

# **Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood Democratic Changes to Islamist Groups**

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*Jack Bergum*

## **Abstract**

Despite a promising start, the Arab Spring of 2011 has resulted in the creation of only one democracy: Tunisia. In Tunisia, an Islamist party called Ennahda has greatly aided this successful democratic transition. This paper aims to examine Ennahda's role in helping Tunisia to become a democracy. In order to complete this examination, this paper compares Ennahda's actions following the removal of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali with the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood, an illustrious Islamist group, following the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Also inspecting a variety of other potential democratizing factors in both Tunisia and Egypt, including socioeconomic development, civil society and political culture, the paper ultimately concludes that unique circumstances in Tunisia have shaped Ennahda into a party that is truly committed to democracy. Constrained by the political and cultural norms in Tunisia, Ennahda has proven to be an integral part of Tunisia's fledgling democratic experiment.

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## **Introduction**

With 2014 marking the first time that a ruling party democratically ceded power in Tunisian history, Tunisia can be solidly categorized as democratic four years after the Jasmine Revolution. Although certainly flawed and facing a number of serious challenges ahead, the democratic institutions established following the ouster of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali have thus far remained effective. The beginning of a wave of revolutions, collectively termed the Arab Spring, Tunisia's revolution is the only one to have actually succeeded in initiating democratic change, making it the object of intense examination by scholars interested in determining what distinguished Tunisia from its peers. Other Arab states affected by the revolutionary fervor of 2011 have either seen minimal changes to their governance, reverted back to something resembling strongman rule or devolved into intractable conflicts. Tunisia's success in democratizing comes from a variety of reasons. Pegged by scholars as a potentially likely candidate for democracy, Tunisia possesses a relatively high level of socioeconomic development (as well as associated benefits) and an ethnically homogenous population—both factors that increase the likelihood of

democratization.<sup>1</sup> These structural factors, however, cannot fully explain Tunisia's democratic transition. In order to highlight the deficiencies in using structural factors to explain the democratization of Tunisia, it is useful to examine Egypt, a country very visibly affected by the Arab Spring that has not transitioned successfully to democracy despite somewhat similar structural factors to Tunisia. As such, the roles of various actors within Tunisia during the revolution must also be examined.

Key to Tunisia's successful democratization during and after the Arab Spring has been an institutionally weak military, the coalition and consensus forming results of Tunisia's first election following the fall of Ben Ali, and the existence of a strong civil society and a political culture that have both embraced democracy. The aim of this paper is to specifically examine the manner in which the strong degree of cooperation between the Islamist Ennahda Party and its secular and centrist counterparts have influenced Tunisia's democratic transition. Ennahda's peaceful rule over the country extended from 2011 to 2014, when the center-left Nidaa Tounes party gained presidential and parliamentary control through elections. Tunisia's democratic success under an Ennahda led government lies in direct contrast to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's brief, tumultuous period of control before the military and popular unrest forced them from power. The Tunisian civil society and political culture, which largely viewed Islamism with suspicion, pushed Ennahda—originally actually influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood—to evolve into a more moderate, progressive organization. An Islamist party tempered by national support of secularism and liberal values, Ennahda and its role in Tunisia's early democratic success suggest that a predominately Muslim state does not necessarily need strict secularity to achieve democracy.

### Structural Factors in Tunisia's Democratization

A variety of structural factors, most of which are fairly obvious and have seen extensive exploration by democratization scholars, have helped lead to the success of democracy in Tunisia. As Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Lipset describe, democracy has at least some relationship with both socioeconomic development and social structure.<sup>2</sup> In 1959 Lipset seminaly presented his modernization theory, which linked economic development to social development and an increased receptivity to democracy.<sup>3</sup> Although facing significant intellectual challenge from scholars subscribing to the transitology school of thought regarding democratization, a large number of academics have continued to assert the importance of structural conditions to democracy's emergence.<sup>4</sup> The theory has undergone some revision as different scholars have examined it, with famed theorizer of democracy Adam Przeworski emphasizing that a high level of socioeconomic development does a much better job of preventing democratic breakdown than actually initiating democratic transition<sup>5</sup> and political scientists Carles Boix and Susan Stokes suggesting that democracy is not caused by a high income per capita per se but by other changes that accompany development, in particular, income equality.<sup>6</sup> Although not

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Bellin, "Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia,[" *Crown Center: Middle East Brief*, 75 (2014), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Lipset, introduction to *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*. ed. Larry Diamond, et al., (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review*, 53 (1959), 69-105.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2002), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Political Regimes and Economic Growth," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 7 (1993), 51-69.

<sup>6</sup> Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics*, 55 (2003), 540.

necessarily the cause of democracy high levels of socioeconomic development generally correlate with the presence of democracy.

Tunisia, possessing a strong middle class and relative economic freedom during Ben Ali's reign, was deemed by some to be among the best Arab countries in terms of economic transparency and equity and was generally regarded to be a promising candidate for democratization.<sup>7</sup> Possessing a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of \$4,305 in 2011, compared to a GDP per capita of \$2,816 in Egypt,<sup>8</sup> Tunisia's level of economic development, at the time of the Arab Spring, gave it a decent probability of democratic transition and a good probability of avoiding democratic breakdown.<sup>9</sup> Possessing a better economy, Tunisia also has better education and healthcare systems than Egypt, enjoying higher literacy rates, life expectancies, and fertility rates—all signs of a more developed country. Furthermore, unlike many of its Arab peers, Tunisia possesses little oil and does not receive an extremely high level of foreign aid, indicating that it is not a rentier state.

Comparatively, Egypt, although possessing little oil as well, received \$1.5 billion in aid from the United States in 2011,<sup>10</sup> allowing the maintenance of a strong and coercive security apparatus.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough though, Egypt possesses a lower degree of social inequality than Tunisia according to the Gini index. Regardless, Tunisia's level of income equality is still within the realm of successful democracies (including the United States).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, although Tunisia was generally better positioned than Egypt for a successful democratic transition in terms of socioeconomic development, Egypt was not necessarily a bad candidate for democratization. However, despite a number of supporters of modernization theory, socioeconomic development alone cannot usually explain democratization, as acknowledged by Diamond, Linz and Lipset.<sup>13</sup> Eva Bellin, a Middle East expert, further describes the inability of development to guarantee democracy by pointing out examples of countries that have failed to democratize despite high levels of development like Chile and Argentina, countries that have democratized despite low levels of development like India and Mongolia, and even Tunisia's inability to democratize in 1987 despite a variety of structural factors in its favor.<sup>14</sup> Thus, factors other than socioeconomic development are in play regarding Tunisia's democratization success.

The demographics of Tunisia and Egypt are perhaps another reason that the two countries' respective paths have diverged greatly from 2011 onwards. Tunisia, possessing a median age of almost 30 years in 2011, had an older population than Egypt, which had a median age of around 25 years.<sup>15</sup> According to research conducted by political demographer Richard Cincotta, countries with older populations are generally much more stable and less likely to be susceptible to authoritarianism.<sup>16</sup> Tunisia falls into what Cincotta terms an intermediate age bracket, with a median age between 25 and 35, and thus was in much better shape to emerge into a democracy than most of its Arab peers that also

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob Abadi, *Tunisia since the Arab Conquest: The Saga of a Westernized State* (Padstow, Cornwall: Ithaca Press, 2013), 532.

<sup>8</sup> "GDP per capita (current US\$)," The World Bank, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.

<sup>9</sup> Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," 537.

<sup>10</sup> "Foreign Aid Explorer," USAID, accessed December 1, 2015, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/>.

<sup>11</sup> Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics*, 36 (2004), 148.

<sup>12</sup> "Tunisia," CIA World Factbook, last modified 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, introduction, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Bellin, "Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia," 2.

<sup>15</sup> Sara Reardon, "Egypt: Arab Spring could be wasted in youthful nations," *New Scientist*, (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Cincotta, "More on Tunisia's Age Structure, its Measurement, and the Knowledge Derived," *NewSecurityBeat*, (2011).

experienced widespread revolutionary sentiment in 2011.<sup>17</sup> However, this demographical difference is not itself necessarily the cause of a successful democratic transition. Instead it may only act as an indicator of a “mature, complex society” that is ripe for democratic transition according to *Nature* editor Sara Reardon.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the decisions made by the political elite and a well-developed civil society both play a crucial role in allowing a country to capitalize on “democratic initiative” and in actually democratizing.<sup>19</sup> The demographic differences between Tunisia and Egypt were perhaps a telltale indicator that Tunisia was better primed to become a democracy but do not fully explain the dissimilarities between the two countries from 2011 onward.

Another structural factor that scholars have traditionally regarded as an indicator of democratic sustainability is ethnic homogeneity. Scholars usually regard ethnic homogeneity, although not a great predictor of democratic success, to be better than a high level of ethnic diversity, at least in terms of “peaceful electoral contestation.”<sup>20</sup> According to political writer Carsten Jensen and political scientist Svend-Erik Skaaning, this phenomenon occurs because “ethnic fractionalization is expected to diminish the willingness for crosscutting mobilization and compromises and to heighten the risk of civil controversies,” thus leading to a decrease in the likelihood of democratization. Tunisia, 98 percent ethnically Arab, and 99 percent Sunni Muslim, certainly has a homogenous population.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Egypt, according to its census, is 99.6 percent ethnically Egyptian and 90 percent Muslim.<sup>22</sup> However, the Arab world, largely consisting of ethnically homogenous states, is notoriously undemocratic. Indeed, as Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson note, “noncompetitive [electorally] Arab countries began with the lowest levels of ethnolinguistic fragmentation.”<sup>23</sup> Although ethnic homogeneity can prove useful in consolidating and maintaining democracy, Tunisia’s ethnically homogenous population does not necessarily explain its successful democratization process.

### The Military

Although structural factors may well have primed Tunisia’s democratization process, it seems evident that other, actor driven factors have played a crucial role in Tunisia’s emergence as a democracy. The decisions made by Tunisia’s institutionally weak military were a critical factor in both the success of the Jasmine Revolution and the democratization process thereafter. According to Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, “new and insecure democracies must therefore find ways to strengthen...civilian control over the military,” suggesting that a reduced role for the military is necessary if a democracy is to succeed.<sup>24</sup> As described by Bellin, the Tunisian military already had a reduced role by the time of the Arab Spring and was not necessarily “invested in the survival of Ben Ali’s regime.”<sup>25</sup> From the founding of the independent state under the leadership of a demagogue, Habib Bourguiba, the military never played a role in internal politics. Even

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Reardon, “Egypt: Arab Spring could be wasted in youthful nations.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson, “An Arab more than a Muslim Electoral Gap,” *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (2003), 40.

<sup>21</sup> “Tunisia,” CIA World Factbook, accessed November 25, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “Egypt,” CIA World Factbook, accessed November 25, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Stepan and Robertson, “An Arab more than a Muslim Electoral Gap,” 40.

<sup>24</sup> Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, introduction, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Bellin, “Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia,” 4.

though Ben Ali originated as a military officer, he too minimalized the political role of the military upon his assumption of power in 1987. Thus, during the Jasmine Revolution, the military did not aid Ben Ali, instead siding with civilian protestors. This action ensured the beginning of a transition of democratic government. Furthermore, since 2011 the military has not inserted itself into political affairs—a sharp contrast to Egypt’s fate.

Although Egypt’s military had “crony-capitalist” ties to the regime of authoritarian president Hosni Mubarek, a strong degree of professionalism and independence allowed it to act independently of the regime, even as Mubarek faced mounting popular pressure.<sup>26</sup> Despite orders to suppress the Tahrir Square protests, the military refused, instead backing the revolutionaries and thereby effectively removing Mubarek from power. Unlike the circumstances seen in Tunisia however, the Egyptian military quickly inserted itself into political affairs immediately after Mubarek’s ouster and used liberal distrust of the Muslim Brotherhood to eventually engineer a coup against President Mohammed Morsi and the Brotherhood, thereby effectively ending Egypt’s abortive experiment with democracy.<sup>27</sup> Whereas the Tunisian military quickly removed itself from the civil scene following Ben Ali’s removal, the Egyptian military’s interference in the country’s political affairs hurt its chances of democratizing successfully. However, the difference in the military’s ability to influence affairs in post-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt respectively demonstrates key differences in the two countries’ civil societies and political cultures—perhaps the most important factors when comparing Tunisia’s success and Egypt’s failure in democratizing.

### Tunisian Civil Society and Political Culture

Civil society and political culture had key roles in shaping the outcomes of both the revolution in Tunisia and in Egypt. These social and political dynamics allowed a democratization process to occur in Tunisia and perhaps managed to temper any illiberal or undemocratic tendencies of any of the main political actors following Ben Ali’s removal. Tunisian civil society has a long history with a variety of organizations first emerging in opposition to the French Protectorate. The Destour Party, formed in the early 1920s was an early Tunisian political party that pressed for an end to French rule.<sup>28</sup> After enduring a split in leadership, part of the Destour Party would morph into Bourguiba’s Neo-Destour Party, followed by two changes of name as it became the Socialist Destourian Party (PSD) and later Ben Ali’s Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique (RCD). Although the party of the president dominated political life, opposition parties like the Islamic Tendency Movement (the forerunner of Ennahdah) and the Movement of Socialist Democrats (MDS) were permitted to operate to a limited degree throughout Tunisian history. However, the government always tilted the playing field just enough to ensure its continued hold on power.<sup>29</sup>

Labor unions also have had a strong presence in Tunisia’s modern history. After a few relatively unsuccessful attempts to organize Tunisian labor, labor activist Farhat Hached founded the Union Generale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) in 1946, a labor organization that has remained active and played a role in the revolution of 2011.<sup>30</sup> Although the Ben Ali regime heavily co-opted the UGTT’s leadership, activist rank and

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<sup>26</sup> Eva Bellin, “Lessons from the Jasmine and Nile Revolutions: Possibilities of Political Transformation in the Middle East,” 4.

<sup>27</sup> Nathan J. Brown, “Egypt’s Failed Transition,” *Journal of Democracy*, 24 (2013), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 85.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

file members were crucially involved in several social struggles, including the 2008 Gafsa demonstrations.<sup>31</sup> As one of four organizations deemed part of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, UGTT won a Nobel Peace Prize for being “instrumental in enabling Tunisia...to establish a constitutional system of government irrespective of gender, political conviction or religious belief” according to the Nobel committee.<sup>32</sup> Partnered with the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), as well as the Tunisian Order of Lawyers, UGTT managed to help ensure peace as tensions rose between different political factions in 2013.<sup>33</sup> Although the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes rigged the rules of the political game in its favor and sometimes prevented the formation of opposition parties, Tunisia possessed a vibrant civil space which spawned political elites able to lead the country and was able to successfully prevent the country from deteriorating in the aftermath of the revolution.

Although Egypt had a variety of different political organizations and parties that chafed against the rule of King Faruq, the rise of Gamal Nasser and subsequent strongman rule largely stifled Egyptian civil society. In the early 1950s, before the Free Officers Coup, different political groups had emerged, including Wafd (the ruling political party), Young Egypt (a youth group with fascist undertones), the Egyptian Communist Party, and, perhaps most notably, the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>34</sup> However, after the January 1952 coup conducted by the Free Officers Movement, Nasser, upon assuming power, quickly moved to eliminate opposition, outlawing all political parties other than the Arab Socialist Union.<sup>35</sup> Although the Muslim Brotherhood continued operating, it faced intense opposition from the regime, perhaps made personal by a Muslim Brotherhood assassination attempt on Nasser. Anwar Sadat, Nasser’s successor, permitted the existence of a few opposition political parties under his reign, but he ultimately ensured that the opposition was tame and incapable of thwarting the regime’s objectives. Assuming power after Sadat’s death in 1981, Mubarak allowed some further liberalization of society during his reign, but civil society still possessed only a limited strength. By 2008 around 30,000 civil organizations of various types existed in Egypt: an impressive amount undoubtedly.<sup>36</sup> Labor organizations, historically not possessing much power in Egypt, began to achieve some results in the 2000s, with a variety of strikes and other such actions achieving some results.<sup>37</sup> However, the regime still maintained a great deal of control over civil society. Even though civil society played an important role in Mubarak’s removal, with various groups doing much to mobilize popular support for the massive protests in Cairo, Egyptian civil society was largely not powerful enough to shape the actions of political actors following the revolution.

The attitudes of the Tunisian people and political elites—the country’s political culture—played a crucial role in Tunisia’s ability to successfully democratize in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Although acknowledging that political culture is “plastic and malleable over time,” Diamond, Linz, and Lipset nonetheless maintain that a political culture committed to democracy, especially if supported by the political elites, is crucial to

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<sup>31</sup> Gilbert Achcar and G. M. Goshgarian, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, (University of California Press), 124.

<sup>32</sup> Julian Borger, “Who are the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet?” *The Guardian* (2015).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1981*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> Hamdy A. Hassan, Civil Society in Egypt under the Mubarek Regime, *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 2 (2011), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, 126.

a successful democratic transition.<sup>38</sup> In Tunisia most political actors sustained a strong level of support for democracy after Ben Ali's ouster, including Ennahda and various secular parties. Initially after Ben Ali's departure to Saudi Arabia, the then-prime minister, Mohammed Ghannouchi, retained his office and Fouad Mezbaa became the interim president; however, public concern that Ghannouchi was not far enough removed from the Ben Ali regime prompted Mezbaa to dismiss Ghannouchi and to appoint Beji Caid Essebsi as prime minister, ultimately resulting in the prompt disbandment of the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique as well as other institutional remnants of Ben Ali's regime.<sup>39</sup> Before his dismissal, Ghannouchi, under public pressure, established the High Commission for the Protection of the Revolution, an organization that was composed of a gamut of political and social figures in order to ensure that the transitional government did not betray the ideals of the movement that deposed Ben Ali.<sup>40</sup> Bellin credits the great degree of inclusivity in Tunisian politics during this time period—the High Commission doubled its members in order to increase the representation of women and youth, and over one hundred political parties were given legal status—in conjunction with the political elite's long instilled "commitment to dialogue" with helping to create a successful democratic transition.<sup>41</sup>

This inclusivity, besides being in and of itself a hallmark of liberal democracy, allowed most segments of Tunisian society at least some degree of representation, perhaps with the effect of reinforcing the Tunisian people's commitment to democracy. Mezbaa's March 2011 announcement of a July election to form a Constituent Assembly charged with drafting a new constitution prompted a further flurry of political activity.<sup>42</sup> Although circumstances pushed the election back to October 2011, the election, deemed fair and free by international observers, saw Ennahda receiving 41.4 percent of the vote.<sup>43</sup> From Bellin's perspective, this result was fortuitous because it "denied a majority to any single party," and "also delivered a large enough share of the vote to the top four or five parties to prevent debilitating fragmentation of the political system."<sup>44</sup> Forming a coalition with the secular Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol parties, Ennahda had to engage in dialogue with secular forces in Tunisia which perhaps managed to curb any wayward, non-democratic, Islamist tendencies. The Constituent Assembly remained in power until November 2014, after the successful passage of a new constitution in January of that year and the following parliamentary elections.<sup>45</sup> Those elections saw Nidaa Tounes, composed of a coalition of liberal and secular parties, assume power. The following November presidential elections resulted in the election of Essebsi, now the leader of Nidaa Tounes, to the office of president and capped off the first democratic transition of government in Tunisian history.

Ennahda, although losing its plurality in the legislature, did win some seats in the new parliament and has operated within the legal and constitutional confines of Tunisia following its electoral loss. Indeed, Ennahda has been extremely conciliatory to the secular and liberal forces of Tunisia, choosing not to run its own candidate in the 2014 presidential election for fears of being seen as trying "to dominate political power" and even selecting

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<sup>38</sup> Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, introduction, 19-21.

<sup>39</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 229-232.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Tunisia's Morning After," *Middle East Quarterly* (2011), 11-17.

<sup>41</sup> Bellin, "Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia," 3.

<sup>42</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 237.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>44</sup> Bellin, "Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia," 4.

<sup>45</sup> "Tunisia 2015," accessed December 6, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/tunisia>.

to join the coalition government of the new Prime Minister, Habib Essid.<sup>46</sup> Thus, despite relatively widespread fear that Ennahda would subvert democracy in order to impose its Islamist ideals on Tunisia, almost all political actors have remained committed to democracy. Although there have been rough patches in Tunisia's democratization, political actors have found ways to compromise and have not allowed democratic progress to deteriorate.

Comparatively, Egyptian political culture has not proven very conducive to the successful emergence of democracy. With the Muslim Brotherhood and the military both possessing questionable levels of commitment to democracy, it is perhaps no surprise that democracy has struggled to emerge following Mubarak's removal. Hopes for a democratic transition began to fall apart even as early as March 2011, when the military held a referendum in order to approve a number of constitutional amendments that would have "spelled out a way to build a new constitutional order."<sup>47</sup> The Islamist forces in Egypt including the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Nour (a Salafist group), supported the amendments, but the military decided to undermine the actual impact of these amendments by pasting the approved modifications to the constitution into a new "constitutional declaration," thus starting the creation of a palpable distrust between the Islamists and the military.<sup>48</sup> Parliamentary elections held in late 2011 and early 2012 only reinforced tensions as the well-organized Muslim Brotherhood and al-Nour together won a commanding victory, despite promises made to the military and secular establishment that the Muslim Brotherhood would not run for seats in most districts. Immediately after their election, the Islamists began to realize the fears of their opposition by appointing individuals with "Islamist inclinations" to the Constituent Assembly—tasked with writing a constitution—despite more promises to appoint nonpartisans and later constructed a similar, second assembly after the courts rejected the first.<sup>49</sup> However, this parliamentary majority was largely for naught because the "constitutional declaration" written by the military gave the military the ability to essentially neuter many of parliament's powers. Shortly after the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's Morsi to the presidency, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the parliamentary election was unconstitutional, resulting in the disbandment of the lower house of parliament.<sup>50</sup>

Also originally promising that they would not run a candidate in the presidential election, the Muslim Brotherhood's victory in the presidential election proved yet another cause of the growing schism between the Islamists and their foes.<sup>51</sup> Morsi, often described as a poor politician, did little to smooth over the growing conflict, supporting the passage of a constitution that "deepened the role of Islam in the country's institutions and laws," in a popular referendum (two-thirds of participating Egyptians supported the new constitution) that was boycotted by the Muslim Brotherhood's opposition in December 2012.<sup>52</sup> Amidst more political wrangling throughout the early months of 2013, popular resentment grew against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, leading the military to remove Morsi from office on July 3, 2013. Tarek Masoud alleges that the Egyptian "political landscape was incapable of sustaining [democracy]"—due to the greater

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<sup>46</sup> Rory McCarthy, "Tunisia's Ennahda: Between Preaching and Politics" (paper presented at annual MESA Panel, October 2015), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," 47.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," 48.

<sup>51</sup> Tarek Masoud, "Egyptian Democracy: Smothered in the Cradle, or Stillborn?," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 20 (2014), 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 7.



organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and the lack of any comparable secular political force—thus leading to this breakdown of democratic progress.<sup>53</sup> With the Muslim Brotherhood possessing a conception of democracy that was “shallow and often illiberal,” the secular opposition rejecting election results and the military ultimately delivering the coup de grace to Egypt’s democratization process, the political culture of the elites of Egypt was not democratic enough to support the successful emergence of an actual liberal democracy.<sup>54</sup> Haunted by the specter of 60 years of authoritarian rule, the political actors of Egypt were too distrustful of each other and the potential results of the democratic process to allow a democratic Egypt to take shape.

### The Shaping of an Islamist Group

Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood, although both founded in Arab, Islamic societies, have perhaps naturally evolved into organizations with different political aims and goals. Ennahda, like the Muslim Brotherhood in some ways, has had a long sometimes antagonistic relationship with the government. However, never possessing quite the cohesive ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda has been shaped quite significantly by a variety of influences throughout its history. According to Alfred Stepan, with Tunisia enjoying “a long intellectual and educational tradition that combines important secular and spiritual elements,” it is perhaps not entirely surprising that Ennahda and the secular forces in the country have been able to reconcile themselves.<sup>55</sup> Secularism first began to be encouraged by the Tunisian political elite following Tunisia’s achievement of independence. Despite using Islam to his benefit while mobilizing popular sentiment during Tunisia’s independence movement, Bourguiba, once president, quickly moved to embrace a modern, French styled secularization of society.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the Bourguiba regime increasingly marginalized Islam’s role in public society.

However, Al-Jam’ah al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Group), Ennahda’s predecessor founded in 1970 by Rachid Ghannouchi, Abelfattah Mourou, and Ehmda Enneifer, emerged out of a vacant space in Tunisian society left empty by the failure of leftist economic reforms in the late 1960s and by the crushing defeat suffered by Arabs during the Six Day War in 1967.<sup>57</sup> With Marxism and Arab Nationalism both somewhat discredited as ideologies, Islamism began to emerge as a viable ideological alternative in Tunisian society. Ghannouchi and Enneifer met first while studying in Paris as members of Tablighi Jamaat, a proselytizing Islamic group.<sup>58</sup> Upon returning to Tunisia, Ghannouchi and Enneifer met Mourou, a member of a Tablighi Jamaat cell in Tunisia and together with a number of other young, religiously motivated men founded al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyah, which initially was a strictly apolitical, missionary organization in the tradition of Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>59</sup>

However, by 1973, beginning to attract attention from Bourguiba’s regime, al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyah began acting more similar to the Muslim Brotherhood, adopting a more politically and socially comprehensive view of Islam.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, it was around this

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, “Egypt’s Failed Transition,” 50.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred Stepan, “Tunisia’s Transition and the Twin Tolerations,” *Journal of Democracy* 23 (2012), 97.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>57</sup> Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi, *The Politicization of Islam*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 10, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>59</sup> Hamdi, *The Politicization of Islam*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 21.

time that Anwar Sadat began to liberalize Egypt to some extent, releasing Muslim Brotherhood prisoners and thus allowing the Muslim Brotherhood's message to reach Tunisia to a greater degree.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, after the Tunisian government placed prohibitions on al-Jama'ah, Ghannouchi realized that the open, conversionary tactics used by the group previously would not work in a civil sphere on which Bourguiba kept a firm hand, prompting a turn to the secretive, highly organized methods of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>62</sup>

Between 1973 and 1981, al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah grew steadily as an organization, especially on university campuses. There Islamist students waged fierce ideological battles against the leftist groups that dominated Tunisian intellectual life of the day.<sup>63</sup> Ghannouchi, a philosophy teacher for a period of time, reflected this trend, spending a good deal of time polemically assaulting the philosophy and political teachings of the west.<sup>64</sup> Bourguiba's regime, then, was not al-Jama'ah's primary enemy initially. Lacking ideological cohesion, al-Jama'ah split in the late 1970s, with Enneifer resigning from the organization due to ideological differences, namely that he disliked the group's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood and was in favor of seriously rethinking elements of Islamic thought to fall more in line with democratic, liberal thinking.<sup>65</sup>

Al-Jama'ah survived this split with minimal immediate change in ideology, but it did begin to change in nature quite significantly in the late 1970s. The emergence of a democratic movement in Tunisia, led by former Prime Minister Ahmad al-Mestiri, resulted in the formation of some ties between Tunisian democrats and Ennahda as well as an increasing receptiveness to the thinking of Islamic reformers friendly to democracy like Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.<sup>66</sup> A massive workers' strike in 1978 had the further effect of pushing the organization directly into the public sphere, shifting its focus from ideological debates to hands-on civic and political participation.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution had a massive impact on the mindset and goals of al-Jama'ah. The first demonstration of a successful Islamic political movement, the Islamic Revolution encouraged the members of al-Jama'ah by showing that their efforts could indeed result in success.<sup>68</sup> However, this influence did not extend ideologically to Jama'ah—the group never sought complete control over the Tunisian state in the manner of the Iranian ayatollahs.

After Bourguiba discovered the existence of al-Jama'ah in 1980, the organization found itself forced to change, eventually making the decision to relaunch as a political party named Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami (the Islamic Trend Movement, or MTI). Bourguiba combated this effort vigorously, however, imprisoning 107 activists—including Ghannouchi and Morou—inadvertently prompting a decent amount of public sympathy for the organization.<sup>69</sup> Despite some violence committed by MTI members, Ghannouchi began to further refine his approach to democracy and Western civilization,<sup>70</sup> adopting a more conciliatory attitude by “looking for a social, human and civilizational model that reflects its religion and heritage and answers the current needs and challenges.”<sup>71</sup> Released from

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> Hamdi, *The Politicization of Islam*, 26.

<sup>64</sup> Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>69</sup> Hamdi, *The Politicization of Islam*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, 69.

<sup>71</sup> Hamdi, *The Politicization of Islam*, 48.

prison in 1984, Ghannouchi returned shortly thereafter, in 1987, alongside 88 fellow MTI members accused of attempting to overthrow the state.<sup>72</sup> Bourguiba's insistence that Ghannouchi be handed out a death sentence threatened widespread violence and led to Ben Ali's bloodless takeover of the country.

Ben Ali, adopting a somewhat more liberal position and generally tolerating MTI in the early stages of his reign, held an election in 1989. MTI changed its name to Ennahda and ran a number of candidates in it (winning 17 percent of vote, behind the ruling Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique), making the same fatal flaw that the Muslim Brotherhood would repeat in Egypt's 2011 elections by alarming elements of society fearful of Islamists with its electoral success and thereby prompting a negative backlash (not helped by accusations of Ennahda violence).<sup>73</sup> Ghannouchi and other Ennahda leaders then fled to London, where they remained until Ben Ali's overthrow. By the late 2000s, Ennahda leadership even began to adopt a more conciliatory tone to the Ben Ali regime, suggesting that its goals had become drastically tempered since 1987.<sup>74</sup>

In exile, Ghannouchi further outlined his support for an Islamic model of democracy, setting the stage for Ennahda's triumphant return to Tunisian politics in 2011. As mentioned earlier, Ennahda has generally been able to compromise with other elements of Tunisian society since 2011. For example, many Ennahda members strongly desired the new Tunisian constitution to reference sharia.<sup>75</sup> However, facing strong opposition from different secular movements from within Tunisian society, Ennahda did an about-face. Indeed, Ennahda has increasingly presented itself as a "modern, technically competent political party that had developed from its Islamist preaching origins into a pragmatic force for political consensus and economic development."<sup>76</sup> This partial disavowal has created somewhat of an internal schism in Ennahda, with some desiring Ennahda to maintain more of its original hardline edge. Moreover, following the 2014 election there were some calls that Ennahda should split into two groups, one a political party seeking not to implement Sharia as a strict code of law, but rather to pursue the "broader objectives of the Sharia (maqāṣid al-shari'a), such as freedom, rights, civility, and equality," and another, non-political organization devoted to preaching.<sup>77</sup> Thus, although Ennahda has never proven to be extremely ideologically cohesive, it has been increasingly ready to drop parts of its ideology if deemed politically expedient.

In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the way in which Ennahda's ideology has shifted historically, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood has moved to an acceptance of democracy; however, the Muslim Brotherhood has remained throughout its history a steadfast proponent of a fundamentally Islamic state, governed by the principles of sharia. Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood has long been a prominent oppositional force in Egypt. Originally focused on providing religious and educational programs to Egyptians, the Brotherhood became politicized and initiated some political violence in the 1940s.<sup>78</sup> Arguing that a rejection of the West and the embracement of Islamic ideas was necessary to return Egypt and the Middle East back to their former glory, the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the first and most influential Islamist movements.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, 70.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> McCarthy, "Tunisia's Ennahda: Between Preaching and Politics," 3.

<sup>75</sup> Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," 115.

<sup>76</sup> McCarthy, "Tunisia's Ennahda: Between Preaching and Politics," 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Muslim Brotherhood," accessed December 16, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37 (2005), 376.

After Nasser's ascent to power, a purported Brotherhood attempt on his life prompted him to enact a massive crackdown on the organization. It was during this era that the writings of Sayyid Qutb, one of the intellectual founders of modern day radical Islam, emerged to prominence as guiding precepts of the organization.<sup>80</sup> Heavily suppressed for the remainder of Nasser's rule, the Brotherhood had a reduced role in Egyptian society until Sadat's "de-Nasserification" of Egypt gave the organization increased room to operate and another chance to participate in Egyptian politics. By the middle of the 1980s, the Brotherhood began to assert itself increasingly.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood has attempted to use elections to its advantage for decades (al-Banna ran for office twice in the 1940s), it has embraced the idea of elections with gusto in the last 30 years as a means of achieving some form of power. Even though not a legal political party at that time, the Brotherhood still managed to run, in a manner of speaking, in the 1984 elections through an alliance with the Wafd party, seemingly signifying a commitment to democracy as a viable means of government.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, participating in the 1987 election as well as publicly demanding democracy's "full implementation into the Egyptian political system," the organization began to demonstrate that it had real dedication to democracy, at least on the surface.<sup>82</sup> However, despite its acceptance of democracy as a method of government, it still favored the use of sharia as the guiding legal principle of the Egyptian state.<sup>83</sup> It also seems likely that at least some of this acceptance of democracy was a strategy to gain more acceptance from the regime and the people. Regardless, the fact that the Brotherhood proved willing to endorse democracy does show that the Egyptian political scene influenced the organization into changing its behavior.

The Muslim Brotherhood continued its support of democracy throughout the 1990s and 2000s; however, its continued support of sharia, coupled with a growing amount of popular support due to an effective grassroots network, provoked the Mubarak regime to enact increasingly repressive measures against the organization.<sup>84</sup> During this time, the younger generation of Brotherhood members demonstrated somewhat of a break from the organization's ideology of the past, making statements in favor of women's rights and party pluralism; the older generation, though, largely retained its hardline conceptions.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, doubts as to the actual depth of the Brotherhood's commitment to democracy have continued to abound, with contradictory statements made by its leaders raising fears that the organization only desired democracy "as a first step toward the ultimate establishment of a political system based not on the preferences of the Egyptian people but the will of God as they understand it."<sup>86</sup> Certainly not an organization with the same ideals it possessed at the time of its founding, the Brotherhood's true position on democracy was nevertheless unknown.

Although it is perhaps unfair to judge the Brotherhood's stance on democracy by its performance governing Egypt after the Arab Spring—due to the difficult position that the military and secular opposition put it in—the sincerity of the organization's commitment to democracy was certainly doubtful, to say the least. For instance, the

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<sup>80</sup> *Britannica Academic*, "Muslim Brotherhood."

<sup>81</sup> El-Ghosabashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," 379.

<sup>82</sup> Chris Harnisch and Quinn Mecham, "Democratic Ideology in Islamist Opposition? The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Civil State,'" *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45 (2009), 191.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>85</sup> El-Ghosabashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," 382.

<sup>86</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "The Muslim Brotherhood and Democratic Transition in Egypt," *Middle East Law and Governance*, 3 (2011), 205.

Brotherhood's opposition alleged that the organization was attempting the "Brotherhoodization" of the country, namely that it was trying to fill the government with only Brotherhood members.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the constitution that the Brotherhood proposed "codified ultra-conservative restrictions on freedom of faith and expression," potentially hurting the freedom of religious minorities and the Brotherhood's political opposition.<sup>88</sup> These illiberal actions, although not necessarily the primary cause of the Brotherhood's removal from power, certainly did not help the situation. Moreover, when compared to Ennahda's behavior upon assuming power, it is evident that Ennahda behaved in a much more conciliatory manner to its opposition than the Muslim Brotherhood did.

### Conclusion

A wide variety of different factors, some structural and some not, are likely to have caused the difference in outcome of the respective transition processes of Tunisia and Egypt. Richer, more educated, possessing a stronger middle class and more favorable demographics, Tunisia had all the structural factors lined up in its favor for a successful democratic transition. Tunisia's military also behaved in a manner much more conducive to democracy than Egypt's, returning to the barracks almost immediately rather than inserting itself into the political sphere. Moreover, with both a robust civil society and a political culture primed for democratization lurking under Ben Ali's nose, the political leadership of Tunisia was continuously kept on a democratic track, ready to check the appearance of any potentially illiberal act.

However, the behavior of the two Islamist organizations that found themselves in positions of leadership during each respective transition also warrants a close look. It seems clear that the two organizations behaved differently from each other during a period of democratic transition, resulting in dramatically different final outcomes. As the result of their respective experiences with repressive regimes, both Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood have made increasingly democratic overtures in recent years. Ennahda, though, never possessing a cohesively thought-out ideology, has proven much more adaptable to conditions existing in a liberal democracy. Moreover, according to Stepan, it has done a good job of respecting the twin tolerations necessary for a successful liberal democracy, not attempting to establish any sort of theocratic rule.<sup>89</sup> Although still purporting to want to govern Tunisia according to Islamic principles, Ennahda has mostly abandoned its former goal of imposing a version of sharia on the country, instead acquiescing to the demands of its liberal peers. The Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, stuck to its ideological guns and paid a heavy price for doing so, losing its power and ultimately getting outlawed. Although the unique set of factors found in Tunisia may make replication of its democratization process difficult, Ennahda is perhaps an example of how an Islamism and liberal democracy can successfully coexist.

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<sup>87</sup> Wael Nawara, "It's the Egyptian Identity, Stupid," *Al-Monitor*, (2013).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations," 89.

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