Publications and Research   College of Staten Island

11-8-2018

Voting for Secular Parties in the Middle East: Evidence from the 2014 General Elections in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

H. Ege Ozen
CUNY College of Staten Island

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/si_pubs

Part of the Comparative Politics Commons, and the Other Political Science Commons

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Voting for secular parties in the Middle East: evidence from the 2014 general elections in post-revolutionary Tunisia

AQ1 H. Ege Ozen

Department of Political Science and Global Affairs, College of Staten Island (CUNY), Staten Island, NY, USA

ABSTRACT
Arab uprisings paved the way for democratic elections in the Middle East and North Africa region. Yet countries in this region, except for Tunisia, were not able to maintain further democratisation. Tunisia, regardless of economic turbulence and security problems, managed to hold its second parliamentary elections in October 2014, and Ennahda, the party of the popular Islamist movement, could not keep mass support. A large number of studies have examined the rise of the Islamist parties as their electoral success in the post-Arab Uprisings elections by focusing on their organisational strength as well as their social services. However, the social basis of secular parties in the region has been overlooked in the democratisation literature. In this study, four competing arguments, religious–secularism cleavage, nostalgia for the old regime, negative campaign targeting Islamists, and retrospective voting, are considered as the key determinants of citizens' party choices. By using original election survey data, this study asserts that secular Nidaa Tounes derived its support from secular people, who, at the same time, sympathised with the old regime and disfavoured Islamists.

Introduction

There are still so many unknowns regarding quantitative measurements of the political attitudes and dispositions that would provide a basis for making gen-eralisable inferences about how Arab citizens vote (Sadiki 2009). However, the Arab Uprisings have the potential to change this pattern and pave the way for further public opinion research that could help scholars test some of the the-ories developed to explain voting behaviour, such as economic voting and religious, ethnic, and other social cleavages. In general, most of the research conducted so far focuses on explaining mass support for the Islamist

CONTACT H. Ege Ozen ✉ HalilEge.Ozen@csi.cuny.edu ✉ Department of Political Science & Global Affairs, College of Staten Island (CUNY), 2800 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10314, USA

movements and parties in the region, and the majority of those studies focus on either the organisational characteristics of the Islamist movements (Yavuz 1997; Langohr 2004; Layachi 2004; Hamid 2011; Hasan 2012), the welfare provisions they provide to their supporters (Alterman 2000; Hamzeh 2001; Ismail 2001; Bayat 2002; Öniş 2006), or the ideological hegemony that Islamism has generated over time (Wickham 2002; Garcia-Rivero and Kotzé 2007; Esposito 2008; Davis and Robinson 2012).[1]

The electoral victory of the Islamist Ennahda in Tunisia in the 2011 elections was interpreted as another example of the political success of the Islamist movements in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region. However, in 2014, in the Tunisian parliamentary elections, the Islamist Ennahda was not able to repeat this success such that the party lost its majority in parliament. Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia),[2] a secular[3] coalition party that was founded by the political and business elite of the old regime won the free and fair elections. The electoral success of secular parties in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was not a rare event, as these either were or had been co-opted by the regime party. What is surprising, though, is the amount of the electoral support that Nidaa Tounes managed to obtain in the free and fair elections. The electoral success of Ennahda in Tunisia and of the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt in the first free elections after the Arab Uprisings constitutes the main focus of the literature (Basly 2011; Sweeney 2013; Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2014). Studies that were written before the Arab Uprisings (Garcia-Rivero and Kotzé 2007; Kurzman and Naqvi 2010; Hamid 2011) concentrated on the electoral performance of the Islamist parties in relatively democratic political systems, where these parties either fielded independent candidates, strategically chose specific regions that could provide maximum mass support, or purposively did not win pluralities of vote to deflect any attention from authoritarian regimes. Overall, there is empirical evidence at the aggregate level showing that Islamic parties, either before (Kurzman and Naqvi 2010) or after (Kurzman and Türkoğlu 2015) the Arab Uprisings, have underperfomed in more open political systems.

All the studies that focus on explaining the electoral success of Islamist movements in various semi-competitive or free and competitive elections, however, are mute when it comes to exploring the electoral success of secular political parties. Recent studies have relied on public opinion data to shed light on electoral outcomes. Berman and Nugent (2015) focus on three critical issues that have influenced the way Tunisians voted in 2014 elections: religion and politics; economy and social policy; and security; while Berman (2016) explores the relationship between Tunisians' evaluations of their country's economy and attitudes toward the democratic reform process. Preisler (2015) adopts an alternative perspective and claims that the sizable decrease in voter turnout is the ultimate explanation for Nida

Tounes' electoral victory. But still, why the plurality of voters in 2014 voted for a secular party in Tunisia is a question that remains to be answered.

Using original survey data collected in Tunisia in a nine-day period (from 4 November 2014 through 15 November 2014) following the Tunisian parliamentary elections of 26 October 2014, this study scrutinises the main factors that led the majority of Tunisian people to vote for Nidaa Tounes and presents some impressive results. The timing of the survey is quite fortunate because it was held before the presidential elections of November 2014, after which Nidaa Tounes gained the control of executive branch on top of its partial control of the legislation. This is why I believe that respondents did not reflect too much of their joy or disappointment of Nidaa Tounes' domination of Tunisian politics when they answered the survey questions.

First, among the various possible explanations for the electoral outcomes in Tunisia, the Islamist–secularist cleavage was the primary determinant of the votes cast. That is, strong support for secular politics, whereby a citizen disagrees with statements on the role of religious figures in elections, government, or decision-making processes, is positively correlated with the likelihood that he/she will vote for a secular party. Second, voters with more positive feelings toward the previous regime in Tunisia were more likely to support Nidaa Tounes, given that this is an electoral coalition with some older figures representing the old authoritarian regime. Nidaa Tounes managed to bring highly fragmented secular forces in society under its party organisation in 2012. As a political party, Nidaa Tounes showed no reluctance to accept the elites of the old regime in Tunisia. Third, Tunisians with a higher degree of disfavour for Islamists showed higher support for Nidaa Tounes and other secular parties in the system. Nidaa Tounes ran a negative campaign, in which Islamists were targeted, and a dominant discourse about the secular–religious cleavage was adopted, and the electoral results can be interpreted as a positive payoff of negative campaign strategies run by secular parties. Finally, the results do not support any sign of voting retrospectively, neither economically nor politically, in the 2014 Tunisian elections. This is a surprising outcome because the process between the 2011 and 2014 elections was highly chaotic due to the alarming level of political violence and negative political discourse that was employed by secular politicians against the Islamist movement.

Secular–religious cleavage in Tunisia

The secular–religious cleavage has been a prominent characteristic of Middle Eastern politics for a long time. It was essential that the debate over the relationship between religion and politics was understood as going to the heart of what democracy means and could mean in the Middle East (Ardıç 2012). And, in general, the evidence indicates that support for the inclusion

of religious values and norms in politics is relatively higher in the Middle East than it is in other regions of the world (Tessler and Gao 2005; Çiftçi 2013).

The secular–religious cleavage was not a new phenomenon in Tunisian politics. At the beginning of the uprisings, the cleavage was safely tucked away in a dusty box because it was necessary for secular and Islamist groups to cooperate in order to bring the Ben Ali regime to an end. However, the cleavage started to re-emerge when competition over whether the new political system would be a secular or religious one became a more salient issue. The importance of this cleavage increased further around the elections held to form the Constituent Assembly and continued to gain prominence during the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

Before getting into a discussion on secularism, a snapshot of the Tunisian society that emphasises the degree of individual piety might help readers who were surprised after Ennahda's victory in the 2011 elections. Relying on the 2011 electoral results is not necessarily the safest way to make claims about the degree of religiosity in Tunisian society because it is highly speculative to assume that all of the Tunisians who did vote for Ennahda in 2011 were religious while the rest of the society who did not vote for Ennahda was not religious. Preferably, the original survey conducted immediately after the 2014 elections in Tunisia provides an excellent opportunity to ascertain the extent of religiosity in Tunisian society in the very recent past.

Table 1 shows Tunisians' responses to two questions: First, 'how often do you salah/pray?' and second, 'to what extent are you a religious person?'. Regarding the behavioural aspect of religiosity, 68.52% of the respondents claimed to pray five times a day in accordance with one of the five main principles of Islam, whereas around 25% claimed that they never pray, a clear indication of being a non-practicing Muslim. At the attitudinal level, 43.35% claimed to be 'not very religious' whereas more than 51% described themselves as either religious or very religious.

Another important indicator of both individual piety and the role of Islam in politics is public support for Sharia law. In the survey, Tunisians are asked whether they 'would say "Sharia rule" is a "very good," "fairly good," "fairly bad," or "very bad" way of governing this country.' While 7% answered as 'don't know', around 42% of them believe that Sharia law is either a very

Table 1. Individual Piety in Tunisia (percentage).

How often do you salah/pray?		To what extent are you a religious person?	
Five times a day	68.52	Very religious	2.58
At least once a day/more than once a week/on Fridays/ only in religious feasts	5.04	Religious	49.16
Never	25.02	Not very religious	43.35
No response	1.42	No response	4.91
N	1547		1548

good or fairly good way of governing Tunisia. Roughly 51% of Tunisian respondents see Sharia law as a very bad or fairly bad way of governing. It is difficult to be precise about how Tunisians interpret Sharia law as a way of ruling Tunisia since one unique understanding and interpretation of the Sharia law does not exist in the Middle East. Still, the responses to the Sharia law question indicate a divide in Tunisian society regarding the role of Islam in politics.

It is crucial to put the increase in individual piety, which became visible in the number of women with headscarves, and the rise in the number of students who go to the Zaytouna University, into a context. Ben Ali's authoritarian regime was losing its legitimacy due to the 'dictator's dilemma' phenomenon and economic hardship. Tunisians have been disengaging from politics due to marginalisation, and very interestingly, there are some signs of a growing number of Tunisians who disapprove of 'a lack of spirituality in the society.' (Wolf 2017, 109–110). It is also crucial to note that Wolf (2013) criticises the previous literature for romanticising Tunisia as being modern and secular already, and for overlooking the role of Islam in Tunisian society. This is why the electoral success of Ennahda in 2011 has been interpreted as a surprise by researchers.

Then, the question is this: How has Tunisian society remained relatively religious despite all the attempts to transform both state and society according to a secular vision? Secularism in Tunisia has been institutionalised in the form of control of religion by the state, which is an apt description of both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali periods. In other words, both of the authoritarian leaders have adopted religious policies to remain congruent with 'the increasingly pious public mood' (Wolf 2017, 31). Agrama argues that modern Middle Eastern states have employed secularism as a tool to reveal their sovereign power, which serves to 'hopelessly blur' religion and politics, rather than to separate them (2010, 521). Keeping religion under control has always been one of the primary goals of modern secular states in the Middle East because, historically, Islam or Islamic traditions played an important role in organising networks between state and society throughout the Ottoman Empire (Mardin 1973). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, and later after the end of colonial rule in other Middle Eastern countries, the modernising elites purposively disrupted these religious networks and replaced them with secular institutions. The Tunisian state under the control of Bourguiba was no exception, given that it used different methods at different times to regulate religious affairs in society with the goal of monopolising any political activity by extending the state's control over religious symbols (McCarthy 2014, 734).

Habib Bourguiba was portrayed as the most extreme cultural moderniser of the Arab world (Alexander 2010). He opposed any possible resurgence of religion and aimed to shape Tunisian society using a nineteenth-century

positivist mentality and a 'triumphant laicity' (McCarthy 2014, 734). Like other modernising elites in the Middle East, he targeted the traditional religious images and symbols in public life, yet, none of his modernising reforms were enough to stifle religion, rather religion moved from the public sphere towards the private sphere (Wolf 2017, 26–27). For instance, Bourguiba eliminated religious schools and integrated the Zaytouna Mosque, one of the prominent universities in the history of Islam, into a new secular university, Université de Tunis. He also changed the traditional law of marriage and divorce with the Personal Status Code of 1956; nine years later he legalised abortion. Among the most contested reforms was the prohibition of women wearing a hijab, which he preferred to call an 'odious rag', in schools and public. Finally, he targeted one of the Five Pillars of Islam, claiming that Ramadan was making life more difficult – especially for those who work hard. And, on this basis, he proposed delaying the fast, which would have been an extremely radical step for any Muslim society to take (Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2016, 176).

In order to explain the emergence of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), Boulby (1988) refers to the Tunisian scholar Elbaki Hermassi who pointed out the peculiarity of Tunisia for being the only Arab country in which 'modernist elites deliberately attacked the institutions of Islam and dismantled its infrastructure in the name of systematic reform of the social and cultural order' (Hermassi 1984, 40). The main goal of the movement was to challenge the authoritarian secular regime in Tunisia. This exlpains how one of the most important issues, if not the single most important issue in Tunisia over the past four decades, 'the proper relationship of Islam and politics' (Allani 2009, 257) was decided.

When Ben Ali took political power in 1987, he made it clear that democracy would arrive in Tunisia in the form of a plural system, in which the Islamist movement could be legalised and run in competitive, free, and fair elections (Wolf 2017, 66). In the long run, his rule was not so different from Bourguiba's. He strategically formed a more cautious relationship with modernisation (Wolf 2013, 562), by broadcasting the call for prayer in public television and radio, reopening three Islamic studies schools at Zaytouna University, and establishing the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Haugbølle 2015, 332; Wolf 2017, 68). The first two years of Ben Ali's rule can be described as a 'honeymoon period' between the regime and the Islamist movement (Allani 2009, 264). The MTI changed its name to Ennahda before elections in 1989. Following the 1989 elections, rumours that Ennahda was planning a coup against Ben Ali spread quickly throughout the country. The government harshly repressed the Islamist movement and, in 1992, military courts convicted 265 Ennahda members on charges of organising a coup against the regime. The leader of the movement, Rachid Ghannouchi, lived in exile in Europe until Ben Ali left the country as a result of the 2010–2011 uprisings. This was a planned,

organised, and systematic government propaganda effort to present Islamists as constituting a serious threat to society.

Ennahda was a constant target of repression by the regime continuously just as the Ikhwan movement was suppressed in Egypt for many years. However, in a different way from Ikhwan, Ennahda never insisted on applying Sharia law as the source of the constitution like some other Islamist movements in Tunisia or other movements such as al-Nour in Egypt did and always kept the door open for political pluralism. Even though Ennahda became a more moderate Islamist movement over time, its position was hardly stable, which means that it was subject to change conditional on the contextual changes (El-Ghobashy 2005). The most obvious example of this ambiguous position was seen when Ennahda started to lead the coalition government after the 2011 elections. This ambiguity is an indicator that there were different voices within the political party (Ottaway 2013). According to Wolf (2017), the followers of Ennahda have been going through various challenges and pressures that the regime dictated to them and this is why the movement has never been monolithic; and this is why Islamists in Tunisia were also divided on the future and identity of the country. There is also a contradiction between the new constitution and Ennahda's 'original' Islamist ideology. In other words, Ennahda's compliance with the new constitution is a clear indicator of moderation in the party's ideological position, and this can be interpreted as a significant step towards the secularisation of the public sphere in Tunisia (Netterstrøm 2015, 122–123).

When Haugbølle and Cavatorta describe and make predictions about the post-revolutionary period in Tunisia, they claim that 'the divisions of the past are still haunting the present transition' (2011, 339). After Ben Ali went into exile, uncertainty was almost the only common characteristic that could explain the post-revolutionary process, and broad fragmentation in the political sphere fuelled this chaotic condition. The general public laid most of the blame for this dark picture at the door of party politics, which was described as the source of potential problems during the transition period (Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2011).

But still, little is known about how elite and party-level polarisation, regarding the secular–religious cleavage, has affected Tunisian society. People are not passive receptors of signals that political elites transmit by using various channels, such as media outputs. There is ongoing communication between the elites and the people. Therefore, it is not unexpected to observe reflections of the secular–religious cleavage in daily conversations among Tunisians, which eventually cause the formation of attitudes and predispositions toward the role of religion in politics and social life.

The respondents were given in total six items regarding the role of religion in politics. The first three items were selected from the World Values Survey (WVS) for comparison and also due to their extensive use and acceptance

in the literature. The survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements by selecting an option ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on a five-point scale:

(1) The relationship between the religion and the state should be fully separate.
(2) Religious authorities and leaders should not influence how people vote in elections.
(3) Religious authorities and leaders should not influence the decisions of government.
(4) Religious parties should not compete in elections.

Table 2 describes the overall distribution of respondents' support for secularism. On average, support for secular politics was considerably higher in Tunisia than it was in Egypt.[4] For the first three items, the majority of Tunisians were more likely to take clear positions on secular politics; approximately 58%, 86%, and 66% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statements, respectively. On the other hand, the respondents tended to favour democratic values combined with a moderate stance on the reach of secularism. More than 70% were against any measures aimed at the exclusion of Islamist parties, e.g. Ennahda, in Tunisia. Using an index of these different items is useful for establishing and accounting for different degrees of secular attitudes.[5]

Nostalgia for the old regime

As a result of the October 2011 elections, none of the political parties managed to win a clear majority in the Constituent Assembly, which created pressure on the leading parties to form a coalition government. The electoral rule can be seen as the primary determinant of the electoral

Table 2. Distribution of support for secular politics (percentage).

	The relationship between the religion and the state should be fully separate.	Religious authorities and leaders should not influence how people vote in elections	Religious authorities and leaders should not influence over the decisions of government	Religious parties should not compete in elections
Strongly disagree	22.8	5.31	10.91	45.94
Disagree	13.23	4.97	13.58	25.4
Partly agree	6.22	4.02	9.57	5.19
Agree	24.3	34.26	31.53	11.88
Strongly agree	33.4	51.43	34.41	11.6
N	1512	1468	1421	1465

outcome, which led to the formation of a coalition government. Ennahda was the only party representing the Islamist movement in the assembly, such that the movement was pushed to compromise with the secular parties. However, Ennahda leadership has already declared that they were willing to share power with other political parties even though their party has had the absolute majority. The more established secular parties endorsed relatively new parties, the left-leaning Congrés pour la République (CPR) headed by expert human rights activist Moncef Marzouki and the center-left Ettaktatol (Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties) party. As a result of the agreement between these three parties, Ennahda assumed the role of leading the government, Marzouki, the CPR's leader, was placed in the Presidential palace and Ettakatol was chosen as the assembly speaker.

The Tunisian public had two overriding concerns: the high unemployment rate and the high level of inequality, especially among the younger population (Boughzala 2016). However, given the severe conditions that prevailed following the popular uprisings, being able to come up with quick and efficient responses to those economic problems was not realistic even for experienced politicians. In a short period, very modest improvements in economic conditions led to discontent in Tunisia, which, in turn, gave rise to political tensions.

In addition to economic problems, political violence erupted for the first time after the uprisings with the assassination of two secular leftist politicians in 2013. This gave rise to further tensions between secular and Islamist camps. Secular parties were already questioning Ennahda's intentions as expressed by that party's insertion of religious and traditional values into the debate on Tunisia's political future. They blamed Ennahda for being inconsistent regarding the claims it made to support democracy and yet its adherence to a 'latent' endorsement of extremist jihadist elements that had started to gain widespread support after the emergence of the Islamic State.

As political violence escalated and tensions between the two political camps intensified, the secular-oriented public started to embrace a new political party, Nidaa Tounes, led by veteran politician Beji Caid Essebsi, who had served as the interim prime minister before the October 2011 elections. Essebsi started to use the widespread discontent and rising violence in the country for his own movement's interests, emphasising that Ennahda, as the leader of the government, was responsible for the country's weak economy and unrest and for undermining the country's progress toward becoming a democracy. Overall, he emphasised republican ideals and pointed the finger at Ennahda for threatening them.

In the summer of 2013, the 'poor' performance of the Ennahda-led government and a lack of significant progress in the advancement of the constitution-making process resulted in massive protests whereby demands were made for the government's resignation. Quite possibly, these popular protests

were inspired by similar occurrences in Egypt, where the military, with public support, removed the Muslim Brotherhood–led government. Civil society organisations in Tunisia got involved in the process and did not allow the protests to become out of control. In fact, they played an important role in keeping the negotiations between the two political camps on track. The involvement of civil society organisations, especially powerful trade unions, was not limited to this crisis. In the autumn of 2013, there was increasing public pressure to reach a consensus over a new constitution, and as a result of the consistent participation of civil society organisations and the ability of rival camps to compromise, by January 2014, the National Constituent Assembly had approved the draft of a new constitution. Four strong interest groups, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Union for Industry, Commerce and Handicrafts (UTICA), the National Bar Association, and the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), which came together under the name of 'Quartet', showed persistent involvement in the process such that the collective group received a Nobel Prize in 2015.

Encouraged by the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, the opposition parties in Tunisia increased their pressure on Ennahda. Eventually, Ennahda agreed to resign after providing two suggestions for timetables, one for new elections and another for completing work the party had already done on a new constitution. Consequently, Ennahda's resignation prevented an extended political crisis while guaranteeing that the party remained a key political player. Ennahda's decision can be interpreted as a reflection of the search for stability and consensual politics, which has historically been reinforced in Tunisian politics.

An alternative way to consider the issue of favouritism of the old regime is the public and political discussion of 'lustration'. Lustration can have different forms contingent on the political context of the transition democracy. In Tunisian context, Ennahda leadership and members built the lustration discussion on electoral exclusion of political elites who took a role in Ben Ali regime (Lamont 2013; Marks 2015; Andrieu 2016). While Ennahda leadership was more motivated to pass a lustration law that would bring limitations on former regimes' actors to run in 2014 general elections, political assassinations and the military coup in Egypt brought constraints on Ennahda's 'margin of strategic maneuver' (Marks 2015, 10). Ghannouchi's hesitation on pushing further for passing the lustration law caused massive disagreements within Ennahda (Marks 2015), which led the resurgence of important figures of previous regime, especially through Nidaa Tounes (Wolf 2017, 154). When the troika government stepped down, very little has been done to purge the political system of people and structures associated with the old regime. The original survey used in this study does not have any specific question on the lustration, yet, it is reasonable to expect that Ennahda's strategic unwillingness to pass a major lustration law

might have alienated some Tunisians who supported the party in 2011 elections.

All of these tensions and failures of the resigned government under the leadership of Ennahda created a context suitable for Nidaa Tounes to convince Tunisians that the country was stable and peaceful during the ancien régime under the authoritarian leadership of Bourguiba. The leaders of the party framed their electoral platform by referencing the old regime in general and the period before Ben Ali came to power in particular. As an electoral strategy, Essebsi and his supporters used his political experience during the Bourguiba period to convince other secular groups as well as the public that he would be capable of governing the country. Additionally, Essebsi referenced the Bourguiba period in his public speeches, in which he referred to that time as Tunisia's 'golden age.' Rather than recalling the single-party domination and the systematic pressure exerted on civil and political liberties in Bourguiba's Tunisia, Nidaa Tounes elites focused on referencing the highly modern and secular reforms introduced by Bourguiba as a reference point for criticising Ennahda's 'hidden' agenda and also its performance as the incumbent party. In this way, they sought to increase perceptions of the 'Islamist threat' in Tunisia. Therefore, Tunisians who favoured the old authoritarian but secular regime of Tunisia were more likely to vote for Nidaa Tounes, whereas this expectation would not hold for the other parties. The respondents were asked to state their opinion of the previous regime by choosing one of four options ranging from 'very favorable' (1) to 'very unfavorable' (4).

Negative campaign & disfavor of Islamists

One possible reason why polarisation between Islamists and secularists increased in the electoral process is that the general electoral discourse was unsophisticated and dominated by discussion about whether Ennahda intended to render Tunisian society theocratic. The secular parties quickly entered this debate because the secular elites might have seen this as a golden opportunity to influence the public. Otherwise, they did not have much to offer concerning policy outcomes. They caricatured Ennahda to fuel fears that if the party came to power, it would enforce wearing the veil, turn back the clock on women's rights, and destroy the tourist industry by banning alcohol and beachwear. Ennahda leaders' attempts to explain the party's commitment to the plural characteristics of liberal democracy and their promises to protect the established rights of women were also challenged by secularists, who questioned the trustworthiness of those promises and pledges (Murphy 2013, 238).

Religious–secularist cleavages have some particular characteristics that distinguish them from other traditional social cleavages, such as class, center–periphery, and urban–rural. Although all of these cleavages have cross-

cutting properties, social movements or political parties that differentiate themselves from each other along religious–secular lines cannot entirely distinguish themselves from the other side of the religious division. In very religious Muslim societies, where secularists are in the minority, Islamists' main challenge has always been convincing these minority groups that their rights and liberties will be secure under Islamic rule. On the other hand, most of the Islamist movements could not satisfy the demands of the more radical or extreme groups in their camp while also making promises to secular groups. This is what I prefer to call being stuck in the 'araf' – the Arabic name for a space between hell and heaven according to Islam. This is a situation that is not the result or outcome of a choice; rather, this is a result of preferential constraints that other groups build in time. It does not mean that Islamist movements have to stay in this blurry discursive space between modern and traditional or religious and secular. This is where choices become relevant. In other words, Islamist movements can choose to radicalise even more and side with more extremist groups, such as the Salafists, thus coming into direct conflict with the regime – in the Tunisian case, the regime forces have always been on the side of the secularists. Or, Islamist movements can compromise and negotiate with secularists to create a more pluralist political system.[6]

Further, the electoral context played a significant role in the electoral strategy pursued by Nidaa Tounes. That is, this setting provided a convenient environment in which Ennahda had to carry a heavy burden due to its contested performance in government until it resigned at the beginning of 2014. In other words, Nidaa Tounes used a negative campaign strategy against Ennahda, thereby further polarising Tunisian society along the lines of the Islamist–secular cleavage and on this basis delivering additional electoral gains to the party.

To this end, the Nidaa Tounes elites built the party's electoral campaign on an anti-Ennahda platform, rather than articulating any clear ideological or political programme. Another reason why they might have chosen this anti-Islamist and anti-Ennahda strategy is the organisational character of Nidaa Tounes. Generally, in Middle Eastern countries, there has been a trend regarding party organisation and formation. On the one hand, the Islamist camp in many countries does not consist of various movements. Usually, one or two prominent groups or movements represent the Islamists, and they can be categorised as moderates and radicals. This is the case in post-revolutionary Tunisian politics as well. On this point, Ennahda represents the more moderate face of the Islamist movement, whereas the Salafists are at the radical edge of the spectrum. On the other hand, the secular camp is divided between numerous small movements and political parties, which causes a high degree of fragmentation and eventually electoral disappointment. The results of the October 2014 elections can be interpreted from this point of

Table 3. Distribution of opinions toward various societal groups in Tunisia (in percentages).

	Previous regime	Islamist movements	Secularist movements	Salafist movements
Very favourable	17.37	15.36	9.32	2.64
Somewhat Favourable	25.02	36.97	36.61	10.08
Somewhat Unfavourable	11.13	13.46	13.47	13.44
Very unfavourable	46.48	34.21	40.59	73.84
N	1491	1374	1180	1399

view. As Nidaa Tounes consisted of various groups with different demands, policy positions, and ideologies, it was challenging to satisfy each of these groups. Therefore, rather than working on finding commonalities regarding policies, the party leaders might have strategically chosen anti-Islamist discourse as a way of creating consensus among the many fragments. This is why this study argues that Tunisians who disfavoured Islamists before the elections were more likely to support secular parties, particularly Nidaa Tounes.

Negative or unfavourable feelings are measured by a question asking whether respondents are in favour of Islamist movements or not. They were given four choices indicating their opinions that vary between 'very favorable' and 'very unfavorable'. Table 3 shows the distribution of the attitudes toward various societal groups including attitudes toward the previous regime. In the latter regard, the respondents were divided regarding their attitudes toward Islamist movements and secularist movements. For instance, around 58% reported that they were either somewhat or very unfavourable toward the previous regime whereas more than 42% were either somewhat or very favourable. On the other hand, the respondents were more homogeneous regarding their attitudes toward the Salafist movements: more than 86% of the respondents were either somewhat or very unfavourable.

Retrospective voting

The socioeconomic and political context in the aftermath of the transition and around the time of the 2014 parliamentary elections might be the key to understanding the citizens' party choices. Voting retrospectively is one of the main mechanisms of democratic systems, whereby voters are given a right to hold elected officers accountable from one election to the next. There are many ways to evaluate elected office holders in democracies. In this study, retrospective voting is conceptualised as considerations of either economic or political conditions in Tunisia under the previous government led by the Islamist Ennahda.[7] When people in Tunisia participated in uprisings that caused the regime change in 2011, economic conditions, especially unemployment, and lack of freedoms and dignity were among the top calls for going against Ben Ali's authoritarianism. Therefore, it is reasonable to

expect that people who decided to change the political system were the same people who would make ex-post facto judgments regarding the performance of the new government regarding economic and political conditions in Tunisia.

Nevertheless, contextual differences between established democratic systems and countries that are at the beginning of their democratic transition might play a role regarding citizens' retrospective evaluations and their impacts on the way they vote. For instance, in another context, in Eastern European transition democracies, voters, in general, tend to vote prospectively rather than retrospectively (Fidrmuc 2000a, 2000b).

In the economic voting literature, it has been asserted that individual perceptions of the economic situation, both at the household level and in society more generally, significantly influence voting choices. Intuitively, an individual would vote for an incumbent party if he/she thinks that the economy is improving. In this case, Tunisians who developed negative perceptions of the economy were expected to vote for parties other than Ennahda because it was the party that led the coalition government from the end of 2011 to the beginning of 2014. However, this expectation is not necessarily a strong one because a care-taking government was in power before the parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, the respondents' ratings of both their household economic situation and the national economy were tested to determine whether or not economically disadvantaged groups supported secular parties.

The context in countries experiencing a democratic transition is entirely different from the setting of advanced industrialised democracies, and the theories of economic voting have been tested almost exclusively in democracies. Nevertheless, individuals do share common characteristics and preferences whenever they vote. Sources of differences are related to differences between countries rather than between individuals. The central mechanism for economic voting is learning, and in new or transition democracies voters do not have enough experience to notice differences between political parties and their strategies because even older voters are new voters in those systems.

There have been elections in many authoritarian countries, and Tunisia is not an exception in this regard. Throughout the Ben Ali era, semi-competitive polls were held, and as Lust (2009) claimed in her study, the primary goal of these elections was to determine the clientelist networks that were crucial for the distribution of resources accumulated in the centre. In most of these elections, though, the Islamist Ennahda was not allowed to run, and most of the essential figures in the Ennahda movement lived in exile. What is striking is that Ennahda was still able to maintain the networks crucial to its organisation and also the channels through which it distributes welfare provisions toward people in need, especially in the southern part of Tunisia. In other words,

Ennahda is another example of an active and influential Islamist movement in the region, and its organisational capabilities and social welfare services might have resonated with many Tunisians, such that it created and sustained a good 'reputation' (Cammett and Luong 2014). If this is, in fact, the case, then the post-2011 elections process was the first point at which Ennahda's reputation was put to the test.

The 2013 Gallup Survey showed that irrespective of which parties they voted for, the respondents had lost trust in the coalition government led by Ennahda. Confidence in the government was reported as 52% in March 2012, but dropped to 32% in May 2013, especially after the threat of political violence by the radical Islamist groups, especially the Salafists, increased. The approval rating of the leadership decreased even more over the same period, falling from 60% to 23%. Another important issue associated with voting behaviour is unemployment – and Tunisians were living with a high level of unemployment at the time the Gallup Survey was conducted. According to the Gallup Survey, 59% of Tunisians claimed that it was a difficult time to find a job locally in 2010 and that this number had risen to 71% in the May 2013 survey.[8] The original election survey used in the present study confirms the results of the 2013 Gallup Survey. For instance, the respondents were asked to answer an open-ended 'most important' question, and 25% claimed that the most critical problem of Tunisia at that time was unemployment. Whereas almost 27% chose terrorism as the most important problem. Poverty, order/security, political instability, inflation, and corruption are among the other favourite answers.

In light of the figures pertaining to public opinion, it is reasonable to expect that Tunisians who believe that the Ennahda-led government was responsible for these perceived political and economic problems would be more likely to vote for secular parties. For instance, there is a general tendency to interpret Nidaa Tounes' electoral success in 2014 as a victory for secular politics over Islamism (Gall 2014; Schemm 2014; Stratfor 2014). Quamar (2015, 282) argues that the picture is more complex than just the secular vs. Islamist cleavage, rather, Tunisians preferred Nidaa Tounes over Ennahda due to widespread disappointment with economic issues. In order to capture the respondents' views on the economic situation of their households and country, the survey incorporated two direct questions: 'Considering the last 12 months, do you think that your household economy (first question) and national economy (second question) became better (1), remained the same (2) or became worse (3)?' The responses were recoded to show the directional relationship between negative perceptions of the economic situation, both at the individual and the national level, and voting for secular parties. An interesting note on these two variables is that the correlation of the ratings of the economy at two different levels is only 0.26, which indicates that 52% of the

respondents reported that their household economic conditions had become worse whereas 84% rated the national economy negatively.

In addition to ratings of the economy, another variable was generated to test for retrospective voting in terms of political issues. This new variable – 'political instability' – is a dummy coded as '1' for those who answered the 'most important problem' question as order/security, political instability, or terrorism. Alternative problems stated by the respondents are coded as '0'. If those who reported political instability as the most important problem facing Tunisia and who held the Ennahda-led government responsible for that question, then it is reasonable to expect that they would have voted for secular parties in the last parliamentary elections.

Survey

The electoral survey data used in the study were collected via face-to-face interviews in Tunisia between 4th November and 15th November 2014, with a sample of adults over the age of 18, as a result of collaborative work with the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM). The stratified random sampling was used in addition to the quota method. Demographic quotas, such as gender and age, were applied to the governorates based on the most recent national census data from the National Institution of Statistics (INS). The sample was derived from 24 Tunisian provinces, among which were Tunis (capital), Sfax, Nabeul, and Ariana in northern Tunisia and Sidi Bouzid (where uprisings started in 2010), Gafsa, and Tataouine in the south. The sampling points were selected randomly, and based on the fact that the sample size is 1550 respondents, the initial distribution was decided according to the proportional distribution of the population by governorate. The second decision concerning distribution was made according to the rate of urbanisation in the governorate, and as a result, the urban–rural ratio in the data is two to one. Overall, the response rate was 73%; therefore, 2125 households were visited for a total number of around 1550 respondents.

Research design

Explaining the voting patterns in a given country is of great significance. Further, an explanation of this nature becomes even more important in transition contexts because party choice in the first fair and free elections in democratising countries is not necessarily about specific policies, accountability, or retrospective judgments. Instead, these elections provide various choices in regard to the future of the country, such as a secular versus a religious political system, or an economic development model based on privatisation versus state-initiation, etc. Whether it is a choice over specific policy outcomes or over the possible direction in which a country may head,

choice models are, in theory, based on the expected utility calculations of individuals, who have idiosyncratic preferences regarding making one choice over another and the order of those preferences (Long 1997). However, in electoral contexts, it is necessary to assume that any new choice is irrelevant to an individual's old preference order; that is, the probability ratio of old preferences should stay stable with respect to alternative choices. In other words, having a preference for voting for Ennahda does not necessarily indicate anything about the order of a person's other possible choices.

The results of the 2014 Tunisian elections provide a natural advantage in regard to explaining the voting basis of the secular parties. Ennahda represented the Islamist bloc in the Tunisian party system and the Salafists were not allowed to participate in the electoral politics. However, this was not the case in the 2011–2012 Egyptian elections, when the Islamist camp, the Freedom and Justice Party, and Al-Nour together secured almost 70% of the votes. Therefore, Ennahda is held as the base category for the multinomial logit analysis, which is preferable to its more complex prohibit alternative because voters have a fixed pool of alternatives in elections and the 'independent from irrelevant alternatives (IIA) property' is neither particularly restrictive nor particularly relevant (Dow and Endersby 2004).

Party choice is the focus of this study such that the survey respondents were asked which political party they had voted for in the last parliamentary election in Tunisia. The survey responses and election results were quite congruent, and the majority of the respondents reported voting for Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda, Free Patriotic Union (UPL), al-Jabha al-Chaabia (the Popular Front), or Afek Tunis. They also stated other political parties participated in the elections. Any political party mentioned by less than 2% of the respondents were labelled 'other'. The other two important categories among all the possible answers to this question were 'didn't vote' and 'no response'. The results were estimated without taking these two categories into account, given that the study's focus is determining the popular base of secular parties in the electoral system. Ennahda voters constitute the base category, as Ennahda is the only Islamist party in the analysis. Table 4 shows the comparison between the electoral results and survey respondents' answers to 'which party did you vote in 2014 elections?' in percentages.

In addition to controlling for religiosity, there are controls for standard demographic variables such as age, gender, education, socio-economic status, political sophistication, and living in an urban versus a rural area. One straightforward relationship considered in the literature is that highly educated people with higher socioeconomic status would be more willing to vote for secular parties in the region (Gümüşçü 2010). Regarding age and gender, it is more difficult to expect a one-sided relationship.

Table 4. Comparison of elections and survey results (Tunisia).

Parties	Election	Survey
Nidaa Tounes	37.6	35.8
Ennahda	27.8	20.3
UPL	4.1	4.1
Al Jabba al Chaabia	3.6	4.3
Afek Tunis	3.02	3.02
Others	10.8	10.8
Invalid/No Response	13.08	21.7

Note 1: The turnout as percentage of registered voters in the 2014 Parliamentary Elections was 67.7%, and the turnout as percentage of eligible voters was 47.7% while in the survey the percentage of respondents who declared that they did not vote was 42.2%. (Source: National Democratic Institute – Final Report on the 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Tunisia: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia%20Election%20Report%202014_EN_SOFT%20(1).pdf)

Note 2: In the survey, Ennahda voters decided to underreport their vote choice. While it is very difficult to be certain about what has caused this phenomenon, one possibility is that respondents might not feel comfortable to share their vote decisions due to the political context and public pressure on Ennahda at the time the survey was conducted.

Results and discussion

There are two important alternative cleavages in Tunisia that could account for voting behaviour: the standard left-right economic policy preferences and regional divisions between coast and interior. While left-right ideological cleavage does not necessarily overlap with secular-religious cleavage, regional differences have a cross-cutting effect. In other words, Tunisians living in the coastal areas are expected to be more secular especially due to the effect of uneven industrialisation and economic development as well as modernisation. The control variable, type of residence, either urban or rural, measures this geographical component, yet, I also introduce a dummy variable that accounts for regional divisions.[9] Additionally, respondents were asked where they place themselves on a typical left-right ideological spectrum that ranges between 0 (extreme left) and 10 (extreme right). However, after I added the ideology variable, the number of observations in the model went below 400, and therefore, I did not include the variable in the final version of the analysis.[10]

Berman and Nugent (2015) did show the significant role of regional dimension in Tunisian politics. They found empirical evidence regarding the effect of regional divisions on religion and politics, economic policy preferences, and the issue of security in an original survey conducted around 2014 elections in Tunisia. Having said that, the variable that measures regional divisions does not have a significant effect on vote choice in this study. On the other hand, Tunisians who were living in bigger cities at the time the survey was conducted have significantly preferred secular parties, such as Nidaa Tounes, Popular Front, Afek Tounes, and other parties.

Table 5. Multinomial logit results: party choice of Tunisians.

Main variables	Nidaa tounes	UPL	The popular front	Afek tounes	Other
Support for secular politics	0.129***	0.0695	0.249***	0.123	0.108**
	(0.0409)	(0.0685)	(0.0721)	(0.0845)	(0.0483)
Disfavour previous regime	−0.571***	−0.504**	−0.0735	−0.134	−0.356**
	(0.133)	(0.210)	(0.239)	(0.274)	(0.159)
Disfavour Islamists	0.809***	0.686***	0.982***	0.745***	0.850***
	(0.139)	(0.230)	(0.236)	(0.266)	(0.166)
Retrospective voting					
Political instability as major problem	0.198	−0.135	0.507	0.0105	−0.0246
	(0.272)	(0.470)	(0.457)	(0.540)	(0.333)
Economic voting					
Household economy	−0.359	−0.381	−0.0837	0.0301	0.303
	(0.228)	(0.391)	(0.375)	(0.448)	(0.260)
National economy	0.636**	0.196	0.383	0.312	0.523*
	(0.281)	(0.558)	(0.493)	(0.626)	(0.317)
Control variables					
Region (coastal & industrialised)	0.184	−0.417	−0.218	1.159	−0.377
	(0.303)	(0.507)	(0.495)	(0.826)	(0.357)
Sharia as a political system	−0.617***	−0.508**	−0.220	−0.535**	−0.232
	(0.123)	(0.222)	(0.206)	(0.257)	(0.147)
Religiosity					
Self−perception	−0.0813	0.0756	−0.0506	−0.482	0.221
	(0.268)	(0.463)	(0.460)	(0.565)	(0.320)
Behaviour	−1.278***	−2.375***	−0.650	−0.767	−1.309***
	(0.427)	(0.618)	(0.665)	(0.723)	(0.478)
Interest in politics	0.141	0.597**	0.182	0.222	0.105
	(0.166)	(0.280)	(0.276)	(0.323)	(0.201)
Socio-economic status	−0.158*	−0.250	−0.0678	−0.0272	−0.217*
	(0.0937)	(0.161)	(0.162)	(0.210)	(0.113)
Gender (female)	0.500*	0.386	−0.00476	0.755	−0.308
	(0.286)	(0.496)	(0.497)	(0.572)	(0.359)
Age	0.00495	−0.0321	−0.0283	−0.0162	−0.00403
	(0.0111)	(0.0208)	(0.0205)	(0.0241)	(0.0134)
Education	0.0562	0.0793	0.150	0.177	0.0861
	(0.0576)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.125)	(0.0698)
Urban	0.409	0.193	−0.0447	1.516*	0.796**
	(0.304)	(0.524)	(0.505)	(0.831)	(0.378)
Constant	2.311**	4.546**	−3.747*	−4.494*	−0.0291
	(1.148)	(1.789)	(1.948)	(2.457)	(1.345)
Observations	549	549	549	549	549

Notes: Standard errors are below coefficient estimates. (***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$) The base category for the model is Ennahda. Log Likelihood −606.3, Likelihood ratio chi2: 308.0, Pseudo R2: 0.2025.

Table 5 presents the results of the multivariate statistical analysis. Overall, three of the competing arguments that intend to explain the electoral victory of the secular Nidaa Tounes. In other words, only the retrospective voting argument does not hold in 2014 Tunisian elections context, which supports previous findings in the literature (Fidrmuc 2000a, 2000b). First of all, support for secular politics has a statistically significant effect on voting for secular parties compared to voting for the Islamist Ennahda party, which is the base category in the multinomial logit regression model. As support for secular politics increases, the probability of voting for each secular party in the analysis increases as well. To show this relationship in a more intuitive
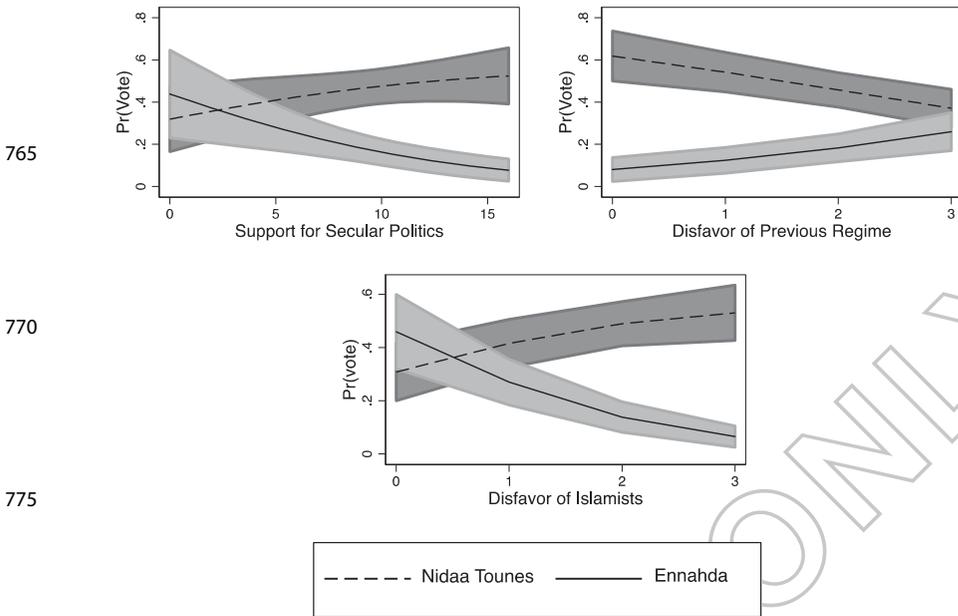
Figure 1. Predicted probabilities with 95% CIs for Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda.

way, out-of-sample predictions are graphed for this variable (Figure 1). On the upper-left side of Figure 1, the graph shows a comparison of the probability of voting for the two main parties in the elections, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. The respondents who reported the highest level of support for secularism were not expected to vote for Ennahda whereas the probability that they would vote for Nidaa Tounes was close to 0.6. Additionally, the confidence intervals indicate that this effect is significant throughout the various levels of support for secularism.[11]

Second, Tunisians who had lower degree of disfavour of the previous regime were more likely to vote for Nidaa Tounes and the UPL. This result is not surprising for two reasons; first, Nidaa Tounes' leader Essebsi made reference to the order and peace that Tunisians supposedly have been enjoying, especially during Bourguiba's period, and second, he has been very inclusive of the old elite representing the previous regime within the Nidaa Tounes, which sent an important signal to Tunisians. Therefore, having a relatively low degree of disfavour of the previous regime let Tunisians support and vote for Nidaa Tounes over Ennahda. The graph on the upper-right side of Figure 1 shows this statistically significant relationship, where among Tunisians who did not have any disfavour of the previous regime, the probability of voting for Nidaa Tounes is expected to be around 0.7 while it is 0.1 for Ennahda. And as the disfavour of previous regime increases, likelihood to vote for Nidaa Tounes decreases while the likelihood to vote for Ennahda increases.

Last but not least, the results support the argument that Nidaa Tounes and other secular parties have been running negative scapegoating campaigns against Ennahda, which show signs of being effective on Tunisians' voting decisions. As the last graph on Figure 1 shows, Tunisians who developed higher degree of disfavour toward Islamists are expected to vote significantly more for Nidaa Tounes compared to Ennahda. For the highest degree of this disapproval, the probability of voting for Nidaa Tounes goes up to 0.5 while it gets closer to zero for likelihood to vote for Ennahda.

Two of the control variables that has a statistically significant effect on vote choice are behavioural piety and consideration of Sharia law as a political system. Both, praying five times a day and being positive about the Sharia law as a political system hurt the probability of voting for a secular party in Tunisia. However, self-perceived religiosity did not have a significant effect on voting for a secular party. The respondents who reported praying five times a day were less likely to vote for Nidaa Tounes, the UPL, and other smaller secular parties in the system, while those, having positive attitudes towards the Sharia law as a political system were less likely to vote for Nidaa Tounes, the UPL, and Afek Tunis. There is a definite connection between the behavioural aspect of religiosity and secular attitudes in Tunisia. When people are asked how religious they are, they are likely to exaggerate the extent of their religiosity, which is why self-perceived religiosity does not have a significant effect on voting behaviour in the MENA region. On the other hand, praying five times a day is a vital behavioural habit that works to differentiate people with stronger secular attitudes from those who do not support secular politics. Likewise, Tunisians were divided regarding their considerations of the Sharia law as an alternative political system. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a significant effect on vote choices they have made in 2014 Elections.

Due to the low level of support for other parties in the system, it is difficult to make general inferences about the support for the UPL, the Popular Front, and Afek Tounes. However, the statistical analysis of vote choices shows that having higher degrees of disfavour for Islamists increases the likelihood to vote for all secular parties in the analysis. In other words, supporters of these parties could agree on their negative feelings towards Islamists. Having said that support for secular politics does not have significant effect on voting for the UPL, which was founded by an entrepreneur, Slim Riahi, and the primary focus of this party has been establishing free-market economy and modern society while rejecting Islamism Chrisafis (2011). The UPL managed to win 16 seats in the parliament with 4.02% of the votes and became the third largest parliamentary group. Another significant result is that Tunisians who had lower disfavour for the previous regime were significantly more likely to vote for the UPL, while this relationship does not hold when support for Afek Tounes and the Popular Front is

considered. In other words, Tunisians might have more similar considerations for Nidaa Tounes and the UPL.

Moreover, Tunisians who were preferring secular politics over Islamism were significantly more likely to vote for the Popular Front, which was the only secular electoral alliance that could be placed on the left side of the ideological spectrum, and was highly critical of Nidaa Tounes for its links to the previous regime of Tunisia (Wolf 2014, 16). 12 left-leaning parties came together and formed the Popular Front, and two politicians who were assassinated, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, were associated with this alliance. This might explain the result that disfavouring Islamists had the most substantial effect on voting for the Popular Front.

Finally, the support for Afek Tounes, a centrist liberal party that stood for civil liberties as well as secularism in Tunisia, was associated with being cynical about Sharia law as a political system and living in an urban setting in Tunisia. This might show that supporters of Afek Tounes were having upper class and intellectual backgrounds.

Conclusion

The 2014 parliamentary elections in Tunisia are historically significant in regard to making a power shift from one party to another possible. As one of the most important principles of democracy, the alternation of power can be seen as a significant step in the democratisation process of Tunisia. What made this occasion even more interesting is that a secular political party won a democratically held election for the first time after the Uprisings in the region. And, this study scrutinises the motivation of Tunisians who voted for the secular Nidaa Tounes party and also for other secular parties in the system by using an original survey conducted shortly after the 2014 elections.

This article explored four explanations about the way the Tunisians voted in the 2014 elections: the secular–religious cleavage, nostalgia for the old regime, negative campaign and promoted disfavour toward Islamists, and finally retrospective voting. Throughout the democratic institutionalisation and transition process, the political elites of Tunisia were divided about the role of religion in politics and the kind of references the new constitution would make to Islam. Instead of keeping track of this cleavage at the elite level, though, this study makes an original contribution by showing how this cleavage influenced Tunisians' political attitudes and party choices in the most recent general elections. As a result of a statistical analysis of the party choices that Tunisians made in 2014, it is possible to infer that the secular–religious cleavage influenced voters' party choices. As Tunisians became more supportive of secular politics and less religious they were more likely to vote for secular parties.

Second, both the organisational structure and campaign strategies of secular parties in general, and Nidaa Tounes, in particular, had a notable impact on Tunisians' political behaviour and the way they cast their vote in 2014 elections. The chaotic and violent atmosphere following the uprisings and relatively ineffective action taken by Ennahda-led government engendered both a power vacuum and opportunity for the parties in the secular bloc. This is why newly emerged Nidaa Tounes has been successful in creating an electoral campaign, which can be characterised by cynical discourse toward the Islamists and positive reminisce and recall of the old regime under the leadership of Bourguiba. Therefore, Tunisians who had negative feelings toward Islamists and positive memories from the former regime supported Nidaa Tounes and other secular parties in 2014 elections.

Overall, all of these three arguments can be interpreted as a result of a deep division in Tunisian society along the lines of secular politics. On the other hand, these results do not tell us much about the future of the country. It is hard to say whether the secular–religious cleavage will continue to divide Tunisian society or even remain a significant issue influencing individual attitudes and political behaviour, especially as both secularists and Islamists at the elite level compromised on the new constitution of the country before signing it. An important signal in regard to the future of Tunisian politics came from a recent Ennahda party congress, where it was officially declared that Ennahda as a political party and social movement would take a step toward secular politics. Party officials stated that Ennahda would separate its religious from its political activities Nawaz (2016). This recent development serves to heighten research interest in regard to the future of the religious–secular cleavage in Tunisia.

Notes

1. Cammett and Luong (2014) put these three theoretical explanations for the Islamists' political advantage under the spotlight and argue that none of them has a direct effect. Instead, they claim that the social welfare provisions, organisational characteristics, and ideological hegemony of the Islamist movements or parties produce a good reputation, which makes Islamist parties appealing to people.
2. Nidaa Tounes, founded in 2012, positioned itself as a 'modern' alternative to the Islamist Ennahda Party. The leader of the party, Béji Caïd Essebsi, is a familiar face from the old days who also served as former interim prime minister. It is more accurate, however, to characterise Nidaa Tounes as a very wide coalition of various segments of Tunisian society, which includes followers of Tunisia's Destourian (Constitution) movement, many trade unionists, leftists, and independents, and additionally former members of Zine el-Abidine, i.e. Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party. Nidaa Tounes was part of the Union for Tunisia, a coalition that came into existence in February 2013 and that consists of several secular parties. However, problems within Nidaa

Tounes affected this coalition and Samir Taïeb, the spokesperson for al-Massar (the second largest party in the coalition) claimed that the Union for Tunisia 'broke-down', due to a crisis within Nidaa Tounes such that the coalition had become only nominal in nature (Source: Wolf 2014b), But still, what holds this 'umbrella' organisation together and also what explains its remarkable rise to become one of the major political parties in the system over a period of just nine months, is the leader, Essebsi, according to Ottaway (2013). Due to Essebsi's long and significant presence in Tunisian politics since the time of independence, he managed to secure the trust of many centrist and secularist Tunisians who had been looking for a powerful alternative to Ennahda.

3. It is crucial to make it clear how this paper refers to the term 'secularism.' In her analysis of 'secular' parties in Tunisia, Wolf (2014a) uses 'secularism' by giving reference to the general context in Tunisia, where it is understood as primarily a binary opposition to the increasing influence of political Islam since the popular uprisings started at the end of 2010. Therefore, it is important to note that the concept does not imply an institutional separation of state and religion.

4. The results in Egypt rely on another survey conducted in 2012 after the elections, and can be found in Ozen (2017).

5. The decision to use only four of these is a result of factor analysis, which determined that a single factor underlies the responses to these four items. Based on the results of the alpha reliability test, the new measure has enough variation, and the items are moderate to highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha = 0.60). The new variable was recoded such that it ranged from 0 to 16, with 16 indicating the highest level of support for secular politics.

6. These two choices can be characterised as 'neo-fundamentalism', versus 'post-Islamism', (Bayat 2007). According to Roy (1996, 2006), Islamist movements have experienced a transformation, and some of them turned into conservative political parties because they failed to capture political power and eventually gave up their revolutionary goals of transforming the state into an Islamic one. On the other hand, other groups did not entirely give up their revolutionary zeal and continue to engage in their morality-focused activism. Being in this position of 'araf' explains the 'ambiguity' between the discourse and actions of Islamist movements (El-Ghobashy 2005; Bayat 2013). I think that making a choice between becoming more radical or embracing post-Islamism does not necessarily help the Islamist movements escape their in-between position. This was clear when Ennahda was struggling between pressure from the Salafists and pressure from secular opposition groups.

Furthermore, Ennahda's main electoral strategy was to portray the party as centrist, reasonable, and consensus-seeking in the ongoing transition process. The primary challenge for Ennahda before the 2014 elections was that of modifying its image toward a more Western-leaning moderate Islamist movement, which necessitated disassociating itself from other Islamist movements that either were or were perceived as being radical such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic State. Accordingly, the party hired a U.S. public relations firm, Burson-Martseller LLC (Tavana and Russell 2014, 8). The party continued to reference Turkey's Justice and Development Party (JDP) because of its relatively close relationships with Western countries and its success in consecutive elections from 2002 onwards.

7. Just like in all the other parties' electoral platforms competing in the 2014 elections, reinvigorating Tunisia's economy was the main priority in Ennahda's

platform (The party's platform is currently not on the party's webpage. There-fore, I used a secondary source: http://www.businessnews.com.tn). The party even provided concrete macroeconomic numbers, such as 5% economic growth and a 4% decrease in inflation, together with a lower unemployment rate. There was also an emphasis on creating the conditions needed to attract investment to Tunisia.

8. For more details on this particular Gallup Survey: http://www.gallup.com/poll/163943/tunisians-lose-confidence-government.aspx?g_source=COUNTRY_TUN&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles.

9. To avoid any arbitrary decision on regional differences, I use the European Council of Foreign Relation's report 'Peripheral vision: How Europe can help pre-serve Tunisia's fragile democracy' written by Hamza Meddeb. The report pro-vides a regional division regarding the economic production. 10 out of 24 governorates of Tunisia are counted as 'economic center', while rest is treated as 'economic periphery'. The list of the regions of economic centre is as follow-ing: Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous, Manouba, Nabeul, Bizerte, Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia, and Sfax.

10. Overall, Tunisians who placed themselves on left hand-side of the ideological spectrum voted for Nidaa Tounes and other secular parties in the system com-pared to support for Ennahda, and yet, none of the coefficients of main indepen-dent variables lost their significance.

11. To avoid any concerns about multicollinearity between main independent variables and some of the control variables, I checked for correlations between following variables: support for secular politics, disfavouring Isla-mists, support for Sharia, and individual piety. The highest correlation is between support for secular politics and support for Sharia: −0.2928. The cor-relation between support for Sharia and disfavouring Islamists is −0.23 while correlation between support for secular politics and disfavouring Islamists is 0.1723. Finally, correlation between support for Sharia and individual piety is 0.1387. Overall, there is no sign of multicollinearity in the model since the highest correlation between main independent variables is below 0.3.

Disclosure statement

AQ3 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

H. Ege Ozen http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4226-9713

References

Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2010. "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminancy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52 (3): 495–523.

Alexander, Christopher. 2010. *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb*. London: Routledge.

Allani, Alaya. 2009. "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation: 1980–2008." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14: 257–272.

Alterman, Jon B. 2000. "Egypt: Stable, but for How Long?" *The Washington Quarterly* 23: 107–118.

Andrieu, Kora. 2016. "Confronting the Dictatorial Past in Tunisia: Human Rights and the Politics of Victimhood in Transitional Justice Discourses Since 2011." *Human Rights Quarterly* 38 (2): 261–293.

Ardıç, Nurullah. 2012. *Islam and Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century*. London: Routledge.

AQ4 Basly, Rajaa. 2011. "The Future of Al-Nahda in Tunisia." *Arab Reform Bulletin* 200.

Bayat, Asef. 2002. "Activism and Social Development in the Middle East." *International Journal of the Middle East Studies* 34: 1–28.

Bayat, Asef. 2007. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bayat, Asef. 2013. "Post-Islamism at Large." In *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, edited by Asef Bayat, 3–30. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berman, Chantal. 2016. "Tunisia's Economic Transition: Popular Evaluations of Social Crisis and Reform." *Tunisia Wave 4 Country Report*.

Berman, Chantal E., and Elizabeth R. Nugent. 2015. "Defining Political Choices: Tunisia's Second Democratic Elections from the Ground Up." *Center for Middle East Policy*, Brookings 38.

Boughzala, Mongi. 2016. "Youth Unemployment and Economic Transition in Tunisia." In *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Vol. 2*, edited by Hafez Ghanem, 153–176. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Boulby, Marion. 1988. "The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia Since Independence." *Third World Quarterly* 10 (2): 591–614.

Cammett, Melani, and Pauline Jones Luong. 2014. "Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 17: 187–206.

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2011. "Tunisia's Political Parties." *The Guardian*, October 19. Accessed 24 October 2011. http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2011/10/19/Tunisian_Parties_2010.pdf.

Çiftçi, Sabri. 2013. "Secular-Islamist Cleavage, Values, and Support for Democracy and Shari'a in the Arab World." *Political Research Quarterly* 66: 781–793.

Davis, Nancy Jean, and Robert V. Robinson. 2012. *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare in Egypt, Israel, Italy, and the United States*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Dow, Jay K., and James W. Endersby. 2004. "Multinomial Probit and Multinomial Logit: A Comparison of Choice Models for Voting Research." *Electoral Studies* 23: 107–122.

El-Ghobashy, Mona. 2005. "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37: 373–395.

Esposito, John. 2008. "Islam and Secularism: Exploring the Place of Religion in Secular Society." *Religion and Secularism* 2: 4–10.

Esposito, John L., Tamar Sonn, and John O. Voll. 2016. *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fidrmuc, Jan. 2000a. "Economics of Voting in Post-communist Countries." *Electoral Studies* 19: 199–217.

Fidrmuc, Jan. 2000b. "Political Support for Reforms: Economics of Voting in Transition Countries." *European Economic Review* 44: 1491–1513.

Gall, C. 2014. "Islamist Party in Tunisia Concedes to Secularists." *New York Times*, July 25. Accessed 27 October 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/world/africa/nidaa-tounes-ennahda-tunisian-parliamentary-election.html.

Garcia-Rivero, Carlos, and Hennie Kotzé. 2007. "Electoral Support for Islamic Parties in the Middle East and North Africa." *Party Politics* 13: 611–636.

Gümüşçü, Şebnem. 2010. "Class, Status, and Party: The Changing Face of Political Islam in Turkey and Egypt." *Comparative Political Studies* 43: 835–861.

Hamid, Shadi. 2011. "Arab Islamist Parties: Losing on Purpose?" *Journal of Democracy* 22: 68–80.

Hamzeh, A. 2001. "Clientelism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends." *Middle Eastern Studies* 37: 167–178.

Hasan, Noorhaidi. 2012. "Islamist Party, Electoral Politics and Da'wah Mobilization among Youth: The Prosperous Justice Party (Pks) in Indonesia." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6: 17–47.

Haugbølle, Rikke Hostrup. 2015. "New Expressions of Islam in Tunisia: An Ethnographic Approach." *The Journal of North African Studies* 20: 319–335.

Haugbølle, Rikke Hostrup, and Francesco Cavatorta. 2011. "Will the Real Tunisian Opposition Please Stand Up? Opposition Coordination Failures under Authoritarian Constraints." *British Journal Of Middle Eastern Studies* 38: 323–341.

Haugbølle, Rikke Hostrup, and Francesco Cavatorta. 2014. "Islamism in Tunisia Before and After the Arab Spring." In *Popular Protest in the New Middle East: Islamism and Post-Islamist Politics*, edited by Are Knudsen, and Basem Ezbidi, 31–60. New York: I. B. Tauris.

Hermassi, Elbaki. 1984. "La Société tunisienne au miroir islamiste." *Maghreb-Machrek* 103: 39–56.

Ismail, Salwa. 2001. "The Paradox of Islamist Politics." *Middle East Report*: 34–39.

Kurzman, Charles, and Ijlal Naqvi. 2010. "Do Muslims Vote Islamic?" *Journal of Democracy* 21: 50–63.

Kurzman, Charles, and Didem Türkoğlu. 2015. "Do Muslims Vote Islamic Now?" *Journal of Democracy* 26 (4): 100–109.

Lamont, Christopher K. 2013. "Transitional Justice and the Politics of Lustration in Tunisia." *Middle East Institute*: http://www.mei.edu/content/transitional-justice-and-politics-lustration-tunisia?print=.

Langohr, Vickie. 2004. "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes." *Comparative Politics* 36: 181–204.

Layachi, Azzedine. 2004. "Political Liberalisation and the Islamist Movement in Algeria." *The Journal of North African Studies* 9: 46–67.

Long, J. Scott. 1997. *Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent Variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Lust, Ellen. 2009. "Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East." *Journal of Democracy* 20: 122–135.

Mardin, Şerif. 1973. "Center-periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102 (1): 169–190.

Marks, Monica. 2015. "Tunisia's Ennahda: Rethinking Islamism in the context of ISIS and the Egyptian coup." Working Paper, Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at Brookings, 1–12.

McCarthy, Rory. 2014. "Re-thinking Secularism in Post-independence Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 19: 733–750.

Murphy, Emma C. 2013. "The Tunisian Elections of October 2011: A Democratic Consensus." *The Journal of North African Studies* 18: 231–247.

Nawaz, Maajid. 2016. "Tunisia Started the Arab Revolts, Now It's Beat Back the Islamist Tide." *The Daily Beast*, June 1. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/06/01/tunisia-started-the-arab-revolts-now-it-s-beat-back-the-islamist-tide.html.

Netterstrøm, Kasper Ly. 2015. "The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26: 110–124.

Ottaway, Marina. 2013. "Learning Politics in Tunisia." The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Viewpoints 26.

Ozen, H. Ege. 2017. "Egypt's 2011–2012 Parliamentary Elections: Voting for Religious vs. Secular Democracy?" *Mediterranean Politics*. doi:10.1080/13629395.2017.1327171

Öniş, Ziya. 2006. "The Political Economy of Turkey's Justice and Development Party." In *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Islam, Democracy and the Emergence of the Ak Parti*, edited by M. Hakan Yavuz, 207–234. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press.

Preisler, Benjamin. 2015. "Three Remarks on the Tunisian Elections." In *Tunisia's Volatile Transition to Democracy*, edited by Marc Lynch, 13–14. Washington: Project on Middle East Political Science.

Quamar, Md Muddasir. 2015. "Tunisia: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, 2014." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 2: 269–288.

Roy, Olivier. 1996. *The Failure of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roy, Olivier. 2006. *The Failure of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sadiki, Larbi. 2009. *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections without Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schemm, P. 2014. "Secular Party Defeats Islamists in Tunisia's Election." *The Huffington Post*, October 29. Retrieved 5 July 2015, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/28/ tunisia-islamists-election_n_6063424.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in.

Stratfor. 2014. "Tunisia Secularist Challenge Ennahda in Elections." October 25. Accessed 30 October 2014. http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/tunisias-secularists-challengeennahda-elections.

Sweeney, Sean. 2013. "The Role of Islamist Political Parties in Tunisia and Egypt in the Wake of the Arab Spring." *Related Scholarship: Symposium on Peacebuilding and Justice*: 2–22.

Tavana, Daniel, and Alex Russell. 2014. "Previewing Tunisia's Parliamentary & Presidential Elections." Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), October.

Tessler, Mark A., and Eleanor Gao. 2005. "Gauging Arab Support for Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 16: 83–97.

Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. 2002. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*. Columbia University Press.

Wolf, Anne. 2013. "An Islamist 'Renaissance'? Religion and Politics in Post-revolutionary Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 18 (4): 560–573.

Wolf, Anne. 2014a. "Can Secular Parties Lead the New Tunisia?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

Wolf, Anne. 2014b. "The Future of Tunisia's Nidaa Tounes Party." *Middle East Institute*, July 25.

Wolf, Anne. 2017. *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yavuz, M. Hakan. 1997. "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey." *Comparative Politics*, 30, 63–82.