

## ***Party System and Political Struggle in Tunisia. Cleavages and Electoral Competition after the Transition to Democracy***

## **Sistema partitico e lotta politica in Tunisia. Fratture e competizione elettorale dopo la transizione alla democrazia**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, there is an attempt to provide a detailed description of the political manifestos of the new parties, which have emerged in Tunisia since the breakdown of the authoritarian regime and the establishment of democracy. The array of policies dealt with by the party manifestos is surprisingly wide and the secular-confessional dimension is present together with others. Secondly, the structuring of the party cleavages is addressed. It is argued that it could be hardly reduced to the classic cleavage theory formulated by Lipset and Rokkan. The re-alignment of the Tunisian party system has taken the form of two opposing coalitions although deep regional and socio-economic cleavages have not helped political integration. Three regions are identified in terms of political continuity and socio-economic development, Sahel and Tunis, the South (Sfax and Kairouan), finally the Western underdeveloped areas at the border with Algeria. The current development of the Tunisian party system is described, referring to its dynamics and the general perspective of the democratization process.*

Lo scopo di questo articolo è duplice. In primo luogo, è avanzato un tentativo di fornire una descrizione dettagliata dei manifesti politici dei nuovi partiti emersi in Tunisia dopo la rottura del regime autoritario e l'instaurazione della democrazia. L'insieme delle politiche trattate dai manifesti partitici è sorprendentemente ampio e la dimensione secolare-confessionale è sì presente ma insieme ad altre. In secondo luogo, viene affrontata la strutturazione delle fratture partitiche e viene evidenziato come questa possa difficilmente essere ridotta entro i termini della teoria classica della formulata da Lipset e Rokkan. Il riallineamento del sistema partitico tunisino ha preso la forma di due coalizioni contrapposte, sebbene l'integrazione politica non sia stata facilitata dalle divisioni regionali e socio-economiche profonde. Tre regioni sono identificate in termini di continuità politica e sviluppo socio-economico, Sahel e Tunisi, il Sud (Sfax e Kairouan), infine le aree sottosviluppate occidentali al confine con l'Algeria. Viene descritto lo sviluppo attuale del sistema partitico tunisino, facendo riferimento alle sue dinamiche e alla prospettiva generale del processo di democratizzazione.

### **Keywords**

*Party System, Cleavages, Elections, Democratization, Tunisia*

Sistema partitico, fratture, elezioni, democratizzazione, Tunisia

## Introduction

After the fall of authoritarian regime in 2011, Tunisia started a transition to democracy which has been largely deemed as successful. Three subsequent elections have been held at the national level so far, namely the elections to the Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée Nationale Constituante*, ANC) in October 2011, and the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 2014.<sup>1</sup> At the 2011 elections to the Constituent Assembly the center-right and Islamist *Ennahdha* (EN, Renaissance) gained 37% of the vote and a relative majority in the Assembly, while most of the remaining seats were divided among a variety of secular, mostly center-left parties, and some personal parties characterized by charismatic leadership and/or led by businessmen. The 2014 Parliamentary showed a different picture, since the new secular party *Nidaa Tounes* (NT, Tunisia Call) resulted as the winner and conquered also the Presidency in the same year. The Tunisian party system seemed to align around two major poles, orbiting around NT on the centre-left and EN on the centre-right. Nonetheless, there could not be said to be the establishment of a true bi-polar or two-party system working according to the Western Government–Opposition pattern. NT and EN have been the two major parties in the country during 2011–14, but at the moment EN is more likely to establish itself as a major player on the Tunisian political scene. Notwithstanding the fact that these two main parties dominate respectively the secular and the Islamist camp, the Tunisian party system persists in its high levels of fragmentation and polarization, both revealed by the profound ideological differences between the two parties and also by their regional rooting. If the secular-confessional cleavage shapes the Tunisian political party system, other social and political cleavages enter into the picture and affect the alignment of the parties on the political space.

After a brief examination of the context which led to the breakdown of the authoritarian regime in 2011 and the subsequent democratization phase, we focus on the elections to the ANC and the subsequent political elections in 2014. We aim at providing an insight over the Tunisian secular-confessional cleavage through a content analysis of the manifestos of the three major parties which entered the 2011 elections, namely EN, the *Congrès pour la République* (CPR) and *Ettakatol* (FDTL), and of NT which eventually established itself as a pivotal actor and replaced FDTL as a reference point for the progressive electorate in the aftermath of the transition to democracy. FDTL represented initially the ideological field of the secular forces in Tunisia, which was subsequently occupied in 2014 by NT. We therefore use the content analysis on the

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<sup>1</sup> Local elections were held in May 2018 that are not included in the present analysis although considered in the conclusive chapter to interpret the general trend of the Tunisian party system.

parties' programmes as proxy of the secular-ideological political spectrum in Tunisia. In this way, we are able to have a relatively homogeneous picture referring to the initial phase of the Tunisian democratization, which culminates with the elections of the ANC and the 2014 elections.

From a theoretical point of view, it is argued that the classic Rokkan approach to the analysis of the spatial party alignment suffers because of its eurocentricity. The manifestos show indeed a much more complex matrix of themes, that cannot easily be reduced to the functional and territorial axis which have shaped the European political landscape according to Rokkan (1967). The compromise reached by EN with a wide spectrum of secular parties between 2011 and 2014 favoured the adoption of the new democratic constitution and hastened the reorganization of the secular camp anticipating the 2014 electoral outcome. The re-alignment of the party system took the form of two opposing coalitions although deep regional and socio-economic cleavages have not helped political integration. Three areas are identified in terms of political continuity and socio-economic development, Sahel and Tunis, the South, Sfax and Kairouan, and finally the Western underdeveloped areas at the border with Algeria. Notwithstanding the fact that the parties in the secular camp changed labelling over time, their appeal in these three areas did not decline in 2011-2014. As has been pointed out (Van Hamme, Gana and Ben Rebbah 2014), the North-South cleavage emerged during the state-building process in the post-colonial phase and it is connected to the different socio-economic levels of development.

## **The Breakdown of the Authoritarian Regime in 2011 and the Elections to the Constituent Assembly**

As has already been pointed out (Battera 2012, Ieraci 2013a, Ieraci 2013b), the political stability of Tunisia after the declaration of independence in 1956 was very much guaranteed by the ability of the regime to channel a relatively low level of mobilization through a party organization (the *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique*, RCD).<sup>2</sup> The party became an instrument of state control and managed various aspects of society, from access to the state bureaucracy via patronage to the control of market sectors and of the national economic system. Tunisia held political elections but they were not free and fair, because the oppositions were excluded, while the Parliament played a symbolic function of ratification of the decision of the autocrat. This func-

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<sup>2</sup> RCD was constituted in 1988 by cadres of the former bourgeoisist *Parti Socialiste destourien* (PSD) in support of president Ben Ali.

tion was symbolic because of the position of the Parliaments and their irrelevance in decision-making, and because of the presence of a dominant party. In Tunisia, 20% of the seats were formally reserved for the opposition, but the RCD of President Ben Ali assured more than 80%, thanks to an electoral system which attributed to the majority party in each constituency all the available seats (Ieraci 2013b: 19).

When Ben Ali fled and a new government was announced on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 this government included twelve members of the ruling RCD. Mass protests continued leading to a reshuffle of the government and the dismissal of all the RCD members with the exclusion of the Prime minister. In April 2011 an electoral commission was instituted to design a new electoral system, which turned out to be a PR with party lists and individual seats distributed between lists in constituencies using the largest remainder method. According to this method, the lists are closed, a voter can only choose between lists, and not individual candidates, and is required to alternate between men and women. The 2011 reform is of crucial relevance, in that it established the electoral system to be used in Tunisia ever since.

Elections for the ANC were held on the following October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. The primary issue of controversy during the campaign opposed the role of secularism and Islam in public life and their place in the Constitution. While EN tried to spread the image of a party which was marked by pluralistic principles such as civil freedoms and equality, most of the secular elite worried about the likelihood that once in power the party would endanger achieved civil rights, and in particular women rights. The public was indeed well conscious that it would be summoned to vote not only for the ANC but, more important, also for a new government. From the results (see Tab. 1), two main political tendencies emerged. The confessional and pro-Islam side of the political spectrum was coherent and dominated by EN. On the opposite side, the secularist 'lib-lab' camp was divided by different conceptions of the economy, ranging from the liberal (*Afek Tounes*) to 'labour' approach (*Parti démocrate progressiste*, PDP; *Ettakatol*, FDTL; *Pôle démocratique moderniste*, PDM), and by different degrees of commitment with the former regime. A third party, the CPR (*Congrès pour la République*), emerged as standing between the two recalled confessional-secular tendencies. There was the communist PCOT (*Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie*), which refused to join the secular 'lib-lab' camp, and finally the partisans of the former regime were allowed to run for elections and they gathered around *al-Moubadara* ('The Initiative').

In total, 4,308,888 Tunisians turned out (52%), and about 4 million of votes were declared valid. *Ennahdha* obtained 37.0% of the votes and was able to gain 89 seats out of the 217 of the ANC (see Tab. 1). It is noteworthy that the third most voted party there was the PP (*Pétition populaire*), a personalist and populist party founded by a businessman (Hechmi Hamdi). About 20% of the electorate voted for the sec-

Tab. 1 – 2011 Constituent Assembly Election (Turn out 52.0%)

PARTY	SEATS	VOTES	%
EN	89	1,502,000	37.0
CPR	29	354,000	8.7
PÉTITION POPULAIRE	26	274,000	6.7
FDTL (ETTAKATOL)	20	285,000	7.0
PDP	16	160,000	3.9
AL-MOUBADARA	5	130,000	3.2
PDM	5	113,000	2.8
AFEK TOUNES	4	77,000	1.9
PdT	3	64,000	1.6
Others	20	1,095,000	27.2
Total Valid	217	4,054,000	100.0

[Source: ISIE 2011]

Tab. 2 – Distribution of the Vote for EN in the Constituencies of Three Areas in the 2011 Political Elections

Sahel and Tunis	%	South, Sfax and Kairouan	%	West	%
TUNIS 1	46.3	KAIROUAN	43.0	BEJA	31.1
TUNIS 2	30.3	SFAX 1	44.1	JENDOUBA	28.0
ARIANA	36.1	SFAX 2	37.8	LE KEF	26.7
BEN AROUS	42.3	GABES	53.0	SILIANA	28.5
LA MANOUBA	40.7	MÉDENINE	47.7	KASSERINE	31.8
BIZERTE	41.0	TOZEUR	43.1	SIDI BOU ZID	15.6
NABEUL 1	31.3	KEBILI	40.5	GAFSA	40.4
NABEUL 2	29.6	TATAOUINE	59.4		
ZAGHOUAN	34.6				
SOUSSE	35.8				
MONASTIR	32.5				
MAHDIA	31.1				

[Source: ISIE 2011]

ular parties (*al-Moubadara* and the communists included). About 9% of votes went to CPR and the rest were dispersed among other 17 parties for a total of 27.2% of the votes. These other minor parties were all characterized by weak ideological profiles and personalism.

As above recalled, if the Tunisian socio-economic and demographic development in the post-colonial phase is taken into account, three areas could be identified (Sahel and Tunis, the South, and the West). Tab. 2 reports the electoral results of EN in the constituencies of the three areas, as a proxy of the confessional vote. EN performed at its best in the southern electoral constituencies, particularly Gabes, Médenine and Tataouine, while its lower scores were recorded in three western electoral constituencies, and particularly in Sidi Bou Zid. It should be considered that the revolt against the regime spread from the western districts of Sidi Bou Zid, Le Kef and Jendouba, characterized by economic underdevelopment in comparison with the coastal north.

Unable to form a government alone, EN started talks with the other parties in search for a coalition arrangement and an agreement on the distribution of the political offices. The CPR, having no prejudices against EN, was prompt to join the coalition government. *Ettakatol* followed, although this move generated much disappointment among its cadres and electors. By the end of October Hamadi Jbeli (*Ennahdha*) was elected Prime minister. A month later Mustapha Ben Jaafar, leader of *Ettakatol*, was elected as President of the ANC, and on the 12<sup>th</sup> December Moncef Marzouki was elected by the ANC as President of the Republic with 75% of votes. The outcome of the Tunisian elections to the ANC had an immediate worldwide impact and it was positively welcomed by comments and analysis. Some factors, such as the degree of urbanization, the establishment of large cross-class coalition, and the absence of communal cleavages, were considered conducive for democratic transition in the Tunisian case (Brumberg 2013; Hinnebusch 2015).

## **Political Struggle and party competition in the Early Democratization Phase. Party Manifestos and the 2011 Elections**

Our aim is to identify the main party cleavages that have occurred in Tunisia after the collapse of authoritarianism. Despite some inter-party conflicts (Yardimci-Geyikçi and Tür 2018), the Tunisian transition still stands out as a case of success among the countries of the Arab spring. We can assume as in the classic interpretation of Lipset and Rokkan that a political party is at the same time an agent of conflict and an instrument of integration. The parties integrate the components of a society because

“they have served as essential agencies of mobilization” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 4). But at the same time, the parties “help to crystallize and make explicit the conflicting interests” Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 5). This dual function of the parties is always evident in politics and becomes even more crucial in the phases of democratic transition, when the problem of reconciliation and the organization of the first open and competitive elections arises. The general assumption of Lipset and Rokkan is that “the crucial cleavages and their political expressions can be ordered within [...] a *territorial* dimension of the national cleavage structure and [...] a *functional* dimension” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 10). This scheme is general enough to be conveniently adapted to various contexts. Moreover, it seems to grasp with considerable appropriateness the main causes of party conflict within a state. In fact, the territorial dimension refers to the possibility that reactions of peripheral regions, linguistic minorities, and culturally threatened population to the pressures of the central elites emerge in the formation of the state, or following a regime transition and the attempt of new elites to seize the power. The functional dimension, for its part, is useful to identify “the typical conflict over short-term or long-term allocations of resources, products, and benefits in the economy” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 10). An explicit “territorial question” is not present in the post-authoritarian phase of Tunisia, which as a post-independence state has not suffered from conflicts with linguistic and territorial minorities. However, the socio-political development of Tunisia cannot be defined as balanced, because the areas of the Mediterranean coast enjoy a higher level of wealth and economic progress than those of the south and west of the country.

The functional dimension and the territorial dimension are therefore connected in the Tunisian case and it is for this reason that the Lipset-Rokkan scheme can be fruitful. Nonetheless, the “critical junctures” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 47) that impacted on the functional and territorial-cultural axes and generated the center-periphery, church-state, land-industry and owner-worker fractures are specific to Europe and have no equivalent in the short history of post-colonial Tunisia. We must therefore see how in the Tunisian case contingent cleavages have emerged on the functional and territorial axes. To do this, two research strategies could be followed. One would imply the systematic study of territorial, cultural and class heterogeneities. It would be a question of applying an extensive research strategy to the Tunisian case, analogous for example to that applied by Bartolini (2000) to the study of the mobilization of the European left between 1860 and 1980. However, this perspective goes beyond the limits of this research, which mainly aims to assess the reactions of the new party system following the democratic transition. Therefore, we needed to adopt a less ambitious research strategy, but which would promise to lead more directly to the answers of some basic questions. What are the main parties that appeared on the Tunisian polit-

ical scene after the transition? How did they fit into the political space? What are the main dividing lines in this space?

For this second research strategy, the solution consisted in searching for a proxy variable of the parties' positions on the «space of competition» which is conceived as *party-defined space* (Budge and Farlie 1977). The Manifesto Research Group (Budge 2001) offered an insight, that suggested submitting the party manifestos to a content analysis in order to detect the positioning of the parties on the “left-to-right” political continuum. In a first stage, the researcher is supposed to identify and classify ex-ante the political issues according to their “leftist” or “rightist” features. Subsequently, a content analysis on some text is run, through which: “The percentages of sentences coded into each category constitute the data used in further statistical analysis, such as the Left-Right scales [...] these identified certain categories as belonging theoretically to the right (‘free enterprise’, for example) and certain to the left (such as ‘economic planning’)” (Budge 2001: 78).

With respect to this solution, we have adopted some variants. The first and most important one was the renunciation of defining ex-ante left and right. Not only do these categories apply with difficulty to non-European countries, they also limit the analysis of the competition space in a one-dimensional sense. Although ‘left’ and ‘right’ may have universal character (for example, left may be associated with ‘eager for equality’, whilst right may be associated with ‘preservation of traditions’), their contents are necessarily historically (during which time?) and spatially (in which context or even country?) determined, something which makes cross-time and cross-national comparison rather unreliable. There is the risk not to measure ‘objective’ party positions but rather ‘subjective’ (the researcher’s) reactions to certain stimuli. Secondly, the cleavages that emerge along the two assumed territorial-cultural and functional dimensions are contingent, that is, they result from the political manifestos of the parties as direct and spontaneous manifestations of the positions.

As we have said (see Tab. 1), the 2011 elections for the ANC signaled three main parties of the post-authoritarian phase, namely EN (*Ennahdha*), the *Congrès pour la République* (CPR) and *Ettakatol* (FDTL). Our analysis was conducted on the manifestos of these three parties, and on the manifesto of *Nidaa Tounes* (NT) which was founded in 2012 and soon became a point of reference of the moderate and progressive camp. EN and FDTL are particularly significant, because they constitute the reference points of the political debate along the confessional (EN) and secular (FDTL) axis. Furthermore, FDTL can rightly be considered the precursor of NT, which became a pivotal party after its success in the 2014 general elections. FDTL stand at the origin of the networks of the secularists and the old regime forces, which eventually led to the foundation of NT (Boubekeur 2016). The case of CPR can be considered intermediate with respect to



these two. In fact, CPR stems from the historical opposition to Ben Ali's regime and combines references to the values of Western democracy and to the Tunisian identity. In its founding declaration (which dates 2001), CPR declared as its goal to establish for the first time in Tunisia a republican regime, guaranteeing freedom of speech, of organization and expression as well as the holding of free and fair elections. CPR also calls for the enactment of a new constitution establishing a strict separation of powers, the respect for human rights and gender equality. In addition, CPR calls for a "renegotiation" of Tunisian commitments to the European Union and support the right to the self-determination of peoples, particularly in support of the Palestinian cause.

The methodology here employed aims at a content analysis of the official political programs of the three parties, that is of their "political manifestos". The frequencies of the themes or issues presented in these programs have been recorded, but care has been taken to distinguish between "axial symbols" and "connected symbols". The axial symbols are those that appear in each sentence of the program as the subject or the main object of the sentence itself. The connected symbols are those subordinate to the axial symbols. For example, in the hypothetical phrase "The Tunisian identity must be the reference point for the development of the political community", "Tunisian identity" will be registered as an axial symbol and "development of the Tunisian community" as a symbol connected to it. In general, the syntactic structure of these programs is elementary (subject, verb, predicate) and although there may be differences in the connection between verbs and predicates, or even if the same subject can be connected to the object or objects with multiple predicates, these differences have not been recorded. Indeed, our aim is not a linguistic analysis, but a substantial one. When an axial symbol is linked to several connected symbols, we have counted the frequencies by associating them with the axial symbol, as shown in the tables in the Appendix.

We can briefly characterize the four parties (see the tables in the Appendix). EN presents itself as a traditionalist party linked to the affirmation of Muslim identity. "Arab identity" is the most frequent axial symbol. "Tunisian society" is another important axial symbol, but it is often connected to a symbol such as "Arab-Muslim identity" and also "independent from the state". "Youth" and "Women" are important axial symbols, but often connected to symbols that recall a traditionalist vision, such as "family", "freedom against clothing style" (which emphasizes freedom from western styles), "mother (breastfeeding)" and "as rural economic worker". In the program of EN we also find constant references to "Development" (axial symbol), which is frequently connected to "local, regional, balanced", "agricultural", "Tunisian production". Finally, there is no procedural conception of democracy and the axial symbol "People" is frequently connected to that of "sovereignty (of the people)". Ultimately, EN could

be seen as a traditionalist party, with a local and regional vision of economic development and ultimately linked to a populist conception of democracy.

In the case of FDTL we find a more secular view of politics and also a more modern conception of social and political development. "State" is the most common axial symbol. Other axial symbols make it clear that FDTL adheres to a procedural and rational-legal vision of politics, for example "Constitution", "Parliament", "Rights", "Judiciary and justice", "Administration". All these axial symbols are actually absent in the EN program. Economic development is conceived in capitalist terms, as shown by the frequency of the axial symbol "Investments" and its connection to "Infrastructure", "Bank orientation to investment", "Private investment", "Business culture" and the like. FDTL also places great emphasis on "Training and education". We find among the axial symbols references to the territorial dimension but a "statist" perspective is privileged. "Regional and municipal administrative structures" is an axial symbol associated with "Autonomy", "Decentralization", "Support for regions and municipalities". The very conception of "Administration" (axial symbol) is modern, as it is shown by its connection to symbols such as "Transparency", "Neutrality" and "Objective assessment". "Family" appears as an axial symbol but in connection with current themes such as "Parental leave", "Protection of minors", and "Fighting domestic sexual violence". Ultimately, FDTL presents itself as a modern and secularized party, which addresses its appeal to the most advanced social and economic strata of Tunisia, such as those found in urban centers or more exposed to Western influence.

The case of CPR is interesting because it is a party founded abroad in 2001 by opponents of the Ben Ali regime. The references to "Development" and "economic growth" are central to the CPR program, but in connection with the "regional" dimension, the "development of the Maghreb", "integration" and "cooperation". CPR greatly emphasizes the cultural dimension of its action, as the symbols related to "culture" show, such as "Arabic-Islamic Ministry", "Superior Council of Culture" and "cultural freedom". CPR is the party that mostly addresses the state establishment and in particular the magistrates and the "Judicial system" (axial symbol). This inclination can probably be explained as an attempt of the CPR to secure the support of the magistrates and of part of the state apparatus. We can similarly interpret the attention to the "Military" and to the "National defense" (axial symbols) to which the symbols "military formation", "strategy", "industry" and "military courts" are connected. The defense of the "Arab identity" is underlined, also in connection with "Arab-Islamic origins" and "Arab revival". Ultimately, CPR is a party that proposes itself as a political guide in the hypothesis of a transplacement (Huntington 1991: 151-161) within the regime. For this reason, in its program there is an attempt to balance references to modernization and

political transition with aspects of continuity of the Tunisian regime and state, as well as the re-establishment of the Islamic tradition.

Finally NT, founded in 2012 by the then Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, presents itself as a political party with a secular matrix, with obvious references in its program to the social-democratic tradition and to the issues of the welfare state (see the relative table in the Appendix). The most recurrent axial symbol is “development”, which is often found in connection with “research and innovation”, “modernization”, according to the typical appeal of parties of the social-democratic tradition. However, the social-democratic vision of NT is very attentive to the theme of Tunisian identity (“Tunisia, Tunisian nation”, 53 occurrences), which is found with the connected symbols “economic development”, “Tunisian history and culture”, “tourism”, occasionally also with “Revolution and Freedom”. The axial symbols “Employment” (44 occurrences), “Enterprise” (37), “training and education” (36), “Youth” (35) are among the most common. It should be noted that the NT program reports specific references to some issues related to the development of a welfare system, as shown by the references to the “National Health System” (14 occurrences) and to the “House policy” (18). Any reference to the religious dimension is absent, while NT is the party that pays more attention to the gender issue (“Women and gender equality”, “and maternity leave” appear with 13 occurrences). Finally, references to the Constitution and human rights are almost absent, perhaps a sign that at this stage of post-democratization fundamental rights no longer seem threatened. In essence, NT offers itself as a progressive party, with an explicit social-democratic matrix, which addresses its appeal to the middle, educated and urbanized classes of Tunisia.

Figs. 1-2 provide a summary view of the “party-defined space” as emerges from the analysis of the contents of the manifestos of the four parties and their qualitative comparison. In Fig. 1 the parties are positioned in a two-dimensional space defined according to the scheme of Lipset and Rokkan, crossing the territorial dimension with the functional one. After the Tunisian transition to democracy, the territorial dimension manifests itself as an opposition between the vision of the state as a rational-legal institution and the tendency to reaffirm the basic communities and the regions. The first vision is clearly a legacy of the French post-colonial tradition, while the second is affected by the attempt to recover local identities and above all the ethnic components. Along the functional dimension, there is a “universal” vision that accepts the effects of the modernization and globalization of the markets and a “particular” vision, still linked to the local dimension and the value of solidarity. Looking at the symbolic content of the programs of the four parties (see Appendix), there is clearly a contrast between the vision of an “integrated” Tunisia proposed by FDTL and the “insular” vision defended by EN. This last, along the territorial dimension, underlines

Fig. 1 – EN, FDTL, CPR, and NT on the territorial-functional axis

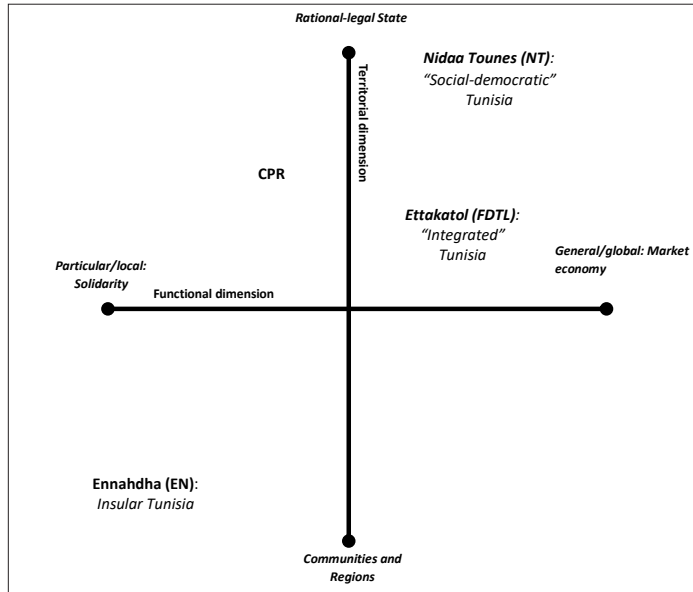
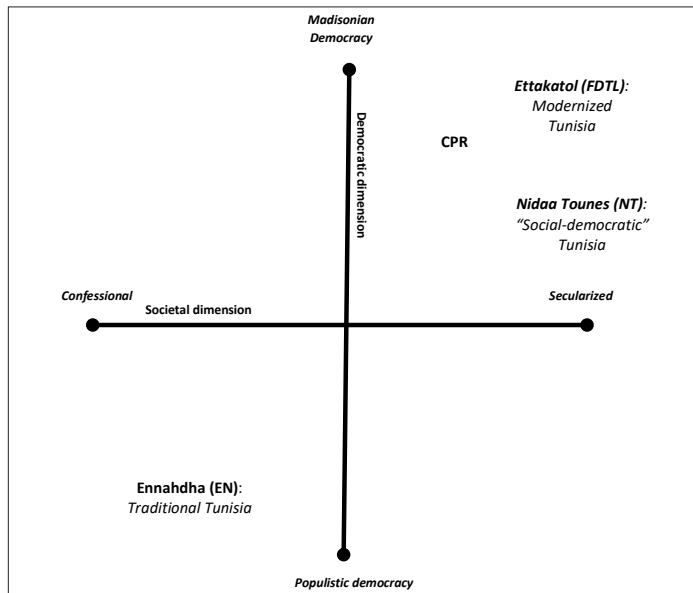


Fig. 2 – EN, FDTL, CPR, and NT on the democracy-confessional/secular axis



the geographical and community composition of Tunisia, almost never proposing a state perspective. Along the functional dimension, EN continually refers to local and regional economic development, which is balanced and takes into account the needs of civil society. Finally, the references to the global economic dimension are absent. FDTL instead presents a vision that we could define as “Integrated” Tunisia. FDTL places the maximum emphasis on the “rational-legal” character of the new Tunisian state, which must be democratic, guarantee freedom and be endowed with an efficient central administration. For this reason, in the FDTL program we also find significant references to the importance of training and higher and university education. The concept of society and the economy of FDTL, along the functional dimension, is clearly inspired by globalization, as shown in the program by the frequent referrals to the levels of investments and infrastructure, to the economic development linked to international markets, to innovation and business competition. CPR instead places itself in an intermediate position between these, because it accepts the secular vision of the state (territorial dimension), but from the functional point of view it underlines both the aspects of the cooperation of Tunisia with its Arab neighbors and the emerging countries, and with the EU. Ultimately, the vision of CPR along the economic-functional dimension is suspended between a cautious adhesion to globalization and the will to preserve the Tunisian matrix of development. Finally, as we have said, NT presents itself in 2012 with a clear secular, progressive and social-democratic vision, in fact launching an open challenge to the confessional vision of EN.

In Fig. 2 the democratic dimension has been crossed with the societal dimension. Indeed, party programs present different perspectives in the conception of democracy and the social community. A counterpoint between the procedural or madisonian conception of democracy and a populist one (Dahl 1956) is clearly evident, while the confessional-secular cleavage appears on the societal axis. Also in this party-defined space the contrast between EN and FDTL appears clear. The former, welcomes the populist vision of democracy and makes itself the defender of the Arab-Muslim identity, and it places the traditional family at the center of its program. In EN’s program we also find the only explicit references to God and the idea that Tunisian society must be declined in the Arab-Muslim identity. Nonetheless, EN can be considered among the “religiously oriented parties” as a conservative type, which acquired at least some features of catch-all parties appealing to all voters except convinced anti-clericals (Ozzano 2013). Ultimately, EN defends the idea of a “Traditional Tunisia” and our findings are consistent with Cavatorta and Merone (2013), who argued that EN moved from its extreme anti-systemic position of the 1970s to become a mainstream conservative party. EN was originally part of the Tunisian Islamist movement developed from the early 1970s as a critical approach to Bourguiba’s attempt to mod-

ernize the country according to a model that would follow the secular tradition of France. The analysis of the political manifesto of EN shows that it “has moved away progressively from its anti-democratic and illiberal position to become a much more traditional religiously oriented political party” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013: 873). On the contrary, FDTL emphasizes the role of political institutions that represent procedural and representative democracy, such as the parliament, the elected president, the constitution and the courts that must defend it. In the FDTL program there are no confessional references. CPR in this two-dimensional space does not differ much from FDTL and also inclines towards a conception of “Modernized Tunisia”. FDTL and other secular parties constitute the political base on which eventually a new rally of the secular camp was possible with the foundation of NT. From December 2011 three subsequent governments followed, and they were supported in the ANC by the same coalition. The first two governments were led by leaders of EN while the third government was a caretaker one led by Mehdi Jomaa (January 2014 – February 2015). The latter enjoyed an even wider support in the ANC including some smaller parties. Under the leadership of Mehdi Jomaa, the Tunisian government tackled some issues related to the economic situation and left the assembly free to focus on the organization of the new political elections. Moreover, Mehdi Jomaa’s government managed a sort of national reconciliation after the former controversial leadership of Ali Laarayedh during whose service in office several leftist activists were murdered.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the group composition of the ANC underwent some remarkable changes. With the exception of EN, between 2011 and 2014 both the CPR and FDTL suffered from floor crossing and splits. A number of new secularist split groups were generated, notably *Alliance démocratique*, *Groupe démocratique* and *Transition démocratique*. *Pétition populaire*, the populist and personal party of Hechmi Hamdi, disappeared from the ANC as an autonomous group.<sup>4</sup>

This reconfiguration of groups in the ANC was also the effect of the birth of NT as the new rally of the secular camp. Although NT does not directly address the constitutional and democratic question in its program, the constant reference to social rights is a clear indication that the political conception of NT is very close to the liberal-democratic one. Contrary to expectations, the fragmentation and the following re-configuration of the assembly before the 2014 elections helped to reach mediation

<sup>3</sup> These political crimes cast a negative shade on Ali Laarayedh and brought about unprecedented political tensions after the transition of 2011. Ali Laarayedh was indeed considered by the secular camp as a hardliner among *Ennahdha*. He was forced to resign in January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Twelve of its MPs resigned from the party already in November 2011 by declaring themselves independent, others quitted the party thereafter. In 2014 the party managed to gain two parliamentary seats.

on the most delicate issues such as the place of secularism in the Constitution and the form of government.

## **The 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections. Cleavages and the regional dimension**

The analysis previously carried out on the manifestos of the four major Tunisian political parties of the transitional phase has served to design a “party-defined space”, which allows the identification of the main cleavages and issues that have guided the political struggle in Tunisia up to the first parliamentary elections of 2014.<sup>5</sup> Now let us turn our attention to this post transition phase. To what extent have the cleavages of the post-transition phase been maintained and how far have they guided the 2014 political electoral campaign? What are the prospects for the 2019 elections?

Under the national dialogue promoted by the civil society and as a result of the new favorable political climate, a new constitution was finally adopted on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2014. As part of the same deal a new government was selected under the leadership of Mehdi Jomaa, which led the country in the transitional period to new elections. On 26<sup>th</sup> October 2014 parliamentary elections were held, followed at the end of November by the first round of presidential elections. As recalled above, the main novelty of this phase is the birth of the new secularist party NT in 2012, which can be effectively considered the “political heir” of FDTL and of other secularist parties. The electorate of NT is secularized and it coincides with the electorate that in 2011 had supported FDTL. Moreover, as illustrated above, NT’s program may be labeled as “social-democrat” and it presents many points of contact with that of FDTL. The 2014 Parliamentary elections significantly gave to NT a relative majority of 86 seats, while EN gained 69 of the overall 217 seats in the Assembly of Representatives of the People (see Tab. 3).

By the end of November, the first round of the presidential election was held. Unexpectedly, EN refused to present its own candidate and decided to support the incumbent president Moncef Marzouki, notwithstanding that Marzouki’s party (CPR) had almost disappeared from the ARP. Therefore, support by EN was crucial for Marzouki but not enough to guarantee him the Presidency,<sup>6</sup> which was won by Caid Essebsi of

<sup>5</sup> The parliament is elected for a 5-year term, but can be dissolved earlier by the President following a failure to form a government, or a failed confidence vote. The country was divided into 27 multi-member constituencies (mostly coinciding with governorates) for 199 seats (between four and 10 seats each) plus 18 seats distributed among six constituencies abroad for a total of 217 MPs.

<sup>6</sup> We can assume that in 2014 CPR’s voters turned largely to EN, as seems evident observing the data of the second presidential run.

Tab. 3 – 2014 Parliamentary Election (Turn Out 68.4%)

PARTY	SEATS	VOTES	%
<i>NIDAA TOUNES</i>	86	1,280,000	37.6
<i>ENNAHDA</i>	69	948,000	27.8
UNION PATRIOTIQUE LIBRE	16	141,000	4.0
FRONT POPULAIRE	15	125,000	3.7
<i>AFEK TOUNES</i>	8	103,000	3.0
OTHERS (CPR)	23 (4)	(70,000)	23.9
TOTAL VALID	217	3,580,000	100.0

[Source: ISIE 2014]

NT with about 56% of votes at the second turn. Discussions followed between the two main parties over the formation of the new government which was eventually led by Habib Essid (February 2015 – August 2016), an independent politician, who had served as Home Affairs Minister in the interlude government of Caid Essebsi in 2011 after the demise of the Ben Ali's regime. Essid's government was supported by a large coalition of NT, EN, the UPL (*Union Patriotique Libre*)<sup>7</sup> and *Afek Tounes*.

The presidential elections showed a country roughly divided into two political areas: in the North, the secularist Caid Essebsi largely prevailed, while in the South the pro-*Ennahdha* Marzouki resulted as the most voted candidate. Two core-opposed areas could be observed. Tunis and the Sahel were pro-Essebsi and NT, whilst the South, Sfax and Kairouan, were largely pro-EN. However in the underdeveloped West, some leftist anti-government parties, particularly the *Front populaire* (FP), drew many of their votes. This electoral result at the first round of the Presidential elections is coherent with the result of the parliamentary elections, which in the West marked the affirmation of some small personal parties (see Tab. 4-5). Presumably, the leftist anti-government voters of the West opted for Essebsi at the second round of the Presidential elections.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Founded by the Tunisian businessman Slim Riahi, UPL is a "liberal" and secularist party, however marked by the personality of its founder. It was the third largest group in the ARP.

<sup>8</sup> The West is the Tunisian region with the lowest pro-capita income (Boughzala & Tlili Hamdi 2014: 10). About a dozen parties compose the FP. A large part of its members were originally members of the PCOT (*Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie*) and Hama Hammami, former leader of the PCOT, is its spokesperson. Notwithstanding that FP is a party which rallies many political fractions, it has not



Tab. 4 – 2014 Presidential Election (I Round – 23.11.14)

CANDIDATE	VOTES	%
CAID ESSEBSI (NT)	1,290,000	39.5
MONCEF MARZOUKI (CPR)	1,093,000	33.4
HAMMA HAMMAMI (FP)	256,000	7.8
OTHERS	629,000	19.3
TOTAL VALID	3,268,000	100.0

[Source: ISIE 2014]

Tab 5 – 2014 Presidential Election (II Round – 21.12.14)

CANDIDATE	VOTES	%
CAID ESSEBSI (NT)	1,732,000	55.7
MONCEF MARZOUKI (CPR)	1,379,000	44.3
TOTAL VALID	3,111,000	100.0

[Source: ISIE 2014]

Rallying the secularist forces behind NT was a key strategy to win a majority of votes in the country, yet the cohabitation between the secularists and the Islamists became very demanding for both the components behind the government. However, party cohesion in EN was no match for that of the parties rallied in the secular camp, where towards the end of 2015 a split appeared between a faction that hardly tolerated any cohabitation with the Islamists and one that was rather more disposed to compromise with EN. In December 2015, these divisions exploded and Mohsen Marzouk,

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been marred by any defection among its MP's since 2014. FP obtained in 2014 about 125,000 votes (3.7% of the total cast), 1/3 of which were casted in the underdeveloped West. Consequently, six out of the fifteen MPs of FP were elected in the West districts, where the votes for the FP were about 1/5 of those for NT and about 1/3 of the votes for EN. The rooting of FP in the West (particularly in the district of Sidi Bouzid) and the economic backwardness of this area might provide an explanation of the outburst of protests in 2011 and more recently in January 2018 against the government.

co-founder and secretary of NT resigned after clashing with the faction led by Hafedh Caid Essebsi, son of the president of the Republic. More than twenty MPs followed him, and in March 2016 Mohsen Marzouk founded a new political party, *Machrouu Tounes* (“Tunisia project”). As a consequence, the parliamentary group of NT started to decline in number, counting in July 2017 56 MPs from the original 86, and as a consequence EN became the largest parliamentary group. The MPs of *Machrouu Tounes* in the APR joined the *Bloc al Horra* (BH), while other eight members of NT merged in May 2017 in a newly constituted *Bloc National* (BN).<sup>9</sup>

In October 2016, another group was formed – *Bloc Démocrate* – made of different parties, mostly members of CPR and of MDP (*Mouvement du Peuple*).<sup>10</sup> *Bloc Démocrate* decided to remain in opposition, while BH and BN offered parliamentary support to the newly formed coalition government under the leadership of Youssef Chahed (since August 2016).<sup>11</sup> The cabinet portfolios were allocated mainly to no-party and independent members, some of whom had already served as ministers in the previous cabinet. The dynamic of the secularist camp seems therefore incoherent, the secularist forces rallied against EN but they were subsequently incapable of coherent action and they split again. Thanks to these splits and divisions in the secular camp, EN acquired a new central position in the APR (*Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple*), the Tunisian single chamber parliament, where it is now the main group (see Tab. 6). EN was able to maintain a greater cohesion and avoid floor-crossing and lost only one MP. Discipline in the party is very strong and differences about political strategies, which regard mostly whether or not to support any coalitional government with secular forces, have been always minimized in order to avoid splits.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Differences between those who adhered to BN and BH are difficult to ascertain. Members of BN have been for the most members also of BH. Almost all the MPs of BN (six out of eight) were elected in the constituencies of the Great Tunis. The MPs of BH are for their part more representative of the regional differences in the country, although most of them come from the North. The party composition of both BN and BH is made of former “second rank members” of NT.

<sup>10</sup> The MDP is a Nasserist party, which elected three MPs in the APR.

<sup>11</sup> Youssef Chahed’s government received formal investiture by the APR with 167 votes out of 194. Votes of confidence were cast by EN, NT, *al Horra*, UPL and AT. Curiously, two abstention votes came from two NT parliamentarians who have nonetheless remained in the party.

<sup>12</sup> Discipline is high in the Assembly where participation by EN members is on average higher than the other parties, but is also managed by an executive bureau – *Bureau Exécutif* (BE) – made of 25 members and approved by the *Choura* during July 2016. Democracy in the party is ruled by the *Choura* which is a consultative council, which also is supposed to approve most of the decisions of the BE. The *Choura* is made of 150 members, 100 of them elected by the Congress with a secret ballot and the others designated by those elected in order to ensure a regional/gender equilibrium as well as representation of professions and a minimum number of MPs.

Tab. 6 – Distributions of Seats in the House of Representatives

PARTY	Seats as July 2018	Difference with respect to the initial allocation (2014)
ENNAHDA	68	-1
NIDAA TOUNES	55	-31
BLOC AL HORRA <sup>1</sup>	19	+19
FRONT POPULAIRE	15	=
UNION PATRIOTIQUE LIBRE	12	-4
BLOC DÉMOCRATE <sup>2</sup>	12	+12
ALLEGANCE A LA PATRIE <sup>3</sup>	10	+10
BLOC NATIONAL <sup>1</sup>	10	+10
OTHERS	14	-9

<sup>1</sup> Made by former NT members.

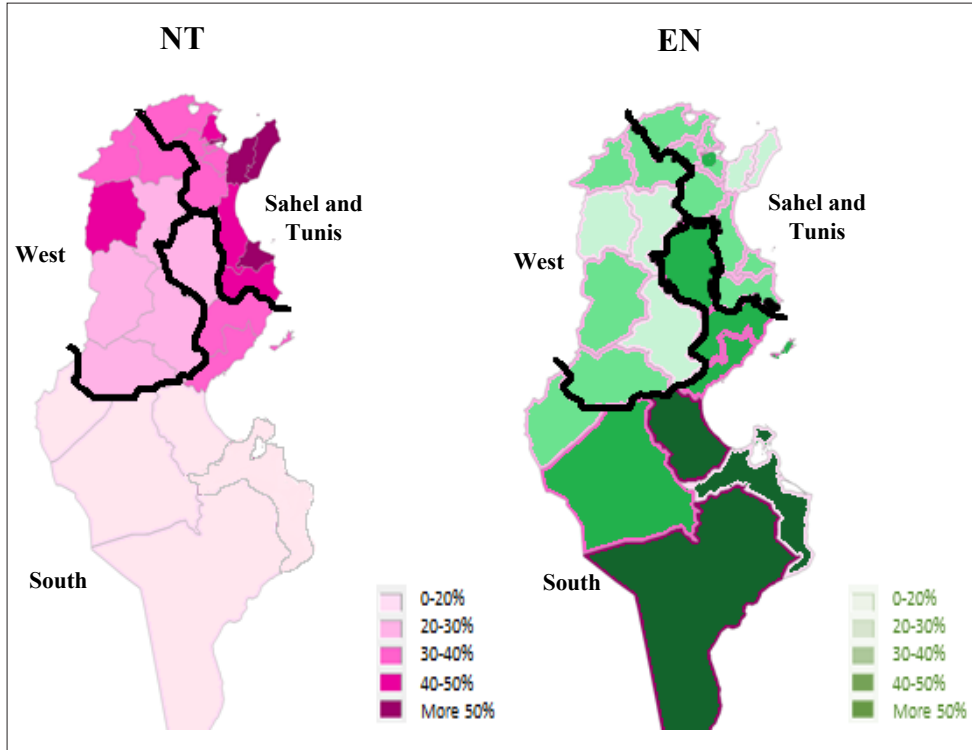
<sup>2</sup> Mostly formed by ex CPR members plus panarabists from *Mouvement du Peuple*.

<sup>3</sup> Group made for the most by former AT and NT members.

## The Future of the Tunisian party system from 2014 to the Municipal elections of 2018

In 2016 EN held its 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, the first after its legalization in March 2011. The Congress broadcasted the moderate and responsible profile of the party. It marked the transition of the movement into a real party by “separating” the religious and the political activities. This evolution started when the party rapidly learned lessons from the changes in the international setting after the overthrow of the Brotherhood in Egypt by the Sisi coup in 2013. Since then the short momentum of religious parties in the Islamic world, which had commenced with the Arab spring of 2011, has ended. The civil war in Syria, the mounting of terrorism, and most recently the crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the major sponsor of movements affiliated or related to the Brotherhood, have also impacted on EN, moving the party towards a strategy which is more conceivable as “conservative” rather than “Islamic”, therefore following a similar pattern as the Turkish AKP during the 2000’s (Özbudun, 2006; Bayat, 2013; Wolf 2013). This should imply the acceptance of pluralism, the value of national unity against Islamic internationalism and the centrality of Islamic values in

Fig. 3 – 2014 Political Elections: Mapping the Electoral Results of NT and EN by Electoral Districts



[Source: own elaboration on data drawn from ISIE]

Tunisian society. It could be that the acceptance of pluralism was a camouflage and an opportunistic tactical move by EN, as implied by the parties of the secular camp. Whatever the case, it is a matter of fact that, at the moment, EN does not enjoy an absolute majority in parliament or in the country. While the 2011 elections marked the best result for EN (37% of the votes), the 2014 elections show a flowing back. The hope of the party is therefore to regain political centrality by exploiting the divisions in the secular camp, by enlarging towards the right its core support, while maintaining at the same time a social profile which could appeal to the lower classes. The emergence of a new generation of young MPs and cadres has been also crucial in improving the party profile, although EN still results “older” by age composition if compared with NT and its split parties.

The electorate of EN could be put into two groups: the emerging urban middle class and the rural poor classes. Therefore, it could be classified as a conservative and class-cutting party. This is consistent with the picture outlined by the “party-defined space” (Figs. 1-2 above), which as we have seen identifies as the main characteristics of EN the local-regional vision, attentive to the religious identity of Tunisia, and the propensity to favor a populist conception of democracy. As the electoral results show, the support for EN is much wider in the poor Southern regions than in the underdeveloped West (see Fig. 3), where its diffusion is hindered by a political culture and attitudes characterized by protest and resentment which are typical of the lower social strata. EN is also well represented in urban areas, in big conurbations such as Greater Tunis. There are also no significant differences in social and regional origins between the emerging urban middle class and rural poor classes, since the former are often of the same origins as the latter, representing the most successful strata of the older exodus. In a country where poor classes are ample,<sup>13</sup> and rural exodus is relevant, patronage has maintained a crucial role for party legitimacy. From this point of view, EN has filled, or aims at filling the vacuum left by the RCD.

The distribution of the MPs in the 2014 political elections obviously reflected the vote distribution of EN as represented in Fig. 3. The EN MPs coming from the South (including the district of Kairouan) prevail over those coming from the other regions, although conurbations like Tunis or Sfax are also well-represented. This predominance of Southerners in EN against Sahelians in NT is also marked by the regional origin of some EN MPs elected in Greater Tunis such as Ali Laarayedh, Sahbi Atig, Jamila Debbech and others, not considering those elected abroad, a great part of whom are from the South by family origin.<sup>14</sup> Out of the 68 MPs of EN, 27 are women and several among them are engaged in Islamic oriented civil society organizations.<sup>15</sup> If we compare EN with NT MPs according to their profession (percentage), the results not only reflect their social roots but also their potential constituencies, with liberal professions and the top positions in the private sector still dominated by secularist representatives, while the public sector, in particular education is growingly dominated by the religious party. Therefore, employees of lower educational levels are found among EN MPs (20.6% out of the total) and less among NT MPs (5.3%), whilst entrepreneurs or

<sup>13</sup> The percentage of population living below the national poverty line was estimated to be about 15.2 in 2015 (<https://data.worldbank.org/country/Tunisia>).

<sup>14</sup> According to the geographic distribution, 39.3% of EN MPs out of the total were elected in the South, Kairouan and Sfax constituencies. Only 11.8% of NT MPs were elected in the same area. On the contrary, 58.9% of NT MPs were elected in the area which include Sahel and the Greater Tunis area against 42,7% for EN.

<sup>15</sup> All these and the following data are available on <https://majles.marsad.tn/2014/fr/assemblee>.

Tab. 7 – Party Fragmentation in Parliament: The Secular vs. the Religious Camp (2011-18)

Camps	Parties (as October 2011)	Seats	Parties (as October 2014)	Seats	Parliamentary Groups (as July 2018)	Seats
Secularist	FDTL	20	<i>Nidaa Tounes</i>	86	<i>Nidaa Tounes</i>	55
	PDP	16			<i>Bloc Al Horra</i>	19
	<i>Al-Moubadara</i>	5	UPL	16	UPL	12
	PDM	5	<i>Afek Tounes</i>	8	<i>Allegiance a la patrie</i>	10
	<i>Afek Tounes</i>	4			<i>Bloc National</i>	10
Religious	<i>Ennahdha</i>	89	<i>Ennahdha</i>	69	<i>Ennahdha</i>	68

managers of the private sector are more likely found in NT (26.8%) than in EN (11.8%). This professional background of the MPs of NT reflects the attitude and preferences of the secular electors.

Once again (see Appendix and the related discussion above), the party manifestos of 2011 highlighted these differences. The secular camp party in that phase, that is FDTL, declared its commitment to a constitutional structure with elective presidential and powers to dissolve parliament. EN, on the other hand, frequently emphasized the principle of popular sovereignty and republican values, with an obviously more populist accent. We are in the presence of the opposition between the procedural and Madisonian conception of democracy, on the one hand, and the populist one, on the other (see Fig. 2). As EN accepted to maintain a diluted form of division between religion and politics,<sup>16</sup> a compromise was reached between the secular camp, which favored presidentialism, and EN, which favored parliamentarism. The result was a mixed form of government where the president is directly elected as head of the state for a maximum of two terms and a prime minister is the head of the government.<sup>17</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> After several drafts, the new constitution was approved in January 2014. The most delicate issues regarded the place of religion and the relations between Islam and the state. The constitutional debate attracted attention and it is well discussed in literature (Marks 2014; Netterstrøm 2015). For a reconstruction of the Tunisian constitutional process, see Carter Center (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Among the most important powers attributed to the President is the power to dissolve the parliament (see above, footnote 6).

major problem for the secular camp is therefore to create a cohesive party which could represent those interests. Personalisms in NT badly impacted on its cohesion (see Tab. 7). In other words, while EN has established itself as a cohesive party and it is capable of appealing to the most conservative sectors of Tunisian society, NT has failed to become a stronghold of the secular camp, lacking party cohesion and being subject to fragmentation and floor-crossing.

## **Conclusion. Democracy, Personal Power and Party System in Tunisia**

Waiting for the next political elections scheduled in 2019, the municipal elections held on the May, 6<sup>th</sup> 2018 came as a shock. The turnout was lower than expected – about 35.6% – and organized parties managed to obtain less than 68% of votes, since more than 32% went to independent lists. EN obtained 28.6% and NT 20.9% of the votes. NT, as expected, lost about 800,000 votes in comparison to the 2014 elections, confirming its crisis. EN obtained a little more than half million votes, half the votes obtained in 2014, and one third of its result in 2011.

Given the high fragmentation of lists and parties, the interpretation of these electoral results is not easy. However, it is possible to identify some general trends, which are partially consistent with previous ones. EN still has its major electoral strongholds in the South and in some areas of the Greater Tunis. Moreover, EN has resulted the most voted party in the majority of the municipalities of the South. EN has also been able to win in 11 out of 18 municipalities in the Bizerte governorship. NT has maintained its strength in the Northern areas and in the Sahel, although losing important positions at the expense of independent lists in major towns.<sup>18</sup> NT has also obtained good results in some districts of the West regions.

What has been the impact of the 2018 local elections on the party system and on the government? Could we consider them as a test for the coming general elections 2019? In terms of absolute votes and relative percentages, EN has been in the 2018 local election very far from equalizing the success registered in 2011. Nonetheless, there has at least been a confirmation of the result obtained in 2014 (which was 27.8% of the votes). EN remains, therefore, the largest and most resilient party in the Tunisian system, and it is well rooted in the South and in the conurbations. EN maintains an important leverage in terms of patronage and influence for future governments, by means of controlling some major municipalities. NT, on the other hand, has collapsed

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<sup>18</sup> NT was the second most voted party in Tunis (after EN), and in Monastir (after an independent list). It was confirmed as first party in Nabeul and Sousse, although only by relative majority (23%).

from 37.6% of the votes obtained in 2014 to 20.9% in 2018. It is still the second largest Tunisian party, it is moreover relatively well consolidated in the Sahel and in the West, but it has now lost about 800,000 votes that have swung to various independent lists and partially got lost because of abstention from voting. In other words, vote dispersion has affected the secular camp more than the confessional one and that explains why EN with a loss of more than 400,000 votes in the 2018 local election, compared to the 2014 results, can still claim to be the major Tunisian party.

Nonetheless the haemorrhage of votes suffered by NT has not favoured any of its challengers in the secular camp, because of the before mentioned success and fragmentation of independent lists. NT was created as a secularist rally behind Beiji Caid Essebsi, but it is hard to predict that he might be successful again in 2019 using the same political programme adopted at the debut of the party in 2012 (see above the discussion of the party manifesto). In this perspective, the 2018 municipal elections resemble those for the Constituent Assembly in 2011, when the secular camp was deeply divided and EN won a majority of votes and seats. If divisions among the secular camp persist, it could be argued that the 2018 local elections provided a reliable test for the forthcoming 2019 political elections. The 2019 elections remain therefore uncertain and the perspective of a new rally of the secular forces against EN is probably doomed to failure. The 2018 local elections also revealed the inability of a secular party to take root because of the patronage and factionalism which are still dominating Tunisian politics.

The democratization in Tunisia after 2011 has certainly produced social tensions, following the growth of new expectations in the classes that in the past were marginal (Weilandt 2019). Compared to the uncertainties of the first phase of democratization, when one wondered if democracy would take root (Landolt and Kubicek 2014), today the prospects appear less gloomy. Firstly, it should be emphasized that in Tunisia “secularists and Islamists tried to adopt more conciliatory policies vis-à-vis each other in order to prevent an Egyptian-style coup and the possibility of collapsing the Tunisian state via internal strife” (Somer 2017: 1037). Many studies have shown that this compromise was favored by the pluralism of Tunisian society and the relative strength of the organizations of interests and the working class (Allinson 2015). Secondly, as we have already implied, in the Tunisian case EN constitutes an exception with respect to the affirmation of religious parties in recently democratizing Muslim countries. In general, the immoderation of incumbent Islamic parties must be observed, for example in Turkey and Egypt. However, EN is the exception to these more uncertain developments, due to its availability to compromise with the opposition parties and civil society organizations (Kirdiş 2018; Torelli, Merone and Cavatorta 2012; Wolf 2013). These moderating tendencies have also been favored



by the new Constitution of 2014, which “creates a political system with many veto players with a thin line between consensus and deadlock” (Pickard 2014: 259). In this way, destructive conflicts have been prevented and the political process is forced to compromise. As a result, the current Tunisian regime consists of a bargaining system between Islamists and old regime elites, which seek to legitimize each other despite a fierce competition over political resources. These trade-offs involve the Islamists of EN and the networks of the secularists and the old regime, in particular NT as the heir of FDTL (Boubekeur 2016).

Finally, from a systemic point of view, the Tunisian party alignment, although extremely fluid, at the moment resembles what has been labelled as «multilateral distribution with dominant party». EN is the dominant party, and its relative decline is compensated by the current difficulties of the secular forces to rally in a stable and cohesive party. We are indeed observing a relatively fluid party system, which could easily be moving to a new structure and dynamics of «multilateral distribution with *no* dominant party» (Ieraci 2012). This potential evolution is highlighted by the composition of the coalition governments, that have included over time parties from the confessional and the secular camps. This type of party system, as has been proved by the experience of the democratic transition in Eastern and Central Europe after the collapse of the Communist regimes, tends to be highly fragmented and lacking in any anchor points. The newly born political parties lacked any clear ideological identity and they were appealing both to the left and right electorate, from different social strata, sometimes as a result of large electoral alliances.

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## Appendix

### Content Analysis of the Parties' Manifestos

<b>Ennahdha (EN)</b>		
Axial symbol	Connected symbols	n.
Development	balanced and civil society children global human of society of the economic sector financing of - of cooperation of the country local, regional, balanced of the banking sector agricultural of tourism and the Kyoto protocol university teaching and - scientific knowledge and - Tunisian production and -	26
Arab identity/Muslim/Islam	Arab-Muslim identity Arab-Muslim culture in the world Arab as language (of the Tunisian state) Islamic finance Islamic banks	16
Partnership	consent and social pact between states and peoples with Arab and African countries with the EU with USA, Canada and Japan between university and business	14
People	wellness of the - sovereignty of -	12
Youth	Family economic enterprise National Youth Observatory youth tourism	11

Technology	and innovation technological poles for network management	11
Family/Relatives	- and business assistance to -	9
Women	right to work freedom against clothing style in education and culture as rural economy worker protection of - as mothers (breastfeeding) achievements of - equality between men and women discrimination and violence against - no to the economic and social exclusion of -	9
Freedom	public and individual of expression of association of belief and thought	8
Jobs and labour market	and family value of work right to work family needs and work	8
State	(Tunisia) free and independent modern of law civil respectful of political freedom as a guarantee against dictatorship	7
Childhood/children	rights of - assistance for - as handicap bearers	7
Tunisian society/Civil society	and Arab-Muslim identity independent from the state and civilization	7
Tunisia	as a market for craft products as a technological port as a medical tourism hub as a regional financial center as a university teaching pole	6
Market	- social and solidarity Maghreb common market Public and private complementarity	6
Republic		4

Revolution (Arab spring)		4
Modernization	and working methods teaching and modern administration of technical / industrial structures	4
God	and security and people	3
Reforms		2
Heritage	National - and tourism	2
Dialogue between Cultures / Differences		2
Pacific alternation in power		2
Rule of law and equality		2
Religion	Islam as State religion	1
Tunisians abroad	and Arab-Muslim identity	1
Citizenship		1
Democracy		1
Social pact		1
Multi-party system		1
Government	responsible before the parliament	1
Elections	for positions of responsibility	1
Divorce		1
Colonization		1
Patronage and clientelism		1
Dictatorship		3
Corruption		3

[Source: [www.ennahdha.tn](http://www.ennahdha.tn) (2013)]

<b>Ettakatol (FDTL)</b>		
Axial symbol	Connected symbols	n.
State	Sovereign people Identity of the Tunisian people Defense of the Arabic language Defense of religious freedom Democratic Guarantee of social cohesion Equality and social justice Central State Administration Stimulation of economic investments	16
Investments	Infrastructure and the fight against corruption Reduction of corporate tax Bank orientation to investment Innovative entrepreneurs Private investment in culture Creation of an agency for cultural investments Business culture Social pact between citizens and business	11
Constitution	Constitutional Court Constitutional rights Human rights	8
Training and education	Compulsory education Reform of secondary education Contrast of early school leaving University reform and autonomy	7
Parliament	Parliamentary majority Parliamentary control of the government Creation of a Maghreb parliament Law initiative	7
Rights	Constitutional rights Human rights Rights of foreigners	5
Judiciary and justice	Improve the working conditions of judges Independence of judges Training and specialization Superior Council of the Magistracy as guarantor	5
Regional and municipal administrative structures	Autonomy Decentralization Support for regions and municipalities	5



Administration	Adjustment of working hours for administrative staff Transparency of procedures Administration neutrality Objective assessment of the administration	4
Family	Parental leave Extracurricular activities of young people Protection of minors Fighting domestic sexual violence	4
Economic development	Creation of five macro regions International market Innovative and competitive industries Tunisia as a service hub	4
President	Direct election Guarantor of balance Presidential power to dissolve the parliament	3
Election, principle of -	of local authorities of the members of the Superior Council of the Magistracy of local authorities	3
Judicial power	Independence of judicial power Compensation for victims and reconciliation	3
Media	Creation of an independent authority Ensure neutrality	3
Ministry of the Interior and Order	Guarantee of neutrality Reorganization Placed at the service of the nation	3
Equality	between genres among individuals of opportunities among young people	3
Tunisian people identity	Tunisian culture	2
Rule of law	Law equal for all Guarantees for the defense of the accused	2
Social justice		2
Work	Creation of 100 thousand jobs in the public service Creation of job centers	2
Freedom	public and individual Fundamental rights	2
Tax system	Fair and just Tax relief for the poor classes	2
Agricultural development	Full rural development Agricultural credit Land use	2

Transparency	of the parliamentary debate Court of Auditors	2
Tourism	Hotel development Crafts related to tourism Local culture	2
Renewable energy		1
Army and defense	Neutrality	1
Emerging countries	Strengthen ties with -	1
Palestinian people	Support the -	1
Revolution (Arab Spring)	Democratic thought Freedom in the Arab world Creation of an Arab Democratic Union	1
Urban development		1
Transportation		1
European Union	Review of association agreements	1

[Source: [www.ettakatol.org](http://www.ettakatol.org) (2013)]

<b>Congrès pour la République (CPR)</b>		
Axial symbols	Connected symbols	n.
Development / economic growth	regional – Arab Fund for Maghreb Development sustainable – alternative energy and – electronic media for the – - in the health sector - and consultation - and regional marginalization internal – Free economic system and – balanced – - and integration - and cooperation	34
Culture	Arab-Islamic Ministry Superior Council of Culture Cultural freedom	18
Judicial system/magistrates	Independent Unification of the -	17
Social justice	inequality and – - and social policies - and social classes	17
Security	National -	14
State	sovereign – - budget - social	13
Tax system	- and progressive rates taxpayer protection from - revision of tax exemptions promotion of tax administration complete tax legislation fiscal balance - and tax burden - and social injustice income tax revision exemption of low incomes - and capital surplus Tax collector, elimination of - review local taxes - as a resource for the state	13
Investments and firms		12
Public sector	- and health - and national debt - right of health assistance	12

Citizenship	- and democracy - and participation - and local democracy	12
Market and business	global – Tunisian international trade cooperation and traders loans to small companies Contrast corruption	11
Reforms and transparency		10
Associations	sport and - - and civil society	10
Tourism		10
Freedom	protection of - - of information - from dependence	9
Environment	- and development Legislation on -	9
Cooperation	- with EU regional economic and finance – school-industry – Tunisia with Arab neighbors Technologic – with emerging countries - in the agricultural sector - in the health sector - between government and regional and local authorities	8
Information and computer technology	Freedom of – - and piracy	8
Rights	Human rights Equality of rights	7
Scientific research		7
Military	- military formation - strategy - industry - military courts	7
National defence		5
Arab identity	education and programs – Arab-Islamic origins Union of Arab peoples - and consent Arab revival	5

Agricultural policy	- and associations product distribution small business agricultural sector and environmental issue	5
Laws	Constitutional – - and cultural initiatives	4
Public administration	- and tax justice	4
Industry	traditional - military, development of - industrial sector, development of - - and cooperation with the state	4
Banks	Independence of the Central bank Transparency Control over the – - for the regional development	4
National debt	Submit foreign debt to control Reduce in foreign debt Evaluate foreign debt	4
Prisons	- and prison police - not meeting international standards	3
Technology	- policy for technology - institutes	3
People		2
Colonization	- and corruption	1
Palestine	- and Zionist colonization	1
Youth		1
International peace		1
'Good government'		1
Zionism		1
Western world		2
Capital	- and profit	2

[Source: [www.ettakatol.org](http://www.ettakatol.org) (2013)]

<b>Nidaa Tounes (NT)</b>		
Axial symbols	Connected symbols	n.
Development	Research and innovation - and renewable energy - and national resources Technology, innovative and competitive industries - and finance - and infrastructure regional and industrial areas Modernization	88
Tunisia, Tunisian nation	- and economic development International system and the EU Tunisian history and culture Revolution and liberty - and science - and tourisme	53
Employment	- and youth - and women protection of the employment	44
Enterprise	- and economic growth private and free	37
Training and education	Compulsory education Reform of secondary education Contrast of early school leaving professional and technological University autonomy and grant system	36
Youth	- and employment - and entreprise - and Tunisia - and education - and "Corp de la Jeunesse" - and access to propety - and agriculture	35
Regions	Internal regions Decentralization Regional banks - and municipalities Support for regions - and development	33

Investments	- and tourisme Foreign investments - and regional development Private investments and growth	24
State	Authority of the - - and the private sector - and development - and security and rule of law Guarantee of social rights Equality and social justice - and the private sector - and consolidation of the republican institutions - and efficient administration	22
Natural resources	water Fishery and water resources	21
Agriculture and farmers	as a strategic sector - and handicraft Financing agriculture	20
Housing	Guarantee of - House policy	18
Social-democracy		18
Public Administration	Efficacy of the - Transparency of procedures Administration neutrality Struggle against fiscal elusion and fraud	17
Tourism		16
National Health System	reform of the - - opened to everyone	14
Women	- and gender equality - and maternity leave	13
Social economy and solidarity	Struggle against poverty and disadvantage social aid	9
Social promotion		7
Finance	Reform of the financial system Regional banking system	6
Urban and interurban transport		6
Employment		5
Pension schema	reform of the -	3

Family		2
Rule of law	Public ethic	2
Constitution		1
Human rights		1

[Source: Nidaa Tounes, *Commission économique et sociale, Notre programme pour un développement ambitieux au service de tous les Tunisiens*, 15 août 2014]



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