

When Islamists Lose: The Politicization of Tunisia's Ennahda Movement

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This article is a case study of how Tunisia's Islamist party, the Ennahda Movement, responded to new political opportunities that opened up after the 2011 Arab uprisings. It argues that Ennahda chose to make a hard-to-reverse commitment to politicization in the pursuit of electoral legitimacy, as protection from repression, and for fear of marginalization. The article demonstrates how the context of a democratic transition exposed internal debates within the movement over ideology, strategy, and organizational structure, ultimately dislocating the relationship between political ambitions and the religious social movement.

Islamist groups in the Arab world have balanced their political ambitions with proselytizing work through religious social movements. When given the chance to participate as political parties in semi-authoritarian regimes, Islamists often have limited their own objectives. When their political ambitions have been frustrated by arbitrary constraints, Islamists have retreated from politicization to preserve and take shelter in their movements, which have often not been subject to the same levels of regime repression. The rarer circumstances of a transition away from authoritarian rule has presented different complications. In such times, Islamists have entered the political process unimpeded, only to face new challenges common to all parties in a period of transition, ranging from political competition and uncertainty about the pace of change to the risk, even likelihood, of defeat in relatively fair elections. This article examines the internal costs such transitional challenges impose on Islamist organizations as well as the internal struggles they expose. Drawing on a city-level study of Tunisia's Ennahda Movement, I argue that politicization during a transition dislocates the relationship between an Islamist group's political ambitions and its affiliated religious social movement.

The approach here offers a counterpoint to studies of Islamism that focus on the formal politics of movement leaders in capital cities. Most accounts tend to gravitate to and are limited by a static reading of movement ideologues, discounting the fragmentation that often marks such groups.¹ As with previous work on democratization, scholarship on the post-2011 political environment in the Arab world has still tended to em-

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1. Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 895, doi:10.1080/01436590500089240.

phasize the role of the state, ruling elites, and leadership of major political parties.² This article instead draws on interviews with 85 current and former members of the Ennahda Movement as well as observations within their community during a year's fieldwork in the Tunisian city of Sousse. These men and women span the full movement hierarchy from ordinary activists to those operating at the district, regional, and national levels, and their views reveal the wide range of debate taking place beyond the capital. Attention to the internal debates within Islamist groups reminds us that these movements are not monoliths and provides space to analyze the transformative effect of internal debates on broader movement strategy and ideology.³ This is not to argue that the activities of rank-and-file members are more important or influential than those of movement leaders, but rather to propose that there is value in studying a movement at a smaller scale in order to identify "ways of doing politics," including practices and behaviors.⁴ In the case of Islamists like Ennahda, a focus on the political behavior of their leadership reinforces the impression that these are unified movements pursuing a primarily political project aimed at attaining state power. This approach does not consider how this came to be the priority, whether that path to politicization was seamless or whether the movement's rank-and-file members perceived it in the same way as its leaders.

ISLAMISTS AND PARTY POLITICS

Much analysis of Islamist political behavior is inevitably shaped by the particular constraints imposed by the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems that Islamist movements usually operate within. Here, I define Islamist movements as those seeking to be active in the political, social, and cultural spheres by drawing on Islamic scripture and reinterpreting it for the present day. By this I mean both that they hope to capture the state through political action in order to create a virtuous society and that they reach beyond the formal political sphere into social and cultural activism.⁵ Since the 1980s, Islamist movements have demonstrated vigorous political ambitions but have been cautious about taking part in a circumscribed political process. If winning elections was not a realistic outcome, then the rewards of politics were limited. As such, social and cultural outreach offered more productive repertoires of contention. This explains why in a semi-authoritarian context, in which elections might be held but are not fair, Islamist movements have invested only cautiously in politics, accepting that winning may not be possible, and, as Nathan Brown put it, leaving themselves "lines of retreat" to protect their social activism.⁶ Thus, we see Islamist movements curbed their

2. Michelle Pace and Francesco Cavatorta, "The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective — An Introduction," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (2012): 127, doi:10.1080/13629395.2012.694040.

3. See, for example, Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

4. Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Brian T. Connor, "The *Ethnos* in the *Polis*: Political Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2008): 144, doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00053.x.

5. Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004), 58; Salwa Ismail, "The Paradox of Islamist Politics," *Middle East Report*, no. 221 (Winter 2001): 34, doi:10.2307/1559338.

6. Nathan J. Brown, *When Victory Is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 160.

ambitions at the ballot box to avoid repression in, for example, Morocco in 2002 and Egypt before 2011.⁷ Indeed, non-Islamist opposition parties have developed a similar risk-averse strategy in such circumstances.⁸

In semi-authoritarian settings, Islamists have often been considered to enjoy political advantages over other opposition parties despite the frequent repression they have faced. This might be explained by what they consider to be their expression of “authentic” Islamic identity,⁹ broad organizational structures capable of mass mobilization,¹⁰ social welfare provision,¹¹ or a reputation for good governance.¹² However, in the context of a transition away from authoritarian rule, Islamist movements have often found themselves subject to the contingencies of party competition and the shifting loyalties of the electorate.

This article takes the view that the experience of non-Islamist parties in transitions elsewhere has much to offer in explaining the challenges and complications facing an Islamist group as it adapts to pluralist political competition. There is, for example, strong evidence to demonstrate that parties that win inaugural elections in states undergoing political transitions rarely gain a second consecutive term.¹³ Islamists are just as likely as any other party to fail to meet the heightened expectations typical of a new political opening or to fall short in fulfilling their campaign promises.¹⁴ They might find that the ideological prestige they enjoyed while in the opposition camp under an authoritarian system weakens in the face of newly energized debate, or that the impact of social welfare provision on voter preferences may not be as pronounced as had been expected. It is not just that Islamic associational work does not always directly link to Islamist electoral support,¹⁵ but opportunities for providing social welfare can be limited. Ennahda, for example, was unable to engage in significant associational work

7. Michael J. Willis, “Morocco’s Islamists and the Legislative Elections of 2002: The Strange Case of the Party that Did Not Want to Win,” *Mediterranean Politics* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 53–81. doi:10.1080/13629390410001679928; Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (Aug. 2005): 387, doi:10.1017/S0020743805052128; Shadi Hamid, “Arab Islamist Parties: Losing on Purpose?,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 1 (Jan. 2011): 74–75, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/412894>.

8. For example, the unauthorized Tunisian Workers’ Communist Party did not participate in elections under Ben ‘Ali’s rule, refusing to endorse what it saw as a rigged system. See also Brown, *When Victory Is Not an Option*, 25.

9. Samuel Tadros, “Islamist Responses to the ‘End of Islamism,’” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 16 (Mar. 2014): 37–38, www.hudson.org/research/10170-islamists-respond-to-the-end-of-islamism-

10. Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

11. Hamid, “Arab Islamist Parties,” 72.

12. Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (May 2014): 199, doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-071112-221207.

13. Similar cases include Argentina’s Radical Civic Union, which won the first democratic elections in 1983 but lost in 1989, and Uruguay’s Colorado Party, which won in 1984 but lost in 1989, as well as later in Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Indonesia. Philippe C. Schmitter, “Twenty-Five Years, Fifteen Findings,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 24, doi:10.1353/jod.0.0144.

14. Jillian Schwedler, “A Paradox of Democracy? Islamist Participation in Elections,” *Middle East Report* 209 (Winter 1998): 28, doi:10.2307/3012731.

15. Asef Bayat, “Activism and Social Development in the Middle East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002): 14, www.jstor.org/stable/3880166; Cammett and Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” 193.

under the regime of former president Zine El-'Abidine Ben 'Ali because of suffocating repression, and it continued to be restricted in this arena even after 2011 because of media criticism of Islamic charities and a state crackdown on religious associations.¹⁶

Ennahda's ostensible political advantage as an Islamist organization may therefore be overstated. Indeed, a broad view of the performance of Islamic political parties across many countries shows how few seats they tend to win in elections.¹⁷ A pattern emerges: the best performances come during breakthrough elections offering relatively fair competition after years of repression, as was the case in Jordan in 1989, Algeria in 1991, Bahrain in 2002, Iraq in 2005, the Palestinian Territories in 2006, and Tunisia and Egypt in 2011–12. However, these were often merely brief political openings. Charles Kurzman and Didem Türkoğlu argued that where relatively open elections have become routine, Islamic parties tend to receive fewer votes over time.¹⁸

A useful theoretical framework for understanding the transformations of Islamist movements in a political transition can be derived from Angelo Panebianco's work on organizational dynamics in European political parties.¹⁹ Oppositional parties, like the socialists he studied in Western Europe, have an "electorate of belonging," representing an external loyalty reservoir and a core of activists made up not just of "careerists" seeking material or status-oriented incentives but also of "believers," participating for reasons of identity.²⁰ Over time, a party may adjust its official organizational goals but cannot opportunistically replace them while retaining its core believers.

The historical context of modern Europe is of course different than the present-day Arab world, but some useful comparisons extend to the Tunisian case. Internal tensions were evident, for example, in the development of the Italian Communist Party (PCI, from the Italian *Partito Comunista Italiano*), which, like an Islamist movement, grew out of a subculture in which identity and behavior were central to political formation. The PCI grew into a mass socialist party, eventually accepting the need for compromise and favoring partnership in coalition over a role in opposition, a similar path taken by Ennahda.²¹ When the PCI finally abandoned its communist identity in 1989–91 to become the Democratic Party of the Left, the subcultural rituals that had previously defined the party and established its boundaries worked against those reformist leaders who now targeted a broader constituency of support.²² In turn, those reformists

16. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Suspension of Associations Arbitrary," August 13, 2014, www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/13/tunisia-suspension-associations-arbitrary.

17. Charles Kurzman and Didem Türkoğlu, "Do Muslims Vote Islamic Now?," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 101, doi:10.1353/jod.2015.0073. Kurzman and Türkoğlu defined the object of their study not as Islamists but as Islamic parties, by which they meant parties that define themselves in Islamic terms or that are defined as such in standard political party compendiums. But the comparisons remain valuable.

18. Kurzman and Türkoğlu, "Do Muslims Vote Islamic Now?," 101.

19. Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, trans. Marc Silver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

20. Panebianco, *Political Parties*, 26.

21. Lawrence Gray, "From Gramsci to Togliatti: The *Partito Nuovo* and the Mass Basis of Italian Communism," in *The Italian Communist Party: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, ed. Simon Serfaty and Lawrence Gray (London: Aldwych Press, 1981), 24.

22. David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 126.

could not give up the legitimacy that the party's ritual system granted them, and they struggled to develop symbols to energize their new project. Another comparison can be made with Christian Democratic parties in Europe. Their experience has shown, as Stathis Kalyvas argued, that parties' religious identity is not primordial but politically constructed. In these parties, identity was forged by the decisions of political actors about how to mobilize and organize. As participation in the political process began, it created unexpected dynamics and autonomies driven by lay activists and lower clergy in spite of, not because of, the original intentions of the Catholic Church hierarchy. The parties became not only more politicized than the Church had originally proposed, but also much more secularized.²³

Most political parties in Tunisia since 2011 have lacked clear policy goals, are highly personalistic, and are geared toward attaining office in order to receive benefits and access to patronage.²⁴ In that time, Ennahda's strategy has been, however, both policy-driven, in that it sought to integrate Islamizing policy goals into the new constitution and the legal code, and vote-seeking, in that it seeks as strong a position as possible within the legislature. But it is also a movement undergoing an uncertain and difficult transformation of political vision. As Steven Wolinetz argued, again within the European context, changes in party orientation come slowly and with consistent and durable efforts in which an organization's leadership and circumstances, including electoral defeats, play a role.²⁵ A party may be pulled in different directions and may not fit into a neat trend toward the catch-all electoral professionalism that occurred in the European context.²⁶ Islamist movements are no less susceptible than any other political party to diversities of membership and ambition and to internal debates and disagreements.

Noting diversity within Islamist movements suggests too the significance of diversity between Islamist movements. Islamist groups are shaped not only by varied interpretations of religious reference but also by their changing political environments, the charisma of their leaders, the framing of a collective identity, and internal debates. In some ways, the trajectory of Ennahda was unusual; its activists came to be regarded as a special case, as "Islamists unlike others."²⁷ The movement explicitly accepted the principles of democratic pluralism in the mid-1980s, well before other Islamist groups in the region. In contrast to most other Islamist parties in the region, Ennahda was almost entirely excluded from Tunisia's political process, except for a fateful electoral

23. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 19.

24. Steven B. Wolinetz, "Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies," in *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, ed. Richard Gunther, José Ramón Montero, and Juan J. Linz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 149; Lise Storm, "The Fragile Tunisian Democracy — What Prospects for the Future?," in *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution: Contexts, Architects, Prospects*, ed. Nouri Gana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 270.

25. Wolinetz, "Beyond the Catch-All Party," 158.

26. Otto Kirchheimer, "The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems," in *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed. Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 184.

27. Michel Camau & Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* [Authoritarian syndrome: Politics in Tunisia from (Habib) Bourguiba to Ben 'Ali] (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003), 267.

experience in 1989. Since 2011, when Ennahda was legally authorized for the first time, it has been operating within a pluralist, democratic context largely unknown elsewhere in the region. This suggests that it may be difficult to extrapolate a wider theory of Islamist political participation from the Tunisian case.

However, significant patterns across Islamist experiences indicate that the case of Ennahda has wider resonance. Like Ennahda, many other Islamist movements survived and reemerged from episodes of regime repression, for example in Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf region.²⁸ All have debated the definition and role of shari‘a, the articulation of an Islamist vision, and the balance between a religious movement and a political party. For example, within the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, some senior figures now propose the group should become a social movement of *da‘wa* (preaching, literally: the “call” to Islam) and have “nothing to do with political competition . . .”²⁹ Brotherhood leaders in Jordan have also begun discussing whether a separation between party and movement might lighten the monarchy’s continued pressure on their organization.³⁰ Even ultraconservative Salafi movements, which once shunned formal politics, are engaged in the same debate about the correct balance between religious and political ambitions.³¹ Debate over Islamic movements’ self-identification has become increasingly common across the region — whether a movement calls itself “Islamist,” a “civil” party “with an Islamic reference,” or a party of “Muslim democrats” (in the latest Ennahda iteration).³² In the first years after 2011, Ennahda leaders frequently said they hoped to imitate the model of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP, from the Turkish *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), in particular its early shift

28. Marc Lynch, “In Uncharted Waters: Islamist Parties Beyond Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, paper 293, (Dec. 2016), https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_293_Lynch_Muslim_Brotherhood_Final.pdf; Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (London: Hurst, 2013); Courtney Freer, “Exclusion-Moderation in the Gulf Context: Tracing the Development of Pragmatic Islamism in Kuwait,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 1 (2018), 1–21. doi:10.1080/00263206.2017.1357031.

29. Shadi Hamid, “Islamists on Islamism Today: An Interview with Amr Darrag, Leading Muslim Brotherhood Figure,” *Markaz* (blog), Brookings Institution, February 9, 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/02/09/islamists-on-islamism-today-an-interview-with-amr-darrag-prominent-egyptian-muslim-brotherhood-figure/.

30. Marc Lynch, “In Uncharted Waters: Islamist Parties Beyond Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, paper 293 (Dec. 2016): 25, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_293_Lynch_Muslim_Brotherhood_Final.pdf.

31. Stéphane Lacroix, “Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism,” Brookings Doha Center, policy briefing, June 2012, www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Stephane-Lacroix-Policy-Briefing-English.pdf; Bjørn Olav Utvik, “The Ikhwanization of the *Salafis*: Piety in the Politics of Egypt and Kuwait,” *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 1 (2014): 5–27. doi:10.1080/19436149.2014.896597.

32. After 2011, Ghannouchi described Ennahda as “a civil party with an Islamic reference,” the same formulation used by both Morocco’s Party of Justice and Development and Egypt’s Brotherhood-linked Freedom and Justice Party. In 2016, Ghannouchi began calling Ennahda “Muslim democrats,” echoing the label “conservative democrats” adopted by Turkey’s Justice and Development Party. See Anouar Jamaoui, “تريد حكم البلاد بتقويض من الشعب” [“We want a government for the country with a mandate from the people”], *El Fejr* (Tunisia), October 26, 2012: 8; Rached Ghannouchi, “Il n’y a plus de justification à l’islam politique en Tunisie” [“There is no longer a justification for political Islam in Tunisia”], interview by Frédéric Bobin, *Le Monde* (France), May 19, 2016, <https://lemde.fr/2rLaRCz>.

from its Islamist origins toward a vote-seeking center-right platform.³³ Indeed, all Islamist movements observe one another's experiences; many read and follow the work of Ennahda's founder/leader Rached Ghannouchi, and in turn Ennahda has sought advice from Islamists outside Tunisia.³⁴

LESSONS OF REPRESSION

The transformations within Ennahda after 2011 were not short-term responses to the new political opportunities on offer, but rather the result of years of self-reflection on the movement's experience and its divergent ambitions. This is what has been characterized elsewhere as "political learning," meaning the modification of beliefs or tactics as a result of crises, frustrations, and dramatic changes in environment.³⁵ I do not argue that the movement always drew the "right" lessons from its experience. Nor do I impose on its historical trajectory a normative, teleological reading in which it "evolved" from religious movement to opposition force to democratic actor — even though the movement often uses precisely this concept of evolution in its own public discourse. Rather, I argue that Ennahda, as an Islamist movement, has acted like any other social movement, changing strategic aims and altering course in its activism in response to changing contexts and according to different interpretations of past actions.

The movement today known as Ennahda first emerged as a preaching circle in the early 1970s, with strong informal links to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. It was tolerated by the post-independence regime of Habib Bourguiba (1956–1987). In 1981, Ghannouchi and other movement leaders declared their ambition to compete within a pluralist political process as the Islamic Tendency Movement (*Harakat al-Ittihad al-Islami* or MTI, from the French *Mouvement de la tendance islamique*). The MTI sided with "the oppressed" (*al-mustad'afun*) and proposed turning Tunisia into an Islamic state through the "crystallization and embodiment of a contemporary image of the Islamic system of government," though this was always more aspirational than substantive.³⁶

At this point, the MTI was estimated to be operating in 300–350 mosques nationwide.³⁷ The Bourguiba regime repressed the newly organized party, carrying out waves

33. Such comparisons became less common after the Turkish party's authoritarian turn from 2013. Stefano Maria Torelli, "The 'AKP Model' and Tunisia's al-Nahda: From Convergence to Competition?," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 65–83. www.insightturkey.com/the-akp-model-and-tunisia-al-nahda-from-convergence-to-competition/issues/195; Monica Marks, "Tunisia's Islamists and the 'Turkish Model,'" *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (Jan. 2017): 102–15. doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0009.

34. Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood drew on Ghannouchi's thinking when it made the case for political participation and later when it looked for direction in the challenging post-2011 environment. In the run-up to the 2016 congress, Ennahda invited Islamist leaders from across the Arab world to give advice on party-movement relations. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*, 157; Lynch, "In Uncharted Waters," 16.

35. Nancy Bermeo, "Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship," *Comparative Politics* 24, no. 3 (Apr. 1992): 274. doi:10.2307/422133.

36. MTI, "البيان التأسيسي لحركة الاتجاه الإسلامي" ["The founding statement of the Islamic Tendency Movement"], in *بيانات ذكرى التأسيس لحركة النهضة التونسية* [Statements commemorating the founding of the Tunisian Ennahda Movement] (Tunis: Ennahda Movement 2012), 11–15.

37. Souhayr Belhassen, "Un coup à droite, un coup à gauche" ["A blow to the right, a blow to the left"], *Jeune Afrique* (France), August 5, 1981.

of arrests in 1981, 1983, and 1987, interspersed with brief periods of respite and informal political negotiations. Although the MTI drew on the literature and organizational strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood, it soon took its own path shaped by the Tunisian context, explicitly accepting popular sovereignty, the principle of democracy, and, by 1988, the goal of a civil, not Islamic, state.³⁸ It grew through an organizational structure that reached down from the leadership in Tunis to the country's regions, districts, and small study circles in private homes. The MTI was particularly strong on university campuses: in March 1985, MTI-aligned Islamist students established the Tunisian General Union of Students, which soon claimed 20,000 members. But the 1987 crackdown during the last months of the Bourguiba regime was severe. Around 3,000 MTI activists were arrested between March and August of that year, including, for the first time, many from the party's lower ranks.³⁹ MTI activists faced brutal interrogations in jail, and Ghannouchi and other leaders were sentenced to long prison terms. This explains why the movement welcomed Ben 'Ali's coup in November 1987 and the promise of a political opening.⁴⁰

A year later, the MTI signed the National Pact, which was designed to bestow some legitimacy upon Ben 'Ali and to gain support for the regime from opposition parties through the promise of a new, more open era.⁴¹ But it was also a way to define the conduct of political debate. The MTI then renamed itself Ennahda (properly *Harakat al-Nahda*, "movement of the renaissance") to comply with a new law prohibiting parties based on religion, language, race, or region.⁴² Although Ennahda was never formally authorized, its candidates were permitted to run as independents in the April 1989 elections. Despite emerging as the strongest opposition group — with 14.5% of the vote overall and with even better performances in well-off coastal cities like Tunis, Bizerte, Sousse, and Monastir — the movement was denied any parliamentary seats.⁴³ Instead, it faced a wave of repression from the increasingly authoritarian Ben 'Ali regime. Thousands of Ennahda members were jailed and socially excluded by being sacked from public sector jobs and forced to register several times a day at police and National Guard offices. Hundreds of others, including Ghannouchi himself, fled abroad to exile in Europe and beyond. Only after the fall of Ben 'Ali in January 2011 was Ennahda finally legalized.⁴⁴

Islamist movements elsewhere in the region — including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, and the Islamic Constitutional Movement in Kuwait — had spent

38. François Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1993), 182–246.

39. Elbaki Hermassi, "The Islamicist Movement and November 7," in *Tunisia: The Political Economy of Reform*, ed. I. William Zartman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991), 195, 198.

40. Jean-Philippe Bras, "Tunisie" ["Tunisia"], *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, Vol. 24 (1985): 708, http://aan.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/Pdf//AAN-1985-24_12.pdf.

41. "Proclamation du Pacte Nationale: Une étape éminente dans l'histoire de la Tunisie" ["Proclamation of the National Pact: An important step in the history of Tunisia"], *La Presse* (Tunisia), November 8, 1988.

42. Emad Eldin Shahin, *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 100.

43. "La scrutin a été tout à fait régulier" ["The vote was entirely fair"], *La Presse*, April 4, 1989: 1.

44. International Crisis Group, "Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way," Middle East/North Africa Report No. 106, April 28, 2011: 1, www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/popular-protests-north-africa-and-middle-east-iv-tunisia-s-way.

many years negotiating the constraints of unfree elections in semi-authoritarian systems. For Ennahda, however, that opportunity came only once — during the 1989 elections. During the subsequent years of repression, Ennahda's leaders in exile admitted that their political aspirations in that election had overwhelmed their cultural, social, and *da'wa* activities and brought them into confrontation with the regime. As they wrote in a 1996 document from London, “The supremacy of the political field over the *da'wa* and cultural fields had a negative effect on the path of the movement and the development of the awakening.”⁴⁵ They announced that the movement would now eschew its former political ambitions in favor of other projects: “We confirm the priority of the cultural and the social over the political, meaning that the political takes on new intellectual meaning and content so that it primarily serves the educational and cultural mission.”⁴⁶ Based on Ennahda statements at the time and later interviews with members, the movement's leaders accepted that failing to build alliances with other opposition parties and with the Tunisian political elite in the 1980s had left them isolated in a highly polarized society and that occasional acts of violence had undermined their position. Discussions among Ennahda members imprisoned in Tunisia were often more critical of the movement leadership on two counts. First, some prisoners argued that in 1989 the movement should have kept to its original risk-averse electoral strategy of only contesting a handful of constituencies in order not to unnerve the regime. Instead, the movement ran candidates in most constituencies with a vigorous electoral campaign. Second, many were angry that after the elections, when Ennahda had outperformed expectations but won no seats in the assembly, the movement leadership led dozens of protests backed up by increasingly strident condemnation of the Ben 'Ali regime. It misjudged the strength of repression; the movement was almost entirely dismantled and up to 30,000 Ennahda members were arrested. Prisoners disavowed the exiled leadership's conclusion that Ennahda now had no choice but to seek reconciliation with the regime.

There was no single lesson learned from the repression of the early 1990s; instead, different subgroups within Ennahda learned different lessons. Movement leaders, who had proposed reconciling with the Ben 'Ali regime, were motivated to compromise their Islamizing ambitions after 2011 for fear of a return to repression. The leaders saw political pragmatism and inclusion in a coalition government, whatever the cost, as the strongest protection against exclusion. However, others within Ennahda advocated a different path, working on the ground in Tunisia with non-Islamists in human rights associations or other opposition parties to challenge the authoritarian regime using a cross-party, rights-based discourse. These Ennahda members often continued such civil society work after 2011. So, for some in the movement, the effect of repression and social exclusion was to encourage a new interpretation of the political project that reached beyond Ennahda and embraced a wider discourse of human rights. Still others in Ennahda stayed away from all political and civil society activity under Ben 'Ali because of the punishing weight of repression and

45. Ennahda Movement, *بيان الذكرى الخامس عشر، لندن في ٦ جوان ١٩٩٦: دروس الماضي وإشكالات الحاضر* [“The 15th anniversary statement, London, 6 June 1996: Lessons from the past, present problems, and future ambitions”], in *بيانات ذكرى التأسيس* [Statements commemorating the founding], 62.

46. Ennahda Movement, *بيان الذكرى الخامسة عشر،* [“The 15th anniversary statement”], in *بيانات ذكرى التأسيس* [Statements commemorating the founding], 85.

social exclusion. For them, the lesson learned from the confrontation was that their leaders' political ambitions damaged the Islamist subculture. In their isolation, they reimagined what it meant to be Islamist when it was no longer possible to organize as a group. For many, it meant returning as individuals to the movement's original project of promoting morality and correct behavior.

When the opportunity for Ennahda to participate in elections finally materialized in October 2011, the movement presented a list of candidates in every constituency. However, it limited its ambitions. Ennahda insisted even before the vote that it would seek to govern in a coalition, which became inevitable once it failed to win an outright majority. Although the party sought to secure the position of prime minister for one of its own, it declined to seek the presidency.⁴⁷ Yet there were obvious rewards on offer to the movement for a strong electoral performance, not least the chance to play a major part in drafting the new constitution — which was to be the primary task of the assembly — and the opportunity to organize and communicate at a national level. Ennahda comfortably won the 2011 election with 34.8% of the vote, taking 89 out of 217 seats in the National Constituent Assembly. It secured more votes than the next eight parties combined and won in all but 1 of the country's 33 constituencies, dominating in urban Tunis almost as much as in rural Tataouine.⁴⁸

However, by the time of the second elections in 2014, Ennahda's organizational and historical advantages had diminished. The party had faced widespread criticism for delays in drafting the new constitution and for failing to fulfill expectations of rapid socioeconomic change. Unemployment, in particular, remained stubbornly high.⁴⁹ Ennahda spent much time defending itself from critics in the media and opposition parties who feared it was carrying out an encroaching, Islamizing agenda. And the political crisis escalated rapidly after the February 2013 assassination of opposition leader Chokri Belaïd by a Salafi gunman. Ennahda was criticized for a lax approach to security, especially after July of that year when another assassination of an opposition politician, Mohamed Brahmi, revived the same concerns and triggered months of street protests. Eventually Ennahda was forced to leave government in January 2014 in a negotiated departure just after the constitution was formally approved in the Constituent Assembly.⁵⁰ As one member of Ennahda's Consultative Council admitted before the election: "We didn't have clarity in the period of the government. We focused on the constitution and didn't think much about issues of development. In these regions they say: 'Ben 'Ali deprived us,

47. "Pour Rached Ghannouchi, il est naturel qu'Ennahda dirige le gouvernement" ["For Rached Ghannouchi, it is natural that Ennahda will lead the government"], *Le Monde*, November 26, 2011, <https://lemde.fr/2kDmVC2>.

48. Republic of Tunisia, Independent High Authority for Elections, "Rapport relatif au déroulement des élections de l'Assemblée Nationale Constituante" ["Report on the National Constituent Assembly elections"], Feb. 2012: 283.

49. Official unemployment had only dropped from its 18.3% peak from 2011 to 14.8% in 2014. Republic of Tunisia, National Institute of Statistics, "Annuaire statistique de la Tunisie, 2010–2014" ["Statistical yearbook of Tunisia"]: 105, www.ins.tn/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/annuaire-2014%20avec%20lien_0.pdf.

50. Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (London: Hurst, 2017), 152–56.

and then came Ennahda, and they deprived us too.' There is a punishment vote."⁵¹ By spring 2014, one poll showed only 31% of Tunisians had a "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" opinion of Ennahda, down from 65% in 2012.⁵²

Indeed, Ennahda's coalition partners, the Congress for the Republic party (CPR, from the French *Congrès pour la République*) and the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (Ettakatol, from the Arabic *al-Takattul al-Dimuqrati min ajl al-'Amal wa-l-Hurriyyat*), had become even less popular than the Islamists. Moreover, by 2014, the rewards on offer for a strong electoral showing had shifted. After the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in July 2013 and having been forced out of government themselves in January 2014, Ennahda's leaders feared a return to anti-Islamist campaigning by opposition parties and thus downplayed divisive issues of religion and identity in favor of promises of economic recovery and improved security that were designed to appeal to a broader electorate. However, the movement's emphasis on consensus and its dilution of religious references failed to appeal to a broader electorate. In the October 2014 election, Ennahda won only 26.5% of the vote nationwide and 69 seats (out of 217) in the new Assembly of the Representatives of the People.⁵³ Its rival, Nidaa Tounes (properly *Harakat Nida' Tunis*, the Call of Tunisia Movement), a new party formed largely from the political and business elite of the former regime, won 35.8% of the vote and 86 seats. The results revealed a growing disenchantment with the political elite. Not only did Ennahda lose more than 500,000 votes from 2011, but voter turnout overall dropped by more than 700,000 (from 51% to 45%).

The performance of Ennahda since 2011 has been studied through the actions of its leadership, which has been seen as having moderated its policies despite long exclusion from the political process,⁵⁴ demonstrating tolerance for a democratic state,⁵⁵ making political calculations in order to maintain power,⁵⁶ and bargaining its way toward mutual reintegration with elites from the former regime.⁵⁷ This focus on a handful of individuals at the head of the movement is particularly pronounced in the case of Ennahda because of the prominent and enduring role of Ghannouchi as founder-leader and intellectual reference.⁵⁸ However, the transformations of the movement were expe-

51. To protect the anonymity of my interviewees, I use pseudonyms, except for those who are senior public figures. Interview by the author with Walid (regional Ennahda leader, born 1963, imprisoned 1987, 1991–2006), Sousse, September 30, 2014.

52. Pew Research Center, "Tunisian Confidence in Democracy Wanes: Ratings for Islamist Ennahda Party Have Declined since Revolution," October 15, 2014, 18.

53. Republic of Tunisia, Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), "تقرير الهيئة العليا المستقلة،" تقرير الهيئة العليا المستقلة حول الانتخابات التشريعية والرئاسية [“ISIE report on the 2014 legislative and presidential elections”], Mar. 2015: 334.

54. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, "Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian *Ennahda* from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party," *Democratization* 20, no. 5 (2013): 857–75. doi:10.1080/13510347.2013.801255.

55. Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 2 (Apr. 2012): 89–103. doi:10.1353/jod.2012.0034.

56. Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 110–24. doi:10.1353/jod.2015.0055.

57. Amel Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition," *Mediterranean Politics* 21, no. 1 (2015): 107–27. doi:10.1080/13629395.2015.1081449.

58. Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

rienced just as deeply and negotiated just as intensely by its ordinary members, whose attitudes were shaped by long histories of activism.

This research seeks to recover these neglected debates by drawing on interviews and participant observation in the coastal city of Sousse before, during, and after the October 2014 legislative election campaign. Sousse is the largest city on Tunisia's prosperous Mediterranean coast, which was long the country's political and economic mainspring and home of the administrative elite who went on to rule after independence.⁵⁹ However, Ennahda members regarded Sousse as an important site of Islamist activism, which spread rapidly in the city's secondary school dormitories and its new university faculties from the 1970s onward. In the 1989 election, Ennahda's seven independent candidates in Sousse won around 27% of the vote.⁶⁰ The Ennahda members interviewed in this study reported how, after 2011, the movement rapidly returned to political life, and in Sousse Governorate, as elsewhere, it drew on a reserve of middle-aged, former student activists from the 1980s to establish 16 internally elected local bureaus in each administrative district, all reporting to an elected regional committee.

INTERNAL TENSIONS

The differences that developed within Ennahda were not driven by hard-liners resisting pressure from reformers or by pragmatic exiles imposing change on those who had spent years languishing in prison. Rather, the tension was what one early leader within the movement described as the problem of "double belonging," the long-standing ambiguity of acting like a political party while also operating as a religious social movement invested in preaching and social outreach.⁶¹ That the disputes had not yet produced irreconcilable splits was largely because Ghannouchi's legitimacy as organizational and intellectual authority held the movement together. I identify here three specific points of tension — ideology, political strategy, and organization — that triggered sharp differences among Ennahda activists.

IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

The most high-profile debates within Ennahda considered ideology, specifically the extent of Islamization advocated by the movement. In its campaign for the October 2011 elections, Ennahda did not shy away from its religious character but advocated Islam as a "supreme centrist reference" (*marji'iyya wasatiyya 'ulya*).⁶² However, the movement soon made a series of compromises to its Islamist vision. In early 2012, it proposed that shari'a be "a fundamental source of legislation" in the

59. Clement Henry Moore, "Politics in a Tunisian Village," *The Middle East Journal* 17, no. 5 (Late Autumn 1963): 528, www.jstor.org/stable/4323663.

60. "Tous les résultats des législatives" ["All the results of the legislative (elections)"], *La Presse*, April 4, 1989: 4–5.

61. Zahir al-Mahjub, "النهضة اكتسبت القدرة على التأقلم مع الأوضاع المستجدة والتفاعل معها بـإيجابية" ["Ennahda gained the ability to adjust to the new conditions and to interact with them in a positive way"], interview by Mohamed Dhifallah, *El Fejr*, June 5, 2015: 7.

62. Ennahda Movement, "برنامج حركة النهضة: من أجل تونس الحرية والعدالة والتنمية" ["The Ennahda Movement program: For a Tunisia of freedom, justice, and development"], Sept. 2011: 3.

new constitution but then retracted this claim after a sharp reaction from secular parties and civil society leaders.⁶³ Similarly, the movement argued that “attacks on the sacred” should be criminalized in the constitution, effectively an attempt to outlaw blasphemy, but later settled for a vague commitment that the state should “protect the sacred.”⁶⁴ Ennahda ran national workshops to defend such concessions to its members, particularly to new, younger activists, who were told that the implementation of shari‘a was impossible in the short term — both practically, because the state administration would strongly resist, and intellectually, because shari‘a should only be applied in a truly just society with neither poverty nor inequality.

Despite this intense internal effort to reframe the movement’s Islamizing narrative, there were very public signs of dissent from within, which demonstrated that the movement was not as disciplined in its unity as commonly thought.⁶⁵ As many as 21 of Ennahda’s 89 elected deputies in the National Constituent Assembly disregarded leadership to vote in favor of a failed amendment in January 2014 that would have made the Qur’an and sunna (the sum of the Prophet Muhammad’s words and deeds) the principal sources of legislation in the new constitution.⁶⁶ That same day, 17 Ennahda deputies voted for another amendment that, had it been successful, would have removed the state’s protection of freedom of conscience.⁶⁷

At the local level these disputes over Islamization were even more apparent. In Sousse, local Ennahda leaders admitted weaknesses in their efforts to educate, cultivate, and reform party membership. Such reform had been conducted through reviving a type of small study group known as an *usra* (“family”). Each *usra* was to envelop new members in a supportive network of familial bonds, explicitly re-creating the imagined solidarity of the MTI in the 1970s and 1980s and directly comparable to similar study groups in other Islamist movements throughout the region. However, many of the new, young members arrived thinking that Ennahda was more intent on Islamizing the Tunisian state than it admitted in public. As Hedi, the leader of an Ennahda bureau in the Sousse Governorate town of Kalâa Kebira, put it:

Some religious young people came on the basis that the movement was Islamic and so they should support it . . . But they were looking for an extremist religious movement and they didn’t find it. There was a shock and many of them began to accuse the movement of not being Islamist at all but secularist.⁶⁸

63. Ennahda Movement, “مشروع دستور الجمهورية التونسية” [“Draft constitution of the Republic of Tunisia”], 2012.

64. Rory McCarthy, “Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia’s Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the Challenge of Free Speech,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2015): 447–64. doi:10.1080/13530194.2015.1005055.

65. For a contrary view, see Netterstrøm, “Islamists’ Compromise in Tunisia,” 117.

66. Marsad, “Vote sur un amendement no. 42 de l’article premier” [“Vote on Amendment 42 of Article 1”], January 4, 2014, <https://majles.marsad.tn/fr/vote/52c92fa112bdaa7f9b90f423>.

67. Marsad, “Vote sur un amendement de l’article 6: Supprimer la liberté de ‘conscience’” [“Vote on an amendment for Article 6: Deletion of the freedom of ‘conscience’”], January 4, 2014, <https://majles.marsad.tn/fr/vote/52caefeb12bdaa7f9b90f45d>.

68. Interview by the author with Hedi (local Ennahda leader, born 1968, imprisoned 1991–95), August 12, 2014, Kalâa Kebira.

In his view, under pressure to defend itself in the face of successive national political crises, Ennahda had failed to pursue its internal educational program for new recruits as carefully as it had intended: “The movement didn’t give them enough time to adapt and make them understand they should go through stages until they found their real place.”⁶⁹

These religious-minded Ennahda members cast the priorities of their project in much the same way that their predecessors had in the early 1970s, as if religious outreach needed to start anew. As Kawther, an activist in the Sousse Riadh bureau, put it:

The first thing we must do is *da’wa*. The movement won’t succeed unless it has people who are well trained in *da’wa*, with a strong belief and who are trained and convinced in Islamic thought. That comes before everything else. Then comes politics. And politics is the means not the end [*wasila mush ghaya*].⁷⁰

According to her, proselytizing should be directed against what she perceived to be superficial understandings of hijab, the unexpected spread of Salafi movements, and the appeal of radical armed groups in Syria and Iraq. For her, such activities were to take precedence over political activity. As another activist put it: “The problem in Ennahda is that we let ourselves become too preoccupied with political work.”⁷¹

STRATEGIC DIFFERENCES

A second internal debate regarded the strategic question of what stance Ennahda should take on transitional justice and the former regime. Perhaps surprisingly, this question was less high-profile but more deeply felt than the issue of Islamization. In the first months after the fall of Ben ‘Ali, the newly legalized Ennahda Movement aligned itself with the populist spirit of the uprising and against what it saw as an elite-led transition. The party voiced popular demands: the prosecution of security officers responsible for killing demonstrators, removal of corrupt judges, and a “final break with the former regime and its choices, symbols and methods.”⁷² At its congress in July 2012, the movement committed to ban senior figures from the former ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD, from the French *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique*), from political life.⁷³ However, there was again a sharp change in direction. From August 2013 onward, a month after the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and as popular protests against the Ennahda government began to mount, Ghannouchi told the movement that it was now essential to compromise and allow former senior regime figures to take part in the next elections. The next April, Ghannouchi managed to convince enough Ennahda deputies in the National Constituent Assembly to defeat, by a single vote, a draft article

69. Interview, Hedi, August 12, 2014, Kalâa Kebira.

70. Interview by the author with Kawther (local Ennahda leader, born 1962), September 11, 2014, Sousse Riadh.

71. Interview by the author with Sahbi (local Ennahda leader, born 1958, imprisoned 1983), August 20–21, 2014, Chott Meriem.

72. Ennahda Movement, “بيان حركة النهضة الإسلامية بعد استقالة السيد محمد الغنوشي” [Statement of the Islamic Ennahda Movement after the resignation of Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi], February 27, 2011, www.ennahdha.tn/بيان-حركة-النهضة-الإسلامية-بعد-استقالة-السيد-محمد-الغنوشي/.

73. Ennahda Movement, “البيان الختامي للمؤتمر التاسع لحركة النهضة” [“The closing statement of the Ninth Congress of the Ennahda Movement”], July 23, 2012, www.ennahdha.tn/البيان-الختامي-للمؤتمر-التاسع-لحركة-النهضة/.

of a new electoral law, known informally as the Law to Immunize the Revolution (*Qanun tahsin al-thawra*), that would have excluded senior RCD figures from political life.⁷⁴ Then, after losing the 2014 election, Ennahda lobbied hard to join the coalition led by its victorious rival, the anti-Islamist party Nidaa Tounes. In 2017, Ennahda supported the return of former RCD ministers into the cabinet in key positions and voted in favor of a bill allowing public officials accused of corruption in the former regime to avoid prosecution, which was seen by many critics as undermining the transitional justice process.⁷⁵

This provoked much concern among Ennahda activists in Sousse, who remained firmly opposed to the return of the former political and economic elite. During the election campaign, local activists often fell short of espousing Ennahda's formal narrative of consensus, presenting Ennahda instead as defending a revolutionary cause that was now endangered by the return of the former regime to political life. This was a clear allusion to Nidaa Tounes, the party they saw as representative of the pre-2011 elite. In using this rhetoric, Ennahda activists reactivated the language of the oppressed that had shaped the movement's original 1981 vision but was increasingly out of tune with its formal narrative framing. One afternoon a group of male and female Ennahda activists went out to campaign door-to-door before sunset prayers in a middle-class district of central Sousse. One student activist, Qais, aged 21, tried to win over a young voter, dressed in jeans and smoking. Qais said to him, "Just one simple question: are you with the parties of the former regime? Or are you with the parties of the revolution? Ennahda is of the revolution so at least say you'll vote with the revolution!"⁷⁶ This reflected the very real fears of local Ennahda activists who were angry about the revival of the former political elite and long delays in the transitional justice process. The local activists' concern was that leftists might ally themselves with Nidaa Tounes and seek to exclude Islamists from the political process, as had happened in the early 1990s. At another campaign event, a rally in a working-class district of the city, Zied Ladhari, the head of the Ennahda electoral list for Sousse, presented his movement as embodying sincerity, trust, loyalty, and "love of the poor," while portraying its opponents as merely seeking positions of power and personal interest. He told the crowd:

Our movement stood against oppression, our movement stood against dictatorship and monopolization, and our movement was standing up when no one dared to stand up in that period, and therefore we say today after being liberated from oppression, we must know how to choose well, to choose people to govern us who will help us and stand with us.⁷⁷

74. Marsad, "Vote sur l'article 167 de la proposition de loi organique relative aux élections et référendums" ["Vote on Article 167 of the proposed basic law on elections and referendums"], April 30, 2014, <https://majles.marsad.tn/fr/vote/53613d2912bdaa078ab82503>.

75. Marsad, "Projet de loi organique No. 49/2015 relatif à la réconciliation dans le domaine administratif: Vote sur Projet de loi dans sa totalité" ["Draft for Basic Law No. 49 of 2015 concerning reconciliation in the administration: Vote on the draft as a whole"], September 13, 2017, <https://majles.marsad.tn/2014/fr/vote/5a3912cb4f24d0761604660e>. For critics of the bill, see "Corruption en Tunisie: Adoption d'une loi d'amnistie controversée" ["Corruption in Tunisia: Adoption of a controversial amnesty law"], *Jeune Afrique*, September 14, 2017, www.jeuneafrique.com/474186/politique/tunisie-adoption-dune-loi-controversee-sur-la-corruption-malgre-les-contestations-de-lopposition/.

76. Interview by the author, October 13, 2014, Sousse.

77. Zied Ladhari, Ennahda rally, 9 Avril neighborhood, Sousse, October 15, 2014.

What was presented here was an ethical agenda, a claim to a distinct value system that Ennahda believed set it apart from its competitors. Two days later, another Sousse candidate, 'Afifa Makhoulouf, addressed a similar rally in the southern part of the city by saying: "You know who to choose: the one who will work for you, not the one who will exploit you; the one who will raise you up, not the one who will be arrogant towards you."⁷⁸

For Ennahda activists, disappointment at defeat in the October 2014 elections was compounded by the late decision of the movement's leadership not to endorse a candidate in the presidential election, held over two rounds in November and December of that year. It was another act of caution: Ennahda did not present its own candidate for fear of appearing to dominate. It had promised to back a "consensus" figure, but instead opted for studied neutrality, which most ordinary members read as tacit support for the candidacy of the eventual victor, Béji Caïd Essebsi, the Nidaa Tounes leader. In their frustration, many in the membership voted for Essebsi's challenger, Moncef Marzouki, the former president and head of the CPR, who had expressly appealed for their support. Many described this as a protest against the Ennahda leadership. One local bureau leader in Sousse, Nabil, spoke openly of their exasperation:

There wasn't a good reception of the results by the base and there was a strong reaction, which was to support the electoral campaign of President Marzouki . . . It was a reaction from the base against the choices of the leadership and for the policies decided during the campaign. It wasn't about support for Marzouki, it was a message to the leaders of our movement.⁷⁹

Many rank-and-file members were angered by the subsequent decision of the leadership to enter a coalition with Nidaa Tounes, a party that had been so overtly hostile to Ennahda and represented many from the old regime. Nabil, the local bureau leader, resigned his post in frustration: "We could have been in opposition and presented a model of a constructive opposition. That would have allowed us to restructure the movement, to rebuild it on a correct basis."⁸⁰ Discontent reached up to the senior levels of the movement. Riadh Chaïbi, a former National Consultative Council member, resigned from the movement in mid-2013, saying that Ennahda was more interested in navigating power struggles than in achieving the goals of the uprising.⁸¹ Hamadi Jebali, a Sousse leader and Ennahda's first prime minister, resigned from the movement in December 2014 in frustration with its "fatal error" to not present a candidate for the presidential election. Ennahda, he said, was pursuing inclusion in government from a position of "weakness," not of balance, and would "lose its position in society and on the political scene."⁸²

78. 'Afifa Makhoulouf, Ennahda rally, Zaouiet Sousse, October 17, 2014.

79. Interview by the author with Nabil (local Ennahda leader, born 1972, imprisoned 2007), May 20, 2015, Sousse.

80. Interview, Nabil, May 20, 2015, Sousse.

81. Lila Blaise, "Interview de Riadh Chaïbi, démissionnaire d'Ennahdha" ["Interview with Riadh Chaïbi, resigning from Ennahda"], *HuffPost* (Maghrib), December 9, 2013, www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2013/12/09/riadh-chaibi_n_4410640.html.

82. Thierry Brésillon, "Tunisie: Après son départ d'Ennahdha, Hamadi Jebali s'explique" ["Tunisia: After his departure from Ennahda, Hamadi Jebali explains"], *L'Obs* (France) December 19, 2014, www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-tunisie-libre/20141219.RUE7101/tunisie-apres-son-depart-d-ennahdha-hamadi-jebali-s-explique.html.

POLITICIZATION AFTER DEFEAT

The third internal debate within Ennahda was organizational and developed over the question of politicization. Ennahda's leaders responded to the 2014 electoral defeat not by retreating from the political process to seek refuge in the original religious, cultural, and social activities of their movement, as proposed in the very different context of the early 1990s, but rather by becoming more politicized. Politicization here refers to a set of behaviors identified by Brown that includes the dedication of resources to elections, forming party-like structures, crafting platforms, appealing to new constituencies, complying with laws, and participating in officially sanctioned institutions and procedures.⁸³ What was innovative, and what separated Ennahda from Islamists elsewhere in the Arab world, was that it made a formal, organizational break with its religious, cultural, and social activities. It did not divide itself into a movement and a political party, an approach adopted by Islamists in Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt.⁸⁴ Instead, it turned itself into a political party that had more in common with Turkey's AKP, a party whose organizational structure was determined by the requirements of the Turkish political parties law.⁸⁵ Like the AKP, the new Ennahda would be a center-right political party that advocates a free market economy and a limited role for the state and seeks to capture a wider range of votes beyond the core Islamist electorate.

At a movement congress in May 2016, Ennahda announced that it would "specialize" solely as a political party. Ghannouchi presented this decision to the international community in stark terms: "We are leaving political Islam to enter into Muslim democracy. We are Muslim democrats who no longer call for political Islam."⁸⁶ To his supporters at the congress, he explained:

The Ennahda Movement has not stopped evolving throughout its long journey . . . The functional specialization [*al-takhassus al-wazifi*] between the political and other social fields is not a sudden decision or a submission to temporary pressures, but rather the culmination of an historical path in which the political work was distinct from the social, cultural, and *da'wa* work in our movement.⁸⁷

Previously, Ennahda had been a social and political movement driven by an Islamist ideology; now it sought to reinvent itself as a political party that was socially conservative but most of all pragmatic. Preaching and social outreach would take place independently, by individuals acting alone or through charitable associations. This reflected a deep commitment to politicization that was hard to reverse and that offered none of the cautious

83. Brown, *When Victory Is Not An Option*, 5–6.

84. Shadi Hamid and William McCants (eds.), *Rethinking Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

85. Ergun Özbudun, "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics* 11, no. 3–4 (2006): 550, doi:10.1080/13608740600856561.

86. Ghannouchi, "Il n'y a plus de justification" ["There is no longer a justification"], interview by Bobin.

87. "خطاب الشيخ راشد الغنوشي في افتتاح مؤتمر حركة النهضة," ["Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi's speech at the opening of the Ennahda Movement Congress"], website of Rachid Ghannouchi, May 21, 2016, archived at the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160526063916/http://ar.rachedelghannouchi.com/ar/article/23/خطاب-الشيخ-راشد-الغنوشي-في-افتتاح-مؤتمر-حركة-النهضة> (May 26, 2016).

avenues of retreat present in semi-authoritarian conditions. This adaptation developed not just from a vote-seeking shift toward the center but from a search for greater legitimacy, because the Ennahda leadership argued that it had failed to distinguish itself from the often-violent Salafi movements that had surged in support after 2011. The party's leadership also believed that politicization offered the best source of shelter from the risk of future repression in a still-fragile transition that had yet to emerge from the "political gray zone" between dictatorship and democracy.⁸⁸ Here, it was thinking not just of the 2013 coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt but also of its own experience under Ben 'Ali following the 1989 election. In addition, it feared that it would be marginalized if it stayed outside the political process, which would preclude its ability to shape legal reforms and might lead to a resurgence of a damaging anti-Islamist stream of Tunisian politics.⁸⁹

However, there were still differences of opinion within the party about the politicization of the movement. Even 'Ali Larayedh, the prime minister from 2013–14 and one of Ennahda's most senior figures, had spoken out against a separation of the movement's functions just two years earlier. Defending Ennahda's wide range of political, economic, social, and cultural activities, Larayedh insisted that the priority was not winning the state: "The project of the Ennahda Movement is directed at society and not at power [*al-sulta*] . . ."⁹⁰ Some feared that separating political work from religious, social, and cultural activism would undermine the movement's concept of the completeness of the Muslim character. As one local bureau leader in Sousse put it:

The problem is it's a functional separation, but not an intellectual one. The separation can't be intellectual unless we fall into the problematic of asking ourselves when are we doing politics and when are we doing *da'wa*. That's why I'm not totally with the idea of separation, because it's a negative idea and it will result in a split character.⁹¹

The movement's original ideology was flexible but not endlessly adaptable. For Ennahda, the principle of the "comprehensive conception of Islam" (*al-tasawwur al-shumuli li-l-Islam*), which combined the political and religious into one vision, had been fundamental since the earliest years and was hard to shed.⁹² These differences of opinion made some question their role within Ennahda and exacerbated the differences that had emerged during the years of repression. For some, Ennahda's experience with electoral participation dampened their enthusiasm for political action, at least in formal national-level politics. They were more interested in returning to a grassroots religious project that more closely reflected the *da'wa*-led activism of the 1970s and that continued to shape local-level Ennahda activism throughout the 1980s. Others remained committed to a political project but were increasingly disillusioned with the consensual pragmatism of the leadership and ar-

88. Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 2002): 9, doi:10.1353/jod.2002.0003.

89. It is notable that Brotherhood groups in Jordan and Kuwait both returned to political life in 2016 after concluding that election boycotts had only marginalized them. Lynch, "In Uncharted Waters," 8.

90. "النهضة منفتحة على جميع القوى الوطنية التي تؤمن بالديمقراطية." ["Ennahda is open to all national forces that believe in democracy"], interview by Fayiza al-Nasir, *El Fejr*, March 4, 2014, www.jaridatelfejr.com/الأخبار/علي-العريض-للفجر-النهضة-منفتحة-على-جمي/.

91. Interview by the author with Youssef (local Ennahda leader, born 1961, imprisoned 1993–95), May 21, 2015, Hammam Sousse.

92. MTI, "البيان التأسيسي" ["The founding statement"].

gued in favor of an oppositional stance that reflected the broader nationwide dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the transition. Some distanced themselves from the movement altogether, either joining alternative political parties or engaging in other forms of activism in human rights groups and civic associations. For example, Tahar, a lawyer and Ennahda activist in Sousse who had worked alongside members of other opposition parties during the 2000s, was one of those who chose not to rejoin the movement after 2011. Instead, he invested his energy in establishing a local cultural heritage organization in his district that was open to Tunisians of all political backgrounds. As he put it:

I work more freely in an association than in the party. All the rules in the party limit your situation and you end up opposing or confronting other parties. That's political life but we're not used to it and we need to learn the way of accepting others. I respect Ennahda and at heart I'm with them but I'm not a member. I prefer to be able to speak freely with others.⁹³

Further divisions were likely between long-term members, who were still linked by strong social bonds, and those new supporters who were drawn to Ennahda in its new politicized form.

The movement's leadership faced another problem with politicization: it had to construct a new intellectual vision to explain its new political strategy of consensus. This happened not subsequent to but parallel with the behavioral change of seeking a rapprochement with the political and business elite of the former regime. Those in favor of politicization argued that since Ennahda was no longer a movement of underground resistance, it needed to present itself as a modern, technocratic political party with policies that appealed to both Islamist and non-Islamist voters.⁹⁴ Islam would be no more than a moral guide. The movement would not seek, for now at least, to implement shari'a as a strict code of law, but rather to pursue the broader objectives (*maqasid*) of shari'a, such as freedom, rights, civility, and equality. Ghannouchi himself insisted that ideological questions of Islamization or secularization of society were no longer relevant. Instead he argued that Ennahda seeks to "create solutions to the day-to-day problems that Tunisians face rather than preach about the hereafter."⁹⁵ It was a significant shift from the party's origins as a preaching circle and then as MTI, when it pursued the mobilization of the "oppressed" through the mosque and when it proposed replacing the authoritarian regime with some form of an Islamic state. For this Islamist movement, where there had once been a transcendent comprehensive vision, the new ideology was a worldly technocracy.

CONCLUSION

When the group that became the Ennahda Movement first articulated a political ambition in 1981, what it prized was inclusion within the political process. Inclusion meant the chance to present a competing intellectual and political agenda with the real hope of win-

93. Interview by the author with Tahar (former Ennahda member, born 1965, forcibly conscripted 1987 and 1989), August 25, 2014, Sousse.

94. Interview by the author with senior Ennahda leader Lotfi Zitoun, September 21, 2016, Tunis.

95. Rached Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (2016): 64, <https://fam.ag/2IRyJ14>.

ning influence in government. In many ways, Ennahda's formal politicization in 2016 still prized that inclusion. This time, its leaders argued that for the sake of broader legitimacy, security from repression, and to avoid the risk of marginalization, the appropriate strategic path was to prioritize participation in the political process. In contrast to common Islamist behavior in a semi-authoritarian context, Ennahda chose not to separate itself into a religious movement and a distinct political party. Instead it decided to "specialize" as a political party in a hard-to-reverse commitment that distanced itself from the religious, cultural, and social activities that had shaped its movement activism over previous decades.

The example of Ennahda demonstrates the new challenges Islamist movements face in transitions away from authoritarianism toward more open political systems. The Islamist electoral advantage is significantly reduced. Islamists are as likely as others to fail to meet raised expectations, their ideological hegemony is likely to be challenged in a freer competitive context, and their ability to provide social services may no longer be as effective as it once was. Now, Islamists can enter the political process unimpeded, but they are more likely to face costly internal debates over ideological, strategic, and organizational questions. The tension is likely to be expressed between the rival visions of believers and careerists within the activist core. The case of Ennahda in particular suggests that the renegotiation of organizational balance between being a religious movement and a political party becomes an urgent question. Ennahda pursued politicization; other Islamist movements may choose a different trajectory. But in each case, the choice will be determined by a movement's perception of its own experience. For Ennahda, the experience of isolation, repression, and political polarization in the three decades before 2011 encouraged it to downplay its religious identity, seek political allies, and prioritize coalition governance over taking more principled stances in opposition. In order to achieve these goals, Ennahda chose to restructure itself as a political party that was separate from its traditional religious, cultural, and social activism.

During Tunisia's transition away from authoritarianism, Ennahda found, in line with experiences of party trajectories in European contexts, that, as it sought to negotiate its way into a consensus of center-right parties, so it was forced to compromise on ideology and strategy. This in turn reenergized a series of internal struggles that had been underway discreetly within the movement since the decades of repression. It became more difficult for Ennahda to balance its political ambitions with the very different demands of its religious social movement, until it sought resolution in a significant organizational shift toward politicization. At the Ennahda party congress in May 2016, this decision was passed with the vote of a large majority of delegates after months of workshops and discussion groups designed to forge internal consensus. However, a tendency of scholars and observers to focus on the political behavior of Islamist leadership elites has occluded analysis of the deep and ongoing internal struggles provoked by these decisions. These struggles had their roots in the decades preceding the transition and were not easily resolved. For an Islamist movement to establish a balance between ambitions for politics and for religious, social, and cultural outreach is a fraught process. The tension between the two trends is ever present, waxing and waning with the political context. The creation of political parties by Islamist movements in democratizing systems is an act of strategic and intellectual adaptation to uncertain, changing circumstances but an act that incurs many costs.

