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Does polarization pave the way for establishing a pluralistic political system? Or is it merely the prelude to ever-worsening power struggles?



This publication is a research paper in a series of policy papers published by the Arab Network for the Study of Democracy, which seek to document and analyze the political developments in the countries of the Arab Middle East that have witnessed popular uprisings, assessing both their initial causes and the resultant changes and conflicts, four years later.

The Arab Network for the Study of Democracy is a non-governmental organization joining researchers and civil society activists from numerous Arab countries. The Network was founded in 2007 and has held citizen discussion forums and published issue guides to public discussions concerning issues of citizenship, electoral laws, unemployment, and political participation. The Network published an edited volume in 2014 entitled *"The Arab Spring": Revolutions for Deliverance from Authoritarianism*, comprised of case studies of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria, as well as of the accompanying changes in Morocco, Algeria, and Jordan, in addition to chapters focusing respectively on the roles of women, young people, and both traditional and new social media in these events. The Network also publishes a newsletter documenting the political, social, and cultural conditions in the region, which can be subscribed to or read via the Network's website: www.ademocracynet.com

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Introduction

During the past four years, the Middle East and North Africa, in particular the countries experiencing what is known as the “Arab Spring,”¹ have followed very different paths in the process of transitioning from authoritarian rule to regimes more closely representing the will of the people.

The Tunisian experience in the four years following “the revolution of freedom and dignity” has been marked by seismic political and social developments, making it a subject of constant interest to observers and political analysts of the “Arab Spring” seeking to understand the causes underlying the

peacefulness of the Tunisian transition.

This paper attempts to analyze the most significant developments in Tunisia in recent years, focusing on the phenomenon of severe political polarization that has dominated the various stages of the transition from decades of authoritarian rule to a nascent political regime based on the will of the people and rooted in free and democratic elections. This paper also presents likely scenarios for the near future, as Tunisian politics moves past the foundational stage, which was concerned with drafting a new constitution² and electing the legislature and executive.



The central issue: polarization

The Tunisian experience during the transitional phase of establishing a new political system has taken a meandering path. In the early stages after the 2011 revolution, the 1959 constitution, which provided the basis for autocratic single-party rule, was suspended, and a national constituent assembly was elected and tasked with writing a new constitution that would guarantee rights and freedoms; lay the basis for a more parliamentary political system with a true division of powers; and establish constitutional institutions enabling citizens to monitor governmental performance. Subsequently, a new election law was enacted and an independent higher body was established to oversee the executive branch and its administration.

In the period between 26 October and 21 December 2014, millions of both male and female Tunisians went to the polls to elect the Assembly of the Representatives of the People

and the President of the Republic.

The total number of voters who participated in the legislative elections was 3,579,257, which represent 68.36 percent of all registered voters, whereas 3,189,381 voted in the second and final round of the presidential elections, representing 60.1 percent of the electorate.³

What was achieved within a period of 60 days in 2014 — elections considered free and fair by all local and international election observers and monitors — contrasted sharply with the six preceding decades, in which the Tunisian people were unable to express their will and sovereignty, toiling for so long under a political regime dominated by a single party that prevented a peaceful and democratic transition of power.

It is important to emphasize that these positive developments in the political climate did not occur easily and smoothly, as is the prevailing impression among many observers.



Such an impression was aided by scenes such as when members of the National Constituent Assembly hugged and kissed on the night of 26 January 2014, as the Tunisian national anthem resounded throughout the council chamber in the suburb of Bardo — expressions of joy at the ratification of the final version of the constitution, with approval from 200 out of 215 total members. Similarly, both local and foreign political circles commended the conduct of the legislative and presidential elections, and all political parties accepted the results.

Nevertheless, from 2012-2013, Tunisia has endured a bitter political conflict between two camps. The first is composed of the *Ennahda* (Renaissance) Movement party, which has an Islamic orientation, allied with several smaller parties. The second joins the *Nidaa Tounes* (Tunisia's Call) party, composed of members of the former ruling Constitutional Party, and some trade unionists, leftists, several smaller parties, and even some civil society organizations. In the beginning, the main field of battle was the halls and corridors of the National Constituent Assembly during the preparatory work by committees to draft successive iterations of the constitution. The conflict soon moved to the spaces adjacent to the assembly, among several other places in the capital, which became rallying points for demonstrations, gatherings, and sit-ins seeking to pressure the majority of the representatives to either amend the draft texts of the constitution or to approve them.

Throughout the stages of writing the constitution, which took place under a governing coalition led by an Islamic party, Tunisia experienced sharp political and ideological conflicts. One of the results of this was deepening polarization between the



two opposing camps, dividing not only the political and cultural elites, but also the media, civil society organizations, and businesses. These political conflicts nearly crippled the institutions of the emerging political system after the revolution of January 2011.

The dispute between the opposing sides intensified over issues related to the place of religion —specifically the place of Islamic law in the legislative system — as well as consideration of universal human rights standards — specifically the inclusion of the principle of equality between men and women in the constitution. In this political and ideological conflict, both sides used predominantly peaceful means, which ranged from discussions inside the committees of the constituent assembly tasked with drafting sections of the constitution, to television debates on both public and private channels, and even to gatherings and demonstrations in the streets as well as sit-ins in front of the constituent assembly.

Despite the largely peaceful characters of these movements, the political landscape was marred by violence: specifically, the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, two of the political leaders of the



Popular Front (a coalition of leftist and nationalist parties), and the assassination of Lotfi Nagdh, a local leader of Nidaa Tounes. In addition, armed fundamentalist groups, based in the mountainous regions adjacent to the Algerian border in the northwest and central west of the country (the governorates of Kasserine, Kef, and Jendouba), murdered several soldiers and officers of the national army and security service known as the National Guard.

The disputes between the two camps peaked in the summer of 2013, blocking all progress in the constituent council, and strengthening opposition to the ruling Ennahda-led side. The opposition blamed Ennahda and its allied parties, the Congress for the Republic and the Democratic Forum, and sought to tighten the noose around this ruling troika of parties through what was known as the “Leave” Sit-In. Wide swaths of the population — including men, women, and several council representatives — participated in the protest, which called for substantial amendments to the draft constitution that had been ratified by a majority on 1 June 2013. Additionally, they demanded the formation of a

caretaker government and called for a number of specific conditions on the presidential and parliamentary elections, including that none of the members of the government stand for election, in order to ensure the neutrality of the executive authority overseeing the electoral process.

With the continued disruption of the constituent council’s work and worsening societal tension, civil society organization took the initiative to launch a “National Dialogue.” Spearheading these efforts was a quartet of organizations: the Tunisian General Labour Union (the central trade union for workers), the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce, and Handicrafts (for businessmen and business owners), the National Lawyers Association, and the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights. The “national dialogue” called for the participation of all political parties and political forces represented in the National Constituent Assembly, with a view to creating an agreed-upon road map that would eventually lead to the ratification of a new constitution. The main steps would to first, find consensus on core issues; second, form a technocratic government succeeding the Troika; third, issue an election law; and fourth, form an independent body to oversee the presidential and parliamentary elections, which would be held by the end of 2014.

After weeks of negotiations, overseen by the quartet of civil society organizations, the Troika government and the opposition reached a consensus in the final months of 2013 on measures (such as the establishment of the Independent High Authority for Elections) to help overcome the obstacles to the issuance of a new constitution, which was ratified on 26 January 2014 by a wide majority. These efforts

also led Ennahda and the two allied parties in the Troika to dissolve their government in favor of a caretaker government, and finally, a call to organize a general election without the exclusion of any political party, contrary to what happened during the National Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011.

Despite the climate of consensus that led to the holding of legislative and presidential elections, the results of these elections very clearly indicated the stark polarization that has dominated Tunisian political life over the past four years.

In the legislative elections held on 27 October 2014, the two major parties Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes respectively won 39.63 percent and 31.79 percent of the vote, thus together taking 71.32 of the seats of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. 27 candidates (five of whom withdrew before polling day) stood for the first round of the presidential elections of November 2014. Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi, the candidate of Nidda Tounes, won 39.4 percent of votes cast, while Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, the interim president of the republic and ally of Ennahda, won 33.4 percent of the vote. Together, the two thus received 73 percent of all valid votes.

Despite the dominance of the two main parties over the political scene, a number of smaller powers emerged throughout the course of the elections: first, a coalition of leftist and nationalist parties operating under the banner of the Popular Front obtained 6.91 percent of the seats in parliament, while their presidential candidate won 7.9 percent of the vote; second, a new party called the Free Patriotic Union (founded by a businessman and president of a prestigious Tunisian football club), obtained 7.37 percent of the parliamentary vote; and third, Afek Tounes, a party with a liberal orientation, took 3.69 percent of the parliamentary seats.

These parties can play an important role in the next phase of political life, especially in light of the inability of Nidaa Tounes, holder of a plurality of seats, to form a government alone.

In the second round of the presidential elections, Essebsi won 55.68 percent of the votes cast, while Marzouki won 44.32 percent.

The presidential elections, particularly the second round of voting, consecrated the depth of the political and ideological polarization that has split society and the political class throughout the four years of the transitional period.

Results for the top five parties in the legislative elections, held 26 October 2014. Total number of seats in the council: 217

Party	Number of seats won in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People	Percentage of valid votes
<i>Nidaa Tounes</i>	86	37.59
<i>Ennahda</i>	69	27.29
<i>Free Patriotic Union</i>	16	4.02
<i>Popular Front</i>	15	3.66
<i>Afek Tounes</i>	8	3.08
Totals	194	75.64



The Nidaa Tounes candidate, Essebsi, won the support of all groups rejecting the return of the Islamists (represented by Ennahda) to power. Essebsi won a majority in the northern and coastal areas as well as a majority of women. The candidate of the “Islamists,” Marzouki, won the support of those wary of the return of the *ancien régime* via the ballot box, winning a majority of voters in the south and in the poorer, working-class neighborhoods surrounding major cities.

On 29 December 2014, the Independent High Authority for Elections announced the victory of Essebsi in the Republic of Tunisia’s presidential elections and thus his election to a five-year term, in accordance with Article 74 of the Tunisian constitution. The outcome of the presidential election therefore consecrated the partisan polarization that had begun to crystallize gradually with the election of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People.

In addition to winning the presidency, Nidaa Tounes won the most seats (though not a majority) in parliament, allowing the party to choose the incoming head of government. Ennahda won a significant number of seats in

parliament, allowing it to either influence the formation of the next government or to form the opposition.

In sum, the political process was marked by a number of significant achievements. Tunisians succeeded in holding legislative and presidential elections, in accordance with a new constitution approved by 93 percent of the members of the constituent assembly. This occurred in an environment marked by great freedom for both voters and candidates alike, under the supervision of the Independent High Authority for Elections, protected by the military and security services, and in the presence of thousands of local and international observers. This series of successes confirmed the largely peaceful character of the political transition beginning on 14 January 2011, proving that it is indeed possible for a country with a dominant Arabic and Islamic culture to gradually move in the direction of democracy.

However, despite the relatively unanimous consensus regarding the constitution and the acceptance of all political parties of the results of the legislative and presidential elections in 2014, the failure of either of the two major parties to gain a majority of the seats in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People has meant that no government can be formed with a broad parliamentary base. Therefore, the ultimate success of the democratic transition in Tunisia will remain in question.

Another critical dilemma is whether the political and social elites will be able to transform the phenomenon of polarization into a catalyst for achieving the “goals of the freedom and dignity revolution,” which at their root amount to providing job opportunities to tens of thousands of unemployed young people, reducing the socioeconomic disparities

between different social groups and different regions, and enacting structural reforms to the security, judicial, educational and taxation systems. The alternative is that continued polarization could merely exhaust the country's resources and deplete the energies of the political parties in skirmishes over "the identity of society" and "dividing the spoils."

The impact of polarization extends to all segments of political and civil society in Tunisia today, in a climate marked by escalating political violence and religious extremism (though thankfully the country has been spared relative to elsewhere in the region), as well as the continued economic crisis in Europe — Tunisia's foremost customer and partner in the economic, social, and cultural arenas.

The fundamental question remains whether this political landscape, characterized by severe polarization and the ineffectuality of smaller political parties, will lead to the establishment of a stable democratic system with peaceful transfers of power through periodic free and fair elections on the basis of a constitution approved by a consensus, as is the case in many democratic countries — or whether this situation will devolve into power struggles, as both sides fight for dominance, and perhaps resort to violence and coercion. The latter possibility could even lead to the return of authoritarianism, if only with a different face.

Major challenges for the political and civic elite in the next phase

If we exclude conspiracy theories, which have become popular in explaining the causes behind the outbreak of the revolutions seeking "deliverance from authoritarianism" as well as what has followed in the countries of the "Arab

Independent High Authority for Elections:

Composed of 9 members, responsible for organizing elections in Tunisia in place of the Interior Ministry.

Responsibilities:

- Voter registration and electoral lists
 - Polling stations at home and abroad
 - Electoral districting
 - Transparency during the elections and during vote counting
 - Sorting votes and announcing the results
- The members of the commission were elected on 8 January 2014 following agreement on the implementation of the outcomes of the national dialogue, on the composition of its members to represent the political parties, and on its task of supervising the legislative and presidential elections in 2014.

Spring," it is clear from modern Tunisian history and current events that there are a number of structural social and political causes for this polarization.

1. In the five decades since winning independence from French colonial rule in 1956, a single political party controlled all aspects of life and consolidated control over the political system, preventing a large portion of the elites from participating in public affairs, exercising their rights of expression, and establishing representative associations.

Additionally, the single ruling party practiced repressive policies toward any opposition, including those inside the regime, and punished whole areas of the country for the presence of any signs of opposition. These practices caused gaping wounds and deep divisions in the fabric of society, which soon found their expression in the many new political parties and currents in the freer climate prevailing after the overthrow of authoritarian rule.

2. Regarding socioeconomic factors: despite

A brief biography of former interim President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki

- Born 7 July 1945, Marzouki grew up in Tunisia — his family hails from the south (the tribe of al-Maraziq in Douz) — and he studied at Sadiki College (an elite, bilingual secondary school) in Tunis. In 1961, he joined his father, who had fled to Morocco at the outbreak of a power struggle between nationalist leaders Habib Bourguiba and Salah ben Youssef in the months before Tunisia's independence in 1956. Marzouki then became a doctor, joining the faculty of medicine at the University of Strasbourg in France in the 1970s.
- Marzouki headed the Tunisian Human Rights League in the early 1990s, and cofounded the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia. Following an attempt to run for president in 1994, he was imprisoned. In 2000, after establishing the Congress Party for the Republic with other activists, Marzouki was expelled from his position at the University of Sousse and forced to leave the country and seek asylum in France.



- Marzouki has numerous publications on medical, intellectual, and human rights topics.
- After the “freedom and dignity revolution,” Marzouki returned to Tunisia on 23 October 2011, and was elected a member of the National Constituent Assembly. His “Congress Party” formed the troika, along with Ennahda and Ettakatol, which ruled for two years.
- In 2014, at the conclusion of his interim term, Marzouki stood for the presidential elections and succeeded in making it to the second round, where he received 44.32 percent of valid votes.

the structural changes in the economy and the modernization of society effected under the presidencies of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia has experienced deepening socioeconomic inequalities between different groups and different regions. Geographically, two Tunisiyas have emerged. The coasts, to the east, have a sophisticated infrastructure and are where most of the economic, educational, and health facilities are concentrated. Western Tunisia lacks such an infrastructure and such facilities. Instead, the west is marked by unemployment (especially among graduates of higher education), poverty, and high illiteracy, in addition to difficulties in obtaining health care. The disparities between these groups and regions has been reflected not only in

the partisan mobilization for one or the other main political parties in the elections, but also in preventing the majority of Tunisians eligible to participate in the political process from even registering to vote, let alone voting on election day.

3. The direct causes of deepening polarization can be traced to the ideological and political conflicts over fundamental issues accompanying the process of writing the constitution. There is also a divide over the governing coalition's performance after the revolution, as well as determining responsibility for the lack of significant achievements in the transitional period in crucial areas: reluctance at holding the former regime accountable, faltering attempts at reforming the security and judicial systems, failure in reducing

unemployment for young people, and the inability to deal with the emergence of the “Salafi movement,” especially its affiliates’ adoption of violence to deal with their opponents or anyone differing with them. Although the crises surrounding the writing of the constitution and preparation for legislative and presidential elections were surmounted using mechanisms of negotiation and peaceful dialogue, the politics and discourse of the

major players has been overshadowed at many times by controversy, ideological strife, and increasing conflicts within the administration, the security services, and media institutions — further dividing the elites and increasing the reluctance of young people to participate in the political process. The regional situation — especially the failures of the Egyptian and Yemeni experiences with peaceful transitions of power and the sinking

A brief biography of President-Elect Béji Caïd Essebsi

- Born 29 November 1926 in Sidi Bou Said, Essebsi grew up in an elite family that was close to the Husainid Beys, who ruled Tunisia until 1957.
- Essebsi studied at Sadiki College in Tunis, then graduated from the Paris Law Faculty.
- He fought in the ranks of the Neo Destour from his youth and was elected vice president of the Association of North African Muslim Students in France.
- Essebsi took on several important official positions for the Tunisian state from 1956-1991. After the country's independence, he worked as an advisor to Habib Bourguiba, then as director of national security; interior minister; defense minister; and foreign minister. He also served as Tunisia's ambassador to France and to Germany.
- In 1971, Essebsi ceased his activity in the ruling Socialist Destourian Party (successor to the Neo Destour), owing to a dispute with President Bourguiba over the issue of reforms within the party and of the broader political system, following the crisis of governance in the late 1960s. In 1974, he was expelled from the ruling party along with a group of other leaders with whom he later founded the opposition party known as the Movement of Socialist Democrats. He also took over the French-language magazine “Democracy.”
- After the coup against President Bourguiba on



7 November 1987, Essebsi joined the Democratic Constitutional Rally (successor to the Socialist Destourian Party), headed by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Essebsi then took over the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies from 1990-1991. He later detailed his experiences with Bourguiba in a book published in 2009 entitled *Bourguiba: the wheat and the chaff*.

- In 2011, Fouad Mebazaa appointed Essebsi head of the interim government to oversee the election of the National Constituent Assembly and the writing of a new constitution for the country.
- In 2012, Essebsi founded a new party, Nidaa Tounes, to unite the opposition to the rule of Ennahda and its allies. The opposition party won the largest number of seats in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People in the elections held 26 October 2014.
- On 21 December 2014, he was elected to a term of five years as president of the republic with 55.68 percent of valid votes.



of the Syrian and Libyan revolutions into quagmires of armed violence — has had a clear impact in terms of increasing polarization. Differing assessments of the Libyan situation, of events in Egypt during the summer of 2013, and of the Syrian regime have effectively become litmus tests, indicating alignment with one of the two major Tunisian camps.

How could polarization become a source for ensuring the success of the democratic transition?

It is indeed a possibility that the ruling authorities and political elites in Tunisia could make the current conditions of political pluralism into a springboard for progress toward realizing the objectives of the “revolution of freedom and dignity,” if they succeed in achieving the following:

1. The commitment of all political parties, especially the government, to respecting both the letter and the spirit of the constitution, and the application of all of its provisions. These include the guarantee of rights and freedoms for all; the establishment of constitutional

supervisory bodies; the adoption of political, economic, social, and cultural policies dedicated to the principle of equality between both male and female Tunisian citizens; and preferential treatment toward the interior of the country. Together, these measures would reassure all political parties and citizens that they are safe from the return of the authoritarian practices and corruption of the deposed regime.

2. The clear support of the incoming government for transitional justice. This would entail uncovering the truth of what happened in terms of the grave violations of human rights perpetuated since independence; holding accountable those responsible for these violations; providing compensation to the victims; and introducing urgently needed reforms of the security services, judiciary, and the media, in order to prevent the recurrence of such violations. Through this, true reconciliation between ordinary Tunisians and the executive authorities could be achieved, thereby eliminating any justification for exploiting the wounds of the past in present and future political competitions.⁴

3. The political will of the executive and legislative branches to formulate and apply public policies aimed at promoting the integration of young men and women into economic life and their engagement with the political process. This would renew the elite political and economic classes, and thereby inject new blood into efforts to improve politics.

4. The application of the provisions of the constitution relating to local governance, through the enactment of necessary legislation, the formulation of policies, and the provision of resources sufficient for a decentralized system of government capable of realistically responding to the needs of the people. This may contribute to reducing the sense of marginalization and injustice felt by many in the interior for decades.

5. The recognition of the role of civil society organizations as essential partners in building the institutions of a democratic state and in formulating public policies that contribute to economic, social, and cultural advancement.

What are the options open to the political and civil elite in the near future?

Based on the results of the legislative elections, the winner of the most seats in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, Nidaa Tounes, has two options:

1. The first option is to form a “national unity / national consensus” government with broad support in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. This would provide the political and legislative support to the executive for a program both responsive to present requirements and supportive of advancing the peaceful transition to democracy.

This option would enable the incoming



government to work in a relaxed atmosphere, and would provide a broad, supportive base in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, thereby enabling and ensuring the implementation of its program without strong opposition. However, this option requires that the leading parliamentary blocs accept the government's program, which may be difficult in light of the significant differences rooted in both the recent and distant past, related mainly to the quality of the economic, social, and judicial reforms to be completed in the next five years, as well as how to handle the grave violations of human rights and the pervasive corruption in pre-revolutionary Tunisia.

2. The second option is related to the formation of a caretaker or technocratic government, on the basis of a consensus government program supported by the largest number of parliamentary blocs, without the members of the government belonging to the parties supporting this option. This option would enable political parties to work together jointly with the support of a great majority of the Assembly of Representatives of the People,

without resorting to an alliance at the core of government. A significant portion of the majority party and also of the public who voted for Nidaa Tounes might not accept such an alliance, as a repudiation of the Ennahda party and its policies.

What is the most likely option in the near future?

The intensifying conflict between the two political parties following the political change subsequent to the revolution, as well as the deepening polarization of society between the two camps, will make it difficult for Nidaa Tounes to form a “national consensus” government encompassing both parliamentary blocs. Additionally, such an option might pave the way for a bipartisan regime divvying up the spoils between them, consequently marginalizing the smaller or emerging political forces. This is what makes potentially influential political forces, like the Popular Front, or social forces, like the Tunisian General Labour Union, wary of the first option.

The second option, to form a caretaker or technocratic government on the basis of a platform approved by a comfortable majority of the representatives, may overcome the deep differences between the parliamentary blocs. Not only is the divide between the two main parties, but also between Ennahda and the parties that joined forces in what was known as the “Salvation Front” in the summer of 2013, in order to topple the government of the troika, led by Ennahda.

Whichever option Nidaa Tounes and its allies choose, the government that obtains the confidence of the Assembly of Representatives of the People in the initial weeks of 2015 will face a difficult test in formulating a



governmental program that responds to the numerous aspirations of Tunisians: to confront the phenomenon of political violence, to overcome the deep economic and social crises, to strengthen newly gained freedoms, and to contribute to reducing the political polarization that has dominated the Tunisian landscape throughout the four years following the outbreak of the “uprising and revolutions of the Arab Spring.”

The early indications following the elections of the Assembly of the Representatives of the Republic and the President of the Republic are that the two main parties, and with them some of the smaller forces, will take a “consensus approach” to governance in the near future. The top three positions in the assembly have been divided between Nidaa Tounes, which took the post of presidency of the assembly; Ennahda Movement, which took the first vice-presidency; and the Free Patriotic Union, which took the post of second vice-presidency. In addition, there have been positive statements exchanged between the leadership of both parties, specifically from elder representatives, which have gradually deepened speculation about establishing rule by consensus. In

an interview with an Algerian newspaper *Elkhabar*, Rached Ghannouchi stated that his “Ennahda Movement will deal positively with any invitation from Nidaa Tounes to participate in the government.”⁵ In turn, Caid Essebsi wrote in an opinion piece for the *Washington Post* that he “... [is looking] forward to working with ... [the leader of Ennahda] to overcome ... [Tunisia’s] difficulties and establish our nation as a solid democracy.”⁶

However, the continuation of this “consensus” approach requires, above all, that Nidaa Tounes succeed in uniting the majority of its members and attracting the largest possible number of emerging political parties to join in this approach.

Ennahda is also concerned with the success of a consensus-based approach, since it represents the ideal way for the party to continue as an important figure in the Tunisian political equation. Additionally, it would protect Ennahda from the vicissitudes of any possible setbacks during the democratic transition, of which Ennahda would be among the first victims.

The possibility of Ennahda participating in the government, whether directly or indirectly by supporting a government headed by someone outside Nidaa Tounes, depends on both the policy that Nidaa Tounes chooses to pursue as well as the success of Ennahda’s leadership in overcoming the repercussions of the results of the legislative and presidential elections. Both the members and supporters of Ennahda fear the return of the pre-revolutionary regime, in light of the majority party’s dominance through control of both the Presidency of the Republic and the leadership of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People — with the powers to form the

government, control the security services, and shape foreign policy. The future of Ennahda is staked to an enormous extent on its leadership keeping its option open and adopting policies similar to the line it has adopted since deciding to disband the government — such as by not putting an official candidate forth for the presidency and calling instead for the formation of a “national unity government.” The formation of the next government will be the first significant test for the leadership of both parties, particularly if they can succeed in developing a “Tunisian” approach to democratic transition, in a society still divided by both “old wounds [and] new fears.”⁷ ▲

1- More accurately, “a wave of uprisings and revolutions at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011.” For more, see Hassan Krayem, editor, *The Arab Spring: revolutions for deliverance from authoritarianism: case studies*, Jeffrey D. Reger, translator. (Beirut: L’Orient des Livres, 2014). [Arabic to English translation of al-Shabakah al-‘Arabīyah li-Dirāsāt al-Dīmuqrāṭīyah, *al-Rabī‘ al-‘Arabī: thawrāt al-khalas min al-istibdād: dirāsāt hālāt* (Beirut: Sharq al-Kitāb, 2013).]

2- See the website of the National Constituent Assembly: www.anc.tn

3- Website of the Independent High Authority for Elections www.isie.tn

4- “Tunisia’s Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears,” *International Crisis Group*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing 44, 19 December 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/b044-tunisia-s-elections-old-wounds-new-fears.aspx>

5- Rached Ghannouchi, interview with the Algerian newspaper *Elkhabar*, 24 December 2014 <http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/monde/440342.html>

6- Caid Essebsi, “Béji Caid Essebsi: My three goals as Tunisia’s president,” *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2014.

7- “Tunisia’s Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears,” *International Crisis Group*.