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Mobilizing for what? Polarized citizens and electoral turnout in transitioning Tunisia

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ABSTRACT


In countries that have recently transitioned to democracy, what factors most drive citizens to mobilize and participate in early elections? Many comparative studies on democratization and elections stress the vital importance of early elections in new democracies – with voter turnout inexorably linked to a democracy’s long-term stability and legitimacy – however, much of this literature focuses on aggregate rather than individual-level behaviour, and very little targets the Middle East/North Africa region. This study closely examines individual voting behaviour in democratizing Tunisia’s critical second election in 2014. We argue that amidst great uncertainty, the polarizing issues of national and political identity created systematic disparities in participation – with the most ideologically polarized citizens/social groups more likely to vote. Using original data from a survey conducted in Tunisia right after its November 2014 elections, we find that Tunisians were sharply divided in their support for democracy, the previous regime, and Islamic governance. Specifically, Tunisians who were more ideologically polarized along its secular-Islamist divide and those more satisfied with the new democratic system were more likely to vote – overall suggesting somewhat uneven electoral participation in this critical election and, therefore, the potential for the kind of instability conducive to democratic breakdown.

KEYWORDS Uneven turnout; Middle East; Tunisia; regime preferences; satisfaction with democracy; polarization

Introduction

Following the 2010–11 Arab Spring uprisings, Tunisia emerged as the Arab Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region’s only democracy. Yet barely a decade after the revolution – on 25 July 2021—amidst widespread protests across the country due to pervasive economic turmoil and corruption – Tunisian President Kais Saied used a controversial emergency law to eliminate Parliamentary immunity, suspend the Parliament, depose several high

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elected officials, including the Prime Minister. Most recently, his authoritarian measures dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council on 13 February 2022. While Saied's moves have been enthusiastically embraced by the Tunisian military and regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt – it has most certainly thrown the future of Tunisia's democratic transition into chaos.¹ In light of these developments and their impact on the overall trajectory of Tunisian democracy, it becomes imperative that scholars more closely examine *political participation* throughout Tunisia's early democratic experience – and specifically which citizens were most likely to mobilize during its critical second election in 2014, and why.²

While there is extensive literature on the determinants of voter turnout at the aggregate level, the question of who participates at the individual level in early elections in democratizing regimes has primarily been understudied – especially in the MENA region.³ Following a transition, we contend that there are three main paths a nation can take via its democratic transition: (1) it can move back to authoritarianism if old elites appeal to voters as 'the same wine in a different bottle' (e.g., Serbia under Vučić, Egypt under Sisi)⁴; (2) new political entities can capture the grievances of citizens and attempt to create another regime type (such as the establishment of Islamic regime); and finally, (3) political actors can accept democracy as the only game in town (Linz & Stepan, 1996) (e.g., Spain, Portugal, or Greece). By closely examining who was (or was not) mobilized and what factors motivated them in Tunisia's critical second election in 2014, we aim to understand better how citizen participation throughout a new democracy's outset can shape its future trajectory.

Prior studies highlight that, unlike established democracies, transitioning democracies face far greater uncertainty regarding their national identity and political future (Lupu & Beatty Riedl, 2012; Schraufnagel et al., 2014; Stockemer & Khazaeli, 2014). By enabling a 'multiplicity of social and political actors' to make 'demands and claims' on the embryonic political system, participation in early elections provides a critically important mechanism for societies to shape the national identity and internalize new norms, values, and institutions (Cavatorta, 2015, p. 4; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Yet when participation in early elections is uneven – that is, some social/ideological groups are more likely to participate than others – it can create significant volatility for a young democracy – from issues of non-inclusive policy-making and unequal distribution of public goods (Franklin, 2002; Norris, 2002), to an outright unstable political environment conducive to democratic breakdown (Lijphart, 1997).

Polarization is a key factor strongly connected to the intensity and 'evenness' of political participation. Polarization can create a more zero-sum political atmosphere that challenges the moral legitimacy of opposing factions (Iyengar et al., 2012)—thereby intensifying supporters and compelling mobilization for groups that feel threatened by a potential loss of power and/or

social status – particularly if this power/status might be gained by an ‘other’ (McCoy et al., 2018; Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 4). Specifically, when participation is skewed in favour of those with the strongest attitudes towards rivals and opponents (especially negative attitudes)—in lieu of moderate citizens more willing to compromise on issues such as national identity – it can open the door for more exclusivity on behalf of elected officials (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018, p. 134), and even compel some citizens to be more receptive towards illiberal behaviour by politicians who align with their identity and interests (Bermeo, 2016, p. 15; McCoy et al., 2018, p. 25).

Given the high degree of uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of its political transition and national identity, the stakes were extremely high in Tunisia’s second election in 2014, following its first election for the Constituent Assembly in 2011. As such, we expect that Tunisians who were more ideologically polarized along its most salient cleavages – namely, the secular/Islamist social divide and whether or not to embrace democratic rule – were more likely to vote in 2014 as a means to shape the future national identity and political trajectory, as well as minimize the influence and political power of ideological rivals/parties. Specifically, we argue that a general lack of experience with democracy and political parties in 2014 meant that while some Tunisians were motivated to vote via an attachment to specific parties (i.e., affective partisanship), many were instead motivated by negative attitudes towards ideological opponents and political rivals (negative partisanship)—particularly opponents/rivals along its secular-Islamist cleavage – who were best represented in the political realm by the Ennadha (Islamist) and Nidaa Tounes (secular) parties. Additionally, we expect those most satisfied with the new democracy were more likely to vote in 2014 due to an intense desire to enshrine democracy – as opposed to some form of Islamist or authoritarian rule – as the centrepiece of Tunisia’s future political identity.

To test these arguments concerning voter mobilization during a critical early election in a transitional democracy, this study uses an original survey conducted in Tunisia right after its November 2014 elections. There are several major findings: first, at the time of the survey, Tunisians did not hold a firm belief over what type of political regime they preferred and were sharply divided in their support for democracy, the previous regime, and Islamic governance. Furthermore, Tunisians who stated more satisfaction with the new democratic system were also more likely to vote when compared with those claiming nostalgia for the old authoritarian system, or those wanting to implement Islamic governance. Most notably, those most polarized in their support for/hostility towards the secularist and Islamist⁵ movements were more likely to vote. All of this suggests that at the time of Tunisia’s critical second election in 2014, Tunisians lacked consensus not only on specific economic and political issues, but also on the direction and

future of the national identity – thereby helping to stall momentum for the ongoing democratic transition and consolidation process (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 3).

Overall, by offering new theoretical and empirical discussions on voter mobilization amidst the uncertainty of a regime transition, this study contributes to a burgeoning literature that bridges studies of political participation in the MENA region with broader comparative politics. Additionally, it presents empirical evidence that regime preferences in general, and support for/satisfaction with democracy specifically, have demonstrable impacts on electoral participation. Furthermore, it utilizes an original measure of affective polarization at the individual level and shows how it boosts voter turnout – especially by those favouring secularist movements compared with Islamist ones. Lastly, it shows that more moderate voters in highly polarized political climates tend to distance themselves from the democratic process – a factor which may ultimately render a polity more susceptible to authoritarian appeals and democratic breakdown. In the next sections, we begin by discussing the voter mobilization and polarization literatures – particularly as they pertain to new democracies – and incorporate our main theoretical arguments throughout. We then provide some background on the case of Tunisia before describing our original survey data, regression analysis, and results/conclusions.

Voter turnout in new democracies

Why is citizen participation in elections – and specifically *who* votes – so vital early in the lifespan of new democracies? Defined as ‘moments of great drama’ by O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 62), early elections in new democracies are crucially important due to the tremendous degree of uncertainty following the breakdown of authoritarianism. Simply put, these elections chart the course of the new democracy by shaping the trajectory of the transition, the robustness of institutions, and perhaps most importantly – the long-term national identity. As such, voting in early elections affords a critical mechanism for citizens/social groups to exert influence over the new regime and ‘determine the long-term axes of political conflict’ (Pacek et al., 2009; Zielinski, 2002, p. 184). Furthermore, several scholars find that turnout in early elections also helps to establish the long-term legitimacy of a new democracy by offering a thermometer reading of the young regime’s development/progress in the eyes of the population (Kostadinova & Power, 2007; Linz & Stepan, 1992).

Despite the vital importance of early elections, numerous studies on new democracies find that following a regime transition and first (transitional) election – political participation and enthusiasm tend to diminish in subsequent elections as citizen uncertainty fades, voter preferences crystallize, and

more defined political parties emerge (Kostadinova, 2003; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989).⁶ Likewise, Pacek et al. (2009) find a trend of low turnout in new, post-communist democracies *unless* citizens think a particular election is important; they believe that they can affect policies, or they feel that democracy is under threat.⁷ Overall, while prior research provides aggregate level insights into the importance of broad participation in early elections in transitional democracies – these studies rarely speak to *who* is turning out at the individual level, and specifically, any systematic disparities (unevenness) in participation between various citizens/social groups. We argue that it is not so much low voter turnout, but *uneven turnout* in early elections that can compromise the long-term vitality and stability of a new democracy.

In the elections following a transition, prior studies suggest that uneven participation may pose serious risks to democracy if certain citizens lose their enthusiasm for the new democratic order and withdraw from political participation. First off, electoral democracies tend to pay closer attention to the preferences of those who participate most vigorously, while ignoring the voices of disadvantaged and/or less engaged groups (Lijphart, 1997; Verba et al., 1995). This means that asymmetries in participation can open the door for biased public policymaking and inequitable access to public goods (Franklin, 2002; Norris, 2002)—both of which challenge the normative assumptions of democratic theory that every citizen has an equal opportunity to influence policy. Especially in new democracies, bias is critical – as policies designed in the early phase of a transition can create a path dependency for policy choices that can harm groups with weak voting records down the road – thereby opening the door for the kinds of instability that is conducive to democratic breakdown (Lijphart, 1997). In Tunisia, popular polarization among those who did not participate in elections had not reached a critical level according to our public opinion survey. While elite polarization on secular vs. religious issues was critical in 2014, citizens attitudes diverged from elites on other issues. Furthermore, both during and after the 2019 election, current president Saied was able to take advantage of widespread public discontent regarding the polarization of elites over the secular-religious cleavage, as well many other issues.⁸

Political polarization as a mobilizing force

A critical factor that we argue drives electoral participation at the individual level – and therefore can create unevenness – is political polarization. Polarization creates a more zero-sum political atmosphere that can intensify various ideological groups and compel their mobilization if/when they feel threatened by an 'other' (McCoy et al., 2018; Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 4). Evidence suggests that especially when facing great uncertainty – as in new

democracies – polarization can mobilize political participation by generating stronger attachments to parties and providing heuristics that simplify complicated electoral choices for voters (Hetherington, 2008; LeBas, 2018; Lupu, 2015; McCoy et al., 2018, p. 16). Likewise, polarization can have a differential impact on citizen participation by both increasing positive attachment to political parties (i.e., affective partisanship – see Lupu, 2015) and by intensifying negative feelings towards opponents/rivals (i.e., negative partisanship – see Abramowitz & Webster, 2018)—each of which can drive uneven voter turnout by disproportionately mobilizing citizens with the strongest ideological preferences.

In the face of immense political uncertainty, Tunisia's second (2014) free election presented a critical opportunity for motivated citizens/social groups to exert influence over the identity and trajectory of the new regime. We expect that Tunisians with the strongest ideological preferences were the most likely to mobilize to shape the nature of the regime and emerging national identity. Amidst such uncertainty, voting in the election represented the best way for these polarized citizens/groups to ensure their representation in the government. Overall, while the relationship between polarization and mobilization has been examined in established democracies, our study attempts to take this discussion to the far less explored MENA region while looking at individual-level attitudes and participation. In the next section, we outline the dimensions that we expect were most polarizing in Tunisia's 2014 elections, and how positive and negative attachments to these dimensions impacted individual-level mobilization.

National identity & regime type as polarizing dimensions in new democracies

At the time of Tunisia's 2014 elections, we argue that by far the most uncertain and therefore polarizing ideological dimensions revolved around the future direction of the national and political identities – namely, whether to have a more secular or Islamist regime, and whether to embrace democracy as the only game in town. First off, in the Middle East generally and Tunisia specifically, the secular-religious cleavage – that is, the extent and role that religion should play in politics – represents not only one of the most salient and heated cultural divides but one that frequently dominates the political struggles of numerous MENA countries (Aydogan, 2021; Evans, 2011; Karakoç & Özcan, 2022; Ozen, 2018, 2020). Likewise, especially in recent years, religious identities have frequently been politicized by elite actors seeking political gain – thereby further heightening their salience in politics (Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Karakoç & Başkan, 2012).

Moreover, in new democracies, the main ideological fault lines frequently coalesce around the future of the political system, and the choice between democracy and other forms of government (Lupu & Beatty Riedl, 2012)—rather than the classical left-right spectrum observed in established democracies, which is mainly defined by economic issues. In new democracies, regime preferences have heightened salience in terms of mobilization because groups that strongly supported the previous regime and those significantly repressed by it can be highly motivated by their potential loss of socioeconomic status or newfound opportunity for empowerment/change, respectively. Additionally, if a transition period temporarily increases social and economic turmoil, then supporters of democracy may experience backlash and counter-mobilization by those feeling nostalgia for the old authoritarian days.⁹ Overall, political polarization tends to be higher in new/transitioning democracies (Jou, 2016; McAllister & White, 2007)—rendering the hyper-salient dimensions of national/political identity the driving forces of popular mobilization in early elections. We argue that in its critical second election in 2014, Tunisians most polarized around its secular-Islamist divide, and those most invested in democracy as its political future, were most likely to vote.

Regarding *how* polarization may have impacted individual Tunisians, we expect that both affective and negative partisanship each played a role – but that negative attitudes were more of a mobilizing factor throughout the 2014 election. First off, it is essential to note that developing party identification takes time, given that parties in new democracies are often viewed as less institutionalized (Lupu & Beatty Riedl, 2012; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). In only its second formative election, Tunisians still had limited experience with electoral democracy and political parties – meaning that most hadn't the time to develop a strong psychological attachment to any of the major parties within the political arena. As such, when asked whether they were attached to any of the political parties in Tunisia, around 55 per cent of respondents in our study said 'No.' Additionally, the major parties – Nidaa Tounes (secularist) and Ennahda (Islamist)—were relatively indistinct regarding key economic issues, as both generally accepted neo-liberal doctrine and even formed a coalition government following the election.¹⁰

The true divide between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda came at the symbolic level, and centred on the identity of the new democracy. Lacking divergence in any major policy area, Nidaa Tounes heavily employed identity politics to distinguish itself in the lead up to the 2014 elections – primarily targeting Ennahda with negative attacks to intensify and mobilize its supporters. As such, of the 45 per cent of respondents who did claim attachment to a party, nearly 20 per cent *more* felt closer to Nidaa Tounes (42.7 per cent) than Ennahda (24 per cent)—potentially highlighting the effectiveness of their attacks and the heightened cohesion they created amongst supporters.

Furthermore, [Table 4](#) (further below) shows that a sizable percentage of respondents (around 42 per cent for each party) held negative feelings towards the opposite group – overall suggesting that the negative attitudes towards political opponents/rivals developed early in Tunisia’s transition not only played a role in mobilizing the most ideologically intense citizens throughout its second election, but may have stifled its democratic transition altogether by turning off more moderate/compromising voters from the democratic process.

To conclude, by examining individual rather than aggregate-level voting behaviour in Tunisia’s second election in 2014, we test the above arguments concerning how the polarizing dimensions of national identity and political trajectory impacted voter turnout. Overall, we contend that polarization along these hyper-salient dimensions drove systematic disparities (unevenness) in the participation levels of more moderate versus ideologically intensified citizens – all of which may have compromised the long-term cohesion and stability of the new democracy. In the next sections, we discuss the background of Tunisia’s 2014 elections before describing our original survey data, regression analysis, and results/conclusions.

Contextualizing Tunisia prior to the 2014 election

To begin, we must first recount the events between Tunisia’s founding democratic elections (held in 2011) and the lead up to its second elections in 2014. The founding elections took place in October 2011, less than a year after ex-ruler Ben Ali was ousted from power (on 14 January 2011) following a massive popular uprising sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010. Enthusiasm for a new democratic era resulted in moderate-to-high turnout in the October 2011 elections – depending on whether one looks at just registered voters (92.2 per cent) or the entire voting age population (53.9 per cent).¹¹

In the elections, while Ennahda became the clear winner with 37 per cent of votes; however, not a single political party managed enough support to capture a legislative majority in the Constituent Assembly. The remaining four parties (all secularist) ranged from 8.7 per cent (Congrès pour la République-CPR), 7 per cent (Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés-Ettakatol), 6.7 per cent (Aridha), and 4 per cent (PDP). Ennahda leadership immediately sought a broad coalition government to help ease political tensions, and as a result, an agreement was struck between Ennahda, the left-leaning CPR (headed by expert human rights activist Moncef Marzouki), and the centre-left Ettakatol party. Ennahda would take the lead role in the government, while leaders from CPR (Marzouki) and Ettakatol would go to the Presidential palace and become the assembly speaker, respectively.

Despite the formation of this coalition government – which symbolized the promise of a new democratic future for Tunisia via power-sharing and compromise – political violence erupted in 2013 with the assassination of two secular, leftist politicians. Immediately, these events intensified the pre-existing tensions between the secular and Islamist camps in Tunisian politics. While Ennahda's leadership attempted to distance the party from the violence associated with the extremist Salafi movements, the secularist parties repeatedly scrutinized Ennahda's intentions, and blamed it for 'inconsistency' in its claims of protecting democracy and its 'latent' endorsement of the extremist Salafi movement, which was attracting popular support.

It was amid these tensions that a new political party, Nidaa Tounes, began appealing to the secular-oriented public by singing the songs of the ancien régime. Founded and led by veteran politician Beji Caid Essebsi – an important figure of the old regime (especially under Bourguiba)—Nidaa Tounes quickly exacerbated discontent by emphasizing Ennahda as responsible for the weak economy and social unrest that were undermining Tunisia's progress towards becoming a democracy. Furthermore, Essebsi and his party verbally championed republican ideals while accusing Ennahda of undermining them. By the summer of 2013, all of this came to a head when massive protests broke out demanding the resignation of the Ennahda government due to 'poor' performance and a lack of substantial advancement in the constitution-making process. Some consider these mass protests to have been inspired by similar occurrences around the same time in Egypt – with the Egyptian military forcefully removing the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in a 2013 coup. Ultimately, encouraged by the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, secularists in Tunisia continued to pressure Ennahda until it was forced to resign – despite it finally drafting timetables for both a new round of elections, and completing the process of drafting a new constitution. From a strategic viewpoint, Ennahda's withdrawal avoided the possibility of an extended political crisis while keeping the party alive as a key political actor.

Overall, the rise of influential figures from the old authoritarian regime can be considered a reaction against Ennahda's half-hearted attempts of lustration.¹² Ennahda leadership – along with other parties in the government – formed the lustration bargain by excluding from the electoral process every single political elite who had a role in the Ben Ali regime (Andrieu, 2016; Lamont, 2013; Marks, 2015). With the 2014 elections on the horizon, Ennahda leadership pushed a lustration law that would significantly limit former regime actors from running in the general elections; however, the rising domestic political violence, as well as military coup in Egypt, ultimately limited Ennahda's 'margin of strategic manoeuvre' (Marks, 2015, p. 10). Eventually, all these factors led to the resurgence of key figures from the previous regime – especially within the ranks of Nidaa Tounes

(Wolf, 2017, p. 154). With Ennahda's poor early performance and disappointment amongst supporters, Nidaa Tounes was able to take advantage by convincing many Tunisians that their country was more stable and peaceful under the authoritarian leadership of Bourguiba. Nidaa Tounes built their electoral platform around the promise of returning to the times of Tunisia's 'golden age,' as Essebsi frequently referenced the Bourguiba period in his public speeches. By highlighting the political experience attained during the Bourguiba period, Nidaa Tounes' leadership argued Essebsi as the best leader to govern the country.

Given the existing social and economic problems in the country – many of which deepened following the transition – the nostalgia experienced by many Tunisian citizens prior to the 2014 elections was hardly surprising. [Table 1](#)—based on our original survey (see Research Design section for details)—shows citizens' responses to questions surrounding perceptions of change across several economic indicators following the democratic transition. Overall, we can see that many Tunisians adopted a very negative view of the transition – with 70 per cent or more claiming that corruption, poverty, and unemployment had 'increased a lot,' while the percentage stating the same about inequality was only slightly lower, at 53 per cent. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents stating that these problems had 'decreased a lot' or 'a little' fails to reach even 10 per cent for any category.¹³

In general, when political instability and economic difficulties come to dominate the social and political discourse in transitioning democracies, citizens often differ in their support for the new democratic system (e.g., Grewal & Monroe, 2019). Furthermore, they frequently develop sympathy towards alternatives. To capture the extent to which citizens supported the new democratic regime, and/or developed nostalgia for the previous (non-democratic) regime or Islamist governance, we designed questions in our survey about these two alternative regime types – both of which were extremely relevant topics in Tunisia's social/political discourse around 2014. First, respondents were asked whether they had a 'very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable, or very unfavourable' opinion of the previous regime. [Table 2](#) displays their answers and shows that 16.7 per cent of respondents had a 'very favourable' opinion of the previous

Table 1. Tunisians' perception of economic problems since the transition.

	Corruption	Poverty	Unemployment	Inequality
	%	%	%	%
Increased a lot	70	71	76	53
Increased a little	10	11	7	13
Remained the same	11	14	10	22
Decreased a little	6	3	4	4
Decreased a lot	1	0	1	1
DNK	2	1	2	7

Table 2. Tunisians' attitudes toward alternative regimes.

Opinion toward Former Regime		Governing this country with Sharia	
Very Favourable	16.7	Very Good	20.8
Somewhat favourable	24.0	Fairly Good	21.0
Somewhat unfavourable	10.7	Fairly Bad	14.1
Very unfavourable	44.7	Very Bad	37
DNK	3.8	DNK	7.1

regime, while 24 per cent of them said 'somewhat favourable.' On the other hand, 44.7 per cent had a 'very unfavourable' opinion of the previous regime, with around 11 per cent saying 'somewhat unfavourable.' Overall, these numbers show that Tunisians were quite divided in their attitudes towardss the previous regime, and nearly half (40.7 per cent) felt positively.

Next, our survey asked Tunisians whether they would like to see the country governed by Sharia rule – with at least moderate support for Sharia rule reaching 41.8 per cent. On the other hand, 51.1 per cent of respondents claimed that Sharia would be bad for the country – overall, again showing Tunisians as divided on this issue. Regardless of how people defined or viewed Sharia and/or Sharia governance, polarization in Tunisia around the role of religion in politics was very strong as of late 2014.

Finally, in terms of outright support for democracy, we asked Tunisians what they thought about the country's new democratic political system? Displayed in [Table 3](#), 89.2 per cent of respondents wanted Tunisia to be ruled by democracy,¹⁴ whereas only 6.4 per cent dismissed democracy as viable for Tunisia. Yet despite professing normative support for democracy, not all people may have been happy with democracy's performance in the country, and/or were concerned with some of the uncertainties and

Table 3. Tunisians' Attitudes Toward Democracy.

Governing this country with . . . Democracy		Satisfaction with the Way . . . Democracy Works	
Very Good	72.9	Very Satisfied	9.9
Fairly Good	16.3	Fairly Satisfied	39.2
Fairly Bad	3.7	Not satisfied	18.4
Very Bad	2.7	Not at all satisfied	27
DNK	4.4	DNK	5.5

Table 4. Tunisians' views towards islamist and secularist movements opinion towards

	Islamists	Secularists
Very Favourable	13.6	7.1
Somewhat Favourable	32.8	27.9
Somewhat Unfavourable	11.9	10.2
Very Unfavourable	30.3	30.9
DNK	11.4	23.9

instability democracy can introduce. To investigate citizen support for democratic operations and functionality, we asked respondents about their experience with democracy via the question: 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Tunisia?' Here we see some divergence when compared with responses about the *ideal* of democracy – with only around 10 per cent of respondents stating that they were 'very satisfied' with democracy's performance in Tunisia, while around 40 per cent were 'satisfied.' On the other hand, 27 per cent of respondents were 'not at all satisfied,' while 18.4 per cent stated that they were 'not satisfied.' Overall, we again see a sharp divide amongst Tunisian society in their beliefs about the performance of democracy just prior to the 2014 election.

To conclude, citizens' support or lack thereof for a new democratic system is critical for its legitimacy. Those who are unhappy with a democratic regime may give up hope and stay at home when election time comes or go out and vote for a party that is associated with the former regime – thereby signalling their displeasure with democracy's performance. Overall, our survey shows that as 'the moments of great drama' transpired throughout Tunisia's transition, citizens lacked a consensus on the kind of regime that the country should embrace moving forward. Specifically, there was sizable support for multiple non-democratic and alternative regime types – most notably, Sharia rule and returning to some form of authoritarianism. To what extent these opinions impacted voter mobilization remains an empirical question – as the divided political climate described above, as well as ideological position/actions of the extremist Salafi movement may have had a conditioning effect on voter turnout in 2014.

Polarization in Tunisia leading up to 2014

As previously discussed, one of the most important and relevant social cleavages in Tunisia is the role of religion in social life and politics. Therefore, the main political discussion after the transition developed along the fault-lines of a more religious versus more secularist nation. Throughout the revolution, both Islamist and secularist groups avoided mobilizing along these lines to remain united against the oppressive Ben Ali regime; however, this cleavage came into stark focus almost immediately after the fall of the regime – when the country's future national identity was most at stake. While palpable tensions existed between the Islamist and secular camps right after the 2011 founding elections, several subsequent domestic and regional developments further polarized political elites in its aftermath. Beginning with the assassination of two leftist politicians, then followed by the rise of the Salafi movements, the military ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Egypt, and several domestic terror attacks by extreme

religious groups all helped to seed a deep distrust of religious actors in politics. As a result, the Ennahda-led government was forced to resign in 2013 in the face of growing unrest and protests by secular elites and the larger population – ultimately leading to a new caretaker government until the 2014 elections.

Furthermore, while elite polarization was salient across the secularist and Islamist parties, this polarization was reflected to a much lesser extent within society. For instance, mass polarization around the conventional left-right ideological spectrum fails to hold in Tunisia. When we asked Tunisians where they place themselves on the left-right spectrum, 40 per cent of survey respondents stated they ‘did not know.’ Overall, the left-right concepts were not fully institutionalized in Tunisian society as in the transitioning, post-communist regimes of the 1990s. To account for this, we used two survey questions that targeted individuals’ opinions specifically towards Islamist and secularist movements in Tunisia. Survey respondents were asked the following question that probed their attitudes towards the opposite side of the ideological spectrum: ‘Do you have a very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable, or very unfavourable opinion of . . . (Islamist movements or secularist movements)?’ As [Table 4](#) shows, more than 46 per cent of respondents viewed Islamists as either ‘very favourable’ or ‘somewhat favourable,’ while around 42 per cent had unfavourable opinions. On the other hand, Tunisians’ views of secularist movements are more complicated to interpret. First, almost the same percentage of respondents (41.1 per cent) claim negative feelings towards both groups; however, fewer people had favourable opinions of secularist movements (only 35 per cent). One reason for this might be a possible association of secularists with the previous authoritarian regime. Furthermore, uncertainty here is far higher than with attitudes towards Islamists – with almost 24 per cent of respondents claiming, ‘do not know.’

Research design

To explore voter turnout in Tunisia’s second free and fair elections following its revolution, we conducted an original public opinion survey through a national polling company (ELKA) soon after Tunisia’s Parliamentary election on 26 October 2014. The electoral survey data were collected in face-to-face interviews between November 4th and 15th via a sample of adults over 18. The sampling units were determined randomly, and the initial distribution was decided based on the proportional distribution of the population by governorate. The second decision regarding the distribution was made based on the rate of urbanization in the governorate. A stratified random sample using the quota method was adopted to collect data. Demographic quotas were applied to the governorates based on the most recent national census

data gathered from the National Institution of Statistics (INS). The sample was derived from 24 Tunisian governorates – including Tunis (capital), Sfax, Nabeul, Ariana (in northern Tunisia), Sidi Bouzid (where uprisings started in 2010), Gafsa, and Tataouine (in the south). Overall, the response rate was 73 per cent, which is relatively high, and 2,125 households were visited for a total of around 1,550 respondents.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable is dichotomous. Respondents were asked simply *whether or not they voted* in the 2014 Tunisian general elections. In general, there is the possibility that surveys over-reports the election turnout, a possibility for which there may be several reasons (Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010)—two of the most common being memory errors and social desirability bias. According to the official statistics, 67.7 per cent of registered and 47.7 per cent of eligible voters turned out in 2014 elections. In our survey data, respondents who claimed that they voted in the 2014 elections represented 57.6 per cent of the sample – meaning that there is approximately 10 per cent over-reporting in our survey.

Independent variables

Based on our expectations, we analysed the effects of the following explanatory variables on voter turnout in the 2014 elections: (a) satisfaction with the democratic system, (b) preferences over the previous regime and Sharia rule, (c) attitudes towards ‘others’ or ‘outsider’ groups as a social/psychological measure of polarization, and (d) affective party identification. To reiterate, we asked the respondents the following question to capture their satisfaction with the democratic system: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied (4), fairly satisfied (3), not satisfied (2), or not at all satisfied (1) with the way democracy works in Tunisia?’ To measure respondents’ attitudes towards the previous regime, we asked them to state their opinion of the previous regime, ranging from ‘very favourable’ (1) to ‘very unfavourable’ (4). Likewise, we use the support for Sharia question presented in [Table 3](#)—re-coding so that higher values represented greater satisfaction with democracy, the previous regime, and Sharia – respectively.

Next, we created a variable for polarization based on our questions measuring favourability towards Islamist and secularist movements (displayed in [Table 4](#)). This polarization variable is ordinal and calculated using the distance between a respondent’s favourability towards Islamist and secularist movements. We simply subtracted respondents’ favourability of Islamist movements from secularist movements, and then took the absolute value – thereby enabling us to capture one’s distance between

these two ideologically opposed groups. Those who have the same favourability score on both questions are coded as zero, which makes up 43 per cent of the sample. Meanwhile, those who are very favourable towards one movement but very unfavourable towards the other are coded as three—which makes up around 11 per cent of the sample. The rest are coded as ones and twos – depending on the distance between an individual's favourability across the two movements, indicating a moderate position towards both sides.¹⁵ Additionally, we also used two alternative measures to capture the impact of polarization on voter turnout.¹⁶

Control variables

We asked respondents whether 'any party representatives visited you at your home or workplace before/during the 2014 parliamentary election.' Respondents could choose either 'yes' or 'no,' or decide not to respond. Respondents who chose not to respond were dropped from the sample, making this a dichotomous variable. According to our survey, only 12 per cent of respondents reported that a political party representative visited them, and only 1 per cent failed to respond to this question. Therefore, 87 per cent of survey respondents stated that no party representative had visited them around the 2014 elections. The party breakdown of representatives who mobilized door-to-door is as follows: 42 per cent were from Ennahda, 27 per cent were from Nidaa Tounes, three smaller non-Islamist parties each had 6 per cent, while 11 per cent of representatives were from other political parties.

We also include several other control variables in our models to account for factors likely to influence individuals' decisions to participate in the general elections. The first set of controls consists of demographic factors such as age, gender (female = 1), formal educational level, and whether respondents were employed in the public sector. The education variable ranges between one (never went to school) and eleven (graduate degree), while income ranges from one to seven—with higher numbers indicating a higher respondent income over the previous six months. Finally, public sector employment is dichotomous and coded as one if the respondent worked for a public institution (representing 12 per cent of the sample).

Next, we pay special attention to Tunisians' perceptions of their household and the national economy, given that it was one of the most salient issues both before and after the revolution. The transition literature offers important insights about how people react to new political institutions and economic uncertainty throughout a regime transition.¹⁷ To test this argument, we asked respondents two questions regarding the economic situation in their households/country: '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)?' Responses were re-coded so that higher values represented a more positive outlook. Overall, the correlation between this variable and the decision to vote is only 0.26, with 52 per cent of respondents stating that economic conditions at home had worsened and around 84 per cent saying the same about the national economy. Additionally, given the importance of social class and political participation, we also constructed a wealth variable that accounts for one's ownership of items such as a car, second home, computer, washing machine, etc. This variable ranges between zero (not owning any of these) and seven (owning all).

We also include religiosity as a control given the saliency of religion's role in Tunisian politics. Here we ask multiple questions in our survey that account for both behavioural and attitudinal aspects of religiosity; however, we only include the attitudinal variable in our statistical models because the inclusion of the behavioural questions (such as praying five times a day, reading the Quran, and fasting during Ramadan) significantly decreased our sample size. The attitudinal questions focused directly on the respondents' perception of religion in their daily lives – with the response categories ranging from zero (not religious at all) to two (very religious). Furthermore, given the importance of 'interest in politics' as a predictor of voter turnout, we asked the respondents, 'how interested would you say you are in politics?' Responses here ranged from 'not interested at all' (one) to 'very much interested' (four). Finally, we control for urban and rural differences – and important factor in Tunisian politics – which are coded as a one for 'urban' and as a zero for 'rural'. The appendix section includes descriptive statistics, the wordings of all questions, and all supplementary statistical models.

Lastly, we argue that participation in the 2011 protests and membership in labour unions/civil society organizations could affect respondents' decisions to participate in the 2014 elections. Respondents were asked whether they 'participated in any protest movement from December 2010 to January 2011 that led to the fall of ex-president Ben Ali.' Respondents' answers are coded dichotomously as a 'one' if they say 'yes', and 'zero' if they say 'no'. Additionally, we asked respondents whether they have ever been part of a labour union or civil society organization – which generated two more binary variables with a value of 'one' if the respondents answered 'yes'.

Results and discussion

To test our arguments, we turn to multivariate regression analysis. We use probit estimation due to the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable. [Table 5](#) shows the results of our analyses, with Model 1 including only the independent variables, Model 2 adding in control variables, and finally, Model 3 interacting the effect of affective partisanship with our polarization

Table 5. Multivariate analysis of electoral turnout in the 2014 elections.

VOTER TURNOUT	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Polarization	0.108*** (0.038)	0.060* (0.041)	0.093** (0.050)
Satisfaction w/Democracy	0.142*** (0.040)	0.069* (0.044)	0.072* (0.044)
Disfavour Previous Regime	0.086*** (0.035)	0.002 (0.039)	0.001 (0.039)
Support for Sharia	-0.014 (0.034)	-0.059 (0.038)	-0.058 (0.038)
Nidaa Supporter	0.260*** (0.105)	0.209** (0.111)	0.257** (0.148)
Ennahda Supporter	0.131 (0.127)	0.126 (0.135)	0.344** (0.207)
Nidaa X Pol.			-0.052 (0.103)
Ennahda X Pol.			-0.169 (0.119)
Household Econ. Improved		-0.084 (0.070)	-0.082 (0.070)
National Econ. Improved		0.046 (0.091)	0.053 (0.091)
Political Mobilization		-0.078 (0.133)	-0.085 (0.133)
Age		0.030*** (0.004)	0.030*** (0.004)
Female		-0.111 (0.089)	-0.110 (0.089)
Education		0.061*** (0.019)	0.062*** (0.019)
Political Interest		0.231*** (0.056)	0.230*** (0.056)
Religiosity (self perception)		0.020 (0.079)	0.016 (0.079)
Public Sector Worker		0.291** (0.140)	0.294** (0.141)
SES		0.063** (0.030)	0.061** (0.030)
Live in City		-0.196** (0.095)	-0.190** (0.095)
Arab Spring Participation		0.210** (0.101)	0.211** (0.101)
Labour Union Member		0.461* (0.296)	0.468* (0.297)
Civil Society Org. Member		0.181 (0.237)	0.160 (0.237)
Constant	-0.476*** (0.154)	-1.987*** (0.297)	-2.037*** (0.298)
Observations	1,058	1,014	1,014
Log-Likelihood	-692.49	-557.94	-576.98
Pseudo R ²	0.028	0.151	0.153
Wald Chi ²	38.85***	156.95***	159.39***

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

measure. Overall, in Tunisia's 2014 election, we find polarization and satisfaction with democracy (SWD) to have a significant and positive effect on voter turnout across all models, while support for Sharia had no effect.

Beginning with Model 1, the measure for polarization turned up positive and significant – showing that Tunisians who strongly disfavoured either Islamists or secularists were more likely to vote in the 2014 general elections. However, only support for Nidaa Tounes led to a significant increase in voting, whereas affective partisanship/support for Ennahda had no effect.

Next, Model 2 shows that several IVs lost some statistical significance when introducing our control variables. For example, the significance of both polarization and satisfaction with democracy only reaches the .1 level. Moreover, disavouring the previous regime fails to come up significant at all. On the other hand, being a Nidaa Tounes supporter remains significant at the .05 level – suggesting a robust effect of affective partisanship for these voters.

Finally, turning to Model 3—we explore the interactive relationship between affective partisanship and polarization (our measure is built on negative partisanship) in Tunisia's 2014 elections. Model 3 shows our polarization variable – which measures the relative distance between one's positions on Islamist and secularist movements – returns to a .05 significance level, indicating that citizens with the most intense attitudes/beliefs towards secular and Islamist movements were also the most motivated to vote as a means of asserting their interests in the face of 'others'. As displayed in [Figure 1](#), we calculated the marginal effects of polarization on the probability of voting. These graphical results further support our expectations that polarization positively mobilizes voter turnout. Specifically, the marginal effects figure shows that the likelihood of voting increased by around 5 per cent for each level of increase in our polarization measure. Additionally, we find that Tunisians with strong support for either party (Nidaa Tounes or Ennahda) have a higher probability of voting – suggesting that affective partisanship played some role in voter turnout.

Furthermore, Model 3 also shows the coefficients of the interaction terms as not statistically significant (despite being negative), thereby suggesting that polarization (negative partisanship) does not condition the impact of affective partisanship on voting. Specifically, the findings show that for respondents whose polarization score is equal to zero, there is a positive relationship between partisanship and the likelihood of voting. In other words, partisanship is already an important factor in terms of mobilization, and polarization does not further intensify this positive effect on turnout for Tunisians. Overall, polarization remains significant across all models (though only at the '1' level in Model Two), thus supporting our expectation that Tunisians with more intense negative feelings towards either Islamists or secularists were more likely to mobilize than those with moderate attitudes towards these respective groups. Additionally, affective partisanship played a significant role for Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda supporters, though more so for Nidaa supporters. One way to interpret this result is that affective partisanship has a

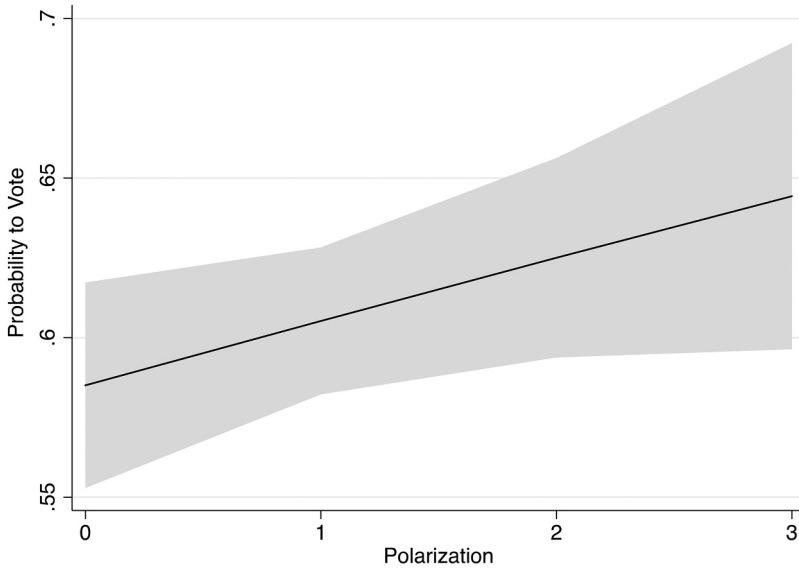


Figure 1. Predicted margins of polarization (95 per cent CIs).

powerful impact on the decision to vote. Partisanship means that these citizens were already mobilized by strong support for their party (and presumably by a dislike of any ideologically opposite parties). Furthermore, given that the coefficients of the interactions between polarization and Nidaa/Ennahda support were not statistically significant, this implies that partisan voters may have been less influenced by polarization than non-party supporters due to an already heightened political awareness and activity.

In contrast, polarization (or negative partisanship) seems more critical for those who did not identify with Nidaa Tounes or Ennahda. In other words, while we argued that polarization should be a *mobilizing factor for all Tunisians*, it appears that non-party supporters felt the bulk of its mobilizing effects. We would suggest that a partisan attachment (either to Nidaa Tounes or Ennahda) can have a similar mobilizing impact to negative polarization – as solid support for one party tends to imply a dislike for ideologically opposite parties. In sum, polarization had its most significant effect on Tunisians *who were not attached* to either Nidaa or Ennahda.¹⁸

Substantively speaking, the overall trends in this analysis – such as relatively low turnout rates among the supporters of Islamists compared to secularists – may be due to a few factors. First, the political climate in Tunisia around this time was largely anti-religious, and there were numerous anti-Salafi parties. Additionally, several Salafi parties that participated in the elections were declared terrorist organizations – such as Ansar al-Sharia

(Cavatorta, 2015). Moreover, several Salafi groups distanced themselves from participating in the 'man-made' political system due to their quietist and/or Jihadi Salafi ideologies which perceive democracy as antithetical to Islam. Similarly, of the minor Salafi parties that were allowed to run in the elections (such as Jabhat al-Islah, Hizb al-Asala, and Hizb al-Rahmah), few were able to gain seats in parliament. Finally, the relationship between the Salafi movements and Islamist Ennahda was not always friendly – as some Salafi groups accused Ennahda of being linked with US security agencies (Karagiannis, 2019), while Ennahda's prime minister Ali Laareidh declared Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization (Cavatorta, 2015). These factors imply that some with Salafi beliefs were not motivated to participate in the 2014 elections. Furthermore, the heightened salience of religion/Islamist movements in Tunisian politics following the revolution may have mobilized more secularists. While Ennahda enjoyed higher popularity in the first democratic elections following the transition, Tunisia's economic stagnation and growing security issues caused by radical Islamist groups disenchanted many Tunisians – ultimately enabling an electoral coalition of secularist groups under Nidaa Tounes to capitalize on a very negative electoral campaign that targeted Ennahda.

Furthermore – older, more educated, more politically active, and higher socio-economic status individuals were more likely to vote in 2014. Specifically, we find that Tunisians who participated in the 2010–2011 protests and/or were active members of labour unions were more likely to participate in 2014. This finding is unsurprising since electoral participation is one of the most common methods of political participation, and those who are more actively engaged in politics through outside channels should be more likely to vote. Additionally, those working in the public sector were also more likely to participate in the elections. Lastly, findings concerning our measure of urban versus rural suggest that respondents from cities were less likely to turn out; however, the magnitude of the effect here is relatively small.¹⁹

Conclusion

While the broader Comparative Politics literature finds a strong connection in new democracies between *citizen participation in early elections* and the overall *trajectory of a democratic transition*, these findings have largely been overlooked by research on the MENA region. To better understand current events in Tunisia, this study aims to bridge the above literature by examining the dynamics of Tunisia's early democratic experience – and specifically, *which citizens* were most likely to vote during its critical second election in 2014.

We argue that in new democracies, early elections provide a vital opportunity for citizens to mobilize as a way to calm the uncertainty following a transition and shape the course of the future national identity and political trajectory. Yet when participation in these critical elections is *uneven*—that is, there are systematic disparities between more moderate/compromising citizens versus those with the strongest ideological preferences – it can set the stage for the kinds of volatility conducive to democratic breakdown. A key force driving electoral participation at the individual level – and therefore potential unevenness – is political polarization, creating a zero-sum political atmosphere that can intensify positive and negative attitudes towards ideological opponents/rivals. In new democracies – and especially in the Middle East – the most uncertain and therefore polarizing ideological dimensions usually revolve around the direction of the national and political identity – and specifically, whether to have a more secular versus Islamist society, and whether to enshrine democracy as the only game in town. Our survey results suggested that Tunisians were sharply divided in their support for democracy versus other regime types. Furthermore, this analysis revealed that in its second elections in 2014, the Tunisians most invested in democracy as the nation’s political identity (as opposed to those wanting to implement some form of authoritarian or Islamic governance), those with a secularist or Islamist identity, and those who had neither identity but were more polarized, were more likely to vote to shape the nation’s future identity to their liking.

To conclude, while polarization can help boost voter turnout – a seemingly positive effect for democracies – our results suggest that when citizens in a new democracy face intense divisions over the country’s direction (as Tunisians did in 2014), political actors are willing to exploit these divisions (as Nidaa Tounes proved with their extremely negative attacks on Ennahda/Islamists), then polarization can propel *uneven participation* that can ultimately stall a democratic transition by signalling consent for more biased, exclusionary, and illiberal behaviour by opportunistic politicians. Overall, our study supports other research highlighting the potentially destructive effects of political parties’ short-sighted, alienating, and incendiary electoral strategies in new democracies²⁰—with polarization helping to intensify and inflame secular-religious hostilities amongst some citizens, while distancing more moderate voters from the democratic process altogether. Therefore, it is unsurprising that voter turnout amongst registered Tunisians dropped precipitously from 68 per cent in 2014 to 41 per cent in 2019. Furthermore, the empirical findings of this study help to shed light on some of the more recent developments in Tunisia that have eroded its democracy. Specifically, our results show that significant segments of Tunisians were uninfluenced by the elite polarization centring on the secular/religious social cleavage. Instead, Tunisians were far more concerned with the issues of corruption, security, and economic stagnation on account of widespread unemployment and poverty.

Current president Kais Saied was highly successful in exploiting this public discontent, using it to gradually erode the hopes for democracy in Tunisia. Overall, Saied's most recent power grab shows that a lack of robust citizen enthusiasm – coupled with weak government performance/incompetence in overcoming economic struggles before and during the pandemic – can be used all too easily as excuses to abandon the hard-fought path to democracy.

Notes

1. For more, see: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/27/tunisia-gulf-information-campaign>, Accessed on August 9, 2021.
2. The first free and fair elections, named Constituent Assembly Elections, were conducted in 2011 to draft a new Constitution. The Constituent Assembly voted to adopt the Constitution on January 26, 2014. The 2014 election was the first after a new Constitution that set the boundaries of a democratic political system.
3. Postcommunist studies have extensively paid attention to turnout in early elections (see Kostadinova and Power (2007)). Some exceptions include a detailed study of turnout in the Arab world by De Miguel et al., Rosenthal et al. (2018) and a few studies on Turkey and Israel (e.g., Rosenthal et al. 2018). Otherwise, the determinants of turnout at the individual level have not received much attention from MENA region studies.
4. The Egyptian case is also relevant here as the authoritarian Sisi regime initially 'legitimized' itself to 'restore' democracy through a coup and not-free/unfair elections.
5. We use Hegghammer (2013) and Volpi and Stein (2015) definition of Islamism. (Statist) Islamist actors are those who justified their (political) activism by primary reference to Islam. As seen in the responses (see Table 4), Ennahda is seen as part of the Islamist movements.
6. Also see Fornos et al. (2004), Kostadinova and Power (2007) and Kostelka (2014).
7. It should be noted that in the cases of Central/Eastern Europe, weak participation in the two decades following the transitions did not initially endanger democratic politics due to factors such as moderate economic development and robust early enthusiasm to be part of 'Europe' (Vachudova, 2005)—however, there is growing evidence that low early turnout in the region (especially Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) has facilitated significant backsliding more recently given the rise of right-wing populist parties that have embraced anti-pluralistic, anti-rule of law, and repressive policies towards political opposition (Pirro, 2015).
8. We thank an anonymous reviewer who raised this important point.
9. A massive literature on citizen attitudes towards democracy in post-Communist countries shows that popularity for returning to some variant of authoritarianism increases when there is a strong sense of nostalgia and/or dissatisfaction with the new democratic regime's institutional and/or economic performance (Evans & Whitefield, 1995; Haerpfer, 2008; Mishler & Rose, 1997).
10. Despite our limited expectations regarding affective partisanship in 2014 Tunisia, we actually find evidence that a positive attachment specifically to Nidaa Tounes resulted in being more likely to vote.
11. For more information on official electoral turnout rates in Tunisia: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/284/40>.

12. Lustration – the purifying/purging of old-regime officials – can come in different forms depending on the context of the democratic transition, and the potential power of prominent actors from the former regime.
13. These survey results – when taken in conjunction with Albrecht, Bufano et al. (2021) finding that disillusionment with democratic procedures can breed support for expanding the military’s role in politics – help shed light on recent events in Tunisia and specifically the military’s embrace of Kais Saeid’s actions.
14. For robustness concerns, we used an oft-used question derived from the World Values Survey which asks whether democracy may have its problems but is better than any other form of government. 83 per cent of survey respondents agree with this statement while only 10 per cent opposed it.
15. Here, one’s represent about 21 per cent of the sample, while two’s represent about 25 per cent.
16. First, we created three nominal variables based on the distance between an individual’s answers for each group; *high polarization* (those who are coded above as 3), *moderate polarization* (those who are coded as 1 or 2), and *low polarization* (those with the same favourability for the two movements, coded as 0). Our second robustness measure examines whether an individual’s favourability towards one group mobilizes them to vote. We use the original survey questions to create two distinct, dichotomous variables-one for “favouring Islamists” and the other “favouring secularists.”
17. See Kostadinova, Kostadinova (2003), Kostadinova and Power (2007), Pacek et al. (2009), and Turner (1993).
18. We ran an alternative model for robustness check, and the results did not change significantly. We separated non-partisans and other party supporters and included them as additional variables to draw the graphs in Figure 2, available in the Online Appendix.
19. For the city variable, we merged town and villages as the former had a much smaller percentage (8 per cent versus 30 per cent). Without merging, the city variable is insignificant. Nevertheless, the size of the coefficient is very small for both operationalizations.
20. See Albrecht, Bishara et al. (2022).

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