A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE SERVICES OF ARAB PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether services of the selected Arab parliamentary websites fulfill the selected dimensions, and whether there is any relation between the countries' ranking on both of e-government survey and democracy index, and the level of services of Arab parliamentary websites.

The final findings were as follows: the goal of designing the websites of Arab parliamentary websites is concerned only in provision of information rather than enabling the relationship between MPs and public and promoting democracy. In case of our sample of Arab countries, the well-established application of e-government does not mean at all an elevated level of the services of Arab parliamentary websites. In addition, there is no relation between the countries' ranking on democracy index and the level of the services provided by Arab parliamentary websites. Low level of democracy in Arab countries has its effect on the designing of parliamentary websites and the services through which they are provided.

Keywords: e-parliament, parliamentary website, ICT, comparative content analysis

INTRODUCTION

Citizens were used in the past to vote for parliament nominees and to help them to be the parliament members without a legal accountability or without questioning them what they are intending to do when they win, but they confine themselves just by looking and reading their own agenda regarding their election campaign [21]. For this reason, people often feel distant from government [9], and for most people parliament's building looks more like an impenetrable fortress than an inclusive democratic space [3]. According to that, and due to the impact of emerging new political and administrative mentalities, parliaments must change and transform themselves within the context of e-parliament practices that are accepted worldwide and supported globally [19]. E-parliament therefore has the potential to reduce citizens-representatives estrangement [11, 12].

ICTs have become essential in supporting the work of legislative bodies throughout the world [5], and have a profound impact on core functions of parliaments (legislation, representation and oversight) [19]. They lead parliamentary institutions to behave as open, transparent and accessible organizations [16], in addition to become more representative of their electorates, more accountable to them, and more effective in their key tasks of legislation and oversight of government [17].

Moving toward e-parliament applications; parliaments have been further challenged to improve the design and usability of their websites so that they are understandable and easy to operate [23]. In this regard, Arab countries have launched their parliamentary websites in order to enhance democracy and relation with public. Nevertheless, they are all still lagging in the democracy index, and citizens in most Arab countries have poor information about their parliaments. Therefore, focusing on analyzing the parliamentary websites of these countries

may contribute to promote democracy and engagement. In this manner, the aims of this study are: to investigate whether services of the selected Arab parliamentary websites fulfill the selected dimensions related to transparency, accountability, interactivity, usability and accessibility. Rating websites based on the proportions obtained through applying the selected dimensions. In addition, to investigate whether there is any correlation between the e-government survey, democracy index ranking, against the level of services of Arab parliamentary websites.

SERVICES OF PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES

A Website is a virtual location attempts to cater the need of all the intended users through a wide variety of contents such as text, image, audio, and video incorporated in connected Web pages of the site [15]. The vast majority of parliaments in the world now have websites with the activities and documents of the parliament available to the public [23]. Parliamentary websites have become the main window of parliament to the outside world [1], and one of the most essential e-participation tools [20, 17]. They used to explain to people how they can participate in parliamentary processes to influence laws and policies by sending submissions electronically or by other means [25].

Also, they increase the transparency and accountability of legislative bodies [4], enable the accessibility of visitors in finding information about legislative work, and facilitate the work of the members of parliament [14].

Parliamentary websites serve a variety of purposes. First: Members and their staff now routinely use legislative websites themselves to view or obtain copies of agendas, draft legislation, proposed amendments, debates, and votes [5]. Second: legislative websites are used to communicate with citizens [4], by providing detailed information on parliamentary procedures, current legislative activity, and the acts of parliamentarians [18], and provision of contact information and other links by which citizens can communicate their views to MPs [8]. Moreover, as the interactive web has emerged, some parliaments have added new tools on their sites that encourage two-way communication between members and citizens, inviting them to share their views and engaging them in the policy process [23].

Finally, parliamentary websites can host: online discussion groups, forums, surveys, public hearings, blogs, polls, e-petitions and chats for soliciting citizens' opinions [2, 8, 20].

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an increasing number of academic studies regarding the analysis of parliamentary websites and their interactivity and provision of parliamentary information to citizens.

The study of [4] aimed to compare the legislative information systems of the European Parliament and the Congress against the criteria of accuracy, timeliness, completeness, clarity, and context. Review the goals these legislative bodies have set for their websites. The findings indicated that these two bodies are generally achieving the goals of accuracy and timeliness. Specific improvements can still be made, but the overall status is good. Much remains to be done to improve on the standard of Completeness. There are a number of ways in which the systems of the Congress and Parliament support the criteria of Clarity and Context especially through explanatory material regarding the text of proposals. [3] presented two case studies of online consultations run on behalf of the UK Parliament and tests a series of hypotheses about online public deliberation. One consultation involved women survivors of domestic violence; the other was linked to the examination by a Parliamentary Committee of the draft Communications Bill. Concluded by suggesting that the success of online parliamentary consultations is dependent upon two groups of actors, parliamentarians and citizens, each of which must acquire new types of communication skills and develop new practices of operating. [24] conducted a comparative website analysis of parliamentary and political parties' websites of candidate states of the European Union. Results indicated that there is considerable variation among both parliaments and parties as far as the development of their websites is concerned. Existing member states tend to have more developed websites and, overall, the quality of parliamentary websites tends to be slightly superior to that of party websites. Most surprisingly, familiarity and use of ICT – as well as higher levels of wealth - do not inexorably lead to better website development. [13] aimed to analyze the parliamentary websites of 17 democratic states of Africa (including Morocco) for information content and interactive tools. Concluded that despite such challenges as inadequate infrastructural facilities and capacity building in most African States, the exponential growth of ICTs in the continent, has the potential for strengthening interactive deliberation between citizens and their representatives and thus reduce citizens- representatives' estrangement and make democratic processes more inclusive and transparent. [1] developed a comparative analysis of the websites of the lower chambers of the Brazilian and the British parliaments. The analysis showed that both websites

achieve much higher levels of complexity in the information area than in engagement. But it also showed that the Brazilian parliament website includes far more tools designed for public interaction than its UK counterpart. [6] aimed to evaluate ECOWAS members' websites based on a modified version of the guidelines recommended by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2009. Concluded that while most Member States websites score well on general information about their parliaments, they lacked progress in making their websites a one-stop point for political information about their countries, and a fulcrum for interaction between legislators and citizens and a real time deliberation on burning national and regional issues despite the current availability of suitable interactive tools on the internet. [8] focused on two particular uses of PWs: provision of MP contact and background information; and links to social media. Through a seminal empirical examination of all 184 functioning lower house and unicameral PWs around the world (including Arab countries such as: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, Yemen, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, and Lebanon). The study found that although PWs in wealthy democracies generally provide more MP information, the majority of PWs are deficient in providing basic MP information to citizens and utilizing linkages to social media. By contrast, some non-democratic states and newly democratized countries, especially those with compulsory voting, display a relatively high level of MP transparency and social media connectivity. [10] used data from a pilot study on the websites of 15 parliaments in Europe to identify which parliamentary functions are portrayed on these websites. Results showed that Legislation is by far the main priority of parliamentary websites in Europe, despite the fact that there is considerable literature showing that parliaments' effective role in legislation is in fact very weak. Often there is not a match between what parliaments do – their role – and what their websites show. [18] analyzed the contents of the parliamentary websites in 18 democratic countries (including Canada, USA, Australia, and Europe). Results showed the similarity of the contents of parliamentary websites in the 18 established democracies. Apart from the information on individual representatives' voting behavior which can be found only on nine websites, all parliamentary websites indeed provide citizens with a lot of information needed for ex post scrutiny. The increased publicity of parliamentary plenary debates can be considered valuable. Parliamentary websites do not, however, increase the scope of matters that are public. Websites increase people's direct access to parliamentary information and also communication between voters and the representatives.

None of the above studies mentioned anything about Arab parliamentary websites analysis except for the study of [8], which analyzed the websites of this study's countries by focusing only on items related to (provision of MP contact and background information; and links to social media) which were included in two dimensions (Transparency, Interactivity) out of the four dimensions of this study. And the study of [13], which only analyzed the website of Morocco by focusing on the items (information content and interactive tools) that were also included in the same two dimensions.

As a result, none of the previous studies focused on analysis of Arab parliamentary websites according to the dimensions applied in this study. Thus, this study can be considered as a pilot study to bridge the knowledge gap in this subject.

QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

Reviewing previous studies shows that researchers have developed many different dimensions based on their points of view. For example: all previous studies focused on "Information provision and interactivity". [24, 15, 6] stated "Accessibility and Usability". [15] stated "Transparency", while [18, 10, 6] stated "Legislation and scrutiny or oversight".

In order to gather the most important dimensions of previous works and to enhance the accumulation of experience, this study uses a modified version of the guidelines recommended by IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009). Therefore, the final dimensions of this study are: transparency, accountability, interactivity, usability and accessibility. Thus, we can ask our first question: to what extent Arab parliamentary websites provide the services related to transparency, accountability, interactivity, usability and accessibility. In other words, which of these dimensions is the focus of Arab parliamentary websites?

From our point of view, widening the analysis of parliamentary websites by comparing the countries' ranking on the e-government survey and the democracy index is a focal point. The reason behind choosing these two indicators depends on two points. First, the government and parliament in addition to judiciary are the three pillars of any country. Therefore, the level of e-government development should move in parallel with the development of the e-parliament as ICT resources are available for both. Second, parliament in any country plays a political role affected by the level of democracy. Thus, transparency, political participation and the level of applying the e-parliament should be affected by level of democracy.

Since none of the previous studies mentioned this point, we can ask our second question: is there any relation between the countries' ranking on both of e-government survey and democracy index, against the level of services of Arab parliamentary websites?

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The population of this study includes all Arab countries, divided into three regional areas: GCC, Iraq and Levant, and North Africa. The process of selecting the sample's components was of two steps. First, choosing Arab countries, which have a (high - very high) ranking on e-government survey 2016. Second, adding the democracy index 2016 for each country. Therefore, the primary components of the sample are as shown in (Table 1).

Table 1: The Primary Components of the Sample

Country global ranking \ Criteria	E-government survey 2016	Democracy index 2016
GCC		
Bahrain	24 very high	2.79 authoritarian
UAE	29 very high	2.75 authoritarian
Kuwait	40 high	3.85 authoritarian
Saudi	44 high	1.93 authoritarian
Qatar	48 high	3.18 authoritarian
Oman	66 high	3.04 authoritarian
The Levant		
Lebanon	73 high	4.86 hybrid regime
Jordan	91 high	3.96 authoritarian
Africa		
Tunisia	72 high	6.4 flawed democracy
Morocco	85 high	4.41 hybrid regime

SOURCE: e-government survey 2016 [26], and democracy index 2016 [22].

When searching the (PARLINE database on national parliaments) (http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp) for the parliamentary websites of the sample's countries, it turns out that Qatar does not have a parliamentary website. This is very odd for a country that has a very high level in e-government application. In addition, the link to the website of Oman Shura Council was invalid at the time of preparation of this study. Therefore, the final sample contains eight countries from three regional areas: GCC (Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi), Levant (Lebanon, and Jordan), North Africa (Tunisia, and Morocco).

To conduct the analysis of the services of Arab parliamentary websites, this study uses the comparative content analysis. The content analysis plays a crucial role in identifying the functional and structural condition of Web site, and It determines government's initiatives to meet citizen demands in the Web [15].

All eight parliamentary websites (types, names, and URLs) of the sample in this study were accessed through the (PARLINE database on national parliaments). To collect the required data, an assessment of these websites carried out in the span between 21/ October and 7/ November 2017. And to ensure the accuracy of the collected data, a reassessment process carried out in the span between 25/ November and 4/ December 2017.

In case of bicameral legislatures (Oman, Bahrain, Morocco and Jordan), this study takes into consideration only the lower chambers, where [24] declared that they are more representative body and the one presumed to be closest to the citizen. (Table 2) illustrates the type, name, and URLs of the analyzed parliamentary websites.

For coding process, this study uses the binary method (or dichotomous coding scheme), where One (yes) is used if the item is available, and Zero (no) is used if not. While for the scaling process, this study calculates the proportions of each country by each dimension, noticing that the proportion of (0.5) means a middle quality of services.

Table 2: Type, Name, and URLs of the Analyzed Parliaments

Country	Legislature's type	Legislature's name	Legislature's Address	Span
UAE	unicameral	Federal National Council	http://www.almajles.gov.ae/	21-22-23-24/10/2017
Saudi	unicameral	Shura Council	http://www.shura.gov.sa/	24-25-26/10/2017
Kuwait	unicameral	National Assembly	http://www.kna.kw/	30-31/10/2017
Bahrain	bicameral	Council of Representatives	http://www.nuwab.bh/	27-28-29-30/10/2017
Oman	bicameral	Shura Council	http://www.shura.om/	not active
Lebanon	unicameral	House of Representatives	https://www.lp.gov.lb/	1-2/11/2017
Tunisia	unicameral	Assembly of People's Representatives	http://www.arp.tn/	2-3-4/11/2017
Jordan	bicameral	House of Representatives	http://www.representatives.jo/	4-5/11/2017
Morocco	bicameral	House of Representatives	http://www.chambredesrepresentants.ma/	6-7/11/2017

SOURCE: (PARLINE database on national parliaments) (http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp).

ANALYSIS

As mentioned before, this study is based on five dimensions containing 108 items for conducting the comparative content analysis of the eight Arab parliamentary websites. These dimensions will be analyzed as follows:

Transparency

We can notice from (Table 3) that six out of eight countries are above (0.5), while Bahrain has the highest proportion of (0.8). Only Lebanon and Tunisia have proportions below (0.5) as they scored (0.32), (0.48) respectively. By breaking down the transparency dimension into each of its items, it becomes possible to gain further insights:

Access to parliament: The assessed websites are generally not concerned with promoting access to parliament, as updated news is available on all eight websites, while visiting hours and panorama are unavailable. The website of Bahrain is the only one that declares guided tours and educational visits. Diagram of seating arrangements, virtual 'guided tour', and visitors' centers are only available on the websites of Kuwait and Bahrain, while UAE provide only visitors' centers. Only websites of Kuwait, Tunisia, Jordan, UAE, and Bahrain provide a location map of the parliament.

History and role: all websites provide text of the country's constitution. All websites provide a brief history of the parliament except Tunisia. All websites provide

description of the role and legal responsibilities of the national legislature except Lebanon and Tunisia.

Functions, composition, and activities: an overview of the composition and functions of the national parliament and its constituent bodies is available on all websites except Lebanon. The websites of Bahrain and Jordan only declare staffing of the parliament, while website of Kuwait declares both the budget and staffing of the parliament. All websites only declare the schedule of general activities and events occurring today, while planned events are unavailable. All websites provide a list of international and regional parliamentary assemblies of which the parliament is a member except Kuwait, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Annual report(s) are available on all websites except Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia. All websites provide statistics on the activities of the current and previous parliaments except Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia. Texts of official press releases of the parliament are available on all websites except Lebanon.

Elected leaders: all websites other than Tunisia generally focus on provision of Biodata and picture of the current presiding officers of the parliament, while there is no complete information for previous presidents. All websites provide a brief description of the presiding officer's powers and prerogatives, and names of deputy-speakers/vice-presidents. Important speeches are available on all websites except UAE, and Saudi. Maybe for safety reasons, none of the eight websites provides any information on presiding officers' public agendas.

Table 3: Proportions of Transparency Dimension

Items\ Countries	UAE[*]	SA[**]	KW[*]	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
Access to parliament								
Visitors' centers [7]	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Guided tours [6, 7]	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Educational visits [7]	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Visiting hours [7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diagram of seating arrangements [1, 6, 7]	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Virtual 'guided tour' of the parliamentary building [1, 7, 20]	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Panorama [24]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
News [6, 10, 20, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
A location map of the parliament [6]	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
History and role								
Brief history of the parliament [1, 6, 7, 10, 18, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Description of the role and legal responsibilities of the national legislature [1, 7, 10, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Text of the country's constitution [1, 6, 7, 10, 18, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Functions, composition, and activities								
Overview of the composition and functions of the national parliament and its constituent bodies [1, 6, 7, 18, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
The budget and staffing of the parliament [1, 7]	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Schedule of general activities and events occurring today and planned [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
List of international and regional parliamentary assemblies of which the parliament is a member [1, 6, 7, 20]	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Annual report(s) of parliament [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Statistics on the activities of the current and previous parliaments [1, 7, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Texts of official press releases of the parliament [1, 6, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Elected leaders								
Biodata and picture of the current and previous Presiding Officers of the parliament [1, 6, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Brief description of the presiding officer's powers and prerogatives [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Names of deputy-speakers/vice-presidents [1, 7]	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Presiding officers' public agendas [6]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Important speeches [6]	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Parliamentary non-plenary bodies								
Complete list of non-plenary parliamentary bodies [1, 6, 7, 18, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Description of the mandate and terms of reference of each body [1, 6, 7, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1

Items\ Countries	UAE[*]	SA[**]	KW[*]	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
Description of the activity carried out by the body [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Membership and names of presiding officer(s) of each body [1, 7, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
National delegations to international and regional parliamentary assemblies of which the parliament is a member [7]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Members of parliament								
Up-to-date list of all current members [1, 7, 8, 10, 18, 20, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Information about each member's constituency, party affiliation, membership in parliamentary committees and/or commissions [1 ,6, 7, 8, 10, 20, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Description of representative duties and functions of members [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Activities of individual members [1, 7, 10, 18]	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Basic information concerning the status of a member [1, 7]	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Statistical and demographic data [1, 7]	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
List with Biodata of previous members [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Political parties in parliament								
List of all political parties represented in parliament [6, 7, 18]				0	0	0	1	1
Elections and electoral systems								
Explanation of the election procedure [1, 6, 7, 18, 20]	1		1	1	1	1	1	0
Link to the electoral commission website [1, 7]	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
Results of the last elections [1, 6, 7, 18, 20]	0		0	1	0	0	0	0
Current composition of party groups and coalitions [1, 7, 18, 20, 24]				0	1	0	0	0
Results of previous elections [1, 7]	0		1	1	0	0	0	0
Administration of parliament								
General descriptions of jobs in the legislature; a list of current vacancies; and details of how to apply [1, 7]	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Publications, documents								
Description of the types and purposes of parliamentary publications and documents [1, 6, 7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information about how and where to obtain parliamentary publications and documentation [1, 6, 7, 10]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Information about parliamentary library, archive [1, 6, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Database of pictures of events [1]	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
General links to websites								
Presidency, government, constitutional and supreme courts [1, 7]	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Ministries and other national agencies [1, 6, 7]	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Inter-parliamentary union (IPU) [7]	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Proportions	0.646	0.614	0.688	0.80	0.62	0.32	0.60	0.48

* All items related to parties' information are overlooked because there are no political parties in the country; ** all items related to elections and parties' information are overlooked because there are no political parties and elections in the country, but only direct appointment.

Parliamentary non-plenary bodies: all websites declare a complete list of non-plenary parliamentary bodies, and membership and names of presiding officer(s) of each body. All websites provide a description of the mandate and terms of reference of each body, and national delegations to international and regional parliamentary assemblies of which the parliament is a member except Lebanon. All websites provide a description of the activity carried out by the body except Jordan, and Saudi.

Members of parliament: up-to-date list of all current members, and information about each member are available on all websites except Lebanon. A description of representative duties and functions is available on all websites except Tunisia. All websites declare activities of individual members except UAE, Jordan, and Lebanon. Only Saudi and Bahrain provide basic information concerning the status of a member. Only Jordan and Tunisia provide statistical and demographic data. All websites provide a list without Biodata of previous members of parliament except Saudi and Tunisia.

Political parties in parliament: this item is overlooked for UAE, Saudi, and Kuwait, as there are no political parties there, while only websites of Morocco and Tunisia provide list of all political parties represented in parliament.

Elections and electoral systems: we can say that Arab parliamentary websites do not in general declare the results of elections, and the shares of political parties in the parliament. For Saudi, all items related to elections and electoral systems are overlooked, as there are no political parties and elections, but only direct appointments. All other websites provide explanation of the election procedure except Tunisia. None of the other websites provide link to the electoral commission website. The results of the last elections are unavailable on all other websites except Bahrain, while the results of previous elections are only available on websites of Bahrain and Kuwait. Only website of Jordan declares current composition of party groups and coalitions, while this item overlooked for UAE, Saudi, and Kuwait, as there are no political parties.

Administration of parliament: a list of current vacancies and details of how to apply are only available on the website of UAE and Kuwait. This is not compatible with the hiring procedures applied in governmental organizations and may considered as one of the reasons that contribute to enhance estrangement with citizens.

Publications, documents: the description of the types and purposes of parliamentary publications and documents is unavailable on the eight websites. Therefore, Arab parliamentary websites should take into their consideration that not all people are aware of parliamentary documents and should explain the content of these documents. All websites provide information about how and where to obtain parliamentary publications and documentation except Lebanon. All websites provide information about parliamentary library and archive except Saudi and Jordan. Database of pictures of events is available on all websites except Kuwait.

General links to websites: the websites of Kuwait and Lebanon do not provide any links, while the website of Tunisia provides a link to (IPU) only. The website of Bahrain provides links to (government, constitutional and supreme courts, ministries and other national agencies), while the websites of UAE, Saudi, Morocco and Jordan provide link to (IPU) in addition to the previous links. What is notable is that none of all websites provides presidency or monarchy links.

Accountability

We can notice from (Table 4) that six out of eight countries are above (0.5), where Kuwait and Bahrain have the same highest proportion of (0.920). Saudi and Jordan have proportions of (0.280), (0.320) respectively. By breaking down the accountability dimension into each of its items, it becomes possible to gain further insights:

General information about legislative, budget, and oversight activities: all websites only declare today's business schedule in the parliament, while future business schedules in all areas are unavailable. Also, an overview of parliamentary procedure and routine order of business is available on all websites. Only the websites of UAE and Saudi provide a chart or diagram showing how the business of parliament is conducted, while other websites neglected the role of these charts in simplifying information. Arab parliaments pay no attention to the fact that ordinary citizens do not understand some parliamentary terms; this is proved by the availability of the glossary of parliamentary terms and procedures only on the websites of UAE, Bahrain and Lebanon.

Legislation: In general, all parliaments are concerned with legislative information provision. All websites provide explanation of the legislative process, and provide the text and final status of proposed legislation from previous years. All websites provide text and status of all proposed legislation except Lebanon. All websites provide text and actions taken on all enacted legislation except Saudi, Jordan, and Lebanon. All websites provide a searchable database of current and previously proposed legislation and of enacted legislation except UAE, Saudi, Jordan, and Lebanon. Bills analysis, comments, and suggestions by the public are only available on the websites of Kuwait, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Table 4: Proportions of Accountability Dimension

Items\ Countries	UAE	SA	KW	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
General information about legislative, budget, and oversight activities								
Today's business schedule in the parliament, and future business schedules in all areas [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chart or diagram showing how the business of parliament is conducted [1, 6, 7]	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glossary of parliamentary terms and procedures [1, 7, 18]	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Overview of parliamentary procedure and routine order of business [1, 7, 18]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Legislation								
Explanation of the legislative process [1, 6, 7, 18]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Text and status of all proposed legislation [1, 6, 7, 10, 18, 20, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Text and final status of proposed legislation from previous years [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Text and actions taken on all enacted legislation [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
A searchable database of current and previously proposed legislation and of enacted legislation [6, 7, 24]	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Bills analysis, comments, and suggestions by the public [1]	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Budget/public financing								
Explanation of the budget and public financing processes [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Explanation of proposed budget/public financing [1, 7]	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Status of parliamentary review of the proposed budget/public financing activities [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Documentation from parliamentary bodies that review or approve the budget/public financing activities [7]	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Documentation regarding the budget from previous years [7]	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
A searchable database of documentation related to budget/public financing from the current and previous years [1, 7]	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Oversight (scrutiny)								
Explanation of oversight responsibilities and the activities of oversight bodies [1, 7]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Summary and status of oversight activities [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Oversight documentation [7, 10]	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Oversight documentation from previous years [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
A searchable database of documentation related to oversight activities from the current and previous years [1, 7]	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Non-plenary bodies								
Documentation produced by non-plenary bodies [1, 7, 10, 18, 20]	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Documentation of non-plenary bodies from previous years [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Plenary activities and documentation								
Documentation produced from plenary sessions [7, 10, 18, 20, 24]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Documentation from plenary sessions from previous years [1, 7]	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Proportions	0.760	0.280	0.920	0.920	0.320	0.520	0.880	0.800

Budget/ public financing: only the websites of Kuwait, Bahrain, and Morocco provide all related items, while the website of Saudi does not provide any of them. The website of Tunisia provides all related items except explanation of the budget and public financing processes. Website of Lebanon provides explanation of the budget and public financing processes too, and the status of parliamentary review of the proposed budget/public financing activities only. The website of Jordan only provides the documentation regarding the budget from previous years. The website of UAE provides three items: explanation of the budget and public financing processes, status of parliamentary review of the proposed budget/public financing activities, and documentation from parliamentary bodies that review or approve the budget/public financing activities.

Oversight (scrutiny): only websites of Kuwait, Bahrain and Morocco provide all related items. The websites of UAE and Tunisia provide all related items except a searchable database. The websites of Saudi and Jordan only provide an explanation of oversight responsibilities and the activities of oversight bodies. The website of Lebanon provides three items: explanation of oversight responsibilities and the activities of oversight bodies, summary and status of oversight activities, and oversight documentation from previous years.

Non-plenary bodies: documentation produced by non-plenary bodies, and documentation of non-plenary bodies from previous years are available on all websites except Saudi, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Plenary activities and documentation: documentation produced from plenary sessions, and documentation from plenary sessions from previous years are available on all websites except Saudi and Jordan.

Interactivity

We can notice from (Table 5) that all the eight countries are below (0.5). However, Bahrain is still the best between the worst with proportion of (0.444), while Lebanon is the worst with proportion of (0.111). By breaking down the interactivity dimension into each of its items, it becomes possible to gain further insights:

Multilateral interactivity (two-way communication): (blogs, online fora and discussions, e-petitions, chat rooms, news comments) are unavailable on none of the eight websites; even Kuwaiti parliament only offers paper-form petitions. Feedback utility (web-based feedback) is available on all websites. Online polling is only available on the websites of UAE and Bahrain. Comments and

questions for presiding officers are only available on the websites of Kuwait and Lebanon, and links to social media for MPs are only available on the website of Bahrain. Links to social media for parliament are available on all websites except Lebanon.

Bilateral interactivity (one-way communication): (links to personal website of each member, contact information of each body, links to the website of each body, and link to each party's website noticing that this item is overlooked for each of UAE, Saudi, and Kuwait) are unavailable on none of the eight websites. Only websites of UAE, Bahrain, and Jordan provide e-mail address for each Member of Parliament. Video webcast of meetings and plenary is only available on websites of Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, while audio broadcast or webcast is unavailable on none of the eight websites. Video archive of meetings and plenary is available on all websites except Lebanon, while audio archive is unavailable on none of the eight websites. Finally, educational videos about parliament are available on websites of Saudi, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, while videos explaining process of legislature for the youth are unavailable on all websites.

Usability and accessibility

We can notice from (Table 6) that all countries are below (0.5) except Saudi, which is the only country that has a proportion of (0.533). By breaking down the usability and accessibility dimension into each of its items, it becomes possible to gain further insights:

Usability (user-friendliness): (what is new on the website, text versions of the site; help function, and guidance on how to search) are unavailable on none of the eight websites, while copyright message in the home page is available on all websites except Bahrain. Only websites of Saudi and Morocco provide frequently asked questions. Only websites of UAE, Saudi, Jordan, and Lebanon provide the site map. Only websites of Saudi and Bahrain provide whom to contact for questions about the operation of the website. All websites provide search facilities except UAE and Tunisia. All websites sort results of search by various criteria except UAE, Saudi, and Tunisia. Quick links/hot buttons are available on all websites except Jordan. Finally, only website of UAE supports multiple browsers.

Accessibility: persons with disabilities can use none of the eight websites. Only websites of Saudi, Bahrain, Morocco, and Tunisia provide international languages. Only websites of UAE, Saudi, Kuwait, and Morocco provide alerting services (RSS).

Table 5: Proportions of Interactivity Dimension

Items\ Countries	UAE*	SA*	KW*	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
Multilateral interactivity (two-way communication)								
Feedback utility (web-based feedback) [6, 15, 24]	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Blogs [1, 7, 10]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Online fora and discussions [1, 6, 7, 15, 18, 20, 24]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
E-petitions [1, 7, 20]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chat rooms [1, 15, 20]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Online polling [1, 6, 7, 18, 20]	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Links to social media for parliament [1]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Links to social media for MPs [10]	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
News comments [1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Comments and questions for presiding officers [6]	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Bilateral interactivity (one-way communication)								
Contact information for each member of parliament including his or her e-mail address [1, 7, 8, 10, 18, 20, 24]	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Links to personal website of each member [1, 7, 10]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact information of each body [1, 7, 20]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Links to the website of each body [1, 6, 7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Link to each party's website [1, 6, 7, 10]				0	0	0	0	0
Audio or video broadcast or webcast of meetings and plenary [1, 6, 7, 10, 18, 20]	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Audio or video archive of meetings and plenary [1, 6, 7, 10, 20]	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Educational videos about parliament, and explaining process of legislature for the youth [6, 20]	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Proportions	0.294	0.235	0.294	0.444	0.333	0.111	0.222	0.222

* All items related to parties' information are overlooked because there are no political parties in the country.

Table 6: Proportions of Usability and Accessibility Dimension

Items\ Countries	UAE	SA	KW	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
Usability (user-friendliness)								
Frequently asked questions [7, 15, 18, 24]	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
What's new on the website [7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Site map [1, 7, 15, 18, 24]	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Text versions of the site [24]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Copyright message in the home page [15]	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Help function [7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whom to contact for questions about the operation of the website [7]	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Guidance on how to search [7]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Support for multiple browsers [7]	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Search facilities [1, 10, 15, 18, 24]	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Sort results of search by various criteria [1]	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Quick links/hot buttons such as HOME, BACK, and GO TO TOP [15]	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Accessibility								
The website can be used by persons with disabilities [7, 15]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
International languages [7, 15, 18]	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Alerting services: RSS [1, 7]	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Proportions	0.333	0.533	0.333	0.333	0.267	0.333	0.467	0.200

RATING ARAB PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES

(Table 7) shows that the total proportions of all five dimensions are divided into two groups. First: four websites have proportions above (0.5) and they are: Bahrain (0.624), Kuwait (0.559), Morocco (0.542), and UAE (0.514). Second: four websites have proportions below (0.5) and they are: Tunisia (0.426), Saudi (0.416), Jordan (0.385), and Lebanon (0.321). Breaking down the total proportions into the five dimensions shows that:

Transparency: six websites have proportions above (0.5) and they are: Bahrain (0.80), Kuwait (0.688), UAE (0.667), Jordan (0.620), Saudi (0.614), and Morocco (0.60). Two websites have proportions below (0.5) and they are: Tunisia (0.480), and Lebanon (0.320).

Accountability: six websites have proportions above (0.5) and they are: Kuwait and Bahrain (0.920), Morocco (0.880), Tunisia (0.80), UAE (0.760), and Lebanon (0.520). Two websites have proportions below (0.5) and they are: Jordan (0.320), and Saudi (0.280).

Table 7: Proportions of Total Dimensions

Dimensions\ Countries	UAE	SA	KW	BH	JO	LB	MA	TN
Transparency	0.646	0.614	0.688	0.800	0.620	0.320	0.600	0.480
Accountability	0.760	0.280	0.920	0.920	0.320	0.520	0.880	0.800
Interactivity	0.294	0.235	0.294	0.444	0.333	0.111	0.222	0.222
Usability, accessibility	0.333	0.533	0.333	0.333	0.267	0.333	0.467	0.200
Total proportions	0.508	0.416	0.559	0.624	0.385	0.321	0.542	0.426

SOURCE: prepared by the researcher.

Interactivity: all websites have proportions below (0.5) and they are: Bahrain (0.444), Jordan (0.333), UAE and Kuwait (0.294) for each, Saudi (235), Morocco and Tunisia (0.222) for each, and Lebanon (0.111).

Usability and accessibility: seven websites have proportions below (0.5) and they are: Morocco (0.467), UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Lebanon (0.333) foe each, Jordan (0.267), and Tunisia (0.20). Only website of Saudi has proportion above (0.5) which is (0.533).

FINDINGS

The following findings came to light from the above analysis:

(75%) of the sample of Arab parliamentary websites focus mainly on the services related to transparency and accountability. While, (94%) of them give little importance to the services related to each of interactivity, usability, and accessibility. This leads to a fact that the goal of designing the websites of Arab parliamentary websites is concerned only in provision of information rather than enabling the relationship between MPs and public and promoting democracy.

In case of our sample of Arab countries, the high application of e-government does not at all mean a high level of the services of parliamentary websites. For example: Bahrain which has the first Arab ranking on "e-government survey 2016" with a "very high application" rank, also achieved the first rank in parliamentary websites services with a proportion of (0.624) is merely exceeding the (0.5) threshold. While, Morocco which has Arab ranking of ten with high e-government application, achieved the third rank in parliamentary websites services with proportion of (0.542) which is very close to (0.5). On the other hand, countries such as Saudi (0.416), Lebanon (0.321), Jordan (0.385), and Tunisia (0.426), which have elevated level of e-government application, achieved low ranks in parliamentary websites services.

In case of our sample of Arab countries, there is no relation between the countries' ranking on democracy index and the level of the services of parliamentary websites. For example: Bahrain which has ranking of (2.79 authoritarian) on "democracy index 2016" achieved the first rank in parliamentary websites services, While Morocco which has a ranking of (4.41 hybrid regime) on democracy index, achieved the third rank in parliamentary websites services. Also, Tunisia the only Arab country that living a flawed democracy achieved low rank in parliamentary websites services of (0.426). On the other hand, we only have Lebanon and Morocco with a hybrid regime, but even though the first one achieved low rank in

parliamentary websites services with proportion of (0.321) and the second (0.542) which is so close to (0.5) threshold.

Finally, and generally, it seems that the low level of democracy in Arab countries has its effect on the designing of parliamentary websites and the services through which they are provided. This is proved by the fact that merely four countries exceeded the (0.5) threshold (UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Morocco), while the other for countries are below (0.5) (Saudi, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia).

DISCUSSION

It seems that the first, second and fourth findings resulted from applying this study on Arab parliamentary websites are very compatible with the results of previous studies, that conducted content analysis on parliamentary websites from other regions.

The first finding that is "the goal of designing the Arab parliamentary websites is only concerned in provision of information rather than enabling the relationship between MPs and public and promoting democracy" is compatible with the study of [24] applied on 144 political parties' websites and 38 legislatures in Europe, which indicated that parliamentary administrations tend to favor the dissemination of impersonal information rather than allowing the legislatures' websites to serve as a platform for individual members to present themselves. Also [9] indicated that Just because parliaments have improved information storage capacity and better internal communication, it does not mean that the application of ICT improves democratic accountability. The study of [13] indicated that online interaction between citizens and parliaments in Africa is low and still at the information provision stage. [6] found out that while most Member States websites of the ECOWAS score well on general information about their parliaments, they lacked progress in making their websites a fulcrum for interaction between legislators and citizens. [10] indicated that the fact that parliaments' websites tend to concentrate on parliamentary outputs rather than parliamentary actors, and even less on political actors. [2] indicated that transparency is much weaker when providing information on individual representatives. Finally, [20] indicated that the new e-participation opportunities emerged for citizens are not available on the TGNA's web site. The TGNA's web site as it stands now is not a participatory, but an informative one. Although the web site offers the basic information to the citizens for participation, it does not open up the e-participation channels to use this information.

The second finding is that "in case of our sample of Arab countries the high application of e-government does not at all mean a high level of the services of parliamentary websites" is compatible with the study of [8] which indicated that MP transparency does not automatically correlate with national e-government development and e-participation indexes compiled by the United Nations.

The third finding that is "the low level of democracy in Arab countries has its effect on the designing of parliamentary websites and the services through which they are provided" is compatible with the study of [10] which indicated that there is not a match between what parliaments do – their role – and what their websites show.

CONCLUSION

People now are more aware than the past, especially with the emergence of social media. Consequently, Arab parliaments must become more open, transparent, accountable, and interactive.

The findings resulted from this study may help in improving the services of Arab parliamentary websites especially those related to interactivity and participatory between MPs and parliaments themselves and citizens. In this regard, the important recommendation is to change the political mentality for both parliamentary administration and the citizens, as [20] suggested for improving the e-participation content of the TGNA's Web site.

Finally, the researcher will conduct more studies regarding Arab parliamentary websites, taking into consideration other different dimensions.

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