and freedom of expression. Elections allow ordinary people to express themselves freely and choose their representatives in the government. As a matter of fact, the presence of election observation in a specific election can only enhance the voting process and promote the outcome of this election.

Democratic elections ensure the respect of human rights, that is equality freedom of thought and speech and provide the citizen with the characteristics of the good governance that is transparency, efficiency, responsibility and the practice of the rule of law. As a matter of fact, when these features of democracy are implemented in an electoral process, people will profoundly trust the outcome of the election. Moreover, they will contribute to the control of their governments either directly or indirectly when expressing their opinion towards a particular issue and can participate to the governance of their respective states. In addition to that, when a country is in post-conflict situation invites election observation to

evaluate the electoral process, it will add confidence to the conduct of this election and make sure that the citizen will feel the presence of equity and transparency that help him to participate in the decision making in his nation.

The great progress made by election observation these recent years in assessing elections has reflected the remarkable efforts made by countries in political transition to democratize their regimes and to abolish oppressive and unnecessary governments. This paper tries to show the important support that elections observation brought to North African states in situation of distress and to what extent this support helped them establish the much-desired democracy.²

1.The Major Organizations of Elections observation

Elections observation are held by famous organizations that do this task with great caution in order to maintain confidence and fairness in the electoral process. Among these organization, the EU, the OSCE and Organization of American States (OAS). In addition to that, recently, the African Union is another regional agency that made great effort in promoting elections in the African continent. Elections observation missions are also carried out by non-governmental organizations as the Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

1.1The Constitution of an Election Observation Mission.

Generally, elections observation mission comprises a core team which is composed of a head of mission, a Deputy Head of Mission and experts in many domains. Basically, this team must work for a

²Anette Faye Jacobson, **Human Right Monitory. Afield Mission Manual**, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, Boston, 2008, p.2.

period between 8 to 12 weeks and present a report that sums up the course of the EOM.

Elections observation played a central role in enhancing democracy in many countries which, so the EU made use over 200 election observations mission in approximately 75 states. The presence of international elections observation in a particular election reveals the aspiration for the enforcement of democracy and the implementation of human rights in social and political fields.

2.The struggle for Democracy in Magreb States

In 2010, an unprecedented uprising called the Arab spring occurred in Magreb and Middle East states and strongly contributed to establish democracy in those countries. The riots erupted in those regions to abolish totalitarian regimes under which people deeply suffer the dictatorship of incompetent leaders that led to the spread of poverty and violence.³

2.1 The Protest Movement in Tunisia

The unrest started In December 2011 when a desperate young man affected by poverty and harsh living conditions set himself on fire. Following this event, great masses of people demonstrated in the street violently calling for the departure of Pre. Zine el Abidine from the presidency. However, the police made use of oppressive means to end the rebellion, but the protesters carried out the revolution against Tunisian authorities and as the riot became uncontrolled, the president declared new reforms in order to calm down the distress socio-political situation that the country was undergoing, but without any

³ The editor of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Jasmine Revolution , retried from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jasmine-Revolution>, December 10, 2023

final resolution. As a result, the rebels succeeded to impeach Pre. Ben Ali from power and forced him to escape from Tnisia.

On January, a state of emergency was declared and Pre. Benali step down with the dissolution of the Tunisian government. The prime minister, Mohamed Ghanouchi took the power and Fouad Mebazaa who was the speaker of the chamber of the deputies of the Tunisian parliament was named as interim president. The new interim government was composed of new ministers and a number of former ones who were with Pre. Benali. Moreover, Ghanouchi defended their presence in the newly formed unit. He claimed that these ministers didn't contribute to Benali's repression to the protest movement, adding that this government is intending to stabilize the economic and political agitation and will certainly release all the politicians who were in Jail. However, ministers from the opposition resigned due the new uprising rejecting the previous members of the government showing their desire to break with the past. Consequently, Ghanouchi and Mebazaa left the RCD and in February of the same year the government sidelined all the activities of this party. Consequently, the transition to a democratic government was a very hard task.⁴

2.2 Election Observation following the Jasmine Revolution

Following the chaos, which was called “the Arab Spring”, Tunisia decided to achieve a democratic process in its political system and this was through fair and free elections that may be achieved with the use of the necessary democratic tools as the deployment of International Observation Mission. This latter played an important role in democratizing many states in recent years showing the profound international devotion to enhance democratic practices. However,

⁴ Ibid.

after the protest movement of 2011, Tunisia aspired for a new democratic political start, so the High Authority for Election in Tunisia invited Election Observation Missions (EOM) to be deployed in these years to strengthen the trust in the vote and avoid any fraud that may cause trouble in it. Moreover, after this mission, others followed in 2014, 2018 and the 2019.

In the Tunisian election held in 2019, Frederica Morini in charge of Foreign Affairs of the European Union affirmed that those elections proved to be an advanced step to a truly democratization. She added that Tunisia was a great collaborator and supporting it in such situation is of major importance as it was confirmed by the deployment of elections observation mission in recent years. This latest election observation mission managed by Fabio Massimo Castaldo indicated the strong aspiration of EU to establish democracy in the Tunisian territory.⁵

3. The Protest Movement in Libya

The aspiration for a democratic transition occurred in many states in North Africa among which Libya, presided by Pre. Muammar el-Qaddafi who was another dictator governing the country for a long period of time. Moreover, Libya was also subject to the Arab spring since it was parts of the countries ruled by a totalitarian regime that ended up with another furious uprising expressing the anger of the masses against the political and social disorder that the country was undergoing. In February 2011, a riot broke out in Libya led by Libyan rebels denouncing Quaddafi's dictatorial authority and calling for a democratic change that may improve the political and social situation

⁵ EU deploys Election Observation Mission to Tunisia, retrieved from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/66160_en, 2 August 2019.

in the country. However, to resolve this crisis, an international coalition led by NATO intervened and helped the rebel forces in their struggle against the Libyan Police. As a result, Quaddafi was impeached from power in August 2011 and the control of the capital Tripoli was taken by the revolutionists. The president escaped for several weeks and finally was killed by the rebels in Sirte in October 2011.

3.1 The EU Assistance to Libya in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring

Libya is another North African country that was subject to the Arab Spring hoping for a democratic transition. As a result it called for the European Union assistance which immediately deployed Election Observation Mission to support the management of the parliamentary national election in 2012. The EU Head of Delegation which came to Tripoli with permanent staff for all functions reported that the electoral process was efficiently conducted in a free and fair manner.

It is important to note that the EU provided a considerable support to the Libyan authorities in 2011 with the amount of €39 million administered for projects in public administration, democratic transition, civil society, health and education. In addition to that, €80.5 million disbursed to provide humanitarian assistance during the conflict phase in 2011. The EU was donating at least an additional €68 million over 2012-2013 for additional sectors like security, technical

and vocational education and training, economic development, and migration.⁶

4. Parameters for observing an election

Observers should understand how the country functions in a cultural and social side and consider the progress of electoral process. Moreover, they have to make difference between insignificant errors in poll due to inexperienced pollsters or voters that may not affect the elections and serious deficiencies which would prejudice the loyalty of this event. This would be noticeable, for instance, in permitting citizens to vote when they do not have this right or prohibiting legitimate voters to vote, or disclosing the confidentiality of the vote.

When assessing a vote, observers are not allowed to talk to the media because they are partly concerned with elections to not perturb the outcome of the poll. Additionally, In order to succeed the voting assessment, the observers must pay close attention to important points that ensure the correct conduct of the poll as securing the ballot box and other elements having major importance in the running of election.⁷

4.1 Why Observing Elections?

Very many states have devoted themselves to invite international observers being sure that operating this way would democratize the electoral assessment. Moreover, the presence of such mechanism in a particular election will empower the respect of human

⁶ EU's response to the "Arab Spring": The State-of-Play after Two Years https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/135292.pdf Brussels, 08 February 2013

⁷ Ministerio de asuntos Exteriores, **Practical Handbook for Election Observation**, area de documentacion y publicacion, Madrid Spain, 2016, p.83-84.

rights and make sure that the parties will accept any electoral result to avoid any violence after.

Elections observation plays an important role in drawing up the election's conclusion, which is reported following a detailed methodology implemented by the observers. It also aims to evaluate to what extent elections implement international democracy and be in accordance with the UN Charter, UN and regional conventions, domestic legislation, and other universal principles.⁸

Conclusion

In modern times, elections observation is deployed in any nation aspiring to enforce the principle of democracy in its electoral process. as an international norm. In fact, countries in post-conflict situation and political transition generally have resort to such practice which is recognized as a way to promote the quality of democracy since it complies with human rights and the international standards . Moreover, it can reassure the voter they can safely and secretly cast their ballots and have credible results. It is worth to note that the Arab spring that broke out in Africa notably in Tunisia and Libya caused serious human and material damages due to public anger towards the incompetent and corrupt leaders who drove those countries to anarchical political and social life. Consequently, to overcome such chaos, they called for genuine elections that can be achieved by the deployment of international observers who can monitor them and organize their running in the right way.

⁸ Ibid.

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