

## RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY OR PARTICULARISTIC BENEFITS?

### EXPLAINING ENNAHDA'S ELECTORAL SUCCESS IN TUNISIA

By Lindsay J. Benstead, Portland State University

Scholars are interested in understanding why parties develop constituencies during transitional elections and what role ideology and particularistic benefits play in attracting and maintaining voters. In the case of Arab and Muslim countries, researchers seek to explain why citizens support Islamist parties. Yet, while some scholarly research finds that supporters are more observant and religiously conservative than those who vote for other parties, many studies also suggest that electoral behavior is shaped by complex political, social, and economic factors, including the constraints on access to public services created by authoritarian regimes (Wegner 2017; Brumberg 2002; Catusse and Zaki 2005; Elsayyad and Hanafy 2014; Fourati, Gratton, and Grosjean 2016; Robbins 2014; Tessler 1997; Pellicer and Wegner 2014; Garcia-Rivero and Kotzé 2007; Masoud 2014). Importantly, Islamist parties' social embeddedness and organizational capacity allows them to reach citizens outside existing clientelistic networks with high-quality services and charity to attract voters (Gidengil and Karakoc 2016; Clark 2004a, b; Brooke 2019; Cammett and Jones Luong 2014).

Yet existing literature explaining Islamist parties' support has so far drawn largely, though not exclusively, from qualitative evidence. Those studies that utilize survey research typically lack the items needed to test a clientelistic explanation of Islamist parties' electoral success.

My work seeks to address this gap. Drawing on a unique method I adapted from classic studies of constituency service in the United States and Great Britain (Cain, Ferejohn, and Morris 1987) as part of my dissertation research in Morocco and Algeria, I tested the role that constituency service by parliamentarians plays in explaining the

electoral success of Ennahda in Tunisia's transitional elections. Through this new application of survey research after the Arab uprisings, I find that, more than other parties, Ennahda reaches out with constituency service to citizens who are relatively marginalized from formal political networks, including women and more religious Tunisians (Abdel-Samad and Benstead 2016; Arat 2005; Ayata 1996; Benstead 2016; Clark and Schwedler 2003; Philbrick Yadav 2014; White 2002). Moreover, Ennahda's strategy—along with its better developed organizational capacity—enabled Ennahda to translate its constituency service into electoral gains more effectively than other parties, even if it ultimately did not prevail against the new party, Nida Tounes, in 2014.

My research challenges the conventional wisdom that religious ideology alone explains Ennahda's electoral success and supports the claim that its success stems from its distinct organizational features, social embeddedness, and cohesiveness. By focusing on the individual constituent as the unit of analysis and using classic questionnaire batteries from studies of legislative behavior in the United States, I capture the universe of citizen-parliamentarian interactions and bring it to bear on an important research question in Middle East political science. This technique provides a comparable measure of how and why Islamist and non-Islamist parties differ in their capacity and strategy and thus sheds light on why are more or less electorally successful in particular contexts. This new stream of evidence, when triangulated with quantitative and quantitative data gathered by other researchers, is invaluable for answering important theoretical questions in Middle East political science and integrating it into comparative politics cross-regionally.

#### Tunisia's first democratic elections

In the run-up to the Constituent Assembly on October 23, 2011 in Tunisia—the first free and fair elections ever held in the country—voters were faced with the choice between more than a hundred parties. These parties fell on a spectrum of ideological views on the role of religion in

political life, but there were perceived organizational differences across the parties as well. On one end of the spectrum was the relatively more cohesive and organized Islamist party, Ennahda, and on the other were hundreds of new, more personalistic non-Islamist parties. Ennahda was distinct in the minds of voters, who saw it as unique from other parties based not only on its religious platform but also its more robust organizational capabilities (Benstead, Lust, Malouche, and Wichmann 2014). Although it was not legally allowed to compete in elections until 2011, Ennahda developed deep social roots since its founding in 1981, allowing it to quickly develop a national grassroots organization following the 2010 to 2011 uprising that ousted the Ben Ali regime. As Wolf (2017) writes:

“although the Ennahda had been out of the public eye for two decades, it still enjoyed a vast network of supporters who had never identified with the country’s supposed secular legacy...in a period of less than six weeks they established 2,064 Ennahda offices, including twenty-four bureaus representing different governorates...Such elaborate electoral strategies, combined with Ennahda’s institutional and organisational leverage, gave the party an immense advantage over its secular counterparts, whose structures were mainly limited to the coastal areas and the capital” (pp. 131-133).

Ennahda would win a plurality (37 percent of seats) in the Constituent Assembly elections on October 23, 2011. Two years later in 2014, Ennahda again contested the parliamentary elections. While it lost some vote share to a new big-tent party representing some element of the old-guard, Ennahda was still able to capture 28 percent of the seats in parliament.

### **The Tunisian Post-Election Survey (TPES)**

In 2012, between Tunisia’s two transitional elections held in 2011 and 2014, Ellen Lust, Dhafer Malouche, and I conducted a nationally-representative survey of 1,202 Tunisians that we hoped would provide a better understanding of voter behavior. Embedded in the survey were questions about citizen interactions with Tunisian parliamentarians. I developed this novel approach part of my dissertation research in Morocco and

Algeria by adapting classic questionnaires on constituency service and voting behavior in the US and the UK (Cain, Ferejohn, and Morris 1987). I found that 15 percent of Moroccans and 10 percent of Algerians requested constituency services from a parliamentarian in the preceding four years. Yet relatively few—only about 5 percent—of Tunisians reported having asked a member of the Constituent Assembly elected in 2011 for help during the previous year. While this was not a small proportion when comparing Tunisia with a developed democracy, it was lower than in neighboring authoritarian regimes, Morocco and Algeria (albeit over a longer time period).

### **Explaining Ennahda’s Electoral Success**

The survey also asked which party the respondent voted for in 2011. Among respondents, 31 percent did not vote, 40 percent voted for a non-Islamist party, and 29 percent voted for Ennahda. Since the official turnout was 54 percent in the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections, this question slightly overestimates voting, which is a common problem in election surveys as a result of social desirability bias. But the survey estimates were very close to the actual election results. When asked about which party they would vote for tomorrow, 70 percent said they did not plan to vote or did not know for which party, 16 percent said they would vote for a non-Islamist party, and 14 percent said they would vote for an Islamist party. This reveals that one year after the first transitional elections—and two years before the next elections would be held in 2014—a majority were unengaged or undecided.

The survey revealed that Ennahda’s parliamentarians were much more active than other parties in reaching citizens and that their service interactions yielded greater fruit in terms of attracting undecided voters. Twenty respondents reported accessing help from Ennahda, while only six respondents contacted another party. Thus, while Ennahda held 37 percent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, according to the survey, it was responsible for 77 percent of constituent service interactions reported in the country as a whole. Further, respondents who interacted with Ennahda always

mentioned the party name, while those who interacted with other parties sometimes named a candidate instead of a party, indicative of the Ennahda's stronger party institutionalization.

Clientelistic linkages also strengthened electoral support for Ennahda more effectively than similar interactions between citizens and members of other parties. In 2011, Ennahda voters were more likely to be male, religious, poorer, less educated, less affluent, and urban than those who voted for other parties or no party at all. By 2012, Ennahda's voter base was made up to a larger extent by citizens who supported a strong role of religion in politics. Decided Ennahda voters were also disproportionately those citizens whom the party had reached through constituency service by Ennahda parliamentarians. Importantly, relatively few of those who were served by an Ennahda member had voted for the party in 2011. But those who reported a constituency service interaction with Ennahda were more likely to continue to support the party in 2014 than those who had no such interaction. This indicates that both religious ideology as well as particularistic benefits in the form of constituency service contributed to the development of Ennahda's voter base by 2014.

#### **Conclusions: The importance of comparisons between Islamist and non-Islamist parties**

This research challenges the conventional wisdom that religious ideology alone explains Ennahda's electoral success. It also allows for a direct test of the role that Ennahda's organizational capacity and constituency service plays in explaining its electoral success. More often than other parties, Ennahda reached out to citizens who are relatively more marginalized from power, including co-religionists and women (Abdel-Samad and Benstead 2016; Arat 2005; Ayata 1996; Benstead 2016; Clark and Schwedler 2003; Philbrick Yadav 2014; White 2002). And this strategy—along with its better developed organizational capacity and party cohesiveness—enabled Ennahda to translate its constituency service into electoral gains more effectively than other parties, even it if ultimately did not prevail against the new party, Nida Tounes, in 2014.

“*Scholars can gain new insights by focusing on a particular political process as the unit of analysis and comparing the frequency and success of such interactions across political actors.*”

This paper—and the larger project of which it is a part—illustrates an important methodological insight about the value of survey research in general and the use of classic questionnaires from studies of legislative behavior in the United States to study electoral politics in transitional regimes. Many scholars who study Islamist parties or politicians from particular groups—such as female or Islamist female parliamentarians—focus their research on these groups themselves while paying less attention to members of other political parties or social groups (e.g., non-Islamist parties or male parliamentarians). Yet scholars can gain new insights by focusing on a particular political process as the unit of analysis—in this case the constituency service interaction—and comparing the frequency and success of such interactions across political actors (i.e., comparing Islamist and non-Islamist parties, male and female citizens). By doing so, it is possible to capture the universe of citizen-parliamentarian interactions for all political parties and to utilize it as a reliable measure of the extent to which ideology and constituency service explains electoral success. This new stream of evidence, when triangulated with other quantitative and quantitative data collection, can be invaluable for answering important theoretical questions in Middle East political science and integrating it into comparative politics cross-regionally.

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#### **THE RESILIENCE OF ALGERIA'S PROTEST MOVEMENT**

**By Sharan Grewal, College of William & Mary**

Seven months after overthrowing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algerians are still in the streets. Mass protests have continued every Friday since Bouteflika's ouster in April, urging authorities to not just reshuffle the leadership but

## ENDNOTES

### Gengler notes:

<sup>1</sup> J. Gengler, M. Tessler, R. Lucas, and J. Forney. (2019). 'Why Do You Ask?' The Nature and Impacts of Attitudes toward Public Opinion Surveys in the Arab World. *British Journal of Political Science*. The study was made possible by a grant (NPRP 9-015-5-002) from the Qatar National Research Fund, a member of The Qatar Foundation. The statements herein are solely the responsibility of the authors.

<sup>2</sup> G. Sjoberg. (1955). A Questionnaire on Questionnaires. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 18, 423-427.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., D. Corstange. (2014). Foreign-sponsorship effects in developing-world surveys: Evidence from a field experiment in Lebanon. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 78, 474-484.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gengler (2017). The dangers of unscientific surveys in the Arab world. *Washington Post*. October 27.

### Sika notes:

<sup>5</sup> Marc Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust, *American Political Science Review* vol. 92, no. 4 (1998): 791-808.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Uslaner, "The Study of Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, by Eric Uslaner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 3-13.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Citrin and Laura Stoker, "Political Trust in a Cynical Age," *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 21 (2018): 49-70; William Mishler and Richard Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-communist Societies," *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 30-62. 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Newton, "Social and Political Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, by Russel Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: oxford University Press, 2007): 342-61.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Beissinger, "'Conventional' and 'Virtual' Civil Societies in Autocratic Regimes," *Comparative Politics* vol. 49, no. 3 (2017): 351-372.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes," *Democratization* vol. 20, no. 1 (2013): 38-57.

<sup>11</sup> Amaney Jamal, "When is Social Trust a Desirable Outcome? Examining Levels of Trust in the Arab World," *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 40, no. 11 (2007): 1328-1349; Justin Gengler, Mark Tessler, Darwish Al-Emadi and Abdoulaye Diop, "Civic and Democratic Citizenship in Qatar: Findings from the First Qatar World Values Survey," *Middle East Law and Governance* vol. 5, no. 3 (2013): 258-279.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Joshua Stacher, "Fragmenting States, New Regimes: Militarized State Violence and Transition in the Middle East," *Democratization* vol. 22, no. 15 (2015): 259-275.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the project see: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/faculty-of-economics-and-social-sciences/subjects/departement-of-social-sciences/ifp/institute-of-political-science/people/middle-east-and-comparative-politics-professor-schlumberger/projects-and-services/arab-youth-from-engagement-to-inclusion-vw/project-description/>

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the project see: <https://www.iai.it/en/ricerche/power2youth-freedom-dignity-and-justice>

<sup>15</sup> The research design and the implementation of the survey study was conducted by the Fafo Research Foundation in Norway. For more information on the survey results and methodology please see: <http://power2youth.iai.it/survey.html>

<sup>16</sup> For a full regression table, please email the author at: [nadinesika@aucegypt.edu](mailto:nadinesika@aucegypt.edu)

<sup>17</sup> Johannes Gerschewski, op.cit; Mark Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31, no. 2 (1987): 266-297.

### Zeira notes

<sup>18</sup> Zeira, Yael. *The Revolution Within: State Institutions and Unarmed Resistance in Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Corstange, Daniel, and Nikolay Marinov. "Taking sides in other people's elections: The polarizing effect of foreign intervention." *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 3 (2012): 655-670.

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Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Amaney A. Jamal. "Anti-Americanism, Authoritarian Politics, and Attitudes about Women's Representation: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Jordan." *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2015): 34-45. Shelef, Nadav G., and Yael Zeira. "Recognition Matters! UN State Status and Attitudes toward Territorial Compromise." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 3 (2017): 537-563.

Nugent, Elizabeth, Tarek Masoud, and Amaney A. Jamal. "Arab Responses to Western Hegemony: Experimental Evidence from Egypt." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 2 (2018): 254-288.

<sup>20</sup> While the Palestinian Territories does have well-established and regarded survey firms, perhaps the best-known firm, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), does not generally accept commissioned research from outside scholars. Due to the international presence and interest in the Occupied Territories, hiring a survey firm is also often prohibitively expensive for Ph.D. students and junior scholars. As such, working with Al-Maqdese, I put together my own survey team and did much of the logistical and administrative work typically carried out by a survey firm myself.

<sup>21</sup> Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. *Survey methodology*. Vol. 561. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Corstange, Daniel. "Sensitive questions, truthful answers? Modeling the list experiment with LISTIT." *Political Analysis* 17, no. 1 (2009): 45-63.

Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. *Survey methodology*. Vol. 561. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Scacco, Alexandra. "Anatomy of a Riot: participation in ethnic violence in Nigeria." *Book Manuscript, New York University* (2012).

<sup>24</sup> Belli, Robert F., William L. Shay, and Frank P. Stafford. "Event history calendars and question list surveys: A direct comparison of interviewing methods." *Public opinion quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2001): 45-74.

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<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics* 29(3), 305-322; Adel Abdel Ghafar and Anna Jacobs, "Lessons for Algeria from the 2011 Egyptian uprising," *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage, March 14, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Neil Ketchley and Thoraya El-Rayyes, "Unpopular Protest: Mass Mobilization and Attitudes to Democracy in Post-Mubarak Egypt," *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming. See also El-Rayyes and Ketchley, "In 2011, Egyptians quickly tired of protest. Here's why that matters for Sudan and Algeria," *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage, September 5, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> A report based on data from April 1 to July 1 was published by Brookings: see Sharan Grewal, M.Tahir Kilavuz, and Robert Kubinec, "Algeria's Uprising: A Survey of Protesters and the Military," Brookings, July 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/algerias-uprising-a-survey-of-protesters-and-the-military/>.

<sup>28</sup> Our survey methodology and questionnaire were approved by the ethics boards at both Princeton University (IRB # 11581) and the College of William & Mary (PHSC-2019-03-11-13532), and have been funded by both universities.

<sup>29</sup> There are important ethical questions about the data Facebook collects on its users. Since our survey is conducted on a separate platform, Qualtrics, Facebook only learns whether a user engaged with or clicked on the advertisement – not whether they took the survey let alone their answers.

<sup>30</sup> See: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>