MENA POLITICS NEWSLETTER

Volume 4, no.2 (Fall 2021)

Symposium: Tunisia's Democratic Crisis

Symposium: The Uses And Abuses of Datasets

apsa AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION
MENA POLITICS SECTION

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VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2, Fall 2021

OUR MISSION

The Middle East and North Africa Politics Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) was established in 2018 to support, develop and publish research on the politics of the MENA region. It seeks to fully integrate the rigorous study of the politics of the Middle East with the broader discipline of Political Science. It serves as an institutional home for the community of political scientists dedicated to the Middle East. This Newsletter is a forum for discussion of research and issues of interest to the community, and is produced with the support of POMEPS.

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Eya Mkaddem (@EMkaddem) via Meshkal (@MeshkalTN)
Photo of demonstration in Tunis, October 3, 2021

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SECTION NEWS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is my final issue as editor of the APSA's MENA Politics Newsletter. I'm very proud of what we've done with it over the last three years, with the enthusiastic support of an active and brilliant editorial board. I would like to publicly thank Holger Albrecht, Nermin Allam, Lindsey Benstead, Alexandra Blackman, Gamze Cavdar, May Darwich, Justin Gengler, Diana Greenwald, Kevan Harris, Shimaa Hatab, Lisel Hintz, Noora Lori, Lama Mourad, Jillian Schwedler, Nadav Shelef, Daniel Tavana, Stacey Philbrick Yadav, and Sean Yom for their exceptional service on the editorial board, including the organization and editing of many of the symposia featured in the volumes. I would also like to thank Lauren Baker, Prerna BalaEddy and Tessa Talebi for their editorial assistance and hard work in producing the six issues of the Newsletter.

During my tenure as editor, we published innovative methodological symposia on the applications of GIS to MENA politics; new approaches to historical archives; new survey research methods and applications; the uses of large scale automated text analysis; and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also published substantive symposia on Israeli politics; Turkish foreign policy; Islamist movements in protracted warscapes; and a full special issue on women and gender in MENA politics. We also published standalone essays on topics as diverse as the ethics of research with refugees, the marginalization of Iraqi Islamists in political science research, the impact of COVID on scholarship, approaches to Yemen, comparisons between Latin America and MENA waves of democratization, publication trends within the field of political science, and many more. These short essays and symposia, in my view, have made a real, substantive contribution to the subfield of MENA political science which will stand the test of time.

We leave the Newsletter in good hands. The new editorial team of Nermin Allam, Gamze Cavdar and Sean Yom bring a wealth of talent, experience and new ideas to the table. They have laid out exciting plans for new features and formats. I am excited to see what they do with the Newsletter over the next three years, as they continue to make it a central forum for our rich and vibrant subfield of MENA political science.

It's also the end of my three year tenure as founding Chair of the MENA Politics Section. I'm eternally grateful to Lindsey Benstead, Steven Brooke, Matt Buehler, Bassel Salloukh, Marwa Shalaby, and Jillian Schwedler for their tireless work to establish and build the section during the last three years. The new chair Stacey Philbrick Yadav, and new executive committee members Rich Nielsen and Nadine Sika, inherit a healthy and thriving Section with a robust membership, exciting programming, and a healthy presence at the APSA's Annual Conference. Building a Section from scratch has been an eye-opening experience, and I'm delighted to pass the torch to the next generation of leaders.

For this final issue, in lieu of a feature essay, I would like to offer some reflections on the state of the field of MENA political science. The issue then features two fascinating symposia, one methodological and the other substantive. The first, The Uses and Abuses of Datasets, looks at the limitations and potential biases of the off-the-shelf datasets which have become so widely used in our research and publications. There's no question that the availability of these datasets has been a boon for MENA scholars, who long suffered from the unavailability of the kind of quantitative social data that scholars of other regions could use in their publications. The Arab Barometer has emerged as a definitive source for reliable survey data, across multiple waves and all open access. A variety of protest and violence event databases have allowed for behavioral analysis. But, as the contributors to this symposium demonstrate, there are serious potential biases and absences in those databases which could systematically distort research findings across multiple issue areas.

The second symposium, Tunisia's Democratic Crisis, brings together nine scholars of Tunisia to reflect upon the July 25 decision by President Kais Saied to dissolve the Parliament and suspend the constitution. A fierce debate has broken out since then over how to think about his moves, and how to respond. In the Middle East Scholars Barometer, a biannual survey of academic experts on the Middle East which I run with Shibley Telhami, 58 percent said it was a coup, while only 14 percent disagreed. Interestingly, 28 percent said they didn't know — by far the largest such response to any question in the survey. Political scientists were eight percentage points more likely to call it a coup than were scholars from other disciplines. Overall, 76 percent of the scholars assessed said that these actions by the president made democracy in Tunisia less likely a decade from now. That's what scholars from the United States, Europe and across the Middle East think – but what about Tunisians, and those deeply immersed in studying the country? Our symposium goes deep into the conceptual issues as well as the politics at a potentially pivotal moment.

Finally, allow me to reflect briefly on our field. My first observation, after three years as Section Chair and over a decade running the Project on Middle East Political Science, is that we are an exceptionally generous and supportive group of scholars. The willingness of scholars in our field at all career stages to step up in support of their colleagues is nothing short of extraordinary. I have organized literally hundreds of research workshops over the last decade, both for article length papers and for full book manuscripts, and I can count on my fingers the number of people who turned down a request to serve as a volunteer discussant without a really good reason. Busy, even overwhelmed scholars eagerly join selection committees, share their research, and step up to create a supportive environment. There are a wide range of research workshops and other forms of support to junior scholars, including but not limited to POMEPS, which have fleshed out a field with a distinctively supportive culture. That culture is one of the great achievements of our field over the last decade or two.

Second, the longstanding complaint that MENA political scientists are distanced from the rest of the field by either methodology or disposition is just clearly no longer the case. MENA political scientists have been publishing in ever greater numbers in both fieldwide and specialist disciplinary journals. The Arab uprisings generated enormous interest across the

discipline of political science and with the general public, which brought MENA scholars into ever closer dialogue with political scientists from outside the regional specialization. In a 2000 review essay, Ian Lustick noted that in the previous three years only three members of the Middle East Studies Association had published articles in the two leading comparative politics journals (*World Politics* and *Comparative Politics*).[1] In a recent Newsletter essay, Melani Cammett and Isabel Kendall found that "from 2000 to 2019, the number of articles per year focusing on the Middle East rose from 4 to 18 articles, with a peak of 22 articles in 2016." In my own study for the forthcoming Oxford University Press volume *The Political Science of the Middle East*, which I edited with Jillian Schwedler and Sean Yom, I found that the same two journals Lustick looked at two decades ago published 20 articles by 24 MESA members (including co-authorship) from 2017-20. Taking the comparison a bit further shows a similar trendline. The *American Political Science Review*, the flagship journal of the American Political Science Association, published only one article on MENA from 1997-2000 and 9 from 2017-2020. *Comparative Political Studies* published only 2 MENA articles from 1997-2000, and 9 from 2017-2020. Meanwhile, *Perspectives on Politics*, a second APSA flagship journal launched in the 2000s, which explicitly set out to be a home for methodologically diverse political science research, published 23 MENA articles between 2011-2020.

Third, the MENA political science field is robustly diverse and inclusive, and is becoming ever more so. It is diverse in its methods, with leading scholars doing quantitative, qualitative and mixed research. It is increasingly diverse in the issues and areas it covers, with the Arab uprisings and their aftermath unlocking a wide range of research programs and debates. It increasingly intersects with non-MENA research in a dizzying range of research areas, and increasingly challenges the limits of the conventionally defined Middle East in its comparisons and analyses. And it is diverse in its membership, with an ever greater number of scholars from the MENA region participating in its networks and publishing in its journals and book series.

Such a benign view of the field stands at odds with the typical decennial lamentations about our field's failings. "The Middle East field is in a crisis within the broader discipline of political science," warned Jerrold Green in 1994.[2] For James Bill a few years later, "political scientists in the United States have made little progress in the past 50 years in understanding and explaining Middle East political systems."[3] Middle East political science was charged with failing to predict the Iranian revolution in 1979, the rise of Islamism in the 1980s, or Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.[4] It failed to anticipate al-Qaeda's attack on the United States in 2001 (though it proved quite prescient in its warnings about the likely

[1] Ian Lustick, "The Quality of Theory and the Comparative Disadvantage of Area Studies," *MESA Bulletin* 34,2 (2000): 189-92.
[2] Jerrold Green, "The Politics of Middle East Politics," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 27,3 (1994): 517-8.
[3] James Bill, "The Study of Middle East Politics: A Stocktaking," *Middle East Journal* 50, 4 (1996), pp. 501-512.
[4] Rashid Khalidi, "Presidential Address to the MESA Annual Meeting" (1994); Lisa Anderson, "Scholarship, Policy, Debate and Conflict: Why We Study the Middle East and Why it Matters," *Middle East studies Association Bulletin* 38,1 (2004): 2-15.

disaster of the 2003 invasion of Iraq).[5] And, most recently, critics demanded to know "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring."[6] A thoughtful post-mortem in *Perspectives on Politics* argued that the field had "failed to predict the Arab uprisings a decade ago due to its "focus on authoritarianism and the obstacles to democratization which marginalized questions relevant to the dynamics of popular mobilization, and deemphasized their potentially inherent importance aside from their relevance to regime change."[7]

A similar lamentation thus emerges every decade or so, with grim assessments of the field's meager accomplishments and warnings of what must be done to avoid disaster.[8] There is a ritual quality to these lamentations. But I choose not to join in those festivities. In my view, our field today has matured into an incredibly robust, diverse community of scholars which is producing rich and innovative research, is publishing in ever greater numbers in leading disciplinary and specialist journals, and has a robust infrastructure of support for emerging scholars which is the envy of many a field. It isn't perfect, of course, but what is? There are some popular methods and debates which I don't find personally compelling, there are some trends in what does and doesn't get published in top journals which I find disturbing, and due to toxic mix of political repression and COVID-19, there are growing and painfully real obstacles to doing serious social science research in many MENA countries which will likely have significant downstream effects. Still, this is a healthy field producing vibrant work.

Perhaps one reason I have these more positive views than are typical is the vantage point from where I have been sitting. Over the last few years, I've curated the Twitter feed with almost every peer-reviewed journal article about MENA politics I could find, with over twenty five google scholar alerts and table of contents alerts from most relevant journals. For the Middle East Political Science podcast, I've read and discussed over a hundred books. I've edited this Newsletter and seen the panel submissions at the APSA Annual Meeting. And, as noted above, along with Jillian Schwedler and Sean Yom, I organized and edited a remarkable forthcoming edited volume: *The Political Science of the Middle East*, in which nearly fifty scholars collectively survey the state of the field across ten different research areas. I've seen so much good work that it's difficult to share the obligatory sense of despair.

To conclude: this summer I sent out a request to the membership of the Section, asking what they considered to be the best work of political science on the Middle East in the last year,

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[5] Ibrahim Karawan, "Time for an Audit," Journal of Democracy, Vol. 13, 3 (2002), pp. 96-101; Fawaz Gerges, "The Study of Middle East International Relations: A Critique," *British Journal of Middle East studies* 18, 2 (2002): 208-220; Steven Heydemann, "Defending the Discipline," *Journal of Democracy* 13, 3 (2002): 102-108.

[6] F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90,4 (2011), 81-90.

[7] Marc Howard and Meir Walter, "Explaining the Unexpected: Political Science and the Surprises of 1989 and 2011." *Perspectives on Politics* 12, 2 (2014): 394-408. But see responses by Eva Bellin, Ellen Lust and Marc Lynch in the same issue, and Francesco Cavatorta, "No Democratic Change.. and Yet No Authoritarian Continuity: The Inter-Paradigm Debate and North Africa After the Uprisings," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42,1 (2015): 135-45.

[8] Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers in the Sand: The Failure of Middle East studies in America* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, 2001); Lawrence Davidson, "The Attack on Middle East studies: A Historical Perspective," *Middle East Policy* 15, 1 (2008): 149-160.

and over the last decade. The first response I got was from a colleague complaining that "this is the hardest survey question I've ever gotten!" The results of the survey suggest that my friend was not the only one struggling to respond. No book or other work of political science received more than two mentions; the only one that did, Laleh Khalili's fabulous *Sinews of War and Trade*, was not written primarily as a work of political science. Rather than a single field defining book, our scholars highlighted work which spoke primarily to their own particular research interests and subfields. Books named ranged over diverse texts such as Stephane Lacroix's *Awakening Islam;* Ceren Lord's *Religious Politics in Turkey*; Calvert Jones's *Bedouins into Bourgeois*; Lihi Bin Shitrit's *Righteous Transgressions*; Lisa Wedeen's *Authoritarian Apprehensions*; Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy*; Noura Erekat's *Justice for Some*; Wendy Pearlman's *Violence*, *Non-Violence and the Palestinian National Movement*; Elizabeth Nugent's *After Repression*; and *The Arab Spring*, by Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud and Andrew Reynolds. I'm not entirely sure what I would have chosen myself. I confess to a preference for books over articles, though. I like to read, and books give authors the opportunity to develop their arguments at their full length, without the constraints of journal word limits or overly intrusive reviewers, and I hope that our field continues to value books in the tenure and promotion process, and in the way we organize the production of knowledge about the MENA region.

It has been an honor and a privilege to lead the MENA Politics Section and to edit this Newsletter over the last three years. I'm excited to see what their futures hold.

- Marc Lynch, (Former) Section Chief and Newsletter Editor

A NOTE FROM APSA

Greetings from APSA's MENA Programs. We hope you and your loved ones continue to stay safe and healthy wherever you are.

We are pleased to share that the 2021 APSA Annual Meeting was held in a hybrid format combining both an in-person as well as a virtual option. The meeting took place on September 28-October 3 in Seattle, Washington and featured several MENA-focused events, including virtual research paper panels, roundtables, and an in-person MENA Politics reception. Alumni of the APSA MENA 2020 Workshop took part in a virtual paper panel to present their research on security issues in MENA. The Arab Political Science Network (APSN) held a virtual roundtable titled "Situating the Lebanese Uprising: Revolution, Transformation, and (De)Mobilization," which brought together MENA scholars to discuss the Lebanese uprising that began in October 2019. In addition, APSA supported this year's MENA Research Development Group (RDG) in collaboration with the MENA Politics Section and POMEPS. The program took place virtually on September 28, in conjunction with the APSA Annual Meeting, and supported five early-career scholars from MENA to receive research feedback and discuss professional development opportunities.

Our APSA MENA Programs continue to grow and evolve as we navigate the virtual space to support political science scholars in the Arab MENA region. This summer, APSA held its annual Workshop on "Visuality and the Creation of Liminal Spaces of Participation: Ethnographic Approaches to the Middle East and North Africa." Nine fellows from across the Arab MENA region participated in the 6-week virtual program in July/August 2021, which consisted of a series of discussion sessions held in two blocks. The first block focused on theoretical and methodological discussions and hosted guest speaker experts in social anthropology with the second part focusing on research presentations and professional development.

Additionally, a follow-up program with four fellows from the 2020 Workshop on "Securitization and Insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa," was also held in August 2021. During the 2-day Workshop, fellows received detailed feedback on their revised research proposals and discussed professional development opportunities. In efforts to continue providing accessible scholarly resources, we also held a recorded webinar on virtual methods for MENA politics research**.** Additional scholarly resources on MENA organizations and institutes, training, funding, and other opportunities can be found in our scholarly resources page.

Looking ahead to next year, we are now accepting applications for the 2022 IQMR summer program. APSA is sponsoring 4 scholars to participate in next year's program. We encourage those interested in receiving advanced training in qualitative and mixed methods to apply through this link by November 12, 2021. APSA will also be sponsoring 4 MENA scholars to attend next year's quantitative summer program organized by ICPSR at the University of Michigan. For those interested in applying, please check our website for updates on next

year's opportunity. We have also announced a Call for Applications for our MENA Mentoring Initiative, an opportunity we recently began to offer to early-career scholars due to Covid-19 restrictions and limited access to traditional sources of scholarly support. For our 2022 Workshops, we are in discussion with co-leaders, Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron, USA), Yuree Noh (Rhode Island College, USA) Daniel M. Silverman (Carnegie Mellon University, USA), Mujtaba Isani (King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Saudi Arabia) to organize a summer Workshop on "Studying Public Opinion in the Contemporary Middle East: Challenges, Opportunities and Best Practices."

As for our departmental collaboration initiative, APSA recently awarded a grant to Alexandria University to organize a workshop for graduate students titled "Visualizing the Doctoral Thesis." The 3-day virtual program focused on helping Masters and PhD students navigate the challenges of undertaking graduate research and presenting a strong research thesis.

If you are interested in learning more or getting involved with the APSA MENA Project, please contact us at menaworkshops@apsanet.org.

Best to all in the coming months and stay well!

Andrew Stinson and Dana El-Issa
APSA MENA Project
American Political Science Association

NEW SECTION OFFICERS

Stacey Philbrick Yadav, Chair

Stacey Philbrick Yadav is associate professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. For close to two decades, she has written about the politics of Yemen, with a focus on opposition activism both within and outside of partisan frameworks.

Richard Nielsen, Treasurer

Richard Nielsen is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He studies and teaches on Islam, political violence, human rights, economic development, and research methods.

Nadine Sika, At-Large

Nadine Sika is an associate professor of Comparative Politics at The American University in Cairo. Her research interests are in democratization, contentious politics, and youth civic and political engagement in the MENA region.

SECTION AWARDS

Best Book
Best Book Award Committee: Lisa Wedeen (Chair), Nadya Hajj, Peter Krause

Noora Lori (Boston University). *Offshore Citizens: Permanent Temporary Status in the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

The APSA-MENA committee unanimously selected Noora Lori's *Offshore Citizens: Permanent Temporary Status in the Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) as the recipient of this year's award for best book. The book's imaginative, well-expressed, and methodologically astute argument regarding forms of liminal citizenship impressed everyone on the committee in showing how states use time (and the process of people waiting or being in limbo) as a mechanism of social control. In a world in which climate change will make questions of migration and the politics of borders even more urgent than they already are, Lori's nuanced, insightful, extremely knowledgeable account will be of utmost importance, not only to scholars of Middle Eastern studies, but to theorists of citizenship, migration, and capitalist labor practices more generally. Her extensive archival work, copious use of open-ended interviews, and reflections on her own positionality distinguish this work, which includes a remarkable discussion of how she was forced to rethink, even destroy, some of her research in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Lori's thoughtful account of the concept of citizenship and its development over time and across space in the United Arab Emirates is notable for its sophistication, standing out as a major intervention from a political scientist whose clarity of mind and commitment to ethical scholarship are exemplary. In short, *Offshore Citizens* will endure as a foundational book in the flourishing field of migration and citizenship studies.

Best Dissertation
Best Dissertation Award Committee: Steven Brooke (Chair), Nadine Sika, Bozena Welbourne

Lillian Frost (Virginia Tech): "Ambiguous Citizenship: Protracted Refugees and the State in Jordan"

The committee is pleased to announce Lillian Frost of George Washington University as the recipient of the Best Dissertation in Middle East and North Africa Politics award (2020) for her work entitled "Intentional Ambiguity: Protracted Refugees and the State in Jordan." In this dissertation, Frost considers the gap between the law and reality as it pertains to national laws governing refugee policy. In particular, she finds that competing external and internal pressures condition the variation seen in the passage and, more importantly, the implementation of refugee policy. In the grand tradition of political science, Frost conducts a longitudinal qualitative analysis of the Kingdom of Jordan's policies

vis-a-vis Palestinian refugees displaced to Jordan in 1948 and 1967 from the West Bank, and 1967 from the Gaza Strip. Drawing on extensive archival files and over 200 interviews conducted in Jordan from 2016-2019 with an impressive number of stakeholders, she finds that leaders often differentiate refugee policy across the law and implementation dimensions to appease influential external stakeholders. She notes that if there are coherent preferences across external stakeholders, leaders can implement refugee policy more easily and without differentiating law from implementation. However, if there is concerted opposition across stakeholders in terms of what course is best, national leaders' distinguishing between policy and implementation increases the range and ambiguity of possible policy responses to a given refugee crisis--especially with chronically displaced populations such as the Palestinians. Frost's contribution to the broader field of political science here is the potential ability to generalize these rich insights across contexts as well as retrench leader agency as crucial to policy in a subtopic which often attributes flagging policy to institutional weakness. We look forward to seeing where she takes these ideas next!

Scott Williamson (Bocconi University): "The King Can Do No Wrong: Delegation and Blame Under Authoritarian rule" (honorable mention)

The committee is pleased to award Scott Williamson of Stanford University an Honorable Mention for the Best Dissertation in Middle East and North Africa Politics in 2020 for "The King Can Do No Wrong: Delegation and Blame Under Authoritarian Rule." In this dissertation, Williamson explains an important question for both Middle East and North Africa Politics as well as the broader study of non-democratic regimes: why do some dictators seem to escape public blame in hard times, while others do not? Williamson argues that the key to blame avoidance lies in the dictator's ability to delegate policy design and implementation, which is particularly well-suited to monarchies. The data to evaluate the argument includes rich case studies of Jordan and Iran, as well as statistical analysis of non-democratic regimes worldwide. The committee was particularly impressed by Williamson's ambitious theory and wide array of evidence, ranging from archival data, to elite interviews, to Google Trends data, to cross-national statistical evidence. We look forward to watching this project develop in the future, and congratulate Scott on his achievement.

Best Article Award

Best Article Award Committee: Neil Ketchley (Chair), Melani Cammett, Kevin Koehler

Max Gallien (University of Sussex) "Informal Institutions and the Regulation of Smuggling in North Africa" *Perspectives on Politics*

In this novel study, Gallien takes us to the borderlands of North Africa to understand how small-scale informal traders of food and textiles move alongside drug smugglers and terrorists. As Gallien richly documents, many of these activities are often highly regulated, frequently impersonal, and made possible by routines and practices that do not easily fit with

prevailing conceptions of how informal institutions operate. Drawing on fourteen months of in-depth fieldwork in the region, this innovate study is an exemplar of how qualitative and ethnographic research methods can meaningfully open up new lines of inquiry into longstanding debates in mainstream political science.

Rich Nielsen (MIT) "Women's Authority in Patriarchal Social Movements: The Case of Female Salafi Preachers" *American Journal of Political Science*

In this article, Nielsen offers an original argument for how women can gain authority in patriarchal contexts. Through an examination of online female Salafi preachers, Nielsen demonstrates how patriarchal social movements face pragmatic incentives to expand women's authority roles when seeking new members, and how female preachers look to establish their authority by drawing on identify-based language. To evidence these dynamics, Nielsen illustrates how data from interviews can be usefully combined with new tools from quantitative Arabic-language text analysis. In doing so, Nielsen shows how the rise of online female Salafi preachers can illuminate the growth of right-wing movements in the Global North.

Best APSA Paper

Best APSA Paper Committee: Mazen Hassan (Chair), May Darwich, Dina Bishara

Tugba Bozcaga (Harvard University) and Fotini Christia (MIT), "Imams and Businessmen-Islamist Service Provision in Turkey."

This innovative and well-researched paper stood out as a contribution to our understanding of not only the relationship between religion, business and services in Turkey but to broader questions about the politics of social service provision by Islamist movements. It combines methodological sophistication with novel empirics, and we look forward to seeing it soon published in a leading political science journal.

RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: THE USES AND ABUSES OF DATASETS

COVERAGE BIASES IN OFF-THE-SHELF PROTEST DATASETS

By Killian Clarke

The revolutionary movements that comprised the 2011 Arab Spring catalyzed a major new research agenda in Middle East political science, which sought to make sense of the drivers, contours, and dynamics of protest across the region. The methodologies embraced in this scholarship have been diverse and eclectic, but one of the most widely used approaches has been to analyze protest event datasets. As I explain in a recent article in *Mediterranean Politics*, which forms the basis for this short essay, these datasets are inventories of contentious events that meet certain criteria and that occur in a delimited time and place.[9] The researcher collects information about each event (e.g., the timing, location, size, demands, and participants) and then examines variation across these dimensions in an effort to understand the features and characteristics of a particular mobilizational wave. Though event analysis had been used occasionally by MENA-focused scholars before the Arab Spring,[10] the technique became much more popular after the uprisings, deployed to study mobilization in places as diverse as Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

One of the thorniest challenges in collecting and analyzing event data is selecting which sources will be consulted to build the dataset. Newspapers are the most commonly used source, with researchers relying on reporters' descriptions of protests in their news articles to collect and code their data. Some datasets are also built using social media data, human rights reports, and/or government archives. However, no combination of sources, no matter how exhaustive or comprehensive, reports on *every* event that occurs, leaving researchers to reckon with the fact that their event datasets are inevitably a selective sample of the broader mobilizational whole. If the sample of events in the dataset is somehow not representative of that broader whole – because the sources used are reporting on certain types of events more than others – then the researcher runs the risk of drawing incorrect conclusions.[11] For example, if the researcher is using a newspaper that reports on large,

[9] Killian Clarke, "Which Protests Count? Coverage Bias in Middle East Event Datasets," *Mediterranean Politics*, online first, 2021.
[10] For example: Joel Beinin, "A Workers' Social Movement on the Margin of the Global Neoliberal Order, Egypt 2004–2009," in *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 181–201; Adria K. Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[11] For more on coverage biases in event datasets see: John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail, and Jackie Smith, "Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations, 1982 and

violent events more than small, non-violent ones (which are potentially considered less 'newsworthy') then the resulting event dataset will paint a picture of an uprising or a movement that is far more violent and explosive than it may have actually been.

The challenges of sourcing in event analysis are particularly acute for scholars doing research on a non-English speaking part of the world. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, many Middle East political scientists insisted that the only event data that would even come close to approximating the true patterns of mobilization on the ground would have to be sourced from Arabic-language newspapers. The alternative was to use MENA event datasets that had already been built as part of broader data collection projects – e.g., the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD), or the GDELT Project.[12] But these datasets were primarily based on English-language sources, like the international wire services AP, AFP, and Reuters, and many Middle East scholars argued that these sources were likely to have serious biases in which protests covered. Though it would require significant investment of time and resources, they insisted that instead scholars should build and analyze *original* event datasets using local newspapers that write and report in Arabic.

In this short essay I evaluate these claims by comparing one locally-sourced event dataset focused on Egypt to two off-the-shelf datasets that rely primarily on English language sources (ACLED and SCAD).[13] The datasets cover a particularly eventful period of Egyptian history – the eighteen months directly preceding Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's counterrevolutionary coup in July 2013, when Egypt was awash with protest and unrest. The locally-sourced data come from the major Egyptian daily newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm*.[14] The comparisons reveal not only that the off-the-shelf datasets contain far fewer events than the locally-sourced one, but also that their datasets appear to be biased in the types of events they include: they tend to capture a larger proportion of events during more intense political periods, and they overcount large, urban, violent, and political events.

We can begin by comparing raw protest counts in the three datasets. I consider all contentious events that occurred in Egypt from January 1, 2012 to July 3, 2013.[15] My dataset, based on *al-Masry al-Youm*, captures 7,522 events that meet this description. SCAD uses the

1991," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 3 (1996): 478–99; Pamela E. Oliver and Daniel J. Myers, "How Events Enter the Public Sphere: Conflict, Location, and Sponsorship in Local Newspaper Coverage of Public Events," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 1 (1999): 38–87; Jennifer Earl et al., "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 65–80.

[12] Clionadh Raleigh et al., "Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 651–60; Idean Salehyan et al., "Social Conflict in Africa: A New Database," *International Interactions* 38, no. 4 (September 1, 2012): 503–11.

[13] The analyses are derived from Clarke 2021.

[14] For more on the data collection strategy see Clarke 2021.

[15] A contentious event was defined as a public, collective, and voluntary endeavor involving a group of people in a specific place trying to influence the actions or policies of some authority. It includes protests, demonstrations, strikes, marches, sit-ins or occupations, roadblocks or blockades, boycotts, petitions, and mass attacks. This definition is draw from: Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

wire services AFP and AP to source its data, and identifies 593 events over the same period. ACLED uses a broader range of sources, including wires as well as international news websites like the BBC and Egyptian English-language newspapers. Its dataset includes 1,014 contentious events over this period.[16] These numbers imply that off-the-shelf datasets are capturing somewhere between 13% and 8% of the events identified in a single local-language source. To put this in perspective, the SCAD researchers have argued, based on a different methodology, that their dataset covers 76% of all the events that occur in Africa.[17]

Figure 1: Monthly Event Counts (Author data, ACLED, and SCAD), Jan 2012 – Jun 2013

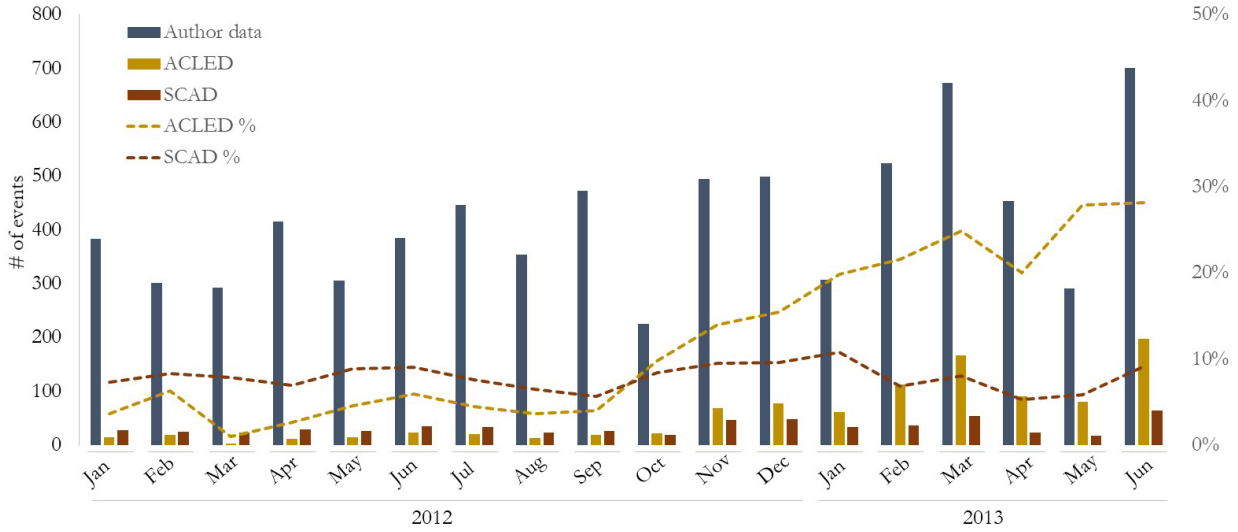
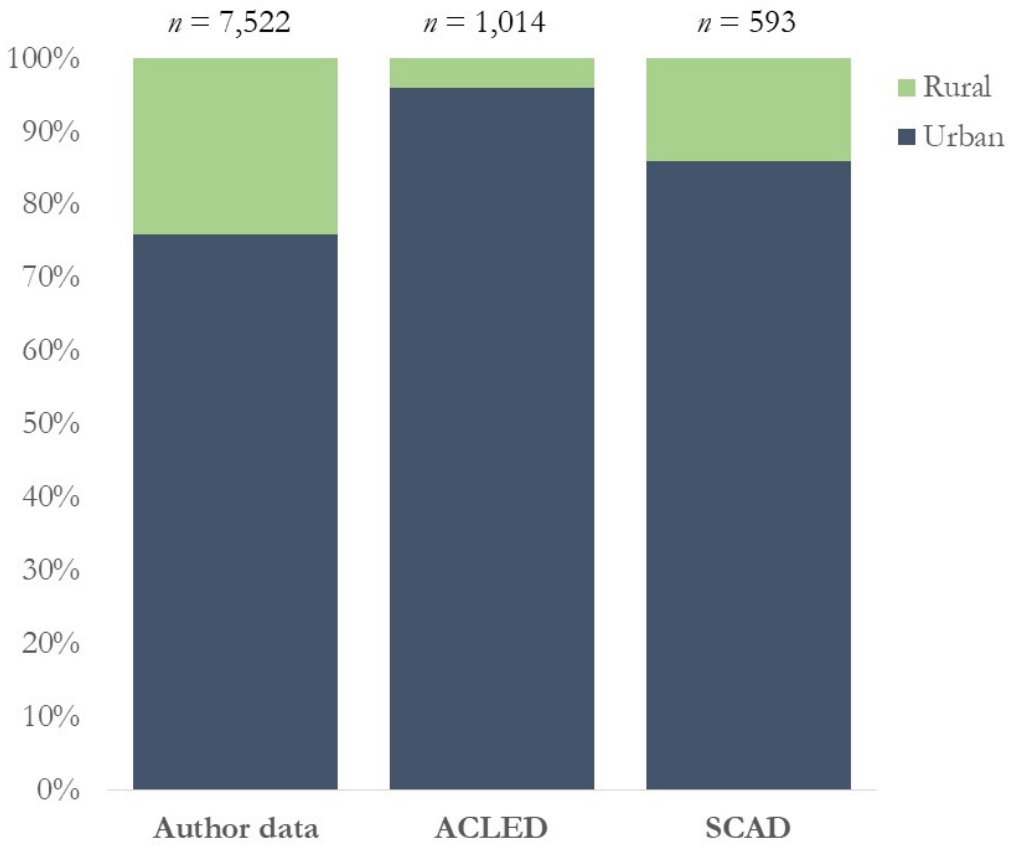


Figure 1 shows the monthly count of events for all three datasets. The figure also plots two lines representing the percent of monthly events in SCAD and ACLED compared to the monthly counts in my dataset. For SCAD the share ranges from 5% to 11%, and for ACLED it ranges from 3% to 28%. We also see in these trend lines signs of certain temporal biases. The ACLED dataset, especially, begins to capture a far higher percent of events after October 2012 and through the first half of 2013. This trend coincides with an increase in national news attention on Egypt, as the government headed by President Mohamed Morsi found itself engulfed in crisis and the counterrevolutionary movement to oust him gained momentum. The figure suggests that during such periods of heightened political tension and increased international scrutiny, ACLED's reliance on English-language and international news sources may result in it overstating the degree of unrest and contention in a country.[18]

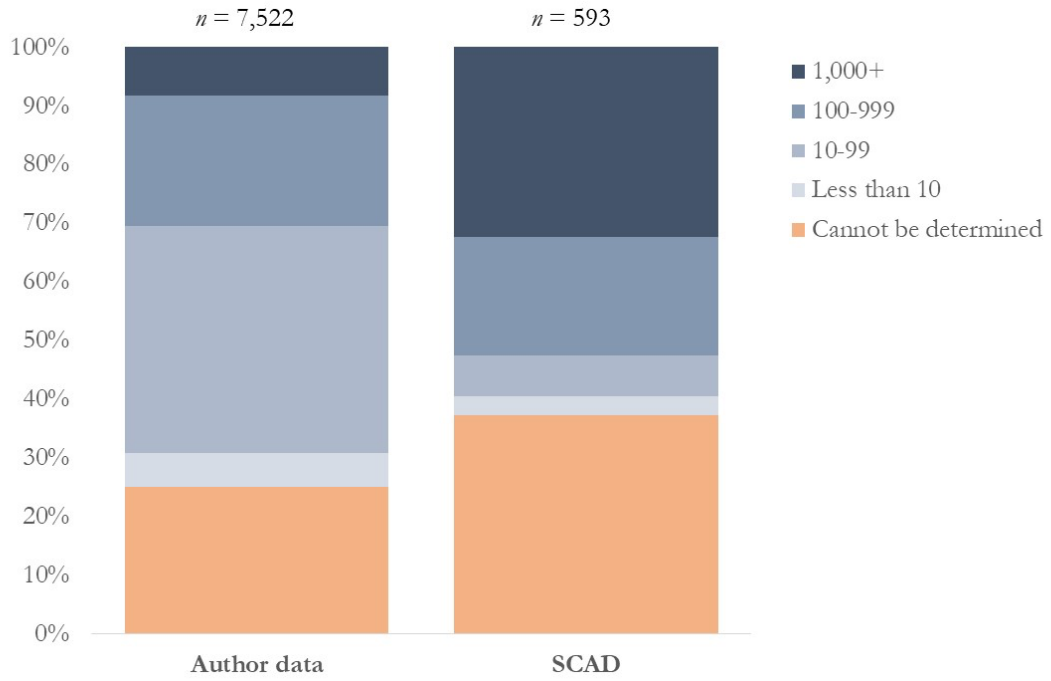
[16] For more information about how I operationalized contentious events in each dataset, and on how I constructed the variables in the analyses below, see Clarke 2021.
[17] Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, "No News Is Good News: Mark and Recapture for Event Data When Reporting Probabilities Are Less Than One," *International Interactions* 41, no. 2 (March 15, 2015): 392–406.
[18] Interestingly, SCAD's data to not exhibit the same temporal biases. This may be because it relies on a more standard set of sources, whereas ACLED's source base fluctuates according to the temporal period.

Figure 2: Urban Share of Events (Author data, ACLED, and SCAD)



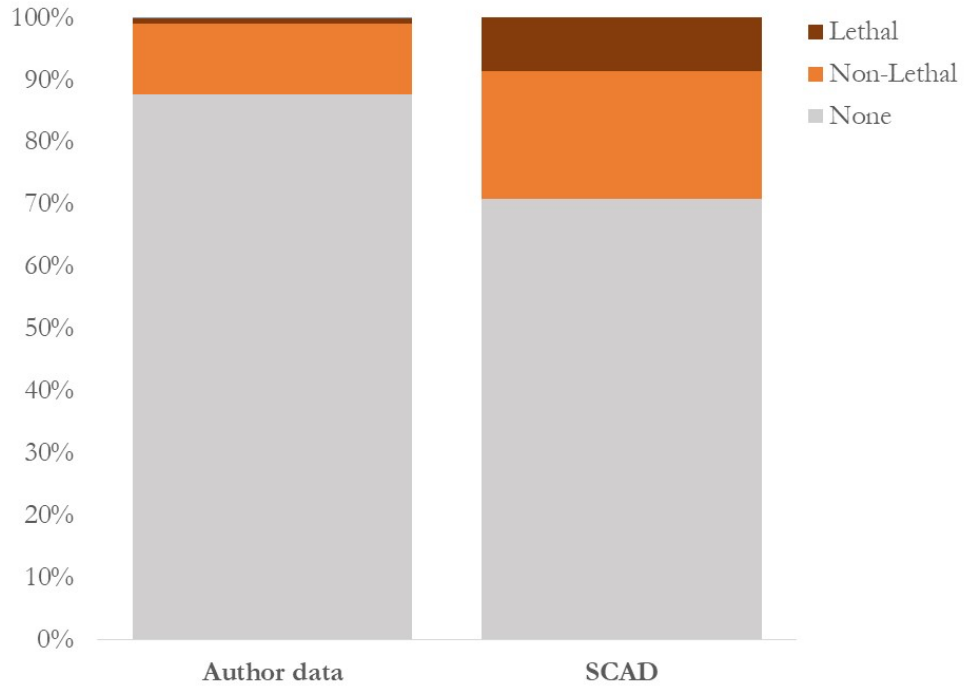
Next, I examine the distribution of events in the three datasets according to various protest characteristics: location, size, violence, and demands. I look first at the location of events, as scholars have found that newspapers and wire services are often biased in their coverage toward events that occur in cities. Figure 2 shows the distribution of events in the three datasets that occurred in urban versus rural locations. All three datasets include a large share of urban events, which partly reflects the simple fact that protests often occur in cities. However, whereas 24% of events in my dataset occur in rural locations, rural events make up only 4% of ACLED's data and 14% of SCAD's data, suggesting that both datasets may be over-counting urban events.

Figure 3: Distribution of Events by Number of Participants (Author data and SCAD)



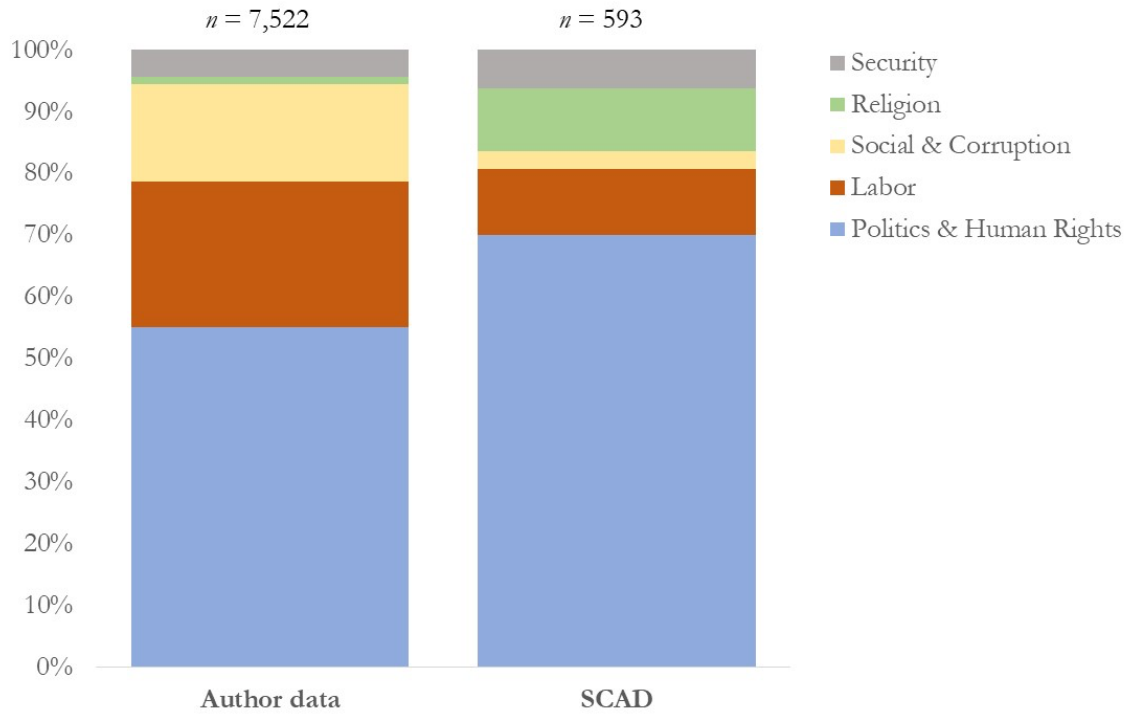
The next three figures compare my data only to SCAD, which includes a larger number of event-level variables than ACLED's data (e.g., size, repression, and demands). Figure 3 compares the distribution of events in the two datasets according to the number of participants, since larger events tend to receive more coverage in newspapers than smaller ones. Events were divided into five categories: those of more than 1,000 participants, 100-999 participants, 10-99 participants, less than 10 participants, and events where the reporting did not indicate a participation number. The figure reveals that SCAD's use of wire services for its sourcing does indeed result in a bias toward larger events: only 10% of its events include less than 100 participants, versus 44% in my dataset. In addition, SCAD has a higher share of events (37% versus 25% in my dataset) for which the number of participants was not reported, presumably because wire services include less rich and detailed information on protests.

Figure 4: Distribution of Events by Repression Level (Author data and SCAD)



Reporters are more likely to report on protests that involve more violence, which are generally regarded as more newsworthy than nonviolent protests. Figure 4 reveals that, indeed, SCAD's data is biased toward violent events – specifically, events that were repressed. The figure plots the distribution of events according to the level of repression they encountered: lethal repression, non-lethal repression, or no repression. The SCAD dataset disproportionately includes events that experienced repression (29% versus 12% in my dataset), especially those involving lethal repression (9% versus 1% in my dataset).

Figure 5: Distribution of Events by Demand Type (Author data and SCAD)



Finally, I compare the distribution of events according to the main demand that was raised. Though there are some issues of commensurability across the two datasets, I am able to group demands into five broad categories: politics & human rights, labor, social & corruption, religion, and security. As Figure 5 reveals, SCAD disproportionately includes events with demands related to religion and politics & human rights, and it tends to undercount events involving labor or social demands. These biases are explicable based on what we know about the reporting priorities of international wire services, which write for foreign audiences that are likely to be more interested in political, human rights, and religious issues than in labor strikes or social protests over issues like electricity provision, education, and corruption.

These findings have important implications for scholars interested in using event data to study protest in the Middle East. Particularly when doing sub-national analysis or examining the contours and dynamics of a single uprising, movement, or mobilizational cycle relying on event datasets whose sources are systematically biased is likely to lead to incorrect conclusions and a skewed representation of reality. For example, some have argued that research on the Arab Spring has devoted too much attention to the spectacular displays of protest in large public squares like Tahrir in Cairo, at the expense of less well-covered but equally important manifestations of contention in smaller cities like Suez and Port Said, industrial factories and workplaces, and rural settings.[19] Use of protest data that are

[19] For example: Jillian Schwedler, "Comparative Politics and the Arab Uprisings," *Middle East Law and Governance* 7, no. 1 (April 23, 2015): 141–52.

themselves skewed toward large cities and political events is only likely to exacerbate such problems.

Further, in the article-length version of this essay I show that use of different datasets may lead to disparate and irreconcilable conclusions in statistical analyses.[20] In a simple pair of regressions modeling the determinants of protest repression I find different results depending on which dataset is used; SCAD's data would lead us to the conclusion that protests in small cities outside Cairo are most likely to be repressed, whereas my dataset suggests that it is protests in Cairo that are most repressed. These findings make sense when we consider that SCAD's wire sources are likely only reporting on events outside of Cairo when they are particularly violent and intense.

Ultimately, then, these biases have real implications for the kinds of conclusions we are able to draw about protest in the region. While off-the-shelf datasets may still be helpful for studying protest in a broader comparative setting – e.g., comparing protest waves across multiple countries or looking at trends over many years or decades – for more fine-grained, within-case analyses scholars are better off relying on datasets that use local, Arabic-language sources.

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[20] Clarke 2021.

THE USES AND ABUSES OF DEMOCRACY RATINGS

By Sarah Bush

Few concepts are more important to the study of politics than democracy. Despite—or perhaps because of—democracy's importance, measuring it is highly controversial. In this essay, I draw on my past research examining a particularly influential and contentious measure of democracy: the annual *Freedom in the World* (FITW) country ratings.[21] The research finds that the FITW ratings have authority in real-world politics not because of their epistemic quality or independence but because of their affinity with how U.S. policymakers think about democracy. An important take-away from my research is that scholars should approach their choice of democracy indicators for empirical analysis carefully; for certain research questions, a measure of democracy that is close to how policymakers understand this concept may make sense, but in other cases it might bias the analysis in worrying ways. I close the essay by suggesting directions for future research related to democracy ratings on which the insights of scholars of the Middle East would be especially welcome.

The Politics of Measuring Democracy

An American non-governmental organization, Freedom House, created the FITW ratings in 1972. FITW is an annual report that assigns countries overall ratings—"free," "partly free," and "not free"—as well as numerical scores for their political rights and civil liberties. Initially, the ratings were compiled by social scientist Raymond Gastil with assistance from his wife, Jeanette Gastil. Over time, the number of experts consulted for the creation of the report has expanded considerably, and the FITW methodology has become much more detailed and rigorous.

Although numerous democracy indicators exist, FITW enjoys special prominence, especially in the United States. FITW has shaped the U.S. State Department's human rights reports, been used to assess the effectiveness of the U.S. Agency for International Development's assistance programs, and provided qualification criteria for the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Given that FITW is used in this way, it is also influential in countries that care about their international reputations for democracy, who sometimes seek to affect their ratings. Outside of the policy world, academics also commonly use FITW to study the causes and consequences of democratization.[22]

Because of the ratings' authority, FITW has been subject to much scrutiny and criticism. One set of critiques pertains to the ratings' lack of transparency historically, when the organization did not provide much information about its coding process.[23] Since then, the methodology has improved, although some methodological critiques still remain. Another

[21] Sarah Sunn Bush, "The Politics of Rating Freedom: Ideological Affinity, Private Authority, and the Freedom in the World Ratings," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 711-731.
[22] For more details on usage of FITW, see Bush, "The Politics of Rating Freedom," p. 718.
[23] Geraldo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 1 (2002): 5-34.

line of criticism points to the ratings' tendency, again especially historically, to score U.S. allies more positively than other ratings; for example, the FITW scores for El Salvador vs. Nicaragua during the Cold War were correlated with the two countries' positions vis-à-vis the United States.[24] Although FITW is usually compared unfavorably to the Polity measure of democracy in such exercises, it is worth noting that criticisms of U.S. bias have also been leveled against Polity.[25] A final critique is that FITW—despite revising its coding criteria over time—remains overly committed to a liberal conceptualization of democracy, similar to U.S. policymakers, whereas other conceptualizations are possible.[26] The Varieties of Democracy or V-Dem project offers one solution to this problem for researchers as it provides indicators of different conceptualizations of democracy (e.g., electoral, participatory, liberal) that can be used depending on the research question.[27]

I have argued in past work that applied researchers would benefit from greater recognition of these debates surrounding FITW. At the same time, my message is not that awareness of criticisms of FITW should prompt researchers to abandon it. For example, their documented historical biases may ironically make the FITW ratings *useful* democracy ratings to use for answering certain research questions. Some research questions—such as about whether the U.S. government is targeting and tailoring aid to countries' regime types—might be answered most effectively through the use of an indicator that best captures how policymakers are likely to think about democracy.[28]

Directions for Future Research

Although there is a growing literature on benchmarks in global politics, it has not yet benefited fully from the expertise of scholars of Middle East politics. I suggest two promising directions for future research on the politics of democracy ratings with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa: one concerning the effects of democracy ratings and one concerning their production.

First, researchers might study how Middle East governments respond to their Freedom House scores. International ratings have been shown to influence countries' policies and behavior through mechanisms such as domestic mobilization, elite shaming, and

[24] Scott Mainwaring, Daniel Brinks, and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Classifying Political Regimes in Latin America," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36, no. 1 (2001): 37-65; and Nils D. Steiner, "Comparing Freedom House Democracy Scores to Alternative Indices and Testing for Political Bias: Are U.S. Allies Rated as More Democratic by Freedom House?" *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 18, no. 4 (2016): 329-349.
[25] Jeff D. Colgan, "American Bias in Global Security Studies," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 3 (2019): 358-371.
[26] Diego Giannone, "Political and Ideological Aspects in the Measurement of Democracy: The Freedom House Case," *Democratization* 17, no. 1 (2010): 68-97.
[27] Michael Coppedge et al., "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011): 247-267.
[28] Sarah Sunn Bush, "National Bias in Quantitative Datasets: A Silver Lining?" *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 3 (2019): 372-383.

transnational pressure.[29] Many countries care about their FITW ratings, believing that the scores will influence their access to foreign aid that is conditional on democracy, among other benefits. Yet is the same true in the Middle East? Arab countries have been relatively insulated from pressure related international democracy promotion, although they have attempted to coopt some of these efforts and game others, such as through a selective embrace of certain liberal norms (e.g., related to women's rights) in order to present a modernizing image.[30] It would be informative to study whether and how FITW ratings are used domestically by civil society and governments in the Middle East and North Africa to advocate for or deflect pressure to reform.

Second, because the Middle East and North Africa is the world region that is widely thought to be least democratic, it would be intriguing to study the dynamics of peer effects on experts' perceptions of democracy in the region. Countries are sometimes graded on a curve in international assessments, such as when international election observers are more lenient when countries experiencing a transitional election or a history of election violence have some malpractice.[31] It is possible that when a country in the Middle East shows signs of democratic opening, international experts may be overly generous given the overall state of the region. Alternatively, and more similar to the positive and negative boosts that countries get from their perceived peer groups, Arab countries' ratings may not reflect when they make real democratic progress given their association with a region that is known to be undemocratic.[32]

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[29] Judith G. Kelley and Beth A. Simmons, "Politics by Number: Indicators as Social Pressure in International Politics," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (2015): 55-70.
[30] On cooptation, see Sarah Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On gaming, especially in the area of women's rights, see Aili Mari Tripp, *Seeking Legitimacy: Why Arab Autocracies Adopt Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Sarah Sunn Bush and Pär Zetterberg, "Gender Quotas and International Reputation," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (2021): 326-341; Daniela Donno, Sara Fox, and Joshua Kaasik, "International Incentives for Women's Rights in Dictatorships," *Comparative Political Studies* https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211024306.
[31] Judith G. Kelley, "D-Minus Elections: The Politics and Norms of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (2009): 765-787.
[32] Julia Gray, *The Company States Keep: International Economic Organizations and Investor Perceptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

THE ELEPHANT IN OUR ANALYSES: SENSITIVITY BIAS AND SURVEY RESEARCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

By Ammar Shamaileh

With the relatively recent development of large survey datasets like the Arab Barometer and the Arab Opinion Index, we have witnessed a significant increase in the amount of research exploring public opinion and political behavior in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).[33] Such resources have proven to be valuable to the field, allowing easy access to data for researchers to use in exploring various theories and phenomena related to the politics of the region. While the work that has been produced has helped answer a number of important questions, there are significant hurdles associated with conducting analyses of such data. Perhaps the most daunting challenge is finding a way to overcome sensitivity bias induced by preference falsification due to fear and social desirability.[34] Despite some important research addressing sensitivity bias, the overarching issues persists.[35] Not enough has been done to properly explore and produce solutions to these problems within the MENA politics community.

Much of the work we produce relies on items collected in authoritarian environments related to topics such as government approval, religious devotion and political beliefs, yet many of our studies do little to problematize the potential bias introduced into the data. All too often, we neglect to adequately deal with or acknowledge the potential threats to our inferences caused by sensitivity bias while working with such questions.[36] Whether the distortions in the data are introduced by social desirability bias or strategic preference falsification, they are potentially severe and should not be ignored or dealt with superficially.

Although the problems associated with sensitivity bias may not be unique to the Middle East and North Africa, the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the region make survey research a particularly difficult task.[37] Estimating the overall degree of sensitivity bias may provide us

[33] Benstead, Lindsay J. "Survey research in the Arab world: Challenges and opportunities." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51, no. 3 (2018): 535-542; Jamal, Amaney, and Mark Tessler. "The democracy barometers (Part II): Attitudes in the Arab world." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (2008): 97-111; El Kurd, Dana. "Creating a State Capacity Index Using the Arab: Opinion Index." *AlMuntaqa* 1, no. 1 (2018): 100-105.

[34] Kuran, Timur. *Private Truths, Public Lies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997; Berinsky, Adam J. "Political context and the survey response: The dynamics of racial policy opinion." *Journal of Politics* 64, no. 2 (2002): 567-584; Shamaileh, Ammar. "Never out of now: Preference falsification, social capital and the Arab Spring." *International Interactions* 45, no. 6 (2019): 949-975.

[35] Benstead, Lindsay J. "Effects of interviewer–respondent gender interaction on attitudes toward women and politics: Findings from Morocco." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 26, no. 3 (2014): 369-383; Corstange, Daniel. "Sensitive questions, truthful answers? Modeling the list experiment with LISTIT." *Political Analysis* 17, no. 1 (2009): 45-63

[36] If this statement is to be interpreted as an indictment of survey research in our field, it should be made clear that much of the thought expended on this issue was related to reflection upon my own work.

[37] Benstead, Lindsay J. "Survey research"; Blair, Graeme, Alexander Coppock, and Margaret Moor. "When to worry about sensitivity bias: A social reference theory and evidence from 30 years of list experiments." *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 4 (2020): 1297-1315.

with some guidance as to whether we can draw descriptive inferences from the data and a rough proxy for how it could affect our analyses. However, it may be just as critical for scholars to understand patterns of response biases in the societies they study when examining relationships between variables. It is for this reason that I argue we should be more cognizant of the threats to inferences drawn from our analyses due to sensitivity bias, acknowledge the sources of such potential bias, and work to further develop tools that help us deal with this issue.

A Brief Simulation

To demonstrate the importance of concerns associated with sensitivity bias, I conducted a simple simulation analysis. To enhance the readability of this short piece, I will sacrifice some precision and technical details in my discussion of the results.[38]

In the simulation, there is a population of one million simulated individuals who are characterized by two core dimensions, whether they: 1) oppose the regime or not; and, 2) belong to the majority or minority group. Twenty five percent of the population belongs to the minority group. Among those who belong to the majority group, forty percent oppose the regime; and, among individuals in the minority group, fifty percent oppose the regime. Note that for analyses of observational data and survey experiments in political science, this represents a fairly typical, if not somewhat large, effect size: Members of the minority group are twenty five percent more likely to oppose the regime than members of the majority group.

Members of this population possess true preferences that can be expressed truthfully or hidden. Their true preferences are the same as their expressed preferences when they face no consequences associated with expressing opposition, but when regime coercion induces fear, some opponents of the regime hide their true preferences. In each of the simulation analyses below, I examine the ability to detect the relationship between minority status and opposition to the regime as we vary the proportion of individuals falsifying their preferences.[39] For these analyses, I run two-proportions z-tests,[40] and examine our estimated statistical power and the difference in proportions indicating that they oppose the regime. Moreover, while there are a number of ways in which patterns of preference falsification can influence the results, I will focus here on two simple scenarios. The first explores preference falsification that is proportionally distributed between groups, and the second examines patterns of preference falsification that are uneven.

Sensitivity Bias when All Opponents are Equally Likely to Falsify Preferences

One might wonder whether sensitivity bias matters much when the explanatory variable is uncorrelated with preference falsification and we are testing a relational hypothesis. In this simulation, there are six alternative universes where zero, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty and fifty percent of individuals who oppose the regime falsify their preferences. The probability

[38] Contact the author if you would like further details regarding the simulation analyses.
[39] 1000 simulations were conducted where I drew samples of 2000 individuals from the population.
[40] This was conducted with Yates' continuity correction.

that any individual opponent of the regime falsifies her preference when asked if they oppose the regime is essentially equal for both minority and majority groups. It should be noted that this would be a very strong and often violated assumption. Nevertheless, even if we were to assume that preference falsification is uncorrelated with the independent variable, and such an assumption is reasonable, a number of issues can arise.

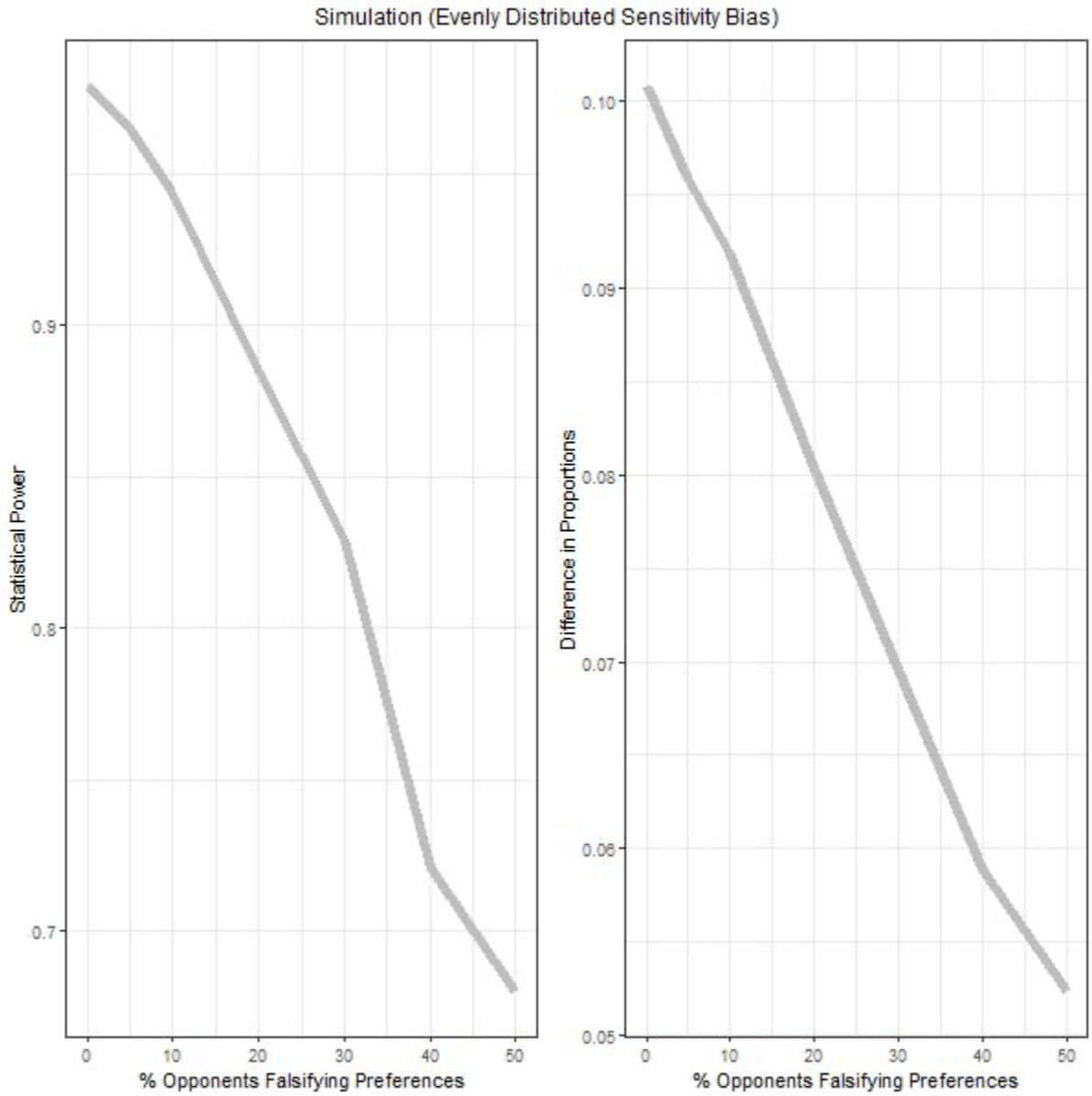

Figure 1

Figure 1 presents the results of the simulation analysis where preference falsification is distributed proportionally by group. Given that the proportion of individuals who oppose the regime is greater among members of the minority than the majority, as preference falsification increases, the proportion opposing the regime decreases at a faster rate for the minority group. This reduces the estimated effect size, leading to lower average estimates of differences between the groups. In turn, the reduced estimated effect size decreases our

statistical power and ability to detect that the effect is positive. In this particular analysis, when approximately 33% of those who oppose the regime falsify their preferences, statistical power falls below the commonly used 80% threshold. While this may appear to be a relatively large amount of preference falsification, it only represents approximately 14% of respondents falsifying their preferences and falls within the range we would expect in authoritarian regimes.[41] In addition to increases in failures to reject the null, for any given sample drawn from the population, the likelihood that the predicted direction of the correlation is in the opposite direction is increasing in the amount of preference falsification. We should always be more likely to see the result point in the correct direction when the probability of preference falsification is not correlated with group membership, yet preference falsification increases the probability that an analysis of a randomly drawn sample points in the wrong direction. One of the core implications of these findings is that analyses of statistical power should factor in preference falsification when determining the appropriate estimated effect size to use for sample size calculations.

Heterogeneity in Sensitivity Bias

While preference falsification that is evenly distributed across groups creates hurdles that may be difficult to overcome when testing relational hypotheses, the more problematic situation is when members of certain groups falsify preferences at a higher rate than others. In this second set of simulations, assume that the minority group, which opposes the regime at a higher rate, is targeted by the regime's coercive apparatus. For the sake of simplicity, also assume that members of the majority group do not fear repression when expressing opposition to the regime. As such, for this analysis, preference falsification is always set to zero percent for the majority group and varies among the minority group at the same rates as in the previous simulation.

[41] Blair, Graeme, Alexander Coppock, and Margaret Moor. "When to worry."

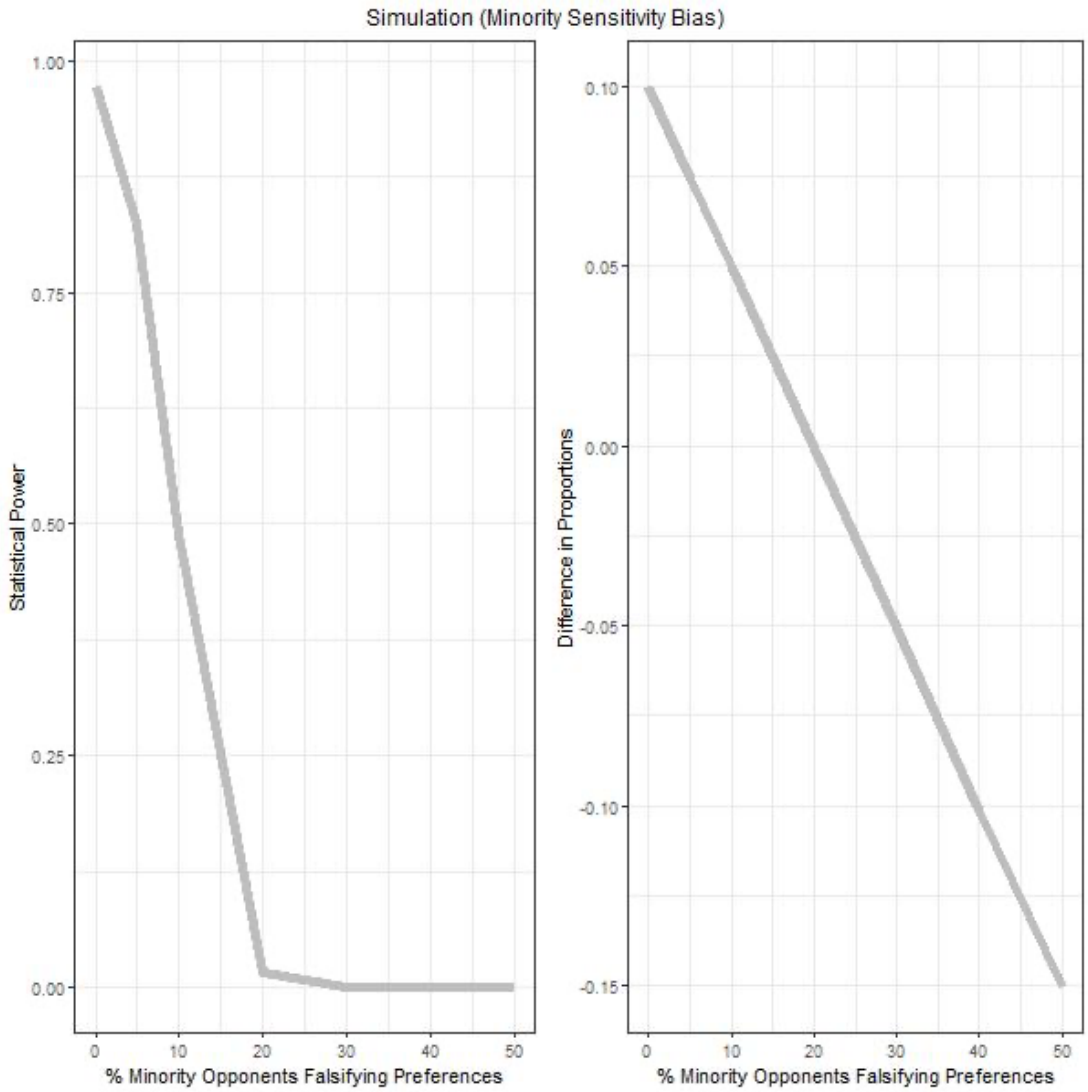

Figure 2

When preference falsification is concentrated in the group that is more likely to hold attitudes that are perceived as costly, not only does it make it more difficult to test the directional hypothesis, but the sign of the estimate will flip at sufficiently high levels of preference falsification. *Figure 2* presents the results of the second simulation analysis. With 10% of individuals in the minority group who oppose the regime falsifying their preferences, the statistical power of a single sample[42] will be 50%. When 20% of the relevant subgroup falsifies their preferences, any sample drawn randomly from the population is more likely to show that members of the minority group are less likely to oppose the regime. It is important to note that the overall falsification rate for the simulated population is relatively low at this threshold with only approximately 2.5% of the population falsifying their preferences. Thus, even a low falsification rate can drastically affect the results produced by an analysis when it is a segment of the population that is driving the results.

[42] *n = 2000*

Of course, were the falsification to occur primarily among the group that is more likely to favor the response acceptable by the regime, we would expect significant overestimations of the effect size. Perhaps more importantly, where the true preferences of different groups are similar, but one group is more likely to respond strategically or face higher social costs for responding in a particular manner, the results produced by an analysis that is ostensibly testing differences in the preferences of the groups may simply be capturing the differences in the sensitivity of the question posed to these subpopulations. It is for these reasons, among others, that researchers utilizing survey data should give significant thought to the potential patterns of sensitivity bias that may be exhibited within the population.

Dealing with Sensitivity Bias

No aspect of what is presented in this piece is revolutionary or even particularly novel. The problems associated with sensitivity bias, particularly in relation to surveys conducted in the MENA region, have long been discussed. However, there has been a tendency for such issues to be set aside when we begin constructing our analyses and discussing our results. The goal of this piece is to highlight the seriousness of the issue and call attention to some of the nuances of sensitivity bias that have not been discussed enough.

At the moment, there is no simple solution to this problem. While multidimensional item response theory offers a promising potential framework for dealing with preference falsification, there are numerous hurdles associated with identifying viable items to incorporate into such analyses. While traditional solutions such as list experiments can be useful, they are no panacea and cannot always be conducted to capture each sensitive item asked in a survey.[43] Moreover, while rough proxies for preference falsification can at times be constructed from standard questions, such attempts are likely to be highly stylized and rooted in a particular context.

Given the abundance of work conducted by MENA experts that relies on survey data and the problems associated with sensitivity bias in many countries in the region, the field should be at the forefront of exploring how we can better capture preference falsification or creatively capture an individual's actual preferences. Until such solutions are produced, it is imperative that researchers that use sensitive questions in their analyses at least think through the nature and likely sources of sensitivity bias by capitalizing on their substantive and regional expertise. As the simulation analyses demonstrate, contemplating how high the overall degree of sensitivity bias is in a state is not sufficient. The patterns of falsification by survey respondents and their relationship to the variables of interest are potentially of greater interest when examining the relationship between variables.

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[43] Corstange, Daniel. "Sensitive questions, truthful answers? Modeling the list experiment with LISTIT." *Political Analysis* 17, no. 1 (2009); Kuhn, Patrick M., and Nick Vivyan. "The misreporting trade-off between list experiments and direct questions in practice: Partition validation evidence from two countries." *Political Analysis* (2021): 1-22.

CONCEPTS, MEASURES, AND RABBIT HOLES: STUDYING RESOURCE WEALTH FROM THE MIDDLE EAST OUT

By Benjamin Smith & David Waldner

Scholars of Middle East politics rightly lamented the relative marginality of their region of focus in political science in the 1990s. Coming off the heels of the collapse of the Soviet Union and East Bloc and the Third Wave, which washed over virtually all of the rest of the world, MENA scholarship remained a comparative backwater. That changed in the period roughly 1997-2001 with Terry Karl's *Paradox of Plenty* and Michael Ross's (2001) econometric exploration of the rentier state and resource curse theories of politics.[44]

Since then, a simple Google search of even the restricted term "political resource curse" turns up nearly 1400 articles. Among other things, this burgeoning resource program means a huge need for quantitative data to analyze, and in turn a need to measure "resource wealth" statistically. Unfortunately, not all efforts have relied on solid foundations. In this short contribution, we outline some of our past concerns with concepts and measurements, the problems with them, and some brief best practices.

Concepts and Measures

Broadly speaking, scholars have approached measuring oil wealth in one of three ways: by calculating ratios, by establishing discrete categories of membership or non-membership, or by using continuous measures.[45] The first approach, which characterized the original scholarship on rentier states, typically took oil income as a share of government revenue, on the intuition that this substitution effect was central to establishing state fiscal autonomy from the population. Later variants included oil export revenues as a share of GDP (Ross 2001; Smith 2004; 2007; Morrison 2009) or of total export revenues (Jensen and Wantchekon 2004). The problem with these ratio indicators is that they induce endogeneity bias: countries with smaller economies or that export less are that way for reasons directly related to their likelihood of being stable and democratic (and negatively). As a result, countries look more "rentierish" not because they are, but because they are poorer and are already likely to suffer from the maladies implied in the resource curse theory family.

More important, as we note elsewhere, "these ratio-based measures tell us little about how oil rents shape the incentives and capacities of rulers, rivals, and citizens" (Smith and Waldner 2021, 31). There is simply not much of a substantive link between these ratios and the processes and outcomes that most interest scholars of resource wealth and politics.

Categorical indicators are worse still: they overwhelmingly rely on arbitrary cut points (such as oil exports comprising 10% or more of exports, per Colgan 2010, 2013), or membership

[44] The references for this short contribution are archived at https://www.benjaminbsmith.net/research.html.
[45] This section draws on section 3 of Smith and Waldner (2021).

in OPEC (Fish 2002). First, we lack any good theoretical rationale for concluding that oil only begins to exert rentier or curse effects at 10.01% and does not do so at 9.99% or below of exports, GDP, or any other denominator. Moreover, there is no reason to think that rulers in a country reliant on oil revenues for 11% of exports would face the same oil-driven incentives as one in which oil comprised 65% of export revenues.

Second, while for a twenty-year period or so in the late 20th century OPEC held some influence in the global oil market, that impact was both ephemeral and overstated at the time. Today, there are nearly 100 countries that produce significant amounts of oil and/or natural gas, and thus close to 90% are not members of OPEC. Presuming that oil does not affect non-members is, to be generous, a challenging assumption. OPEC plays an outsized role in calling another common measure—proven reserves—into question as well. The reason is that OPEC member production quotas are calculated based on proven reserves. Member states thus have a strong incentive to inflate their proven reserves to maximize the quantity allotted to them, and there have been systematic, and sudden recalculations immediately following changes in quotas. Given that members have an incentive to inflate the actual volume of reserves, we incur the risk of endogeneity bias because reserve declarations are shaped by political factors.

The benchmark measure for oil wealth has become oil and gas income per capita, both because it is simple and transparent and because the work done by Paasha Mahdavi and Michael Ross to compile data since 1932 and to archive it publicly has reduced the cost of a quality measure to an internet connection. It is best thought of as a measure of abundance, since it captures directly the revenues, mostly in the hands of state leaders, that can be directed to patronage or coercion per citizen. While this measure, like all measures of oil wealth, is ultimately endogenous in some way to politics, oil and gas income per capita is probably the least compromised. Any scholar using a different measure should really feel the obligation to explain exactly why, with concrete and question-specific theoretical and substantive rationale.

Given that, however we measure oil wealth, we have to worry about endogeneity; scholars have also periodically turned to instrumental variables that are exogenous to domestic politics. Ramsay (2011) employs a statistic for natural disasters in oil producing countries in other regions of the world, reasoning that, for example, an earthquake or major hurricane afflicting Mexico cannot possibly be endogenous to Saudi Arabia's oil wealth or politics but might well cause a spike in oil prices that would both enhance the latter's annual oil income *and* induce political effects too. MENA scholars may be dismayed to learn that Ramsay's results are not robust to excluding their region of study from the statistical analysis, probably because of the ability of Saudi Arabia to increase its own output to compensate for supply disruptions elsewhere.

Readers could be excused at this point for asking, "What about concepts?" When we think theoretically about rentierism, resource wealth, oil export dependence, or any of the cognate constructs that are part of the resource curse lexicon, they each imply different kinds of measurement choices. Oil and gas income per capita, in a country where rulers control most

of the oil income, is a conceptually good measure of the fiscal latitude available to them to spend on security forces, social policy, infrastructure, patronage, or anything else, and as such fits nicely with an elite-incentive theory. A measure of oil income as a share of GDP, on the other hand, while endogenous to the overall economy, is a good measure of a country's dependence, as well as being a good rough measure of the leverage that state-controlled oil income has over the average citizen where (as is nearly always true) the state owns the resource sector. To the extent we want to explore theories involving elite time horizons, reserves may enter the set of appropriate measures. The point is that we should start with the theoretical framework, focus on what we theorize oil to be "doing," and then think about the array of possible measurement choices, selecting and explaining the choice on concrete grounds.

Middle East Particularity

For scholars of the MENA region, studying rentier states was an integral part of Middle East studies long before it became common elsewhere—witnessing the origins of the paradigm in the 1970s (Mahdavy 1970) and 1980s (Beblawi and Luciani 1987). It was not until Terry Karl's *Paradox of Plenty* (1997) and Michael Ross's "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" that the resource curse began to filter outside of Middle East-focused political science. As we have tried to demonstrate (2021a; 2021b) elsewhere, the problem is that what has come to be understood as global statistical findings are in fact specific to Middle East political dynamics.

The putative findings of the political resource curse, on one hand, turn out to be an artifact of British imperial policy that had the unintended effect of locking in particularly durable forms of hereditary monarchy in the five small Gulf kingdoms. The theory of petro-aggression, on the other, in which oil-rich states are held to be more bellicose when ruled by radical regimes, is in turn entirely dependent on the outsized influence of the Iran-Iraq war. In short, regardless of how we conceptualize and measure oil wealth, some of the key global findings about the resource curse turn out to be limited to the MENA region.

In short, there are two challenges to the cross-national econometric study of oil and politics. The first is that any country's oil sector is at least somewhat shaped by politics. From the willingness to explore, to the willingness to sign long-term contracts with rulers who are often only minimally accountable to citizens, each step of the oil extraction process depends on calculations made about a country's domestic politics. As a result, endogeneity concerns are thorny and not easily resolved. Second, recent research suggests that many of the putatively global regularities in the resource 'curse' are disproportionately influenced by small numbers of cases in the MENA region. To a large extent, the more careful our collective research becomes, the more it appears to lead us back to where the rentier state thesis stood a quarter-century and half-century ago: predominantly the domain of the Middle East.

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RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: TUNISIA'S DEMOCRATIC CRISIS

ATTITUDINAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE IN TUNISIA

By Holger Albrecht, Dina Bishara, Michael Bufano, and Kevin Koehler

On 25 July 2021, Tunisian president Kais Saied dissolved parliament and dismissed the prime minister. In what appeared to observers of Tunisian politics as a 'power grab,'[46] Saied doubled down on his bold move less than two months later by announcing his intention to dissolve parliament indefinitely and suspend the country's constitution. These events in Tunisia may quite well mark the beginning of the end of the only post-Arab Spring democratic success story. While Saied's move has surprised many observers, it has in fact been in the making for some time. Tunisians' mounting disenchantment with the political establishment not only led to the election of Kais Saied himself—a candidate outside of the established party system who rose to the presidency in 2019—but also provided the popular support base for the president's recent power grab.

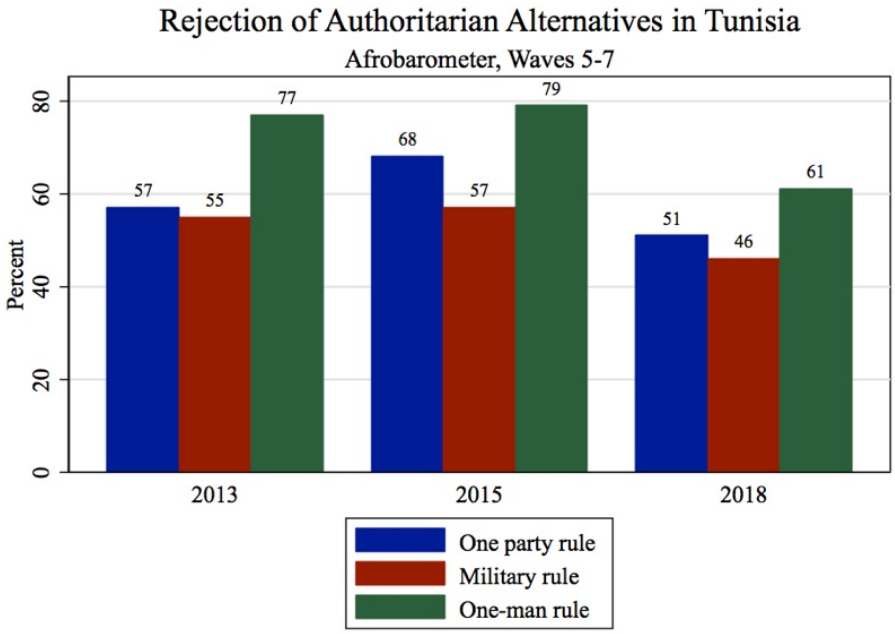
Countries transitioning to democracy often suffer from weak party systems, socioeconomic instability, and political unrest, creating fertile ground for such attitudes to take root. Tunisia is no stranger to the political and economic growth pains of democratic transitions. It has in fact experienced a troubled transformation since protestors overthrew Ben Ali's dictatorship in January of 2011. While the country witnessed competitive parliamentary elections in 2011, 2014, and 2019, along with the promulgation of a new constitution in 2014, Tunisia has also been hampered by political gridlock, economic stagnation, and virulent street protests.[47] In the process, popular support for both democratic institutions and established political parties, such as the Islamist party Ennahda and the secular party Nidaa Tounes, have declined in recent years. In turn, electoral support for political outsiders has been on the rise.[48]

Drawing on data from the Afrobarometer project and our own, nationally representative telephone survey among adult Tunisians conducted in 2017, we unpack the attitudinal

[46] Grewal, Sharan. 2021. "Kais Saied's Power Grab in Tunisia." *Brookings: Order from Chaos*, blog post (https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/07/26/kais-saieds-power-grab-in-tunisia/).
[47] Antonakis-Nashif, Anna. 2016. "Contested transformation: Mobilized publics in Tunisia between compliance and protest," *Mediterranean Politics*, 21(1), pp. 128-149.
[48] Grewal, Sharan and Shadi Hamid. 2020. *The Dark Side of Consensus in Tunisia: Lessons from 2015-2019*, Foreign Policy at Brookings, No. 1, https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-dark-side-of-consensus-in-tunisia-lessons-from-2015-2019/.

foundations of democratic decline in Tunisia.[49] While many studies have measured levels of trust in democratic institutions, far less has been written about popular support for political alternatives. What type of alternatives to the status-quo do citizens support in countries transitioning to democracy, and why do they support such alternatives?

The chart below reports data from several rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys in Tunisia, which shows that the number of respondents rejecting authoritarian alternatives declined over time. Tunisians have remained suspicious of one-man rule because they presumably associate this type of autocracy with the discredited Ben Ali regime. Yet, by 2018, about half of the population did not rule out one-party or military versions of authoritarian rule, which implies not only an obvious vote of no confidence to the emerging multi-party democracy in the country, but also some genuine sympathy for specific authoritarian alternatives.

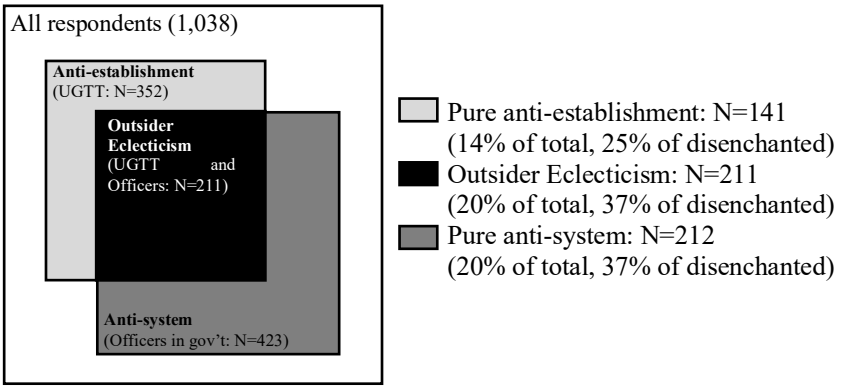


We dug deeper into the question of possible political alternatives Tunisians have in mind in opposition to the political status quo. Beyond rather abstract notions of authoritarian regime types, we designed our own nationally representative survey to gauge popular support for existing political forces in the country that represent different types of opposition to the status quo. We argue there are three distinct types of attitudes in support of political outsiders: anti-system, anti-establishment, and outsider eclecticism. Individuals with anti-system attitudes support alternatives to the current regime type, for instance military or one-party rule. In contrast, individuals with anti-establishment attitudes support the current political regime but oppose the organizational infrastructure, that is, the existing political parties and their elites. Finally, some Tunisians are ready to support anything but the status quo, a set of attitudes we call 'outsider eclecticism.'

[49] Albrecht, Holger, Dina Bishara, Michael Bufano, and Kevin Koehler. 2021. "Popular Support for Military Intervention and Anti-Establishment Alternatives in Tunisia: Appraising Outsider Eclecticism." *Mediterranean Politics*, open access at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13629395.2021.1974691.

Leveraging the results from our 2017 survey, we demonstrate the degree to which these three distinct attitudes have emerged in Tunisia—an unmistakable harbinger for what would be the popular support base for both the election of Kais Saied to the presidency in 2019, as well as for his ultimate power grab in the summer of 2021. Anti-system attitudes in Tunisia are best reflected in support for military rule as the most obvious form of an authoritarian alternative to the existing political order. Our data show that approximately 40 per cent of the Tunisian population support the idea of officers holding positions in government.[50] In contrast, anti-establishment attitudes are best reflected in popular support for an electoral challenge by the country's largest labor union, the Tunisian General Labor Union (*Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail*, UGTT)—a union that previously has not participated in electoral politics despite its extensive popularity.[51] Our data show that 34 per cent support the UGTT's electoral participation and hence a civil-society alternative to the party establishment in parliament. Finally, 20 per cent of respondents in our survey, in seemingly contradictory fashion, hold eclectic attitudes in that they want anything but what they see in politics. They support both what we perceive empirically as an authoritarian turn and a civil-society alternative: officers serving in government *and* the UGTT as a player in parliamentary politics.

Anti-System, Anti-Establishment, and Outsider Eclecticism



Our systematic analysis reveals some interesting findings on the social constituencies particularly prone to harboring these attitudes. First, support for outsider alternatives is more widespread among younger, less educated respondents in the more marginalized regions of Tunisia. We also find that non-voters and women are more likely to look for alternatives outside of the electoral arena, while those having participated in the 2011 revolution are less likely to do so. Second, our analysis reveals that disenchantment with the status quo in Tunisia does not lead to support for a single political alternative. We find, for instance, that anti-system attitudes are more prevalent among those with an understanding

[50] Albrecht, Holger, Michael Bufano, and Kevin Koehler. 2021. "Role Model or Role Expansion? Popular Perceptions of the Military in Tunisia," *Political Research Quarterly*, online first.
[51] Bishara, Dina and Sharan Grewal. 2021. "Political not partisan: The Tunisian General Labor Union under democracy," *Comparative Politics*, online first.

of democracy that focuses on socio-economic output rather than institutional processes, while voting for Nidaa Tounes as well as membership in the UGTT are negatively associated with support for an electoral challenge by the UGTT. Finally, we find Nidaa voters in 2014 are more likely to endorse outsider eclectic preferences for political alternatives, as are those who think the UGTT and the military have a positive influence on the political situation.

While we still need to explore the social drivers of these different forms of opposition to the status quo more systematically, we know that anti-system and anti-establishment sentiments characterize political attitudes among Tunisians a decade after the Arab Spring. Empirical evidence for what we coined 'outsider eclecticism' amid these attitudes is surprisingly large, with one out of five adult Tunisians stating seemingly contradictory preferences for both authoritarian and civil-society alternatives. This indicates that many Tunisians want anything other than what they see in the political status quo. It is this phenomenon where we see the most robust support base for outsiders, such as president Kais Saied, and anti-democratic power grabs, such as the president's decision to suspend parliament this past July.

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Bishara, Dina and Sharan Grewal. 2021. "Political not partisan: The Tunisian General Labor Union under democracy," *Comparative Politics*, online first.

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MAKING SENSE OF TUNISIA'S INTERREGNUM: THE OBSESSION WITH LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND MISSED SOCIAL CONTRACT DELIVERY

By Giulia Cimini

President Kais Saied's power grab with the support of a large part of Tunisia's public opinion must stimulate reflections and self-reflection in the broader academic community. Cheering crowds flooding the streets of many cities across the country with anti-government and anti-Ennahda slogans even surrounding military units, must make us seriously question the reason for such mass celebrations at the president's announcement on July 25. While there is still debate in Tunisia about whether or not there was a coup (*inqilāb* in Arabic), polls showed clear support for Saied's decision. The question is whether and for how long this support will last. After all, many consider his decisions to be legitimate precisely because other political actors are no longer legitimate in their eyes. Even Saied, however, risks getting caught in the pay-off between expectations and meeting those expectations. The widespread dissatisfaction with the establishment (as represented by political parties and Ennahda in particular, parliament and government) which 'captured the revolution' has not been a mystery for some time now.

Most of the scholarship on post-2011 Tunisia – not unlike that on the Arab uprisings and their aftermath more broadly – has remained imbued with Western-centrism, liberal normativity, and anxieties about the dark side of Islamists.[52] Much of the debate, therefore, has focused on democratization and its 'compatible' actors, and resorted to classic binary paradigms like democratic transition *vs* authoritarian resilience.

There are several problematic aspects to these approaches. First, there is the temptation of Tunisia's 'exceptionality' which reproduces – more or less intentionally – a set of culturalist and reductionist tropes. Second, there is the selectivity in scrutinizing which actors may or may not be democratic and accountable and how much, specifically the question only arose for Ennahda party, but for no other political or social actor (not even the police, and more recently the army). Third, there is the biased conceptualization of democracy, not only in procedural terms bound to elections and institutions but in line with the specific liberal model of democracy.

The greatest omission is the depoliticization of the economy, with its relevance overshadowed by attention to purely procedural understandings of democracy. This is despite the fact that the claims for dignity, social justice, more efficient and better service delivery, the fight against corruption and regional imbalances were as much at the root of the 2010-11 uprisings as civil and political rights. Those protests have never ceased over the

[52] Paola Rivetti, and Francesco Cavatorta, "Revolution and counter-revolution in the Middle East and North Africa. Global politics, protesting and knowledge production in the region and beyond," *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 511-529, 10.1285/i20356609v14i2p511

last decade. Politics and policy-making have never fundamentally challenged the economic fabric of the country. Academia, for its part, has devoted too little attention to the nexus between the missed implementation of social and economic rights and citizens' political behavior and preferences, and their continuing contentious action. The 'delivery problem' in the construction of Tunisia's democratic governance nurtures the populist currents embodied by President Saied and others in different forms.[53] It is also, and crucially, linked to the new, promised social contract based on greater inclusiveness, social justice, and redistribution.

If the uprisings that subverted the Ben Ali regime marked the definitive breakdown of the previous populist authoritarian bargain, they also came with the imaginary of new relations between the state and society, calling for a more participatory, inclusive and performant governance. Concomitantly, they raised people's expectations for those in power to significantly improve general living conditions and 'with an added sense of urgency.'[54] These promises and expectations of greater inclusion and wealth redistribution were the cornerstones around which the new social contract would be forged after the uprisings. At stake therefore was the input and output legitimacy of the system in its supposed new form, and of the new ruling class above all.

At risk of oversimplifying, the social contract, either implicit or explicit or both, was intended as the renegotiation of the rules of the game, and their reconfiguration. In this sense, even before being a final agreement, it was a contested and contestable process which involved a plurality of dimensions and actors, to the exclusion of others. While the new 2014 constitution explicitly incorporates principles like social justice around which a larger mobilization was easier to coalesce, it does not exhaust the premises and promises of the social contract. It acts, if anything, as a reminder of the inconsistency between rhetoric and action inasmuch as the ruling class failed to fully implement its principles (social justice, or the right to a good job among many others) and prescriptions (the still missing Constitutional Court being the most glaring example).

In the eyes of citizens, the rulers' avoidance of liability on their side of this contract has progressively strengthened the loss of legitimacy and credibility of the political system after Ben Ali's fall. At the same time, an alternative order that is sufficiently coherent and shared to be viable – not necessarily one that everyone agrees on – is struggling to emerge and consolidate. As Gramsci would have said, this is precisely what the *crisis* is about. While Gramscian interpretations to Arab politics are certainly not new, some have returned to reflect more recently on their potential and limits as theoretical lens to frame revolutionary dynamics.[55] Notions such as the 'crisis of authority,' 'interregnum,' and the centrality of

[53] Hamadi Redissi, Hafedh Chekir, Mahdi Elleuch, Mohamed S Khalfaoui, *La tentation populiste: les élections de 2019 en Tunisie* (Tunis: Cérès éditions, 2020).
[54] Youssef Mahmoud, and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, "Improvising Peace: Towards New Social Contracts in Tunisia," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14, no. 1 (2020): 101-118, 10.1080/17502977.2019.1629377
[55] See, for example, John Chalcraft and Alessandra Marchi's Special Issue "Gramsci in the Arab World," *Middle East Critique* 30, no. 1 (2021) and the Special Section edited by Gennaro Gervasio and Patrizia Manduchi,

'processuality' – and I would add in close connection with the question of the social contract – can help us make more sense of current events in Tunisia.

More properly, the 'crisis of authority' refers to the loss of consensus of the ruling class, that is thereby no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant' in Gramscian readings. In Tunisia, ruling elites cannot be said to have exercised control through coercive force, despite the resurgence of repressive and securitarian policing methods typical of the old regime. At this early point, it would be utterly hazardous to speculate on Saied's possible authoritarian drift premised on the military and police to date. In any case, the question of leadership legitimacy remains a central node for understanding the elements on which it rests.

Thinking in terms of *interregnum* helps us to consider this 'pending' moment in its own right, and not as a mere transition between two endpoints, whatever they may be. This allows for reflection on the transformative dynamics and forces at work regardless of their presumed orientation. In this sense, the discourse on backward and forward steps, especially on a democratic backsliding and a return to authoritarianism, makes less sense as framing what is far from a linear process, with continuities alongside the changes. Evidence for this can be seen in the presence of the representatives of Tunisia's pre-revolutionary regime in the now collapsed Nidaa Tounes party – and through alliances with new actors like Ennahda – and in the rising Abir Moussi's Free Destourian Party (not to mention the administration and security sector). Likewise, the persistence of some core issues on the economic and social front and, to a lesser extent, civil and political rights. Simplistic narratives of change, nearly always normative in orientation, had the counterproductive effect of fueling frustration since they were met with a good deal of inconsistency. In other words, the state's 'organized hypocrisy' manifests itself in the enduring mismatch between promises and their delivery, and the increasing discrepancy between societal expectations and reality.[56]

Related to continuities, which continue to shape the reality on the ground, is the dimension of *processuality*. It means, firstly, that crises are not reducible to single exogenous shocks breaking into an existing order insofar as 'they originate in contradictions or tensions of the old, dying social order.'[57] In this context, it is evident that Saied's actions capitalized on enduring discontent, as it is often the case. What is missing is the absence of a new 'hegemonic' model, a viable social, economic and political project that is truly capable of imposing itself by generating (enough) widespread consensus. This is equally true for the political class, perhaps even more remarkably for the intellectuals who should have, instead, a crucial role of 'avant-garde' if we want to remain in a Gramscian reading, and society at large.

"Introduction: reading the revolutionary process in North Africa with Gramsci," *The Journal of North African Studies* (online first), 10.1080/13629387.2020.1801264

[56] On the elaboration of Krasner's notion, see Ruth Hanau Santini, *Limited Statehood in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia*
Citizenship, Economy and Security (Palgrave, 2018).

[57] Milan Babic, "Let's talk about the interregnum: Gramsci and the crisis of the liberal world order," *International Affairs* 96, no. 3 (2020): 767–786, 10.1093/ia/iiz254.

On a concluding note, a cumbersome juxtaposition, often implicit in many analyses and perhaps unintentional, is the misleading and above all unnecessarily simplistic dichotomy between (bad) political actors and (good) civil society actors with a clear normative bias. By endorsing this perspective, one risks obscuring the complexity of both, not least the plurality of agents of which each is composed, and the permeability between the 'two sides.' The emphasis on the 'streets of Tunisia' as if they had a single voice renders analysis less useful to the extent that it overlooks class-based, geographic and other differences, while underestimating how disconnected segments of society can be from each other in a sort of freezing, homogenizing effect.

In light of this, concepts like 'electoral legitimacy' and 'street legitimacy' should not be dismissed tout-court as they mirror a difference very much felt in Tunisia these times.[58] Yet, the allegedly sharp division between the symbolic spaces where politics is done, official institutions on the one side and the streets on the other side, is at best ambiguous, if not analytically irrelevant. Remarkably, in fact, not only the ranks of demonstrators also include left-wing political parties, mostly excluded from the governance of the country, but dominant political parties themselves, take to the streets to show off the strength of their base, not to mention the social actors, trade unions *in primis*, who sit in institutional settings. These interactions deserve more attention, as well as the reasons why some actors more than others, think of leftist forces or youth movements, fail to assert themselves politically. Looking at how the social contract dictating the way forward is forged in its being a dynamic agreement, its internal (in)coherence and conflict issues, its 'winners' and 'losers,' tells us much more about what is going on.

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[58] Such a juxtaposition was the *leit-motiv* of the 2013 anti-government and anti-parliament protests and promptly repeats itself.

BURNING EMBERS: YOUTH ACTIVISM AND THE HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA

By Kirstie Lynn Dobbs

President Kais Saied's suspension of Parliament and firing of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi called into question Tunisia's leadership and their commitment to democracy. Tunisia's transition to democracy represented a beacon of hope in the Arab world, but Saied's recent actions sparked debates about the future trajectory of Tunisia's democratic institutions. Corruption and political infighting have characterized much of the political scene in the post-revolution era. What is predictable in the aftermath of Tunisia's revolution since 2011 is the civic engagement of the country's youth. Through revolution, transition, elections, and a "constitutional coup," the scholarship on the political behavior of Tunisian youth affirms that this cohort is unlikely to change its course of political action regardless of who is in power. Young Tunisians appear to care less about measuring the democratic progress of the country through elections, representation, and regime change but are more concerned about the presence of corruption, political infighting, and Tunisia's stagnating economy. Looking through the perspective of youth, I think the case of Tunisia calls into question what we measure as democratic "progress."

The remainder of this article briefly outlines the history of Tunisian youth political participation over the past ten years. I argue that increasing inclusion in formal politics means little to a generation that continues to suffer from socio-economic marginalization. Yet, young people continue to persevere as "burning embers of hope" for Tunisia's democratic experiment. Governments (regardless of regime type) ought to take "street activism" as a legitimate form of communication between traditional political spheres and youth.

Active on Street, but Apathetic at the Ballot Box

Scholars link Tunisia's transition to democracy to a pre-existing civil society where youth were active. During the Ben Ali era, political participation in formal politics was severely limited, so young people wanting to become more politically active joined student unions, labor unions, professional associations, and other civil society organizations.[59] Young people's propensity to be civically engaged prior to the revolution was likely connected to their education. Youth in Tunisia enjoyed some of the best educational institutions in the Arab world.[60] Although significant disparities exist among youth in terms of education - Tunisia's youngest cohort in 2011 was more educated than previous generations.[61]

[59] Sabina Henneberg, *Managing Transition. The First Post-Uprising Phase in Tunisia and Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 53.

[60] Margaret Bohlander, "The Youth Unemployment Cris in Tunisia," Center for International Private Enterprise, Nov. 18, 2013, The Youth Unemployment Crisis in Tunisia - Center for International Private Enterprise (cipe.org).

[61] Dobbs, Kirstie Lynn. "Active on the Street but Apathetic at the Ballot Box? The Voting Behavior of Tunisian Youth (2011-Present) in a Comparative Perspective" (PhD dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 2019).

Yet, this educated youth cohort experienced difficulty finding jobs. Soaring youth unemployment, socioeconomic marginalization, and corruption motivated young Tunisians to take to the streets in the revolution. Youth were disproportionately represented in the protesting coalition.[62] After the revolution, young people's involvement in civil society flourished after associational rights expanded in 2011 and continued to expand in 2014,[63] but their participation in traditional politics remained minimal. Youth who participated in the revolutionary protests were not more likely to vote in the 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) Elections than their non-protesting counterparts. Yet, older generations who participated in these protests were more motivated to vote in 2011.[64]

Qualitative studies suggest that youth in Tunisia were drawn more to civil society and informal politics than to the ballot box due to their growing mistrust of the political parties, including Ennahda and Nidda Tounes.[65] Despite the transition to democracy and the successful implementation of free and fair elections in 2011, 2014, 2018, and 2019, youth viewed that decision-making was still in the hands of old autocratic elites who excluded them. Many young people felt abandoned and marginalized by the debilitating socio-economic inequality,[66] sentiments exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, there is still a significant socioeconomic rural-urban divide. Much like the Ben Ali regime, the post-revolution governments have not overcome the perception that the national government cares about youth in the interior and southern regions of the country.

There is evidence that political elites have attempted to include youth in the institution-building process post-revolution. For example, the Ben Achour Commission, which was tasked with rebuilding the state's institutions leading up to the NCA Elections, decided that each member of the commission needed to have one youth and one female representative on its team.[67] Before the 2014 Parliamentary Elections, Tunisia's government officially instated youth quotas where every party list was required to have a youth candidate (aged 18-35) among their top four candidates. In practice, these quotas favored young women as parties attempted to 'double-dip' to fulfill both the youth and women's gender parity quotas. These quotas did lead to more representation for young women, but these female

[62] Mark R. Beissinger, Amaney A. Jamal, and Kevin Mazur, "Explaining Divergent Revolutionary Coalitions: Regime Strategies and the Structuring of Participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions," *Comparative Politics* 48, no. 1 (2015): 1–24; Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal, "The Youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities," *Middle East Law and Governance* 4, no. 1 (2012): 168–188.
[63] Kirstie Lynn Dobbs, "Civil society as revolutionary diplomats: Foreign policy after the Arab Spring," *Orient*, January 2021.
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[66] Zouhir Gabsi, "Tunisian youth: Demands for dignity in the context of challenging socio-political and economic upheaval," *Orient*, January 2021.
[67] Sabina Henneberg, *Managing Transition. The First Post-Uprising Phase in Tunisia and Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 27.

representatives were largely excluded from leadership positions. Generally, this formal institution achieved little for young women's empowerment in traditional political spaces.[68]

Before the 2018 local elections, the electoral code was rewritten so that every party list had to include a youth candidate in their top three positions and within every sixth consecutive member. The 2018 elections saw a massive increase in the number of youth participating as candidates. About 52% of the candidates were youth, and 37.6% of the seats at the municipal level were allocated to youth. But this increase in youth participation in formal politics at the local level did little to improve turnout rates and trust in government among young people. Experimental research shows that Tunisian youth care very little about the ages of political candidates and are not more likely to vote for or believe that a younger candidate is more likely to represent their interests than an older candidate.[69] Instead, younger people are drawn to candidates that are "outside the state" rather than those closer to their age. President Saied was the favored candidate among young Tunisians in the 2019 presidential elections because he represented the anti-status quo and was a political neophyte.[70]

The predictability of Tunisian youth political behavior

There is some predictability to youth political behavior, therefore. First, youth in Tunisia, like youth worldwide, are almost always more likely to be drawn to informal activism than traditional politics and are almost always less likely to vote regardless of regime type.[71] Second, despite the conventional wisdom that Tunisian youth abstain from voting due to lack of trust and perceptions of corruption, a large N quantitative study found that the strongest explanatory factors for youth voter abstention in Tunisia from 2011-2018 were socio-demographics, low political interest, and a perception that voting is unimportant. Tunisian youth voter participation thus resembles youth in various contexts throughout the world. The life-cycle thesis that argues people are more likely to vote when they accrue "adulthood" type of responsibilities- which the state of the Tunisian economy largely denies this generation in "waiting"[72] - applies to Tunisia.

Overall, young people's political behavior is unlikely to change as long as the grievances still exist. Unemployment and corruption represented significant contributors to why youth chose to protest in 2011. They continue to mistrust the government, are less likely to vote, and are more likely to engage in informal forms of activism like protests and civil society.

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[68] Jana Belschner, 2019. "Empowering Young Women? Gender and Youth Quotas in Tunisia," in *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in The MENA Region*, ed. Hanane Darhour and Drude Dahleroup (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 257-278.

[69] Kirstie Lynn Dobbs, "Youth Quotas and 'Jurassic Park' Politicians: Age as Heuristic for Vote Choice in Tunisia's New Democracy," *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (2020): 990-1005.

[70] Salah, Faïrouz ben Salah, "Young People: Kais Saied's Secret Weapon in Tunisia's Presidential Election," *Middle East Eye*. Sept. 18, 2019.

[71] Kirstie Lynn Dobbs, Dobbs, "Active on the Street, but Apathetic at the Ballot Box? Explaining Youth Behaviour in Tunisia's New Democracy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* (2021): DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1962243.

[72] Abbott, Pamela, and Andrea Teti. "A generation in waiting for jobs and justice: Young people not in education employment or training in North Africa." *The Arab Transformations Working Paper Number 19* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 2017).

Recent efforts have centered on progressing rights for members of the LGBT+ community. The Tunisian government attempted to shut down the LGBT+ rights group Shams, a youth-oriented group, in early 2020, arguing that the work of Shams violated Tunisian law under article 230 of the penal code and went against the traditions of Islam. Despite these arguments, a Tunisian appeals court rejected this case.[73] Shams now has full authorization to continue its advocacy work. This example represents a burning ember for democracy.

Even during the pandemic, young people continue to lead protests demanding more civic freedoms and economic reform. In January 2021, protests broke out in Tunis demanding freedom for political prisoners and social justice. A leading Tunisian feminist and women's rights activist, Henda Chennaoui, stated that "I have been a witness to every single demonstration since January and noticed a continuity in their attitude towards propaganda from both the government and the media. What is new this time...is the intersectionality of the movement. Slogans about women's and LGBT+ rights can be heard alongside demands for social justice."[74]

In sum, it is unlikely that young people in Tunisia will dramatically change their behavior if the socioeconomic marginalization of the country's youthful population does not improve. Tunisian youth will continue to push back on unpopular policies and push forward for civil and political rights using their "choice" forms of participation - keeping the embers of Tunisia's fledgling democracy burning despite continued corruption, political mistrust, and a "rogue" president.

As scholars, what we need to ask are new questions when it comes to measuring a country's democratization process. There has been a lot of focus on Tunisia's elections, but does electoral reform in terms of inclusion matter if the socioeconomic needs of the country are not being met? The fact that Tunisian youth are still active on the street and pushing for civil rights and liberties should represent a burning ember of hope for Tunisia's democratic experiment. But, have civil society groups and political parties focused too much on building opportunities for youth involvement in traditional political spaces? Should CSOs and parties pivot towards meeting youth where they want to be - which is in more informal spaces for activism? Perhaps the focus should be on strengthening the connection between the informal and formal political spaces - to bring more legitimacy to the voices expressed in "street" activism where youth are already drawn to participation. Creating synergy between elite-centered theories and popular mobilization frameworks will offer novel insights for measuring the vitality of a precarious democracy.

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[73] "Tunisia: Appeals Court Support LGBT Activist Group Shams," *Rights Africa*, Feb. 22, 2020.
[74] Henda Chennaoui and Giuseppe Acconcia, "Queer and Feminist Militants Are Shapring Tunisia's Protests," *Roar.* March 30, 2021.

TUNISIAN DEMOCRACY ON HOLD: COUP, COUNTER-COUP, OR CREATIVE DESTRUCTION?

By John P. Entelis

When Tunisian President Kais Saied suspended the parliament, dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechchi, and effectively shut down the country's democratic institutions on July 25, 2021, was he staging a coup d'état intended to halt the "excesses" of a democratic process run amok, initiating a counter-coup in which the basic contours of the Habib Bourguiba era (1956-1987) are being resurrected, or engaged in Schumpeterian process of incessant product and process innovation by which new production units replace outdated ones, in this instance an inchoate but flawed democratic system is completely reimagined and reconfigured to better represent "the will of the people?"

It is still too early in the suspension process to determine its eventual outcome. Distinct divisions in society have emerged between supporters of Saied's presidential power grab as a necessary step to reestablish a law-and-order state and those accusing him of nothing less than a "coup d'état" reminiscent of Ben Ali's "constitutional coup" against Bourguiba on November 7, 1987. His move lacks the fig leaf of constitutional legitimacy as provided in Article 80 that requires parliamentary consultation and approval before a state of emergency can be invoked. That the president has unilaterally extended the thirty-day suspension of parliament without constitutional approval adds weight to those concerned that Tunisia may be sliding back into its autocratic past. Not unlike similar democratic backsliding taking place in both consolidated and newly established democracies, autocratic alternatives are finding popular support by those feeling politically, socially, culturally, and/or economically marginalized. Is Tunisia another example of such backsliding or is it involved in a more structural transformation whose political outcome remains uncertain? Even more profoundly, is the country experiencing an incipient reordering of state-society relations that provides neither socioeconomic opportunity nor political freedom?

All the preconditions for systemic upheaval were fully in place on the eve of Saied's political putsch. Despite a relatively successful institutional transition from a single-party authoritarian political order into a multi-party democratic political system following the successful overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, Tunisia faced numerous social, economic, security, and health challenges that have compromised the system's democratic aspirations. The result has been a society in constant turbulence, facing popular unrest, social upheaval, economic stagnation, security threats, political fragmentation, ideological discontinuities, and a pandemic-related health emergency. It is within such a chaotic context that Saied decided to act and, in so doing, revealed the deeply fractured nature of the state-society dialectic from which autocratic tendencies have re-emerged to challenge the country's democratic future.

Despite the hopes engendered by Ben Ali's overthrow, Tunisia has been unable to overcome the ongoing and expanding challenges that it has faced. Fragile in the best of times, the economy has remained stagnant given the narrow base of its domestic production and

foreign exports. Tourism, a core component of economic development, has been severely compromised by bouts of terrorism and the Covid-19 pandemic. The dinar's steady decline since 2011 has made imports more expensive. Youth unemployment is estimated as high as 40 percent and probably even higher in the rural areas of the south. Inflation is estimated at over 7 percent, a record high. Pressures for reform come from without and within, with the IMF's recommendations to shrink the public sector and eliminate subsidies have failed to achieve the intended results while the powerful Tunisian national labor union, UGTT, has led numerous labor strikes demanding higher wages and the end of job cuts in the public sector. The result is an economy in free fall, leading Tunisians of all classes to take to the streets on almost a daily basis. Mass street protests are but one symptom of a political economy in complete disarray with the resulting increase in popular discontent, total distrust of authority figures, record low turnouts for every election held since 2011, and disenchantment with the "Jasmine Revolution" itself that have led significant sectors of the mass public to embrace an autocratic gesture of the kind Saied has undertaken.

The failure of the political class to resolve the political economy challenges described above is reflective of a deeper divide within the Tunisian polity which puts into question the commitment that both state and society have to democratic values, norms, and procedures. The experiences of the last decade have exposed the discontinuities and divergencies between the architecture of democracy (structure) and its normative underpinnings (culture). While post-authoritarian Tunisia succeeded in erecting the formal institutions of democratic governance—constitution, parliament, elections, parties—it failed to imbue them with the values, norms, and spirit of democratic belief system that would provide a cultural context for the new structures, ones that would prioritize social justice and economic reforms for society's most disadvantaged. Rather than reinforcing a more legitimate and collaborative state-society relationship, the new order has privileged those with power, money, and connections that has strained, to the point of rupture, civil society's faith in the people and institutions that were intended to represent it. One consequence has been the total distrust in politicians, parties, elections, elites, and the full constellation of authority figures. Such loss of faith finds daily expression in protest movements, desires to immigrate, occasional violence, wildcat strikes, and a dangerous disillusionment with both the idea and practice of democracy.

This disturbing trend finds expression across the full spectrum of Tunisian political life. The pre-existing ideological and personalistic cleavages between secularists and Islamists have been amplified in recent years as Rachid Ghannouchi, the head of the moderate Islamist Ennahda Party, has battled against both Presidents Essebsi and Saied, representing the country's secularist orientation, over the political, social, and economic direction of Tunisian society. Saied's power grab was in great part directed at Ghannouchi and Ennahda given the latter's dominant position in the Assembly of the People's Representatives (Legislature) with Ghannouchi serving as speaker of the Assembly. Ghannouchi has accused the Tunisian president of staging a "coup" with the intent of reasserting an autocratic system of rule.

Among the secularists themselves a moderate-right wing cleavage has emerged. While lauding the revolution's democratic outcome and constitutional foundation, many Tunisians have criticized the major economic and social failures that successive post-revolutionary

regimes and leaders have left unresolved. Indeed, the vast socioeconomic cleavages that have formed since Ben Ali's overthrow have led individuals and movements to "*restaurer le passé pour faire oublier le present*."[restore the past to forget the present] In its most extreme form this reactionary trend has seen the rise of right-wing, anti-democratic forces emerging in the form of the Free Destourian [Constitutional] Party (*Parti Destourien Libre*) led by Abir Moussi, a woman in the image of France's Marine Le Pen and her *Rassemblement National*, both of whom invoke a mythical past as the basis for overcoming today's problems. This championing of the Destourian past of Bourguiba and Ben Ali is resonating among significant segments of the incumbent and incipient middle class that fear the indeterminacy of the ruling regime on the one hand and the putative political power of the Islamists on the other.

It is unclear if Saied's bold gestures are intended to give legitimacy to this Desoutian desire or are meant as a prelude to something more transformative. What is less in doubt is the harsh way in which authority is being imposed in which the police and security services are becoming more instruments of state control than defenders of citizens' rights. Human rights activists, political opponents, and journalists and media figures who have criticized the regime prior to the "coup," have been the targets of state oppression reminiscent of the Ben Ali years. The state's recent attacks on independent journalists and media personalities in putatively democratic Tunisia highlights the ambiguity between intent and impact. As recently as April 2021, for example, Tunisian police clashed with journalists at the state news agency (TAP) demonstrating against a new chief executive whose appointment they saw as an attempt to undermine editorial independence. In a similar vein, Tunisian blogger Emma Charqui was sentenced to six months in jail for sharing a satirical Facebook post about Covid-19 written in the style of a Koranic verse. Earlier Tunisian police shut down the studios of privately-owned television broadcaster Nessma TV citing regulatory violations. While Tunisia ranks well above most Arab countries in its media and press freedoms, in a global context the 2021 World Press Freedom Index ranks Tunisia 73rd out of 180 countries (Morocco 136, Algeria 146). These recent challenges to press freedoms in Tunisia provide current context of how the post-Ben Ali media environment has altered or re-compositioned politics in the country.

In their book How Democracies Die, authors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt identify four key behavioral warning signs that might signal the emergence of authoritarianism: (1) rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game; (2) denial of the legitimacy of political opponents; (3) toleration or encouragement of violence; and (4) readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media. [75] The presence of just one of these four characteristics serves as a warning that serious democratic backsliding is taking place. Saied's suspension of all key democratic institutions while imposing a martial law-like security state floats dangerously close to one or more of these behavioral signals. As posed from the start, is the Tunisian president's gesture a simple re-ordering of a flawed process for which a temporary freezing of certain political rights may seem necessary, or is it a prelude to "*restaurer le passé pour faire oublier le present*" which implies an authoritarian solution? A more generous interpretation would have Saied's actions representing a truly

[75] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 23-24.

revolutionary purpose, a process of "creative destruction" intent in forming a political system that is genuinely democratic with legal commitments to social justice, economic opportunity, and an egalitarian society. Most Tunisians would hope for the latter but are fearful that authoritarianism is at their doorstep.

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ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

By Nate Grubman

One of the main paradigms applied to Tunisia since 2011 has been that of a country that has recently and successfully transitioned to democracy. According to conventional wisdom, Tunisia became a democracy in 2011 when political elites agreed to hold competitive elections, removed all doubt in 2014 when elections yielded a change in government, and perhaps ceased to be one with President Kais Saied's recent suspension of the 2014 constitution. But what do we mean when we say that Tunisia is or was a democracy? Why have many Tunisians become disillusioned by institutions of electoral politics? And why was there pushback against the notion that Kais Saied's recent suspension of the popularly elected legislature constitutes a coup against democracy?

To understand these questions, we must grapple with the failure of electoral democracy in Tunisia to achieve accountable and representative government, as well as the conceptions of democracy offered by Tunisian elites as alternatives to a party-based electoral democracy. By focusing on the ways that disagreements even among self-professed democrats regarding the appropriate mechanisms of accountability can spark serious political crises, the case of Tunisia may contribute to our understanding of democratic "careening" elsewhere in the world.[76]

Competitive democracy and its discontents

According to the often used definition of Juan Linz and Al Stepan,[77] Tunisia completed its democratic transition in 2011 when elites agreed to hold competitive elections to produce a government with a reasonable level of authority. Writing in the *Journal of Democracy* in 2012, Stepan argued as much, suggesting that what remained was for that democracy to "consolidate."[78] According to Samuel Huntington's "two-turnover test," the country became a consolidated democracy in late 2014.[79]

Tunisia has featured many of the hallmarks of a competitive electoral democracy. The country has held multiple rounds of presidential and legislative elections, as well as municipal elections. Circumscribed campaign periods and regulation of campaign and party finance have aimed to blunt both the professionalization of politics and the influence of dark money that have challenged other democracies. With relatively low barriers to candidate entry and highly proportional systems of allocation, Tunisian voters have been treated to ballots that seemingly offer a staggering degree of choice. According to domestic and international observers, votes have seemingly been accurately and honestly tallied. Winners

[76] Here, I refer to Dan Slater's term. See Dan Slater, "Democratic Careening" *World Politics* 65 (October 2013): 729–63.
[77] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
[78] Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia and the Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy* (April 2012): 89–103.
[79] This concept originally comes from Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1991).

have taken office and losers have acknowledged defeat. These are not small accomplishments.

But as the last two months—and the essays in this symposium—illustrate, Tunisia's political system has been so dissatisfying to many Tunisians that many have questioned whether it was a democracy at all. Indeed, pointing to survey evidence from the last decade, a recent Arab Barometer post argues that "What pundits seem to have missed is that relatively few Tunisians believe they currently live in a democracy."[80] Although there was enough consensus to get from one election to the next, at least until 2021, disagreements regarding the proper accountability mechanisms of democracy have repeatedly contributed to political crises throughout the transition, fueling what Dan Slater has dubbed "democratic careening," moments of destabilization fueled by conflicts between those pushing for constraints against mob rule and those bristling against these constraints.[81] Whether democracy should be defined by elections or by something more is an important normative question. Why these processes have failed to deliver the more substantive democratic goods, such as accountability or social justice which many deem critical to democracy, is a profoundly important empirical question.

Part of the answer is that competitive elections have served as a limited instrument of democracy in Tunisia, especially if we think of democracy as something resembling Schattschneider's "party government."[82] In theory, elections allow voters to periodically weigh in on major policy questions by choosing the party that offers the most appealing solution to them. But in Tunisia, political parties have struggled to offer clearly distinct policy choices for addressing the country's problems and policy platforms have played little role in electoral politics. With many political parties unable to retain their members from one election to the next, the legislature has continually opted for broad coalition or nonpartisan governments that muffle the voice of the voters in determining who governs.

Voters and civil society organizations have continually pressured parties to adopt policy promises that can be used to hold politicians accountable. Most of the largest parties have assembled teams of experts to draft electoral platforms, many of them of great length. But these platforms have been difficult to distinguish from each other and have often included wildly optimistic promises. In 2011, Ennahdha promised to create 590,000 jobs, decreasing unemployment to 8.5 percent by 2016. In 2014, Nidaa Tounes pledged to put an end to

[80] "Tunisia's Democratic Pulse," Arab Barometer Arab Pulse, 29 July 2021: https://www.arabbarometer.org/2021/07/tunisias-democratic-pulse/

[81] See Dan Slater, "Democratic Careening" *World Politics* 65 (October 2013): 729–63.

[82] This section draws upon Nate Grubman and Aytuğ Şaşmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied," *Middle East Report Online* (17 July 2021): https://merip.org/2021/08/the-collapse-of-tunisias-party-system-and-the-rise-of-kais-saied/. On party government, see E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1942). On elections as instruments of democracy, see G. Bingham Powell, Jr. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.).

poverty through a staggering 155 billion dinars of investment over five years. Neither of these came to fruition.

National governments have generally struggled to implement the contents of these platforms and after a tumultuous period of a national government featuring Ennahdha and two coalition partners, Tunisian legislators steadily retreated from the notion that governments should reflect the political parties chosen by voters. After winning a plurality in 2011, Ennahdha formed a coalition government primarily comprising members of three political parties that had performed well in the elections. But in March 2013, amidst widespread calls for Ennahdha to step down, the party announced a cabinet shakeup that gave important ministerial portfolios to non-partisan independents.

This would become a model for future governments. In 2014, after Nidaa Tounes won a plurality in the legislature, it not only formed a coalition government that included its principal rival, Ennahdha, but also appointed a non-partisan prime minister, Habib Essid, who pledged little fealty to the party's electoral platform. Since 2015, no government has had much more than half of its ministers associated with political parties and the latest government featured no partisans. The country has not had an interior or justice minister officially associated with a party since March 2013. Policy in some domains, such as fiscal policy and security-sector and judicial reform, seems to be a product less of election results than of negotiations between corporate actors.

It is perhaps not surprising then that many Tunisians express the notion that political parties are odious institutions formed for the purpose of attaining political power. This perception is fueled in part by campaign promises that were later revoked, such as Nidaa Tounes's 2014 promise not to govern with Ennahdha or Ennahdha's 2019 promise not to govern with Qalb Tounes, a party formed by media magnate Nabil Karoui and dubbed by Ennahdha "the party of corruption." It is also a function of the rapid rise and subsequent collapse of many of the country's parties. Elected legislators have frequently changed parties after the elections, leading to a Tunisian neologism "partisan tourism." Although some members of the legislature have performed their duties with dedication, many members of the legislature have eschewed many of their voting or attendance duties, despite the fact that these things are tracked by Tunisian civil society.

In perceiving parties as election-winning machines, Tunisians have been very suspicious of their sources of finance. Campaign finance rules have been difficult to enforce and political actors in Tunisia have traded accusations of foreign financing. At times, former leaders of some of the main parties, such as Ennahdha's Hamadi Jebali and Nidaa Tounes's Lazhar al-Akremi, have conceded that perhaps their parties did not follow the campaign finance rules. These accusations, made by former rather than current party leaders without publicly available evidence, should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt. But Tunisian institutions, such as the Court of Audit, have also raised charges that have gone unresolved but likely affect the way many Tunisians perceive the parties.

In gauging whether Tunisians have lost interest in "democracy," then, it is important to note that Tunisians seem to have become more exasperated with institutions, such as the constitutional balance of power, than with other elements of democracy, such as freedom of

speech. As I wrote in a recent Monkey Cage piece describing a survey experiment designed with Milan Svolik in October 2019, Tunisians were far more concerned with protecting freedom of speech than the constitutional balance of powers.[83]

Careening

Amidst the unsatisfying electoral politics in Tunisia since the transition, elites have offered two main conceptions of democracy that constitute alternatives to party-based electoral democracy. The first is a form of deliberation, either elite or corporate. In 2011, the commission tasked with building consensus surrounding the political transition trumpeted its emphasis of "consensus" as a key ingredient to Tunisia's successful transition.[84] Especially after one year had lapsed since the election of the constituent assembly, many elites continued to push for this sort of consensual model of governing. The national dialogue held in late 2013 was internationally celebrated and Tunisian elites went back to the dialogue well in 2016, when President Beji Caid Essebsi convened a broad set of parties and national non-partisan organizations to fashion a charter for a new government. Although this brand of elite deliberation and consensus politics attracted much international plaudits, a number of recent essays have instead focused on the tendency of elite deliberation to preserve the status quo.[85]

The second competing vision prizes direct democracy. Calls for a more participatory democracy have emanated since the uprising, but Kais Saied has emerged as one of the prominent champions of these calls. Saied's campaign for the presidency was a performance in anti-partisanship. Saied criticized political parties as outmoded institutions and refused to form his own party. Characterizing election platforms as empty promises, Saied emphasized that he offered no platform, except for a vague promise to deliver decentralized participatory democracy. Last December, as it became clear that a newly formed technocratic government had little capacity to address the country's problems, the UGTT pushed Saied to hold another national dialogue. Saied refused, only issuing a vague declaration that he would convene a national dialogue along a very different model from those before it. On July 25, he dispensed with the legislature. Although many Tunisians supported the freezing of the legislature, political elites are now divided regarding the path forward. Many of those who praised Saied for moving against the legislature began to criticize him for refusing to convene elite deliberation.

[83] Nate Grubman, "Do Tunisians still want democracy?" *Washington Post Monkey Cage*
[84] See Yadh Ben Achour, Tunisie, une révolution en pays d'islam (Tunis: Cèrés éditions, 2016); Sabina Henneberg, *Managing Transition: The First Post-Uprising Phase in Tunisia and Libya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[85] See especially Nadia Marzouki, "Tunisia's Rotten Compromise," Middle East Report Online (10 July 2015) and Amel Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition," *Mediterranean Politics* 21 (no. 1, 2016): 107–27.

Tunisia's experience—a new democracy deeply dissatisfying to many of its citizens and a transition pocked by crises between the proponents of different types of democratic constraints—resembles that of many other democratic transitions. Indeed, recent events are somewhat reminiscent of those described in a recent essay by Dan Slater as "careening." Thus far, it is unclear whether Tunisia is careening, albeit at a slow pace, from one model of democracy to another or whether recent events will presage a transition to a non-democratic political regime. The current regime led by Kais Saied is hardly consolidated and seems unlikely to last in its current form. But it would be naïve to dismiss the possibility that the indefinite assumption of so many powers by one man, albeit a popular one, might open the door to a new dictatorship.

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KAIS SAIED: THE ODD FIGURE IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE "TUNISIAN MODEL"

By Tarek Kahlaoui

Since its beginning, the narrative of the Tunisian revolt was framed by an increasingly dominant narrative: a "Jasmine Revolution", which just needs "democratic transition" to respond to the majority's expectations. A narrative reducing implicitly the social forces into one single social structure. Left out of this narrative is the deep antagonist social and economic pre-and-post-revolt structures and players. Democratizing, which by the end meant effectively holding cyclical election and some kind of a training electoral process, allowed politicians empowered financially, either by local or foreign players, to dominate power and thus annihilate the ability of politics to resolve the contradictions that caused the revolt in the first place. Drafting the constitution and the different alliances allowing it to pass, and then the 2014 elections bringing in an alliance between Islamists and seculars, reduced political conflicts to reoccurring forms of "consensus" among an elite preserving the interests of a renewed rentier class. Tunisian president Kais Saied, who with the awe of the traditional elite grabbed all powers on July 25, consistently presented himself as anti-elite and the enabler of what the "people want". His rejection of the whole democratic transition process as a derivation of the "revolutionary explosion" makes him stand as the unwanted figure in the dominant narrative of the "Tunisian model." The failure to read him and thus approach him by the different players is an essential reason for the current crisis. But it is also the best argument explaining why Tunisian democracy has been inherently ill and largely corrupt.

A surprising win of the "clean" populist

Much of the debate since Kais Saied's power-grab in July 25 was constitutional: was it a coup or not attracted much attention. Clearly the nice-looking decade-long "Tunisian model" was hurt. Regardless if it is a coup or not, Saied seems to be the odd element in the dominant narrative. Yet the indications that something went wrong should not be seen only since July 25. And if there is a "coup" against democracy, then the signs were much earlier.

The results of the 2019 elections were at odds with the dominant trend since the beginning of the democratic transition. Instead of the dominance of clearly structured political parties, the majority of votes in both legislative and presidential elections were given to outsiders. Actually, they were dominated by different types of populist forces and candidates. The outcome of the first round of the presidential elections guided the general atmosphere: a face-off of two populist candidates.[86] Then the legislative elections moved on to weaken the post-revolutionary elite including the highly structured Ennahda party coming first yet losing hundreds of thousands of votes. However, the new populist parties and coalitions,

[86] I provided a prediction of the results a day before: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/14/how-tunisias-presidential-election-could-result-populist-president/

such the old regime-supporters the New Doustouri Party led by Abir Moussi or the revolutionary-conservative Dignity Coalition led by Seifeddine Makhlouf, got unexpectedly many votes, which posited them to build opposing parliamentary blocs and later became leading agitators disrupting the parliament's proceedings.

Saied's win with 75% votes and nearly 3 million voters became the most popular figure in the country. A university law professor never involved in politics before the revolution and becoming politicized always from an independent position after 2011, he waited carefully for his chance. He became known for his frequent interventions through 10 years in the most watched program, the news of the state owned channel at 8:00 pm, about constitutional issues. With his classical Arabic and very rigid voice, he became an icon of the middle-class intellectual, emphasizing the early ideals of the revolution. A conservative-revolutionary yet with a tie. For Saied, the main issue since 2011 is that the "voice of people" has been marginalized by the elite; this happened mainly because of the political system, which according to him prioritized legality vs legitimacy.

The main background that should be emphasized when trying to understand Saied's surge and his growing influence and certainly his ability to grab more powers when activating article 80 in July 25 is not his political capacities as much as the rotten democratic process since 2011. Democratic transition emphasized building formal institutions and largely ignoring the persistent social wounds. As elections were recurring with the hails of the democratic international partners, the outcome did not result in any major changes in the failing economy. Worse: the new political elite became increasingly discredited, campaigning fiercely against each other and then making political deals with one only goal in mind: that is, staying in power. The very idea that the winner would govern and the loser would be in the opposition was negated by the most influential figures of the political elite. Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda present basically in most of the government since 2011, defended publicly many times the principle that in a "young democracy" there is no point to have the division between governments and opposition. The total disregard of antagonism and the willingness to build coalitions at any cost created the right context to allow populists to get the upper hand by 2019. Saied had the upper hand over the others most likely not only because he was perceived to be more anti-elitist (insisting unlike the other populists not to have a party and to stay away from the legislative elections) but also because he insisted on projecting an image of the "cleanest", running a campaign in coffee shops, during which his campaign would spend money only on espresso shots.

Democratic legality vs revolutionary legitimacy

It is in this disjuncture between democratic theory and praxis that Saied won the presidency in 2019, with his open-ended campaign slogan-platform *al-sha'b yurīd* and pledge to push for an administrative and political reconstruction to combat corruption and ensure a better economic distribution of resources. His intransigent interpretation of the presidency's constitutional prerogatives and use of the bully pulpit to give fiery moralistic sermons on political corruption, in the absence of a full Constitutional Court augmented his presidential

powers in ways his opponents were unable to counter.[87] Saied has frequently repeated his long-time frustration that the multiparty system, enshrined in the 2014 Constitution, perpetuates the bifurcation of Tunisian society between political and economic insiders (*haggara*) and outsiders (*mahgourin*) – a position that resonates with many Tunisians. This political-economic status quo, he believes, is in contravention of the spirit of the revolution captured in *al-sha'b yurīd*.

Saied has spoken in great length about the difference between legality (الشرعية) and legitimacy (المشروعية), where only legitimacy can beget legality. This goes a long way in explaining his understanding of his actions, as well as the core of his support-base, and increasingly many other citizens. For Saied, a rule, set of institutions, or even the Constitution might be legal, but to be legitimate it must be in the interest of the majority, and not merely a reflection of the privileged few. And though an instructor of constitutional law himself, he never believed the 2011-2014 NCA constitution drafting process was an open discussion. Explaining his refusal to join the NCA's constitution experts commission in 2013, is reported to have said: "I refuse to join this commission because it will only legitimate choices that have already been made." Though a radical position at the time, that way of seeing things had become the norm to many by July 25, Republic Day 2021. Perhaps this is because neither the NCA, nor the one and a half parliamentary sessions that followed were able to address three of the major priorities Tunisians want the democratic system to solve: transitional justice, fighting corruption and a more equitable, state-driven distribution of wealth.

Cognate to the word legitimacy, المشروعية, Saied's vision of governance is called المشروع, or 'the project' by his tight knit group of supporters. Best summed up in a June 2019 interview, Saied proposes bottom-up legislative governance, with a stratigraphy of councils from the local to the regional to the national level. Elections in the 265 local councils (currently governorate sub-districts) choose 10 members to lead each council, which is supported by observers from the local administration. Members of the 24 regional councils are chosen, by sortation, from each of the local councils, and are tasked at coordinating local council development proposals, to be voted on at the national assembly. That body, in turn, is composed of one member of each local council, who is elected at the council level, and is tasked with passing national legislation and fructifying locally requested development projects. Executive power would function within a presidential system, where the president is elected by popular vote, and is responsible for naming a government with a prime minister passed by the national assembly. Should the national assembly pass two votes of no confidence, the president must resign.

[87] Specifically, he has focused on wording and procedure. For example, Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh resigned following a parliamentary vote of censor, but prior to a formal vote of no confidence. Lacking a Constitutional Court to rule on the spirit of the law, Saeid claimed he, not the parliament, had the right to name the successor Prime Minister. When Mechichi fired replaced several Saied-allied ministers in January 2021, the president refused to swear in Mechichi's proposed replacements. While the constitution gives the Prime Minister the right to nominate and fire ministers, Saied argued, the constitution stipulates that they only come into function once sworn in by the president. Lacking a Constitutional Court, what might ordinarily be seen as decorum, was interpreted, by Saied, as constitutionally defined procedure

While clearly a system that would accumulate vast authority in the hands of the president, his project also proposes a bottom-up approach to economic development that takes local development concerns seriously. Local political decisions, not IFIs or elites, will control institutions and allocate state development monies, and collectively determine the contours of the national economy, including the highly political question of wealth redistribution and regional equity.

Conclusion

Saied is not the real threat or the bad guy interrupting a nice dream. He is the product of a decade of democratic transition that produced in fact a fragile "corrupt" democracy discrediting in a record time the "new elite" (now it is already "old"). It is unclear if he would be able to impose a process to introduce his dream of a political system, which seems to be his major *raison-d'etre* for a longtime legacy. He imposed in September 22 a de facto new small constitution with a simple presidential decree (No. 117), which would allow him to prepare the scene for a referendum amending the constitution in the sections relating to the political system. This plan does not have a timeline. He sidelined most of the elite in his steps since July 25 including not only all political parties opposing or supporting him, but also the mighty union UGTT, usually very much present in managing such political major junctures. In addition, he will bear solely the responsibility of running government affairs given the prerogatives he gave to himself in decree no. 117. This in time of major financial challenges when the budget deficit is more than 3 billion dollars until the end of this year. Such a gamble that is facing off the whole elite yet going through an economic storm alone would be surprisingly successful. The current popular support may well decrease in the coming months. The real problem is what would happen when a strong believer with a lot of prerogatives and powers would fail. Maybe there looms the real threat.

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POLITICAL MISTRUST AND THE ISLAMIST IMPASSE

By Rory McCarthy

What does the political crisis in Tunisia tell us about our explanations of Islamism in the decade since the 2011 uprisings? Tunisia's Islamist movement Ennahda was often considered exceptional compared to other Islamist organizations, moving earlier to prioritise inclusion in the political process and running a comparatively underdeveloped social welfare structure.[88] Ennahda made an unusually clear break between movement and party, declaring in 2016 that it would no longer conduct religious, cultural, and social outreach but instead specialize as a self-described party of 'Muslim democrats'. As Rached Ghannouchi, the organization's founder-leader, said at the time: 'We seek to create solutions to the day-to-day problems that Tunisians face rather than preach about the hereafter.'[89] Yet, the paradox of politicization is that this project of technocratic reinvention has failed on its own terms. Although restructuring itself as a programmatic, socially conservative, economically liberal political party, Ennahda has not delivered effective policy solutions to Tunisia's pressing socio-economic crisis and has suffered a dramatic slide in vote share. The Islamists are now widely perceived as most responsible for the failure of successive governments to meet the revolutionary demands of the uprising a decade ago.

The trajectory of Ennahda shows the diverse conditions under which Islamists can moderate their ideas and behaviour. The organization gave up its original ambition to install an Islamic state based on a totalizing conception of religion and politics and moved to an explicit adherence to participation in a pluralist, democratic system in a civil, not religious, state. At first, this moderation was the result not of political inclusion, but instead the 'double exclusion' of state repression and social rejection in the decades before the uprising.[90] Later, the effect of political inclusion after 2011 also pushed Ennahda into ideological and behavioural change, as anticipated by the literature.[91] The organization withdrew an early proposal to introduce the shariʿa as a fundamental source of legislation, cancelled attempts to criminalize blasphemy, and reversed a policy to ban senior figures from the old regime from contesting elections. This last decision reflected the intense pressure Ennahda experienced after the repression of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood following the coup of July 2013, but it also prefigured the current political crisis.

However, identifying the causes of moderation is not sufficient to explain how Ennahda reached its current impasse. More significant now are the effects of the particular path of moderation that the Islamist leadership has chosen. Over the past decade, Ennahda presented a political programme that was risk averse, thin on substance, and often

[88] Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le Syndrome Autoritaire: Politique En Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003).
[89] Rached Ghannouchi, 'From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia', *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (2016): 58–67.
[90] 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.
[91] Jillian Schwedler, 'Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis', *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (2011): 347–76.

indistinguishable from those of its rivals. Instead, under the leadership of Ghannouchi, the organization prioritised pragmatic, cross-ideological cooperation in order to remain in government. But political institutions became increasingly paralysed, unable to realize the essential elements of the new democracy, including the Constitutional Court, which remains unestablished, and redistributive reforms, which have been often promised but not delivered. Ghannouchi insisted this 'politics of consensus', as he called it, offered Ennahda the best protection against a return to marginalization and exclusion. Electorally this has not been a success. Ennahda has lost significant vote share during a period of electoral volatility, suggesting that though the Islamist advantage may apply in founding elections, it has a diminishing effect over time.[92] After winning 89 out of 217 seats in the assembly with 1.5m votes in the first elections in 2011, the party dropped to 52 seats and just over 500,000 votes in the most recent elections in 2019. Of course, Ennahda is not alone. Many other Tunisian parties have lost electoral support or disappeared from the political scene, and in Morocco, after several years of electoral success, the Islamist Party of Justice and Development has just suffered an even worse collapse in its share of the vote. However, Ghannouchi's consensual approach is significant for the deeper effect it had on the transition. Consensus politics may have avoided the dangers of political polarization, but it introduced a conservative bias, blocking progress toward further political, social, and economic reform. It promoted an impression of stability, widely lauded abroad, which obscured what was often a highly contested transition. Public trust in political parties and institutions fell significantly, and much recent work connects this popular disillusionment to a remarkable rise in new forms of protest.[93] Political mistrust also created an opportunity for the emergence of populist challengers, among them the architect of the July 2021 power grab, President Kais Saied.

Moderation has also had a significant consequence for Ennahda internally. We know that Islamist organizations are not monolithic, but there is more to explain about their internal differences. Recent work on Jordanian Islamists demonstrates how internal ideological disagreements can develop over many years.[94] Strategic differences can also emerge, particularly after severe repression, as in the case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.[95] For Ennahda, internal differences in strategy and identity have developed over how this new 'Muslim democratic' party should function and what policies it should pursue. The corollary of adhering to democratic norms in public is that Ennahda members are insisting that democratic processes must also be followed inside the organization. But just like secular parties, which have also been riven by factional splits, Ennahda has struggled to create

[92] Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, 'Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?', *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 187–206; Charles Kurzman and Didem Türkoğlu, 'Do Muslims Vote Islamic Now?', *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 100–109.

[93] For example: Prisca Jöst, 'Mobilization Without Organization: Grievances and Group Solidarity of the Unemployed in Tunisia', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2020): 265–83; Irene Weipert-Fenner, 'Unemployed Mobilisation in Times of Democratisation: The Union of Unemployed Graduates in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia', *The Journal of North African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2020): 53–75; Saerom Han, 'Transitional Justice for Whom? Contention over Human Rights and Justice in Tunisia', *Social Movement Studies*, 2021; Rory McCarthy, 'Transgressive Protest after a Democratic Transition: The Kamour Campaign in Tunisia', *Social Movement Studies*, 2021.

[94] Joas Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[95] Khalil Al-Anani, 'Rethinking the Repression-Dissent Nexus: Assessing Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood's Response to Repression since the Coup of 2013', *Democratization* 26, no. 8 (2019): 1329–41.

accountability in its hierarchical decision-making structures. Some within the organization opposed the decision to align with rival parties that had ties to former regime elites, arguing it would have been better to work towards socio-economic reform and more equal regional development from the opposition benches. Many were also frustrated with the leadership's decision to rewrite the party's candidate lists for the 2019 legislative elections, which sidelined some well-known Ennahda activists. Last year, dozens of Ennahda members signed a petition calling on Ghannouchi to stand down at the next party congress to make way for a new generation of leaders. They argued his monopoly of power was damaging Ennahda's credibility, provoking internal splits, and spreading public mistrust of parties. Several prominent figures have resigned in recent months and this September, 113 Ennahda members, including seven deputies in the current suspended parliament, quit in a high-profile open letter, accusing Ghannouchi of centralizing power and isolating the party on the political stage.

Under mounting pressure both externally and internally, Ennahda's leadership has promised a period of revision and self-critical 'evaluation' (*taqyīm*), a concept it has deployed in the past when facing internal dissent.[96] Ghannouchi continues to argue for dialogue and consensus as a priority, and in doing so, has reversed the organization's historic attitude towards the state. Islamists, including the Tunisians, once saw the state as a means through which to impose their moral order, not as an independent field of conflict resolution in itself.[97] But the implication of Ennahda's new practice as a party of government is that this orientation towards the state has entirely changed. Now it defends the state in its own right, issuing public statements calling for 'respect for the prestige of state institutions'.[98] Not only does this echo the 'state prestige' (*haybat al-dawla*) logic often employed by Ennahda's nationalist rivals and by authoritarians in the region, but here, as elsewhere, it also inadvertently reveals the fragility of the state at this time of crisis.[99] Tunisia's Ennahda has moved further than most other Islamist organizations through a process of moderation and politicization and it remains a key political actor today. But accounting for moderation can only be part of an explanatory analysis. What matters are the decisions and constraints that shape how this process is conducted and with what contingent effects. The particular path of moderation chosen by the Ennahda leadership has had a significant impact on the wider transitional process. Now the organization faces not just an internal dispute over accountable leadership, but the twin challenges of profound public mistrust and a new democratic regression.

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[96] Rory McCarthy, *Inside Tunisia's al-Nahda: Between Politics and Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[97] Roel Meijer, 'Islamism from Piety Politics to Party Politics', in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Politics and Ideology*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (London & New York: Routledge, 2021), 106–20.
[98] Harakat al-Nahda, 'Balāgh Iʿlāmī [Press Statement]', Facebook, 22 August 2021, https://www.facebook.com/Nahda.Tunisia/posts/4679954165362006; Salaheddine Jourchi, 'Ḥarakat al-Nahḍa fī qalb al-ʿāṣifa [The Nahda Movement in the Heart of the Storm]', *arabi21.com*, 24 August 2021, https://arabi21.com/story/1380499/حركة-النهضة-في-قلب-العاصفة.
[99] Rabab El-Mahdi, 'The Failure of the Regime or the Demise of the State?', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 2 (May 2018): 328–32.

TUNISIA: FAILURE OF THE POLITICAL CLASS, RISE OF KAIS SAIED, AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

By Bedirhan Mutlu and Salih Yasun

Tunisian President Kais Saied's July 25th decisions to dissolve Parliament and declare a state of emergency came as a shock to many. However, he was fulfilling a promise he had made on the campaign trail: to shake up the political class. Saied's landslide election victory in October 2019, as well as Tunisians' broad support[100] for the July 25th "exceptional measures", were both a result of widespread frustration with the inability of politicians to salvage the economy and extinguish the endemic corruption.

As an outsider, Saied ran a populist campaign with a modest budget,[101] a slogan of *al-shabab yuriyd* (the people want), and a promise to end widespread corruption. His followers described themselves as the "machine" *(ahna el-makina),* a reference to their outsider status to the political scene.[102] Saied envisioned an alternative political system from the existing constitutional order, one in which the president continues to be elected through a popular mandate but legislative elections are replaced by a chain of representation to achieve direct democracy.[103] Elections would take place at the lowest administrative units (*imāda)* for single posts rather than lists. Among those elected officials, representatives would be selected through a lottery to the upper units, including the parliament. His plan, visible to some extent in the recent Presidential Decree,[104] leaves little room for parties and consolidates at least a portion of legislative authority within the presidency.

We argue that Saied's approach will face substantive limitations because Tunisia's problems are structural and changing the regime type will not necessarily provide solutions to them. To understand the conditions that led to Saied's election and his decisions on July 25th, we first focus on what went wrong with parties in Tunisia. Then, we show why Saied's power consolidation risks increasing unaccountability and corruption due to Tunisia's institutional heritage. We conclude that for the country to move forward, a more robust party system is needed that can initiate a comprehensive dialogue to solve the pressing issues among a

[100] "Sondage Emrhod - 87% des Tunisiens approuvent les décisions de Kaïs Saïed," *Business News*, accessed September 24, 2021, https://www.businessnews.com.tn/sondage-emrhod-87-des-tunisiens-approuvent-les-decisions-de-kais-saied,520,110629,3.
[101] Nizar Bahloul, *Kais Ier President d'un bateau ivre,* (Ariana:Edito Editions, 2020), 24.
[102] Ibid, 27.
[103] Qais Saied, "Alcharaa al-Magharibi tanshiru hiwar Qais Saied kamilan" (Acharaa al-Magharibi publishes Qais Saied's full interview), *Acharaa al-Magharibi*, June 12, 2019, https://acharaa.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85/.
[104] "Le texte intégral du décret présidentiel N° n° 2021-117 du 22 septembre 2021, relatif aux mesures exceptionnelles," *Leaders*, September 22, 2021, https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/32442-officiel-le-texte-integral-du-decret-presidentiel-n-n-2021-117-du-22-septembre-2021-relatif-aux-mesures-exceptionnelles.

diverse set of actors including but not limited to the President, political parties, and civil society.

In Tunisia's experience, a hegemonic party structure dominated the country under former Presidents Habib Bourguiba and Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Since the revolution, many opposition groups have refrained from self-labeling as "parties,"[105] instead opting for terms such as "Congress," "Movement," or "Forum" with the exception of regime-successor parties, such as "The Independent Constitutional Party." Despite avoiding the word "party" for its association with hegemony, parties have, since the revolution, increasingly represented "cartel organizations"[106] that employ state resources to ensure their own survival.[107] By the same token, the developments since the revolution have been famously described as "the democratization of corruption."[108] Parties have also suffered from the "iron law of oligarchy": a leadership class that dominates the party at the expense of their constituents' concerns.[109] The umbrella party Nidaa Tounes collapsed in part due to the attempts of late President Essebsi to insert his son to power while internal criticism has grown unchecked within the Islamist Ennahda, as its leader Rached Ghannouchi postponed the 11th General Congress, which according to party by-laws should have put an end to his tenure.[110]

The ruling coalitions of the Troika (2011-2014) and National Unity (2014-2019) governments were unable to solve the economic challenges which constitute the most salient issues for many Tunisians.[111] The parties have engaged in economic position blurring,[112] failing to represent the interests of different regions or economic classes and instead focusing on cultural issues.[113] Civil society and unions have, in part, taken on the role of defending the interests of many Tunisians, while providing an alternative way for them to get involved with public life.[114] Due to these factors, the party structures could not institutionalize,[115] paving the way for Saied and the outsiders to contest their dominance.

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[105] Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le Syndrome Autoritaire : Politique En Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003), 227.
[106] Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: the Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics*, 1, no 1. (1995), 5-28.
[107] Sharan Grewal and Shadi Hamid.. The Dark Side of Consensus in Tunisia: Lessons from 2015-2019. *Brookings Report,* (January, 2020)*, available at https://www. brookings. edu/research/the-darkside-of-consensus-in-tunisia-lessons-from-2015-2019*.
[108] Sarah Yerkes and Marwan Muasher. *Tunisia's Corruption Contagion: A Transition at Risk.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 25 (2017). 1-40. https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/25/tunisia-s-corruption-contagion-transition-at-risk-pub-73522
[109] Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy (New Brunswick (N.J) London: Transaction publ., 1999), first published in 1911.
[110] "Des Dirigeants d'Ennahdha Appellent à La Tenue Du 11e Congrès Du Parti Avant Fin 2020," *Web Manager Center*, May 26, 2020, https://www.webmanagercenter.com/2020/05/26/451000/des-dirigeants-dennahdha-appelle-a-limperatif-du-11e-congres-du-parti-avant-la-fin-de-lannee-2020/.
[111] "Arab Barometer Wave V." Dataset, 2019. https://www.arabbarometer.org/surveys/arab-barometer-wave-v/.
[112] Rovny, Jan. "Where Do Radical Right Parties Stand? Position Blurring in Multidimensional Competition." *European Political Science Review* 5, no. 1 (2013): 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773911000282.
[113] Yasun, S. Attitudes on Family Law as an Electoral Cleavage: Survey Evidence from Tunisia. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 12, no. 2 (2020): 131-166.
[114] Personal communications with young civil society activists in Tunisia in 2021.
[115] Dix, R. H. (1992). Democratization and the institutionalization of Latin American political parties. *Comparative Political Studies*, *24*(4), 488-511.

Since July 25th, Saied has consolidated power in his own hands as he has attempted to deliver on the matters at which ruling parties have been unsuccessful. He has managed to reduce pandemic-related deaths, in part thanks to the donations provided by other countries, and has taken some steps on the economic front, such as initiating a cooperation with the Union of Retail Stores to cut the prices for some products.[116] However, this initiative was not sufficient to curb inflation, particularly in food prices.[117] Similarly, an emboldened judiciary has begun going after politicians suspected of engaging in corruption, including MPs suspected of smuggling,[118] money laundering and tax evasion,[119] and misusing state projects.[120] Saied has also replaced some governors[121] and other high-level state officials, a task traditionally undertaken by cabinets.

Consolidating power comes with two main promises: stability and greater capacity to solve structural problems. It can enable a more targeted approach towards key issues and enrich the confidence of investors. However, it does not provide a panacea to all problems and can have grave repercussions. In the case of Tunisia, a late-industrialized country, trade deficits and large public debts limit the capacity for domestic spending and welfare distribution. This situation is exacerbated by high barriers of entry[122] to the market for domestic entrepreneurs, the prevalence of veto players and corruption,[123] and the unwavering inflation, which is partly imported through the exchange rate.[124] Furthermore, top-down, distributive and mostly unaccountable institutional heritage influenced the workings of

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[116] "Réduction des prix de plusieurs produits," *La Presse de Tunisie*, August 1, 2021, https://lapresse.tn/105040/reduction-des-prix-de-plusieurs-produits/.

[117] "Taraju' nisbat al-tadhakhum fi tunis khilal shahr 'ut" [Inflation rate in Tunisia declined in August], *Mosaique FM*, September 5, 2021, https://www.mosaiquefm.net/ar/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3/953887/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%AE%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%AA.

[118] "Naqabat Al-Diwana: Akbar Muharrib Fi Kasserine Asbaha Na'iban," [Customs Syndicate: The Biggest Smuggler in Kasserine Became an MP] *Babnet*, October 9, 2019, https://www.babnet.net/rttdetail-190658.asp.

[119] "Tunisian Party Leader Fined $7 Million for Customs Violations," *The Arab Weekly*, April 16, 2021, http://thearabweekly.com/tunisian-party-leader-fined-7-million-customs-violations.

[120] "Al-Qabd 'ala al-na'ib 'an hizb 'Tahya Tounes' Lotfi Ali" [The arrest of the deputy of the 'Tahya Tounes' party, Lotfi Ali], *al-Araby al-Jadid*, August 21, 2021, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%22%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3%22-%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A.

[121] Mohammed Yahya Ahmed Mohammed, "Tunisie: Kaïs Saïed Démet de Leurs Fonctions Trois Gouverneurs," *Anadolu Agency*, August 6, 2021, https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/politique/tunisie-kaïs-saïed-démet-de-leurs-fonctions-trois-gouverneurs/2326257.

[122] Hanan Morsy, Bassem Kamar, and Rafik Selim, "Tunisia Diagnostic Paper: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Unlocking the Private Sector's Potential and Developing a Sustainable Market Economy" (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, November 2018). *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.* (November, 2018). https://www.ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/tunisia.pdf?blobnocache=true

[123] Tunisia's Corruption Contagion.

[124] Ghrissi Mhamdi, "Determinants of Inflation in Tunisia: Using Structural Modeling," *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2013).

many institutions, such as the bureaucracy,[125] private sector, unions and even security forces.

So far, Saied has not laid down any clear plans to tackle these structural issues. His popular anti-corruption initiative risks losing steam over time, as the Institute to Fight Against Corruption (INLUCC) was closed after July 25th. Moreover, consolidating power in a single leader can embolden some corrupt practices, as large corporations can more easily reach deals with the central authorities without the need to convince multiple sources of power. This also relates to a central paradox in Saied's model, which assumes that the "general will" as represented by the President overlaps with the interests of individuals. A manifest example of this paradox occurred with Saied's call[126] to increase phosphate production, which contradicted the decades-long activism of environmental groups. Similarly, when Saied attempted to reduce the market prices, he solicited the support of the Union of Retail Stores, a near-monopoly organization, illustrating the limitations in his approach as he relied on the same institutions that he is said to be going after.

Political parties can tackle multifaceted matters[127] through representing divergent interests,[128] making it possible to reach compromises on issues that may not be permissible through the other governance methods. In Tunisia parties have facilitated compromise,[129] most notably in the period between 2011 and 2014. In the 2014 elections a voting cleavage between regions was also visible. Ennahda came strong in the South, and Nidaa came strong in the North and the West. This was an opportunity to stabilize the party competition around issues that mattered for Tunisians. However, the coming consensus governments left no room for a viable opposition in the parliament that could hold the governing party accountable and provide alternative solutions.[130]

Almost all parties, including those which had initially supported Saied's decisions, are now opposing the Presidential Decree 117 of September 22nd which gives the President full legislative and executive powers without any checks and balances. Although these measures

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[125] Salih Yasun. Bureaucrat-Local Politician Linkages and Hierarchical Local Governance in Emerging Democracies: A Case Study of Tunisia. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*. Forthcoming.

[126] Kais Saied: Tunis satasta'id mukanatha wa lan takun laqma sa'ifa [Kais Saied: Tunisia will regain its position and will not be up for grabs]. *Independent Arabic.* August 9th, 2021. *https://www.independentarabia.com/node/248961/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%82%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%BA%D8%A9*

[127] Aldrich, John Herbert. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. American Politics and Political Economy Series. (Chicago: London The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[128] S. C. Stokes, "Political Parties and Democracy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (June 1999): 243–67, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.243..

[129] Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," Journal of Democracy 23, no. 2 (2012): 89–103, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2012.0034.

[130] Frances Mccall Rosenbluth and Ian Shapiro, "Empower Political Parties to Revive Democratic Accountability," *The American Interest*, October 2, 2018, sec. Essays, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/10/02/empower-political-parties-to-revive-democratic-accountability/.

were announced as temporary and a new commission is supposed to work on reforming the political system, it remains unclear whether Saied will push for his plan for a hybrid between "direct democracy" and presidentialism or settle for a "compromise" that would maintain a role for the political parties. As a recent poll indicates,[131] there is no guarantee that a majority will support a presidential system.

We believe that Saied's decisions have not only put the future of democracy in Tunisian in peril, but also will not provide a remedy to Tunisia's pressing problems. Instead, we recommend a new process of national dialogue that will include all actors to initiate a durable agenda. "Consensus" in Tunisia sometimes means avoiding hard-to-tackle problems[132] and normalizing corruption. We agree that ending corruption and enhancing the judicial capacity are pre-conditions for a viable compromise. These goals can be achieved through establishing a Constitutional Court, strengthening judiciary and setting new conditions on the parliamentary immunities without fully consolidating the power in the president's hands.

Parties can have positive roles to play for Tunisia in tandem with other organizations such as unions, civil society, and the presidency if they change their governance approach. Rather than converging around "consensus" programs that fail to solve Tunisia's binding issues, they should strengthen the dynamics of platform-based opposition. The party leadership should be more open to challenges and innovations through internal democracy mechanisms, including representing the bottom-up demands. Similarly, parties should be more mindful of polarization and strive to make the democratic system more accessible for the youth.[133] We recognize that our suggestions do not provide a magic solution to end the prevalence of corruption and other economic challenges. However, they can provide a basis for a viable and robust governance structure. The diversity of and competition among different interests in Tunisia, coupled with its institutional heritage, require an approach based on humility and compromise that would involve actors representing diverse interests.

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[131] Alqatiba, Facebook, August 4th, 2021 https://www.facebook.com/alqatiba/photos/pcb.3751427101628813/3751503591621164

[132] Nadia Marzouki, "Tunisia's Rotten Compromise" (Middle East Research and Information Project, July 11, 2015), https://merip.org/2015/07/tunisias-rotten-compromise/.

[133] Sarah Anne Rennick, "Has Tunisia's Democracy Failed to Convince Its Youth? The Slow-Going of Democratic Socialization," Bawader (Arab Reform Initiative, August 24, 2021).

FAST AND SLOW POLITICS – SOME OBSERVATIONS ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, EXPECTATIONS, DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND PITFALLS IN TUNISIA'S TRANSITION

By Mariam Salehi

Dates, durations, and deadlines, questions about when things are done or when they happen: time has political value and is essential to political processes.[134] The critique of assumed linear temporalities in peace and transition processes has become increasingly popular in scholarship. Looking at current events in Tunisia through the lens of conflicting temporalities, with a focus on the transitional justice process, can help us make sense of the hopes/expectations, pitfalls, and disappointments that have been shaping the current situation.

In the direct aftermath of Kais Saied seizing power at the end of July 2021, many commentators talked about an 'Egypt moment', drawing parallels between the coup of 2013 and the 'failure' of Tunisian democracy. Thus, we could observe "*temporal Othering"*[135], as the developments in Tunisia as "currently strange phenomena"[136] were linked to events with a known endpoint to make them more intelligible and, potentially, "more amenable to […] intervention." Such temporal Othering, however, neglects the very different temporalities in Tunisia, not only with regard to political developments over the last ten years that may make the situation different to the one in Egypt, but also with regard to conflicting temporalities that may have shaped the Tunisian transition and its struggles and conflicts.

We can observe the political value of time beyond observers' tropes. This essay will zoom in on two issues: first, it will outline the initially existing but then lost sense of urgency with regard to dismantling old and creating new structures, leading to or resulting from conflicting temporalities. Second, it will discuss the tension resulting from fast and slow approaches towards reparations, looking at (fast) ad hoc measures, the (slow) planned reparations process that should integrate and 'offset' ad hoc measures, and the political struggles that have led to further delays.

Urgency and thoroughness: Fast and slow politics in transition

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, Tunisia very quickly started developing a 'new political architecture'[137] and dealing with its repressive past. While the first transitional justice measures were ad hoc and scattered, subsequent explorations for a more structured transitional justice project that would be "strategic and viable" [138] took place in a very timely

[134] Elizabeth Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), https://books.google.de/books?id=PoJIDwAAQBAJ. (p. 7)
[135] Andrew Hom, Angst springs eternal: Dangerous times and the dangers of timing the 'Arab Spring', Security Dialogue (2016), p. 173 italics in the original.
[136] Ibid. p. 173
[137] Term used by ministerial staff member in an interview, Tunis, March 2015
[138] Personal interview with Tunisian law professor, Tunis, October

manner. These explorations led to the development of an ambitious, comprehensive, transitional justice project, regulated in a transitional justice law that passed in December 2013. Transitional justice was also fixed in the 2014 constitution.[139]

The transitional justice project had both backward and forward-looking tasks. It should not only establish a historical record about violence, marginalization, and repressive rule, but also form the basis for vetting and reforming institutions and state structures, for example the judiciary, the administration or the security sector, as well as other crucial areas, such as the media.[140] It was therefore supposed to influence who could keep and gain positions of power and to contribute to the dismantling of structures and networks that were pillars of authoritarian rule.

Notwithstanding the timeliness of both ad hoc measures and the initiation of a more structured transitional justice project, several of my interview partners perceived transitional justice as 'delayed' in Tunisia.[141] Thus, on the one hand one could observe a decoupling of the ad hoc measures from what became to be perceived as 'transitional justice' in Tunisia:[142] the ad hoc measures were perceived as 'messy'[143], contributing to conflict rather than helping to bring about justice. 'Proper' transitional justice was only to start with the structured project codified in the transitional justice law.[144] On the other hand, the thoroughly planned transitional justice process was perceived to be slow[145] and to take too much time, so that those who should have been vetted and whose power structures should have been dismantled "gained time"[146] and the momentum for the plans to actually come into effect would be missed. Once the sense of urgency that initially drove the transitional justice process[147] faded, the harder it would become to actually implement reforms.

According to some of my interview partners, the sense of urgency for transitional justice faded with the 2013 National Dialogue, an acute conflict-resolution forum, that brought the stalled constitution-making process back on track.[148] While the National Dialogue fostered understanding between adversary political factions[149], it also paved the way for a return of the 'old regime' into politics, and as a result, vetting and reforms lost their urgency. An expectation for social closure[150] developed.[151] However, temporalities have been conflicting,

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[139] Article 148, 9
[140] Article 43, TJ law
[141] Personal interviews with NCA members, civil society representatives, (former) government/state institution
representatives, academics.
[142] Mariam Salehi, 2019, "Droits de l'homme, bien sûr": human rights and transitional justice in Tunisia, in:
[143] Personal interview with transitional justice professional, Tunis, May 2014.
[144] Personal interview with member of the National Constituent Assembly, Tunis, April 2014
[145] Personal interviews with for example truth commissioner and ARP member, Tunis, March 2015.
[146] Personal interview with with labour and human rights activist, Tunis, October 2015.
[147] Personal interview with head of Tunisian branch of international human rights NGO, Tunis, March 2015
[148] Personal interviews, for example with Tunisian transitional justice professional, Tunis, May 2014
[149] Tereza Jermanová, "From Mistrust to Understanding: Inclusive Constitution-Making Design and Agreement in Tunisia," *Political Research Quarterly* (2020) (accessed September 27, 2021).
[150] Mueller-Hirth, Natascha. "Temporalities of victimhood: Time in the study of postconflict societies." In Sociological Forum, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 186-206. 2017.
[151] Personal interview with former government minister, Tunis, October 2015

since simultaneously, the 'slow' transitional justice project progressed because it was anchored in the constitution.

Looking at recent events, the failure to establish the constitutional court, which is crucial for enabling Saied to grab power in the way he did, is another example for this tension between fast and slow politics, between urgency and thoroughness in procedure. Rather than urgently being nominated by, for example, the National Constituent Assembly, the establishment of the constitutional court first required the establishment of the supreme judicial council, which alongside parliament and the president would have the competence to nominate judges.[152] However, the establishment of the council only happened after the deadline for establishing the constitutional court so that the momentum to secure the establishment of this safeguarding institution was missed.

Reparations: politics of rashness, politics of waiting?

Another area in which we can observe the political value of time, and potentially conflicting temporalities, is reparations. Reparation and compensation measures were part of the ad hoc measures that were introduced very quickly after the revolution in a rather unstructured manner. They were one of the measures that were described to me as rushed and 'messy' and therefore as potentially fostering conflict because it was hard to comprehend who would get what and why.[153] The slow, thoroughly planned transitional justice project, therefore, was supposed to develop a more 'just' approach to reparations that would somehow account for – and off-set – the previous fast measures.[154] However, following the procedures within the work of the Tunisian Truth and Dignity Commission, which should have been the basis for determining eligibility for reparations, took a long time. Thus, at the end of the Truth and Dignity Commissions mandate, there was a rush to send out reparation decisions, leaving potential recipients without any idea of when they might actually be able to access what they have been promised.[155] As Natascha Mueller-Hirth notes: "To delay reparations for an uncertain time contributes to senses of continuity with the past, which transitional justice precisely seeks to disrupt."[156] Again, fast and slow politics are at tension, because neither approach seems suitable for evoking a sense of justice.

Concluding remarks

Single deadlines appear somewhat arbitrary, they don't allow for nuance and "for the fact that time […] is not static."[157] For example, cut-off dates that determine who may be eligible for reparations do not leave room for the ongoingness of grievances. Looking again at current events in Tunisia, it is important to recognize that those who fought for change ten years ago may not be the same as those who protest now – although grievances or justice problems may be very similar. Whether someone is eligible for reparations, for example, may therefore

[152] Constitution Art. 118 https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf
[153] Personal interviews with transitional justice professional and with politician, May 2014.
[154] Personal interview with truth commission members, Tunis, March 2015.
[155] Phone interview, transitional justice professional, May 2020.
[156] Natascha Mueller-Hirth. "Reparations and the politics of waiting in Kenya." Journal of Eastern African Studies 15, no. 3 (2021): 464-484.
[157] Cohen, p.55

appear to be somewhat arbitrary and less related to their grievances or what potential marginalization or violations they have suffered (or are still suffering), and more to how time matters.

In Tunisia, it has been hard for transitional justice- both fast and slow – to meet hopes and expectations and create a sense of justice. Fast transitional justice measures were at times perceived as 'messy' not well thought through and therefore unjust, while slow transitional justice measures bore the danger of missing the momentum for initiating change. While these tensions between fast and slow politics may be hard to resolve, recognizing them, as well as their ongoingness, may help us to better understand why it has been so hard to do the right things at the right time in Tunisia's transitional politics.

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QUOTIDIAN INDIGNITIES: THE STRUGGLE FOR SPACE IN THE POST-REVOLUTION CITY

By Lana Salman

Figure 1: The corner of Salwa's house in Ariana, photo by author, July 8, 2021

On July 27, 2021, two days after President Kais Saied dismissed the prime minister and suspended the activities of parliament, western journalists surmised that "Maybe Tunisians never wanted democracy." More useful than making such a declaration is to question how Tunisians are living the democratic promise as a claim for public services, functioning institutions, and honest politicians. In this essay, I suggest that redirecting our attention away from procedural understandings of democracy towards the quotidian indignities that permeate marginalized citizens' everyday lives, enables us to question what democracy means in terms of the rearrangement of material and social relations of urban space. I focus on a recent anti-eviction battle in the municipality of Ariana in metropolitan Tunis to show how poor dwellers struggle to carve out livable spaces for themselves and their families in cities that violently exclude them.

The eviction case of khala Meherzia and her family

She stacked the cardboard boxes at the corner of a plastic crate turned upside down to make a seat where she could rest her body and smoke her morning cigarettes in peace (figure 1). The flimsy cardboard structure separated her corner from the bustle of the street – a thin layer of privacy to shield against the indignities of yet another day of homelessness.

Salwa[158] sat in the corner, in front of her house, every morning from 4am until 11pm, retreating from the street corner only to shower and sleep for a few hours at her sister's

[158] I use a pseudonym to protect the identity of my interlocutor.

house. A few weeks earlier she, her 76-year-old mother khala Meherzia, another one of her sisters, and her two adult sons were evicted from their house in the center of Ariana where the family had been living for the past sixty years.[159] Activists invested in building a right to the city movement took turns joining Salwa and her family every day in June and July 2021 to advocate for their right to housing. I participated in the group's activities for early morning sit-ins (6-10am) in front of Salwa's house.

My morning routine consisted of purchasing coffee and water across the street and joining Salwa behind the cardboard structure. We sat together watching the slowly unfolding activity of Sidi Ammar's street-market where itinerant vendors were claiming their spots and unloading the fruits and vegetables of the day's sale.[160] One morning, I asked Salwa about the hardest thing she experienced since being evicted. I had a few answers in mind: police brutality, the lack of neighborly solidarity, or the callousness of local government authorities. Her answer was more straightforward, and more complex. "To be homeless" (*ma 'andeesh dar*) she told me.

The struggle for a space in the city

Salwa's attempt to reconstruct a modicum of privacy on the street corner where she was turned homeless among her neighbors translates a desire to be seen and heard, while also preserving her dignity. In this delicate balance between a struggle for visibility[161] and the preservation of one's dignity,[162] marginalized Tunisians negotiate quotidian injustices in cities that violently exclude them. Refusing to vacate the street corner of the house she was evicted from, even when threatened by the police, Salwa's homeless body became "the site that brings together 'the structural and the political violence of the state.'"[163] She was aware that if she and her family were to be displaced to a distant popular neighborhood in the peripheries, she would lose access to the popular economy that sustains her and her family. So, she held on to her space in the city by camping in front of her house. Her eviction case gestures at the politics of housing, in particular housing destined for lower income groups.

The politicization of the housing question predates the 2011 revolution. Successive regimes have instrumentalized housing for multiple objectives: attaining political legitimacy, pacifying dissidents, and deepening clientelistic networks. As the state disengaged from

[159] Unlike evictions in the US, banks are not the institutions evicting people in Tunisia, but rather private persons or investors who purchase usually delapidated property, or estates with complicated underlying claims to ownership, both of whihc apply in this case. Aida Delpuech, "Reportage | 'Nous Vivions Ici Depuis plus de 60 Ans' : À l'Ariana, Une Famille Lutte Pour Son Droit Au Logement," accessed September 22, 2021, https://inkyfada.com/fr/2021/06/08/expulsion-famille-ariana-droit-logement-tunisie/.
[160] Ariana is a middle-class municipality of metropolitan Tunis. For the municipality, the Sidi Ammar popular street-market, located in Ariana's oldest neighborhood, is a nuisance that prevents it from maintaining a 'clean city'.
[161] Ulrike Lune Riboni, "Filmer et rendre visible les quartiers populaires dans la Tunisie en révolution," *Sciences de la société*, no. 94 (October 1, 2015): 121–36.
[162] Nadia Marzouki, "The Call for Dignity, or a Particular Universalism," *Middle East Law and Governance* 3, no. 1–2 (March 25, 2011): 148–58.
[163] Didier Fassin cited Banu Bargu, "Why Did Bouazizi Burn Himself? The Politics of Fate and Fatal Politics," *Constellations* 23, no. 1 (2016): 27–36.

housing provision in the 1980s, it invested heavily in urban upgrading programs[164] meant to provide basic infrastructure in already consolidated popular neighborhoods.[165] Mixing coercion and cooption, in each neighborhood undergoing upgrading, a new party cell, a delegation, and a police station were also added.[166] Thus, infrastructure provision in these neighborhoods reinforced the authoritarian state's territorial control over dissident spaces.[167] Rather than a right, housing was mobilized by various governments for political gain.

With its rise to power in 2011, the Islamist party Ennahda recentered the housing question, adding to urban upgrading programs the promise of delivering 30,000 housing units in three years.[168] In 2012, the party launched a government program called the Specific Program for Social Housing (PSLS). By 2014, 230,000 applicants submitted requests for housing units. The PSLS implementation was extended from a period of ten years in order to select beneficiaries and organize the modalities of provision. To date, only 8,400 of these units have been completed. Financed by the Qatari government, and the Saoudi investment fund,[169] the PSLS shows what regional alliances are mobilized to satisfy housing demand. Housing is thus an instrument of power that operates at multiple scales: from the micropolitics of quotidian indignities, to national policies with geopolitical reach, to the encounters with local governments to which I now turn.

The municipality's response

Elected municipal councils – primed to address such inequalities through sophisticated procedures of participation – peddle instead a humiliating discourse of cultural and political awareness that adds insult to injury. The municipality's response to Salwa's eviction case is an opportunity to examine the traction of participatory procedures in place since 2014.[170] When Salwa and her niece met with the mayor, he discussed his many accomplishments in Ariana, for example a classic music festival open to all of the city's residents, including people "like them". According to Salwa's niece, his discourse about bringing leisurely activities to the city was meant, in part, to debase the vital aspect of their demands; only unsophisticated beings would be so basic as to demand a roof to shelter them. Refined citizens, on the other hand, appreciated the city's cultural life that he made possible. The municipality's response

[164] Hend Ben Othman and Sami Yassine Turki, "L'accès au logement en Tunisie 1970-2020. Évolution des politiques et renouvellement des modalités de régulation," *NAQD* N° 38-39, no. 1 (2020): 121–40.
[165] Morched Chabbi, "Politiques Urbaines et Réhabilitation En Tunisie. Le Cas Du Grand Tunis (1960-2007)," in *Habitat Social Au Maghreb et Au Sénégal, Gouvernance Urbaine et Participation En Questions*, ed. Aziz Iraki and Julien Le Tellier, Coll. Habitat et Sociétés (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).
[166] Ali Rebhi, "Dynamique urbaine non-réglementaire et gouvernance locale à Kairouan," *Insaniyat / إنسانيات Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales*, no. 38 (December 31, 2007): 11–28.
[167] Olivier Legros, "Le gouvernement des quartiers populaires. Production de l'espace et régulation politique dans les quartiers non réglementaires de Dakar (Sénégal) et de Tunis (Tunisie)" (phdthesis, Université François Rabelais - Tours, 2003).
[168] Othman and Turki, " L'accès au logement en Tunisie 1970-2020. Évolution des politiques et renouvellement des modalités de régulation »."
[169] Ibid; Ali Bennasr and Sami Ben Fguira, "Regards sur les mutations du logement social dans les politiques d'habitat en Tunisie," *NAQD* N° 38-39, no. 1 (2020): 33–50.
[170] Lana Salman, "Spaces of Expectation: Local Politics in Post-Revolution Tunisia" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2020).

to collective pressure from the group of activists who mobilized against this eviction case was similarly mediocre. On June 8, 2021, I joined the protest march the group organized. When we arrived in front of the municipality, the large wooden doors were sealed shut. Instead of using participatory mechanisms to create opportunities for dialogue, municipal staff members went into hiding; those who wanted to access to the building were asked to use the back door. This a representative elected body, a democratic authority, who hides from its own constituents.

Behind a discourse about civility, and in the absence of effective participation, the municipality was playing powerless. When pressed for a solution, the mayor offered to pay the family two months' rent, after which they would have to fend for themselves. He could do nothing else for them. As he explained, his responsiveness to their case would open the floodgates for claims about precarious housing situations that the municipality could not possibly handle. The solution then was simply to create the conditions under which marginalized families like Salwa's are forced out of urban cores into distant peripheries where they have no other solution but to build their own shelter. Rather than displacement, this process is one of "banishment [a state project] entangled with processes of regulation, segregation and expropriation,"[171] which become evident when one traces the political connections underlying this eviction case.

The appeal of a different local

Whose territories are popular neighborhoods? Who exerts power in these spaces and who garners political allegiance? The man who purchased the house from which Salwa and her family were evicted is a businessman, former RCDist (member of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally), and currently member of Tahya Tunis, the party of former prime minister Youssef Chahed. Activating his networks in the municipality, he weaponized the law[172] to sway the local government's eviction decision in his favor. Ariana's municipal council is considered progressive; the city's mayor is a former academic.[173] But the political leanings of the municipal council are irrelevant in this case. Instead, powerful party affiliated businessmen lock in the administrative decisions of the bureaucracy (*idara*) who rules against the interests of the poor. Contrary to prevalent opinions about popular neighborhoods as strongholds of Ennahda, I want to suggest that these spaces are not easily monopolized by a single party. Instead, their marginalization is exploited circumstantially by various parties for political gain.

Unsurprisingly, there is among inhabitants of popular neighborhoods a deep disillusion with representative democracy, one that makes President Kais Saied's vision of direct democracy appealing. Permeating my discussions in these spaces is the sense that elections are a joke: politicians show up only around election times with money, food, and some promises only

[171] Ananya Roy, "Racial Banishment," in *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2019), 227–30.
[172] Yassine Nabli, "ليس للفقراء حقٌّ في المدينة," *Legal Agenda* (blog), June 28, 2021, https://legal-agenda.com/ليس-للفقراء-حقٌّ-في-المدينة/.
[173] A list of independent candidates, members of a center-left coalition of parties, garnered 38.18% of the votes in the 2018 municipal elections, followed by 16.5% for the now dissolved party of Nidaa Tounes, and 13.99% for Ennahdha. http://www.isie.tn/elections/elections-municipales-2018/resultats/

to disappear soon after they win their seats. The emphasis on the lack of familiarity with those representing you, the feeling that you share nothing with them, that their life looks nothing like yours, is a strong dimension of local political legitimacy. I emphasize the local here to connect these feelings about representative democracy with the ways in which supporters of Saied perceive his vision of direct democracy. Those who adhere to this project believe it to be one cure for people's estrangement from and lack of trust in their political representatives. Here is how one activist, asked in 2016 why he does not join a party and run for local elections, explained it:

"I believe in and adhere to a pyramidal structure of power that does not require you to join a party; it asks that you focus on your own neighborhood. The election law that would support such an organization of power would rest on the election of representatives at the smallest possible spatial scale—not on the basis of the electoral lists of political parties. So, you would no longer vote based on partisan politics, but based on the integrity of particular people who are your neighbors. Your neighbor can't possibly promise that he will create 500 new jobs. You know him [sic] —he is your neighbor, and you know what he can and can't do…. If you had a new local governments law that prioritized local representation over the national parties, you could prevent all the chicanery, all the false promises."[174]

Conclusion

In post-revolution Tunisia, poor people's struggles for space in cities that exclude them affects local politics. In popular neighborhoods, the perceptions and relations of inhabitants with 'the state' takes shape in the crucible of encounters with municipalities and the police. 'Democratic transitions' evolve in the intimacy of this micropolitics too – in negotiations about shelter and livelihoods, in daily affronts to poor people's personhood, and in embodied encounters with authority. Rather than procedural dimensions of democracy, scholars should turn their attention to the city, to physical and material rearrangements of space and their democratic potential. When scholarly inquiry is anchored in these spatial practices and everyday experiences, the popularity and appeal of Saied's revisionist project of direct democracy become apparent.

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[174] Laryssa Chomiak and Lana Salman, "Refusing to Forgive | Middle East Research and Information Project," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Activism, 46, no. MER281 (Winter 2016).