

# Majority versus proportionality? Trajectories of electoral reform in the Mediterranean

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**Abstract** The study of electoral system reform is often focused on consolidated democracies. This special issue on electoral reforms in the Mediterranean region selects both consolidated democracies and moderate authoritarian systems. It analyses reforms under the aspects of how they deal with the dilemma between improving ‘governability’ by majoritarian instruments versus increasing proportionality of representation. While governability also depends on other factors, public debates are frequently structured along this dichotomy, which also affects the outcome of the reform process. The Mediterranean focus reflects the higher degree of reform activities in this policy area (for instance compared to the Nordic countries), which helps to focus on drivers, scope, direction, and vested interests of electoral reforms.

**Keywords** Electoral reform · Proportionality · Majoritarianism · Mediterranean region

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## Mehrheit oder Verhältnismäßigkeit?

Die Entwicklung von Wahlrechtsreform im Mittelmeerraum

**Zusammenfassung** Die Untersuchung von Wahlsystemreformen konzentriert sich häufig auf konsolidierte Demokratien. Für dieses Sonderheft über Wahlreformen im Mittelmeerraum wurden sowohl konsolidierte Demokratien als auch gemäßigte autoritäre Systeme ausgewählt. Es analysiert die Reformen unter dem Gesichtspunkt, wie sie mit dem Dilemma zwischen der Verbesserung der Regierbarkeit durch majoritäre Instrumente und der Erhöhung der Proportionalität der Repräsentation umgehen. Während die Regierbarkeit auch von anderen Faktoren abhängt, sind die öffentlichen Debatten häufig entlang dieser Dichotomie strukturiert, die auch das Ergebnis des Reformprozesses beeinflusst. Der Fokus auf den Mittelmeerraum spiegelt den höheren Grad an Reformaktivitäten in diesem Politikbereich wider (z. B. im Vergleich zu den nordischen Ländern), was dazu beiträgt, sich besser auf die Triebkräfte, den Umfang, die Richtung und die Interessen der Wahlreformen konzentrieren zu können.

**Schlüsselwörter** Wahlsystemreform · Proportionalität · Mehrheitsentscheidungen · Mittelmeerraum

This special issue (SI) aims to empirically and conceptually contribute to the analysis of electoral reforms in the Mediterranean region. In a series of case studies and comparative analyses, the development of electoral systems is reconstructed along the proportionality-majority axis. Two general arguments have been identified to legitimize electoral reforms (Nohlen 2009, p. 214): a strive to improve the proportionality of representation, and the reduction of parliamentary fragmentation in order to improve the formation and functioning of governments. This distinction serves as the analytical framework of this SI that aims to explain how the dilemma between improving proportionality of representation and facilitating the formation of majorities is solved in individual cases of electoral reforms across the region. Surprisingly, the number of such cases is much higher in Southern Europe and the Levant, compared to Northern Europe, for instance. The articles in this SI focus on the trajectories of electoral reforms and their impact on either proportionality of representation or on ‘manufacturing majorities’ (Mitchell 2005) as the (anticipated) outcome of reform. Electoral systems and their reforms are key topics in comparative politics (Lijphart 1994; Colomer 2004; Shugart 2008; Behnke et al. 2017), as they are widely seen as a key factor for the creation and development of the party system and for government formation and stability (‘governability’) (Anckar 1997, 2000; Geys 2006; Pilet and Bol 2011; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Sartori 1986, 1997). The SI aims to fill a gap in comparative research on electoral reforms by focusing on an area that has been understudied due to its internal diversity. Results show that despite the diversity of reforms, one can assume a trend towards strengthening proportional elements.

## 1 Stability and change of electoral systems

Stability and change of electoral laws can be explained by a range of variables, from institutional and contextual factors to actor-centered ones. The international debate offers deeper insights into mechanisms and dynamics of electoral reforms (Boix 1999; Neto and Cox 1997; Benoit 2004, 2007; Clark and Golder 2006; Farrell 2011; Andrews and Jackman 2005; Norris 2004) both in terms of theoretical and empirical contributions.

Electoral reforms show a great variety of scope and measures, ranging from the introduction, change or abolishment of elements such as legal thresholds in PR systems (Bischoff 2008; Krumm 2013; Pukelsheim 2014; Taagepera 2002) to (much more rarely) a complete system change (Blais 2008). Considering an historical perspective across Europe, electoral reforms were often driven by parties and élites interests and shaped by politics, such as the need to find majorities to pass the new electoral laws, and by legal rules and regulations (Ahmed 2012; Boix 1999; Colomer 2004, 2005; Regalia 2015; Renwick 2010). In the German debate about the reform of the federal election law that was started by the federal constitutional court, most reform proposals adamantly adhere to the principle of overall proportionality, as recently stipulated in the amendment to the federal electoral law. Reforms and proposals in other countries are often more open to majoritarian elements such as bonus seats and parallel systems. In the same way, and since there is not a “better” electoral system that fits every context, debates about electoral system reforms have arisen and continue to occupy the public space in many democracies up to the point that it is not easy to try to understand the reasons of electoral system stability and/or change in any given country (Renwick 2010). However, it is striking that not only democracies present a high level of electoral reform activism, but also authoritarian systems pursue an active electoral reform politics. Here, elements of majoritarian voting are by no means the first choice, as one might assume, and implemented reforms point in a direction of proportional representation. However, this depends on certain conditions, which are of course related to authoritarian leaders’ concerns about their own retention of power. Usually, the aim is to split the opposition or, as Gandhi et al. (2022) have also shown, to discipline the allies, especially in nascent autocracies.

In general, it is much easier to agree on the aim of improving democracy (Norris 2011) than on the proper means to do it: different understandings of democracy—such as majoritarian or consensus orientations—soon lead to dissent. The articles of this SI are conceptually based on the debate about the advantages and disadvantages of majoritarian and consensus democracy, as outlined for instance by Arend Lijphart (1984, 1994, 2012). The electoral system is only one of the five variables in the first dimension (executive-parties) in Arend Lijphart’s axis of consensus and majoritarian democracy, but it is an important one for either concentrating or dividing power in a political system. Pursuing a double aim of classifying democracies into two types and of assessing the performance of the two different types, “[h]e found that consensus democracy performs as least as well as majoritarian democracy, and often better. This claim clearly raised the stakes and increased scholarly interest in the underlying typology of democracy.” (Bogaards 2017). Lijphart’s framework

therefore allows the authors of this SI to discuss broader questions of types of democracy and regime performance.

This SI gives special attention to the first dimension (proportionality), which recently came under stress in the public and scholarly debate due to (alleged) collisions with the need for sufficient parliamentary majorities to form stable governments. However, while government stability rests on other factors too, proportionality and stability seem difficult to balance so that the focus will either be on the fairness of a proposed reform, as enabling fair representation can contribute to acceptance and stability of a political system in socially heterogeneous societies (Lebanon and Israel, for instance) with a high number of veto players (Tsebelis 2002). Or the focus can be on questions of efficiency and stability of governments, as can be observed in cases such as Turkey and Italy. Renwick (2010, p. 62) observes that when electoral systems are stable (unchanged) over time they appear with the “patina of rightness”. Spain and Portugal can serve as examples of cases in which the status quo prevailed. In contrast to such ‘frozen’ electoral systems, in cases like Italy and Greece, the debate is much about how to add elements to a PR system that help to enable parliamentary majorities and more stable governments.

With Lijphart, we can expect a kinder, gentler performance of PR systems, while majoritarian systems could produce more adversarial outcomes. However, when it comes to electoral reforms, the logic can be different. Proportional systems could develop a majoritarian reform drive and majoritarian systems could move in PR directions. Institutionalism would however suggest a path dependency in most cases when it comes to electoral reform. Against this background, the macro qualitative comparative (respectively empirical and historical) approach of Nohlen seems appropriate at the empirical level of analysis. It provides an operationalisation for the aims of strengthening proportionality or enhancing governability by strengthening majoritarian elements in electoral reforms.

One of the advantages of Lijphart’s typology is that it does not have to deal with regional delineations. On the contrary, Nohlen (2009) includes a regional dimension in his comparison of electoral systems, distinguishing between industrialised Western countries, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia (see also Nohlen et al. 1999, 2001; Nohlen 2005a, b), however, mainly for practical reasons of presentation. Lijphart’s model has been applied to national and subnational levels of analysis, as well as to intra-regional comparisons (see e.g., Roberts 2006 for Eastern Europe, Croissant and Schächter 2010 for Asia, Arter 2006 for the Nordic countries, Reilly 2008 for the Asia-Pacific region, where he observed a convergence towards mixed systems). This SI is an example of the latter strategy: comparing cases in the Mediterranean region in a most different setting.

From a comparative perspective, it is interesting to analyse the different strategies and legitimacy claims as well as the changes and compromises made in these processes. Or, to try to understand whether, as suggested by Bowler and Donovan (2013), the effects of electoral reforms are more limited than promised by the reformers. The articles of this SI also try to understand why reforms were successfully completed in some case and stalled in others. Katz (2006, p. 73), for instance, highlights three questions for analysing electoral reforms: 1) Why do they happen?, 2) When do they happen?, 3) What form and direction do they take? Rahat and

Hazan (2011), instead, developed a barriers model of electoral reform, pointing at seven barriers to be overcome in order to successfully reform an electoral system. In the condensed version of Jacobs and Leyenaar (2011, p. 504) these are:

1. The procedural superiority of the status quo,
2. Political tradition,
3. The systemic balance and efficiency,
4. Actors' vested interests,
5. Coalition politics and the need to 'serve everyone'.

This model can be helpful in explaining the chances of electoral reform. It can also contribute to explaining the degree or 'scope' of reforms, as distinguished by Jacobs and Leyenaar (2011) as major, minor and technical reforms by developing an ordinal scale measurement to assess the overall degree of reform. In addition, they suggest five dimensions of reform activity: 1) Proportionality, 2) Election levels, 3) Inclusiveness, 4) Ballot structure, 5) Electoral procedures.<sup>1</sup> The scope of electoral reforms can also be explained by institutional rigidity (Lorenz 2005). More rigid constitutions and a strong constitutional court such as in the case of Germany may allow for only a limited degree of change, or, on the contrary, cause the proliferation of reforms and counter-reforms, as in Italy in recent years.

Methodologically, most articles of this special issue apply case study methods. Nohlen (2009, p. 69) distinguishes normative, empirical-statistical and empirical-historical approaches in electoral system research. Behnke et al. (2017, p. 60) further elaborated on the latter approach, characterizing it as qualitative-comparative, as it strongly includes case studies and aims to 'individualize' the cases within their social and historical contexts, which influence the forms and trajectories of electoral systems (Kaiser 2002) and their reform. All the cases analysed in this special issue can be characterised as 'piecemeal engineering' (Nohlen 2009, p. 66): electoral reform is seen as one of the (many) factors influencing the 'performance' of democracies. Electoral reforms can thus provide opportunities to enhance legitimacy and effectiveness of a democratic system and to strengthen the 'governability' of a political system, as has been tried in Italy for many years.<sup>2</sup>

In the last decades, intra-élite interaction and élite-mass-interaction at the input side were quite popular perspectives of research on electoral reform (Renwick 2010 for instance), often in a rational choice framework. Pippa Norris (2011) argues on electoral reform from a public policy perspective, Rahat and Hazan (2011) from an institutionalist perspective. We expect that a 'pure' institutionalist approach may face difficulties in an area with relatively weak institutionalisation of party systems such as the Mediterranean (Croissant 2008), often highly volatile voting behaviour, and electoral systems instability (especially Italy). Thus, analysing the majority-

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<sup>1</sup> On the other side, this raises the question of which factors determine their scope as major, minor, or technical reforms. Thus, this model 'only' provide a framework of constructing electoral reform as an ordinal dependent variable.

<sup>2</sup> However, the reform debate in Germany is often narrowed to technical aspects such as surplus and compensatory seats (e.g. Behnke 2013, 2016).

proportionality dimension in electoral reform is “making a difference” (Bogaards 2015), while avoiding over-determination at the same time.

## 2 Regional focus: The Mediterranean

A detailed regional focus is so far largely missing in the scholarly literature on electoral reform. Both the 2011 special issue of *West European Politics Understanding Electoral Reform* (Vol. 34, No. 1) and the 1995 special issue *The Politics of Electoral Reform* of the *International Political Science Review* (Vol. 16, No. 1) do not systematically address electoral reform under a regional perspective. And neither do Gallagher and Mitchell (2006) in their “*The Politics of Electoral Systems*”.

The cases of this SI are, thus, chosen to address the variety of electoral systems and their reform in an often-understudied region. We have selected cases that vary in scope and extent of our dependent variable (i.e. electoral system reform), with Italy having the most experiences with electoral reform, and Portugal the least. The other cases lie somewhere in between, and help us to uncover the overall tendency of reform between proportionality and majoritarianism, as well as drivers and obstacles that can be identified for the individual development of each system. In other words, we are curious how in different institutional settings and regime types, the struggle for majoritarian or consensus solutions is fought and decided, and which impact it has on party system fragmentation, for instance.

Depending on subject and scholar, some refer to ‘MENA’ or ‘Near East region’, some to Southern Europe, Maghreb, and East Med. Mediterranean region is a quite encompassing label, comprising EU and non-EU states, as well as European, Asian and African ones (see Kuru 2021 for the Mediterranean in International Relations). Setting apart the dispute over the exact regional boundaries, the Mediterranean region represents an interesting starting point for comparative research. This applies not only to the comparison within the region, but also to the possibility of interregional comparison based on it. The resurgent field of comparative area studies (CAS) transformed from mainly descriptive to much more theory-driven and methods-driven approaches (Berg-Schlosser 2012). Area Studies contribute to “bringing new data, new theories, and valuable policy-relevant insights to social sciences.” (Ahram et al. 2018). From this perspective, the SI can contribute to future inter-regional comparisons (“cross area studies”).

How is the dilemma between majority and proportionality addressed in electoral reforms in the Mediterranean region? The regional focus provides a variety of electoral reforms as well as regime types, and shows some institutional variations. The region covers a variety of regimes, from fully democratic to highly authoritarian. It is a theoretically and empirically so far under-researched area (Pace 2006). Connecting the fringes of Europe, Asia, and Africa, it is a centre of geopolitical conflicts and discourses. In public perception, such images overlap the regional efforts to emphasise the links between the northern and southern Mediterranean countries, as for example in the EU’s neighbourhood policy with the Union for the Mediterranean since 2008. The ‘Great Sea’ (Abulafia 2011) has historically been a place of exchange and interaction for the littoral countries, contributing to the idea of a Mediterranean

civilization or identity in the eyes of French intellectuals Paul Valéry or Fernand Braudel, for instance. Already in the early 1980s, Rosenthal (1982, p. 1) observed that the Mediterranean Basin “is rapidly constituting an arena in which many contemporary international problems are being acted out”, due to reasons of location, diverse and complex national systems and political economy.<sup>3</sup>

Within this regional focus, electoral system design is much more debated than in other areas, such as in the Nordic countries. Given a series of recent inconclusive elections in Spain and Israel for instance, and the constitutional reform reducing the number of parliamentarians in Italy, it can be expected that electoral reform is to become an even more salient issue in the region.

Spain had two consecutive parliamentary elections in 2019, which did not produce conclusive results, while in Israel even three consecutive elections between April 2019 and March 2020 failed to produce a stable Parliament. By contrast, in Greece a bonus system with 50 seats for the winning party produced a single party government in July 2019. However, due to reasons of proportionality and fairness, this bonus system has been abolished for the next general election—with a chance to be reintroduced in future.<sup>4</sup> The election of March 2018, the two decisions by the Constitutional court of Italy (repealing two electoral laws), the permanent reform debate, and the 2020 constitutional reform, frame Italy as a case in which we can easily foresee an electoral reform before 2023 (Regalia 2018; Höhne 2012).

Croissant and Lorenz (2018, p. 417) found no clear trend in electoral rules for lower house elections in the Southeast Asian region. Can a trend be identified for the Mediterranean region? If yes, which one? Several recent reforms such in Greece, Lebanon, and Jordan point to a strengthening of the PR element. Despite its diversity in regime types, this could point to a more homogenous electoral systems development compared to Southeast Asia (Reilly 2008), for example. The prevalence of path dependency in cases of reform seems to be another common feature between the regions that can be explained, for example, by the uncertainty about the future electoral outcome of reforms from the side of reform actors. An important motivation among reform promoters is thus the reduction of electoral risk (see the article of Farag and Abudalu in this SI). Path dependency in electoral reform can also be observed in the case of Italy, where the movements on the majoritarian-proportionality dimension show greater amplitude. The 1993 reform moved to the majoritarian direction, while the 2006 reform bounded back to the proportional side, followed by the 2018 reform that implemented a mixed system. Local election systems, on the contrary, have gone in the majoritarian direction.

The Mediterranean focus has been chosen because of the high frequency of reforms. Recently, the Mediterranean region has shown dynamic changes and democratic challenges too. In Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia for instance, populist strongmen

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<sup>3</sup> “It lies at the strategic junction between East and West; at the political junction between Europe and the Middle East and Europe and Africa; at the economic junction between the industrialized and developed North and the non-industrialized, less developed South and between the oil-poor North West and the oil-rich Middle East.” (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> As in many other cases, the global financial crisis (GFC) contributed to a significant realignment of their party systems. Kovras and Loizides (2014) asked for a “majoritarian pitfall” in the Greek debt crisis, for instance.

with ambitious plans are restructuring state and society, while in Italy, Greece and Lebanon, societal and political checks and balances are more resilient against the populist projects, sometimes at the price of efficient governance. Israel is a case in-between. Its resilient institutions and civil society prevented a large-scale state capture by populist leaders so far. The recent level of electoral reform activity in the selected countries seems to be considerably higher than in many Western European and Anglo-Saxon countries. Institutions and democratic consensus in some of our cases seem to be less consolidated, triggering either a standstill or a high frequency of reforms such in the exceptional case of Italy.

### 3 Contributions to this special issue

The contributions of this special issue cover recent electoral reforms from Portugal to Tunisia. They are mostly case studies of reforms with various degree of change, from the almost non-reform in Portugal to major reforms in the case of Italy. The papers of this special issue have been presented and discussed in a virtual author's workshop on 24th and 25th of September 2021. Based on the workshop discussions and comments, the papers have been revised and submitted to the ZfVP, which started the double-blind-peer review process in 2022.

Our first case study on electoral (non)reform in Portugal by *Ricardo Carvalho* and *André Freire* corroborates the finding of institutional stability as outlined before. Portugal has never embarked on the path of electoral reform after its democratization in the 1970s. While there has been some reform debate in Portugal, too, the system at national level is still particularly resistant to change. Especially in the last 16 years, the number of proposals sharply declined, while the academic and civil society debate about reform became livelier. The institutional stability can partly be explained by the factual two-party systems successfully operating in the last decades. Methodologically, *Carvalho* and *Freire* apply a contextual barriers approach to further analyse constraints to a successful reform initiative. Among others, they point at intense intra-party competition and personalisation, and the absence of serious institutional problems, that lower incentives for an electoral reform.

*Jan Labitzke's* article examines the ongoing search in Italy for an electoral law that both ensures the representation of the electorate and provides reliable majorities for stable governments. He argues that despite multiple changes to electoral laws, this goal has not yet been achieved, which is why electoral reforms will remain on the agenda of Italian politics. The author asks for reasons and mechanisms behind this seemingly unstoppable reform cascade and explores the question of whether the problems of lack of stability and representativeness in Italy can be solved by electoral reforms at all. Rather, he identifies causes in the political culture and the party system that lie outside the scope of formal electoral law. Until these causes are addressed, Jan Labitzke argues, the prognosis for an electoral reform that could last for several electoral periods is very unfavourable.

In Lebanon (as in Germany), a Constitutional Court decision opened the box of electoral reform. The gridlock of Lebanon's unique consociational system produced much headlines in recent years. *Maximilian Felsch* analyses why the recent change



of the electoral system had so little effect on the entrenched system of sectarian-based clientelism<sup>5</sup> in the 2018 election. This system guarantees political representation to all major confessional communities through fixed quotas in parliament, cabinet and throughout the public administration. In this case of externally initiated reforms, the solutions finally agreed upon did not really convince anyone. Felsch consequently asks for conditions of an effective reform in the context of the societal divisions. Lebanese confessionalism has been discussed as an initially successful case of Lijphart's consociationalism applied to religious groups (Clark et al. 2009, p. 735). The recent crisis in Lebanon seems to confirm Lijphart's argument that, to deal with ethnic minorities, simply using PR electoral rules is better than providing reserved seats guaranteeing representation of specific minorities (ibid.: 736). The case of Lebanon also illustrates the problem of 'counting equality' of votes and factual overrepresentation of groups. Since mandate quotas are reserved for each confessional community (sect), a Member of Parliament often feels first and foremost obliged to his or her sect. This carries the risk of structural imbalances for individual sects and leads to the problem of inter-communal counting equality (Behnke, Grotz and Hartmann 2017, p. 25).<sup>6</sup>

The case of Israel as analysed by Nir Atmor, shows some similarities to the Portuguese case. The basic principles of the extremely proportional electoral system are stable over time. One exception is the temporary introduction of a directly elected prime minister (1992–2001), that showed a majoritarian tendency, another one the slight increase of the electoral threshold over time to 3.25% in 2014. The idea behind the 1992 short-lived reform was to strengthen the prime minister and to improve governability, as well as to "reduce the size, number, and influence of the smaller parties in the Knesset, without changing the proportional nature of the system used to elect it" (Rahat and Hazan 2006, p. 346). However, in contrast to the intentions of the reform, the results in terms of reducing the influence of small parties and facilitating government formation in the subsequent elections were disappointing, leading to a "decline of the large parties and the concurrent upsurge in sectarian representation" (ibid., p. 347), and to an abolition on the reform. Israel is one of the few cases with a low nationwide electoral threshold and thus very high proportionality between vote shares and seat shares of parties. Partly, the stability results from the influence granted by the system to smaller parties for change of the status quo. Small parties that are needed to form a majority in the Knesset could

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<sup>5</sup> The case of Lebanon provides an example of what has been called 'limited proportionality'. Already established by the Ottoman Empire in 1861 and confirmed by the 1926 pre-independence constitution, officially recognized sects enjoy segmental autonomy in terms of personal status law, for which only religious courts still have exclusive jurisdiction. In addition, Parliament and Cabinet follow the principle of proportional representation (Art. 95 & 24, see Bogaards 2019, p. 31). The Taif Agreement of 1989 confirmed the proportional representation of the religious groups, with changes in the details.

<sup>6</sup> The case of Lebanon somehow contradicts the observation of Levitsky and Murillo (2009, p. 128) that "[w]eak institutions are more open to repeated and radical change". While repeated change prior to parliamentary elections has been observed, they were hardly radical. Thus, in the case of Lebanon weak institutions seem to favour incremental change, while the more radical change of 2018 was stipulated by the constitutional court.

successfully block a further increase of the threshold. As the recent election cascade in Israel illustrates, this problem is still unsolved.

*Mahmoud Farag* and *Muath Abudalu* address the surprising delay of electoral reform in Jordan after the Arab uprisings. Public pressure for electoral reform was highest in 2011–12, but did not transform into a full PR system at that time. However, four years later in 2016 the mixed SNTV-list PR system previously introduced was further transformed into a full PR system. The authors explain this delay in following public demands with a perceived uncertainty of the government about possible effects on election results. The chances for full PR were further increased by a fragmentation of the oppositional Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood as well as malapportionment. The authors pay special attention also to the legitimating rhetoric applied by the regime both at elite and at mass level.

Tunisia has until recently widely been acknowledged as the only consolidating democracy resulting from the Arab spring. *Hager Ali* examines the consensus model that was introduced to overcome the crisis of 2012–2013. However, between 2014 and 2021 Tunisia's electoral system failed to improve proportionality and to prevent gridlocks, thus jeopardizing democratic stability. As recent developments illustrated, while the consensus model that was meant to balance between secular and Islamist interests, could bridge the initial transformation, the resulting balance was always fragile including cabinet instabilities, gridlocks, and precarious institutionalisation of parties. In 2022 president Kais Saied introduced sweeping reforms towards a personalized, majoritarian system that abolished Tunisia's party-based PR-system altogether. Ali argues that the consensus-approach between ruling elites initially soothed differences between secular and Islamist politicians, but at the expense of governability. She finds that Tunisia's electoral reforms increasingly restrict access to the electoral arena for smaller, less wealthy candidates and parties by altering legislation on gender parity, suffrage for military staff, campaign duration and finance, and penalties for electoral malpractice.

Attempts to switch to a majoritarian system are rare. *Thomas Krumm* analyses two of them by comparing the introduction of direct election of the head of government in Israel and that of the head of state in Turkey about two decades later. In Turkey in 2014, a two-round system was chosen for the direct election of the president. However, the multi-member PR system for parliamentary elections remained untouched by Erdogan. In the 2017 constitutional reform in Turkey, governability has been an argument, too. The presidentialisation was justified by its initiators with a lack of efficiency and risk of self-blockade of the parliamentary system and was regarded as a (further) step towards a majoritarian style of government. In Renwick's (2010) typology, both the constitutional reform and the following electoral reform were elite imposed. Élite-mass interaction was minimised to propaganda in the run-up to the mandatory constitutional referendum. Krumm focuses on the possible impact of different levels of democracy for both the introduction and trajectory of such a reform. Applying a policy cycle model of electoral reform, he focuses on differences in both reforms along the five stages of a policy cycle. Already in the first step, the impact of the different levels of democracy come out clear in the (bottom-up versus top-down) problem definition and agenda setting of both cases. While the legitimation in both cases showed some similarities (tackling problems

of cabinet formation and stability), the reforms were assessed and contextualised very differently; while Israel returned to a modified status quo, in Turkey it became a core element of (further) authoritarianisation (Krumm 2018).

Finally, *Norbert Kersting* and *Marta Regalia* compare the use of constitutional referendums in Italy and Turkey. Recognizing that direct democracy instruments could improve the quality of representative decision-making, they ask whether referendums can be seen as conducing to majoritarianism or to consensus democracy in Lijphart's terms. Among others, they found that in Turkey the constitutional referendum of 2017 contributed to majoritarian developments, while in Italy the different referendum variants offer opportunities for minorities and regions to express dissent, promoting a more consensual democracy.

#### 4 Conclusion: electoral reform in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region has recently attracted much attention with regard to issues such as migration, security, conflict studies, authoritarianism, and geopolitics. How-

**Table 1** Tendencies in the cases under examination

Case	Period under investigation	Current electoral (or referendum) system	Reform tendency (majoritarian/proportional)	Reform drivers and obstacles
Portugal	1983–2021	Closed list proportional representation	No clear tendency	Satisfaction with the status quo
Italy	1948–2022	Mixed-member proportional	No clear tendency	Government and party driven reforms (1993: élite-mass interaction)
Lebanon	2018–2022	Segmented proportional representation	Strengthening of PR in 2018; system of “limited proportionality”	élite-mass interaction
Jordan	2011–2016	Proportional representation	Introduction of PR in 2016	Reform as a result of élite-mass interaction; élite fears as main obstacle
Israel	2013–2021	Proportional representation in one national district	Threshold increase as a minor majoritarian reform	Status quo widely accepted
Tunisia	2012–2021	Single member plurality	The consensus model adapted in the 2012/13 crises was replaced in 2021 by the president's “elective dictatorship”	Inter-élite interaction and consensus
Direct elected chief executives	Israel: 1992–2003 Turkey: 2007–2014	Israel: Majority vote of PM by parliament Turkey: direct election of president in two round system	Direct election of a chief executives contributes to majoritarian development	Israel: cross-party consensus Turkey: government driven reform
Referendums in Italy and Turkey	Turkey: 2017 Italy: 2020	Constitutional	Turkey: majoritarian Italy: consensual	Turkey: government driven reform Italy: élite-mass interaction

Source: Own compilation

ever, it is rarely taken into account as a distinctive region in comparative politics, neither at the level of case studies nor at the level of cross sectional or longitudinal empirical analysis. It “sits uneasily across the literature on regionalism” (Bicchi 2018, p. 37) and across comparative politics, too. Given the problems of characterizing the Mediterranean as a distinct region, not only historically, culturally or as a “security complex” (ibid., p. 38), comparative studies should initially focus on intra-regional comparisons. This special issue aims to mitigate this gap, as the region offers a rich diversity of electoral systems, as well as a variety of experiences with electoral reforms and regime types. The cases under examination in this special issue illustrate in particular the difficulties of electoral reform between Scylla and Charybdis: Permanent reform or policy stability. Thus, generalised long-term tendencies are difficult to identify among the selected cases, except a reinforcement and differentiation of varieties of PR systems. In contrast, reform trends in Italy and Turkey suggest an oscillating pattern between a more proportional and a more majoritarian orientation. The cases of Jordan (2016) and Lebanon (2018) indicate an adjustment towards the principle of proportionality. Although the developments in these two cases can initially be explained in terms of domestic politics, the approach of ‘policy diffusion’ could open further perspectives. Table 1 summarises some findings from the case studies.

As shown in Table 1, a general tendency of policy convergence is difficult to discern, but a continuation or strengthening of PR elements is obvious in most of the cases. In addition, intra-élite bargaining processes and the calculation of expectations about possible gains or losses have been dominant considerations in several cases (Italy, Jordan, and Lebanon). In addition, the structure and power of civil society actors as well as the élites’ willingness to listen played a role in the cases of Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Israel, too. However, civil society is organised and institutionalised in quite different ways across the cases, probably most conflictual in Lebanon.

If we were to construct an axis of willingness to reform, Portugal would certainly be at one end and Italy at the other. However, it would go too far to assume that on the one side permanent reforms contribute to decreasing consensus and on the other side policy stability contributes to permanent crisis of government formation and stability. Rather, long-term reform trends in Italy and Israel suggest an oscillating pattern between a more proportional and a more majoritarian drive, while the reform in Lebanon intended to strengthen proportionality paradoxically strengthened sectarian clientelism. Unintended outcomes are a not unfamiliar phenomenon in electoral reforms.

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