

Africa 2019: An Overview on Three Key Elections

Africa 2019: una panoramica su tre elezioni chiave

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Abstract

This paper analyzes and compares three key elections that have been selected among the many held in 2019 in Africa. Countries have been chosen according to the demographic and geographical relevance of the countries and their impact at a macro-regional level. In particular, elections in Tunisia, being the only free country in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, were believed to have a broader impact at the macro-regional level, effects which would embrace the entire Arab world, and therefore well beyond its political, demographic and economic status. South Africa and Nigeria are two continental giants and the impact of their elections speaks for itself. The elections in South Africa occurred in a well consolidated setting of cleavages and parties, which however is still evolving. This evolution deserves specific attention, in particular in the perspective of a future end of ANC dominance. Elections were held in Nigeria under the threat of terrorism and important logistical challenges. In this case too, special attention must be given to considering the interactions of ethno/regional cleavages and their impact on party consolidation. It serves as a test case for other countries as well.

Questo articolo analizza e compara tre elezioni chiave selezionate tra i molti casi presenti in Africa nel 2019. I casi sono stati selezionati sia in base a criteri di rilevanza demografica e geografica che il loro impatto a livello macro-regionale. In particolare, le elezioni in Tunisia, essendo la Tunisia l'unico paese pienamente libero dell'area MENA (Medio Oriente e Nord Africa), erano ritenute avere un impatto più ampio a livello macro-regionale, con effetti tali da abbracciare l'intero mondo arabo e quindi molto al di là della statura politica economica e demografica del paese. Il Sudafrica e la Nigeria sono invece due giganti e l'impatto delle loro elezioni parla da sé. Le elezioni in Sudafrica si sono tenute in un contesto ben consolidato di fratture e partiti. Un contesto che però è in evoluzione. Questa evoluzione merita un'attenzione specifica perché potrebbe mettere in discussione il futuro del dominio stabilito dall'ANC. Le elezioni nigeriane si sono tenute in un contesto segnato dalla minaccia terroristica e dalle sfide logistiche. Anche questo caso meritava dunque attenzione. In particolare, sono stati presi in considerazione sia le dinamiche etno/regionali che il loro impatto sul consolidamento dei partiti. Questo caso potrebbe infatti servire come test per altri casi africani.

Keywords

Africa, Elections, Cleavages, Party-System, Democratization
Africa, elezioni, fratture, Sistema partitico, democratizzazione

Introduction

In Africa the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991) started at the beginning of the 90s and so far many regular elections have been held throughout the continent. Given the many elections held in 2019 a selection of three cases has been made. Countries and elections have been selected according to their magnitude in terms of population and geography and/or the importance of their political impact in the area or region. Three countries have therefore been selected: South Africa, Nigeria and Tunisia. These cases were selected for the following reasons: South Africa and Nigeria are two giants in terms of demography and regional importance. The weight of the two countries is such that it surpasses their serious flaws as far as their democratic standards are concerned, at least in the case of Nigeria.¹ Countries like Namibia, Botswana and Senegal, which met those standards, were excluded because their importance on a regional scale was less significant than Nigeria. Tunisia was included, being the only North African/Arab country that met those standards in 2019. This reason excluded therefore the case of the presidential elections in Algeria which in 2019 could be still considered under an authoritarian regime.

On 8 May South Africa elected a National Assembly (NA) and the Provincial Legislatures (PLs). A presidential nomination by the NA followed. Similarly, also Nigerian electors were called to cast their vote on 24 February for the President, the House of Representatives (HoR) and a Senate. Governors and State Assemblies (SAs) followed on 31 March. South Africa too has an upper house (the NCOP; National Council of Provinces), whose members are however provincial delegates selected by the PLs according to the proportion of party representation in each legislature. The role of the NCOP is to amend bills and propose legislation on matters where PLs have concurrent legislative power. Tunisia held elections both for the President and the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP), respectively on 15 September (first round) and 13 October (second round), and 6 October. Presidential elections had previously been planned for November, but were brought forward after the death of the president Caid Essebsi in July to ensure that a new president could take office within the terms required by the constitution.

The first two countries are big players on a continental scale while Tunisia is a small country of about ten million inhabitants, but which acquired importance after 2011 and the fall of the previous authoritarian regime as an outstanding exception among Arab countries. Common points with the two other major players considered here are very weak. Nigeria democratized in 1999 and South Africa achieved full mem-

¹ In 2019, Nigeria was still a partly free country according to the 2019 FH report.

bership among young democracies with the demise of apartheid and its full multiracial elections in 1994. Therefore, experience of elections in Tunisia is very poor compared to the other countries. Tunisia held for the first time multiparty elections in 2011 when a Constituent Assembly (CA) was elected. Furthermore, contrary to the other two political systems, three subsequent elections in Tunisia took place in a very flawed and incoherent party system. However, elections in Tunisia deserve attention for the political impact on a regional scale and for assessing the vitality and sustainability of the democratic process. The failure of this process would probably end or endanger the further increase of democratization in the Arab world.

South Africa and Nigeria in Comparative Perspective: Towards a Decline of ANC Dominance in South Africa

Some common points between South Africa and Nigeria can be found. One is decentralization. Nigeria is a federal state and South Africa is a quasi-federal one. This means that also local (provincial or state) elections are crucial for the electoral and internal power distribution. However, differences regard stability of the unitary state. Nigeria historically proved to be a far more fragile state, with local dissent/secessionist/terrorist movements and guerrillas concentrated in the southeast and the northeast, although the country also proved to be resilient and managed to pass through several crises in an extraordinary way. In Nigeria, elections are held every four years. Therefore, since 1999, five electoral cycles have been held and notwithstanding some flaws and manipulations, elections have been held regularly and are generally free although less fair. Electoral participation is not the best in Sub-Saharan Africa (on average a little less than 50% in the last ten years), given the extensive underdevelopment. Terrorist activity by Boko Haram did not impede voting in the northeast, in 2019, where a voter turnout (VTO) above the national average (34.8%) was reached. For example, in Borno, the state most affected by terrorism VTO was between 40 and 50%, while in the extreme south – Lagos and Abia – where terrorist activity was nonexistent, VTO was less than 20%.

Development indicators are more generous in South Africa and a tradition of political mobilization by the dominant party – the ANC (African National Congress) – explains the levels of political participation which are usually excellent (a mean of 78.3% since 1994). Since 1994, South Africa has also experienced five electoral cycles (electors are called every five years) all dominated by the ANC with declining scores. Up to 2015, when Muhammadu Buhari was elected as President of Nigeria and his political party – the APC (All Progressives Congress) – won the parliamentary elections, also

Nigeria was dominated by a single party – the PDP (People’s Democratic Party). This dominance is now over and Nigeria is possibly evolving towards a two-party system. Similar trends have not been observed in South Africa, although a long stand in power by the ANC has favored a process of erosion both on its left and on its right.

Electoral systems differ for the two countries. In Nigeria, a single-member district system is in force (commonly referred as first-past-the-post; FPTP) for both the HoR and the SAs, while in South Africa electors cast their vote according to a proportional system by closed list for the NA and have no decision on the selection of the candidates, whose order on the list is decided by the parties. In South Africa, half of the 400 MPs are elected from national party lists, while the others are elected from provincial party lists in each of the nine provinces. The PLs are also elected by proportional representation with closed lists and the premiers of each province are nominated by the respective provincial legislatures.

In Nigeria, running candidates for presidential elections are decided by the party through primaries. Since Buhari was the incumbent President he was selected as the sole candidate by his party. The country is roughly equally divided by Muslims and Christians, with the former dominating the north and the latter the south. An unwritten rule states that presidential candidacy should alternate between Muslims and Christians, so the PDP selected a Muslim candidate – Atiku Abubakar – to oppose Buhari. In South Africa, since ANC dominates the legislature, the nomination of the President is often a matter of intra-party competition. Ramaphosa secured the candidacy in December 2017 when he managed to defeat Dlamini-Zuma for party presidency. He was subsequently elected unopposed to his first full term as president by the NA on 22 May 2019.² Tables 1-2 for elections in the two countries follow, and conclusions will be made at the end.

NA election in South Africa confirmed dominance by the ANC. However, this dominance is slowly declining from the maximum reached in 2009 (69.7%) eroded both on the right – the Democratic Alliance (DA) – and on the left – Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The DA reached its apex in 2014 when it was led by Helen Zille who was also the premier of the Western Cape Province. In 2019, the party leader changed and a black leader was selected – Mmusi Maimane – since the party had proved to be attractive for the growing black middle class, however in 2019 he was not able to continue the growing trend which started in 2004 when the party scored 9.6%. The erosion of the ANC is therefore much more due to the growth of the extreme left. The EFF was founded in 2013 by expelled former African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) members.

² Following President Jacob Zuma’s resignation in February 2018, Ramaphosa was already elected unopposed as President of South Africa by the NA on 15 February 2018.

Tab. 1 – NA ELECTIONS SOUTH AFRICA (only parties that obtained more than 5% votes)

PARTY	SCORE 2019	SCORE 2014	SEATS WON	SEATS CHANGE
ANC	57.5%	62.2%	230	-19
DA	20.8%	22.2%	84	-5
EFF	10.8%	6.4%	44	+19
SUM/TOTAL	89.1%	90.8%	358/400	

Tab. 2 – HoR ELECTIONS NIGERIA (only parties that obtained more than 5% of MPs in the HoR)

PARTY	SCORE 2019	SEATS WON	SEATS CHANGE
APC	47.5%	217	+5
PDP	41.7%	115	-25
SUM/TOTAL	89.2%	332/360	

It opposes capitalism and campaigned in mining areas with an aggressive platform against black business and the ANC, accused of being transformed into a center-right party. It was first represented in the NA in 2014 when it obtained 25 seats. Its voters are overwhelmingly black and young. Neither of the two main opposition parties are in sufficient numbers to pose a serious threat to the ANC, however their local impact could be important enough to worry the dominant party. In fact, in 2019, the ANC managed to retain 8 out of 9 provinces' governments with the exception of Western Cape where a DA government has been in force since 2009, when ANC lost control of the province. However, in 2019, by losing three seats in Gauteng Province, ANC was on the brink of losing an absolute majority there, which it eventually managed to maintain by reaching the threshold (37 on 73 seats). The decline of the ANC dominance has transformed the racial cleavage into a socio-economic one. The two main parties – the ANC and the DA – have been increasingly assuming a position which can be labelled

as center-left and center-right. However, at the left of the ANC, the growth of the EFF which is overwhelmingly black, and the local emergence of the Freedom Front Plus (FF+), which represents the Afrikaners interests, is prompting again the racial question which is connected to the continued socio-economic marginalization of most of the black majority, which the Black Economic Empowerment policy by the ANC failed to fully redress. In particular, the growth of the EFF is having effects, and by 2018 ANC's government proposed to confiscate farms owned by white farmers.

Towards a Two-Party System in Nigeria

If the ANC is reducing its dominance in the South African political system, such dominance was lost by the PDP in 2015, in Nigeria. The victory of the APC in 2019 has made the transformation of Nigeria's party system into a two-party system a more likely outcome. However, resemblance between the two systems up to 2015 ends only in the vote percentages of the dominant parties. The ANC is a political movement that mobilized the black majority during apartheid, devoted to an ideological commitment – a non-racial and equal society – that has probably been diluted since ANC has been in government but with durable effects on the party's appeal and on cleavages. On the contrary, the PDP was a loose assortment of local bosses and a coalition of interests more than a party. APC retains the same profile as PDP. It was founded in 2013 as a merger of opposition parties. It benefitted also by many former PDP members who jumped on the bandwagon because unsatisfied with the party. None of the two main parties have a strong ideology even if the APC considers itself more progressive, while PDP is considered more conservative. The fact that APC won two consecutive elections in the North, which is a very conservative area and where sharia law is applied, and PDP won in the South-East which is more developed and traditionally progressive, says much more about what cleavages do count in a country like Nigeria. Nigeria has unfortunately a bad record of communalism and ethnic hostility which are added to religious conflict in certain areas – in the North and in the so called Middle-Belt (MB). Much of these conflicts have a local impact with important outcomes at state and governors' elections and less at national level. The federal state is divided into 36 states, with most of them ethnically dominated. The three main ethnic groups – the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo and Yoruba – were also divided into many states. This policy of reproducing and further dividing states was promoted by the federation under the Gowon presidency (1966-75) in order to lessen the salience of the ethnic cleavages. It was deemed to be successful in that it scaled down big ethnic conflicts which could have destabilized certain states, circumscribing them to small scale conflicts and thereby

preserving the federation's general stability. However, with the reintroduction of party competition and democratization, voting according to the main ethnic cleavages was also apparent. To avoid this, presidential candidates are now required to obtain a majority of the vote and over 25% of the vote in at least 24 states to be elected in the first round, otherwise a second round is called.

During February 2019 Presidential elections, incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari of the APC won with 55.6% of votes against Atiku Abubakar of the PDP who obtained 41.2%, the remaining divided among many candidates. Both candidates are Muslims while their running mates were Christians. Abubakar came from the Adamawa state which does not apply sharia. Both had Southerners as running mates; Buhari's was Osinbajo, who is from the South-West and a Yoruba, while Abubakar's running mate Peter Obi is from the South-East and a Igbo. Therefore the electoral results followed a similar ethno-regional polarization, with much of the South-East and the Middle Belt plus Adamawa going to Abubakar, while the South West and the sharia states of the North voted for Buhari. Tab. 3 summarizes the vote for presidential candidates and the number of elected MPs by party according to the state and macro-regions.³ Governors and SAs elections followed at the end of March. The results were also included in the table, with the exceptions of SAs' elections. Comments follow.

As far as the presidential election is concerned Buhari defeated Abubakar with a difference of about 14% of votes. This meant roughly 4 millions of votes of difference between the two. Buhari won in 19 states while Abubakar in 18, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) included. However, VTO was very low reaching 35.6% nationally with a decrease of 8% compared to the previous elections. VTO was the lowest since the re-establishment of multiparty politics in 1999⁴. However, participation varied according to the state. In general it was more generous in the north that favoured Buhari than in the rest of the country. Buhari won with overwhelming majorities in 10 states and all are sharia states. On the contrary, Abubakar reached similar results in six states all concentrated in the Southeast, where however VTO was lower. The Middle Belt and the

³ Macro-regions have been created by the author by aggregating states according to their historical and cultural affinity and consistent with dominant electoral partisanship. Southeast states are those states which were part of the Eastern region in 1963 plus Delta (which at that time was part of the Mid-Western region). Southwest states are those that were part of the Western region plus Edo, Kwara and Kogi (the last two were part of the Northern region). Both Sharia states and Middle Belt in 1963 were part of the Northern region. The Southeast therefore roughly coincides with Biafra area with a majority of the population of Igbo ethnicity. The Southwest is dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group. Sharia states are dominated by the Hausa/Fulani and by Islam, while the Middle Belt regroups several smaller ethnic groups for the most part non muslims.

⁴ VTO reached its peak in 2003 elections (about 69%) to decline thereafter.

Tab. 3 – Regional parties' anchorage in Nigeria according to 2019 electoral results

STATE (REGION)	PRESIDENTIAL	HoR	GOVERNORS
(SHARIA STATES)			
SOKOTO	Abubakar (PDP) 41.5 Buhari (APC) 56.2	PDP 2/11 APC 9/11	PDP
KEBBI	Abubakar (PDP) 20.4 Buhari (APC) 76.9	APC 8/8	APC
ZAMFARA	Abubakar (PDP) 21.7 Buhari (APC) 75.8	APC 7/7	PDP
NIGER	Abubakar (PDP) 25.6 Buhari (APC) 71.9	APC 10/10	APC
KATSINA	Abubakar (PDP) 19.8 Buhari (APC) 79.2	APC 15/15	APC
KANO	Abubakar (PDP) 20.8 Buhari (APC) 77.5	APC 24/24	APC
KADUNA	Abubakar (PDP) 39.0 Buhari (APC) 59.7	PDP 3/16 APC 13/16	APC
JIGAWA	Abubakar (PDP) 26.2 Buhari (APC) 71.8	APC 11/11	APC
YOBE	Abubakar (PDP) 9.1 Buhari (APC) 88.9	APC 6/6	APC
BAUCHI	Abubakar (PDP) 20.4 Buhari (APC) 77.9	PDP 1/12 APC 9/12	PDP
GOMBE	Abubakar (PDP) 25.0 Buhari (APC) 72.7	APC 6/6	APC
BORNO	Abubakar (PDP) 7.8 Buhari (APC) 90.9	APC 10/10	APC
(MIDDLE BELT)			
FCT	Abubakar (PDP) 61.3 Buhari (APC) 35.9	PDP 2/2	
PLATEAU	Abubakar (PDP) 53.0 Buhari (APC) 45.3	PDP 4/8 APC 4/8	APC
NASSARAWA	Abubakar (PDP) 48.9 Buhari (APC) 49.9	PDP 2/5 APC 3/5	APC
BENUE	Abubakar (PDP) 49.0 Buhari (APC) 47.7	PDP 6/11 APC 1/11 APGA 2/11	PDP
TARABA	Abubakar (PDP) 52.6 Buhari (APC) 45.6	PDP 3/6 APC 2/6 APGA 1/6	PDP
ADAMAWA	Abubakar (PDP) 50.6 Buhari (APC) 46.6	PDP 4/8 APC 4/8	PDP

(SOUTHWEST)			
KWARA	Abubakar (PDP) 30.1 Buhari (APC) 67.2	APC 6/6	APC
KOGI	Abubakar (PDP) 41.9 Buhari (APC) 54.9	PDP 1/9 APC 8/9	APC
OYO	Abubakar (PDP) 43.8 Buhari (APC) 43.7	PDP 4/14 APC 9/14	PDP
OSUN	Abubakar (PDP) 47.2 Buhari (APC) 48.6	PDP 3/9 APC 6/9	APC
EKITI	Abubakar (PDP) 40.4 Buhari (APC) 57.5	APC 6/6	APC
OGUN	Abubakar (PDP) 34.5 Buhari (APC) 49.9	PDP 1/9 APC 6/9	APC
LAGOS	Abubakar (PDP) 41.1 Buhari (APC) 53.3	PDP 3/24 APC 21/24	APC
ONDO	Abubakar (PDP) 49.6 Buhari (APC) 43.5	PDP 3/9 APC 4/9	APC
EDO	Abubakar (PDP) 49.2 Buhari (APC) 47.8	PDP 4/9 APC 5/9	APC
(SOUTHEAST)			
DELTA	Abubakar (PDP) 71.6 Buhari (APC) 26.7	PDP 9/10 APC 1/10	PDP
ANAMBRA	Abubakar (PDP) 86.6 Buhari (APC) 5.5	PDP 6/11 APGA 5/11	APGA
ENUGU	Abubakar (PDP) 84.5 Buhari (APC) 12.9	PDP 8/8	PDP
EBONYI	Abubakar (PDP) 72.0 Buhari (APC) 25.3	PDP 6/6	PDP
IMO	Abubakar (PDP) 65.5 Buhari (APC) 27.5	PDP 6/10 APC 1/10	PDP
ABIA	Abubakar (PDP) 68.0 Buhari (APC) 26.3	PDP 5/8 APC 2/8	PDP
CROSS RIVER	Abubakar (PDP) 70.1 Buhari (APC) 27.8	PDP 7/8 APC 1/8	PDP
BAYELSA	Abubakar (PDP) 61.5 Buhari (APC) 36.9	PDP 3/5 APC 2/5	PDP
RIVERS	Abubakar (PDP) 73.8 Buhari (APC) 23.5	PDP 13/13	PDP
AKWA IBOM	Abubakar (PDP) 68.4 Buhari (APC) 30.3	PDP 10/10	PDP

Southwest were generally disputed areas, but generally, with some exceptions the former voted for Abubakar and the latter Buhari, roughly confirming the same electoral pattern of 2015 presidential elections when Buhari won over the incumbent Jonathan. In 2011, Jonathan had won by adding the Southwest to the PDP. At that time the APC had not yet been formed and several opposition parties ran against the PDP candidate, among them the CPC of Buhari.

The APC won also a comfortable majority in the HoR, controlling 217 seats out of a total of 360. The PDP won 115 and other smaller parties totalled 20. Eight were not assigned. The difference in the HoR between the two major parties is much due to the FPTP electoral system which rewards who wins simple majorities at the constituency level, however it is also due to the fact that not all those that voted for Abubakar casted their vote in favor of the PDP for the HoR election. The first effect is reflected in the Osun election where the two candidates came very close, but the APC secured 6 out of a total of 9 MPs in the state. The second effect is particularly apparent in the case of Anambra state which rewarded Abubakar with a generous 86.6% of votes but the PDP almost failed to win most of the constituencies there because tailgated by the APGA (All Progressives Grand Alliance). In the Oyo state Abubakar won with a strict margin but the APC won most of the constituencies (9 out of 14). Similar results were found in other South-Western states. Therefore, it was possible that the electors voted for Abubakar as president while preferring the Buhari party for the HoR. This is reflected in the gubernatorial elections that followed, which while generally consistent with presidential and HoR elections recorded some exceptions, most notably, Sokoto, Zamfara and Bauchi in the North, where governors elected came from the PDP, Oyo, in the South-West (PDP), Plateau in the MB (APC) and Anambra (APGA). These variations have to do, firstly, with the fact that in the MB and the South-West elections were much more contested and, secondly, with the patronage networks developed by some influential northern governors, who in Parliament frequently cross the floor. These variations help parties to maintain some bases outside core ethnic areas, keep an inter-ethnic profile and so bridge prevalent ethnic and religious cleavages. The only exception is APGA which has much of its support from the South-East-Igbo areas⁵.

⁵ In 1999, during the first democratic elections after the restoration of democracy it presented as its presidential candidate "Emeka" Odumegwu Ojukwu, the former military governor of the Eastern region during the Biafra breakaway attempt (1967-70).

The Tunisian Elections: The Consolidation of the Democratic System in Question

The South African party system is dominated by a single big party – the ANC – with some small size parties challenging this dominance at the left and at the right. Racial cleavages still dictate electoral outcomes although socio-economic differences play a recognizable role. Nigeria is probably evolving into a two party system pending the ability of the PDP to survive as a viable opposition party (nothing indicates the contrary, so far). Nothing of this kind is observable in Tunisia if we compare the three succeeding elections held for the parliament since 2011: 2011 CA election, and 2014 and 2019 ARP elections. The party system is completely incoherent, parties failed to institutionalize with the notable exception of *Ennahdha*, the religious (Islamic) and conservative party, which however obtained declining votes throughout elections and was unable to elect its frontrunner in the last presidential elections of 2019 – Abdelfattah Mourou – who received less votes than the party and was unable to pass the first round. Furthermore, 2019 elections recorded a serious drop in TO especially in the parliamentary election (41.7%; 69% in 2014 and 52% in 2011). Presidential election TO was a little more generous (55%) at the second round but below the level reached in 2014 (64%). Protest and political disengagement characterized these elections and impacted badly on a party system poorly developed and institutionalized. The political system is semi-presidential and the powers of the president are weak compared to Nigeria. However, by voting more generously for the president than the Parliament Tunisian electors demonstrated the little confidence and/or knowledge of their own system.

Tunisia came to free and fair elections for the first time in 2011, following the establishment of democracy after years of autocratic rule.⁶ In 2011, electors were asked to vote for a CA with a highly proportional representation system (the seats were distributed between lists in constituencies using the largest remainder method). At that time, only *Ennahdha* an Islamic party founded in 1981 and declared illegal under former autocratic regimes was able to obtain more than 10% of the votes with a remarkable 37% (see table below). The remainder was composed of a long list of parties for the most populist, secular or leftist (the second party of that time – the CPR – obtained a meagre 8.7%). Secularist parties failed to gather under a common umbrella⁷ and a national government was formed that included both Islamists and secularists. Although very weak, secularists

⁶ For an analysis of the party competition and cleavages in Tunisia after 2011, see Battera and Ieraci (2019).

⁷ The best result among secularist parties was reached by *Ettakatol*, the Arab name for the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties), which obtained a mere 7.0% of votes and 20 MPs out of a total of 217. *Ettakatol* entered the government with *Ennahdha*.

were able to counter attempts by the Islamists to change the constitution by amending the secular profile, and contributing to find at the end a consensual compromise.

In 2014, the secular camp managed to reorganize itself pending the elections for the ARP. A new political party was formed – *Nidaa* – regrouping different secularist tendencies (from left to liberal), all opposing the risks of an Islamic hegemony in a country renowned for its tolerance in religion and towards women. *Ennahdha* had been so far in government as the major party and was responsible of the meagre economic performances compared to the last years of autocracy. *Nidaa* was promising a halt to extremism – many political killings by religious extremists had characterized the years between 2011 and 2014 – and the resuming of economy. Its leader, the aged Caid Essebsi was appreciated abroad for his political capacities and esteemed in the country for his charisma and moderation. He was elected as president during a second run by 55.7% of votes against the incumbent president (who had been nominated in 2011 by the CA). The party system had found a façade equilibrium around two main parties, one secularist which was able to obtain 38% of votes and one religious which obtained around 28%, losing about half a million votes compared to 2011. The same electoral rules employed for the CA election were maintained for the ARP election. As the secularists were this time under a common umbrella dispersion was reduced. However, none of the parties were able to form a government so a new coalition was put in place which regrouped *Ennahdha* and *Nidaa Tounes* plus minor parties. Several bloated governments followed none of whom able to solve the problem of growth and rampant youth unemployment. The only outstanding result was the recovery of security. Furthermore, rivalries affected *Nidaa* almost from the beginning, leading to many splits both in the parliament and outside. The results are apparent in the table below. *Nidaa* practically vanished in 2019 obtaining only three MPs from the 86 it had obtained in 2014. The only result of any importance among the many offshoots of *Nidaa* has been that of *Tahya Tounes* (14 MPs against 4% of the national vote), created by the last PM Youssef Chahed.

The 2019 electoral result marks the failure of the political class and the party system. The demise of an important secular party, the consequent dispersion of a secular vote among many parties, including the populist *Qalb Tounes* and the serious decrease of a religious vote. The latter could be read as an interesting political development. Given the serious economic decline, it proves the decline of the secular vs. religious polarization which characterized the constituent phase after 2011 up to the elections of 2014. However, it also stresses the difficulties that parties encounter when taking root in society, the consequent volume of electoral volatility, and the continuous potential of popular protests which have marked the Tunisian transition and the consequent risks of political instability. Notwithstanding such decline and although seriously downsized, *Ennahdha* remains as the only institutionalized party in the ARP. Populism made

Tab. 4 – Changes in party dominance in Tunisia

Year of Election	2011	2014	2019
Parties (% of votes)			
<i>Ennahdha</i>	37.0	27.8	19.6
<i>Nidaa Tounes</i>	NA	38.0	(1.5)
<i>Qalb Tounes</i>	NA	NA	14.6
Others	63.0	34.2	65.8
Absolute votes (1000)			
<i>Ennahdha</i>	1,501	947	561

a serious irruption in the electoral offer and its major advance demonstrated the weaknesses of the party system and consequently of this young democracy. Populism since 2011 has always been a political factor. In 2011, it was about *Aridha*, the party of the controversial and bizarre Mohamed Hamdi, a media entrepreneur, which performed rather well (third party in the CA; 273,000 votes and 26 MPs elected, who very rapidly defected to other parliamentary groups). Nevertheless, populist tones were common also in the CPR (*Congrès pour la République*) which came second in 2011. Populism has therefore marked the 2019 elections more than previous ones. Ideologically, populism as shown by the results of the 2019 elections spans from the extreme religious right – *Al Karama* (21 MPs and about 6%, 170,000 votes) – to the center-left and left (*Qalb* and *Courant Démocrate*, the latter an offshoot of the CPR).

Populism in particular affected the vote for the President, which was held in a double round, as this vote was considered by many electors, still marked by decades of authoritarian rule, as a blank cheque for an all-powerful president. This actually is not the case according to the constitution. So VTO was rather more generous for the presidential elections, especially in the second round (55.0%), if compared to the parliamentary ones (41.7%), considering that only a week separated the two events. This seemed to be a serious drop in confidence by the electors to the parties and the party system.

Interestingly, the two candidates that managed to pass the first round, Kaïs Saïed and Nabil Karoui, were unable to obtain more than 20% of the national vote, the

former having obtained 18.4% of the national vote and the latter 15.6% (see table below; only candidates that obtained at least 10% of the national vote are included in the table). Therefore, during the first round the same dispersion was recorded as for the vote for the ARP. Mourou who was the frontrunner for *Ennahdha* was unable to match the votes of the party in the parliamentary election (about 13% against about 20). Mourou had a moderate profile and reasons for this bad performance were considered by political observers as mainly due to the transformation the party had undergone after the 10th Congress in 2016, enhancing the democratic profile of the party and reducing its radical one. Therefore, the dispersion of votes marked also the first round of presidential elections, and this time such dispersion affected the two ideologically opposed camps⁸.

The profiles of the winning candidates, portraying themselves as “men of the people” were however much more difficult to define, and controversial. Karoui, a successful media businessman, had previously worked for *Nidaa*, campaigning in 2014 for the party. He founded his own party in 2019 – *Qalb* – after quitting *Nidaa* in 2017, around a populist platform which was largely secularist (many women figures heading the list of the party at the ARP elections). While campaigning he was also committed to fighting poverty through charities owned by himself. Karoui was put under arrest before the elections, in late August, for money laundering (he was released before the 2nd round took place). Saïed, a retired professor of constitutional law, ran as independent but is credited to have received votes from different constituents, mostly from the young unemployed protesters and the conservative part of society. He gained attention by speaking critically about the political class, advocating a direct form of democracy, and against the controversial and debated gender equality law in inheritance issues, probably the most important ideological divide in the country. Votes for him rose in the second round and he soundly defeated his opponent.

These elections were considered by most observers as a last warning for the political class and a serious alarm to this young Arab democracy. A general decrease in electoral participation has been observed as a result of the fragmentation of the electoral offer (data on VTO are provided in the table below where a comparison with the other two cases is provided). A fragmented parliament will probably find it difficult to form a new and stable government⁹. The democratic experiment ending in ruin in Tunisia would probably turn out to be an important setback to democratic scenarios in the MENA region, notwithstanding the many recent expectations.

⁸ A good share of the secularist vote went to Abdelkrim Zbidi (10.7%), an independent candidate and a medical doctor, former Defense Minister.

⁹ A new government, led by Elyes Fakhfakh, finally sworn in at the end of February 2020.

Tab. 5 – Electoral results and trends in Presidential elections (Tunisia)

Year of Election	2014	2019
Candidate % (I round)		
Caid Essebsi	39.5	
Marzouki	33.4	
Saïed		18.4
Karoui		15.6
Mourou		12.9
Zbidi		10.7
Candidate Votes (I round)		
Caid Essebsi	1,289,000	
Marzouki	1,092,000	
Saïed		621,000
Karoui		526,000
Mourou		435,000
Zbidi		362,000
Candidate % (II round)		
Caid Essebsi	55.7	
Marzouki	44.3	
Saïed		72.7
Karoui		27.8
Candidate Votes (II round)		
Caid Essebsi	1,732,000	
Marzouki	1,379,000	
Saïed		2,778,000
Karoui		1,043,000

Tab. 6 – Trends (%) in Voter Turnout (VTO) in the selected countries (since democratization)

	I election	II election	III election	IV election	V election	VI election	mean
Nigeria ¹	52 (1999)	69 (2003)	57 (2007)	54 (2011)	44 (2015)	36 (2019)	52
South Africa ¹	87 (1994)	89 (1999)	77 (2004)	77 (2009)	73 (2014)	66 (2019)	78
Tunisia				52 (2011)	68 (2014) ²	42 (2019) ²	54

¹ General elections data² Presidential elections (2014: 1st round 63%; IInd round 60%; 2019: 1st round 49%; IInd round 55%)

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