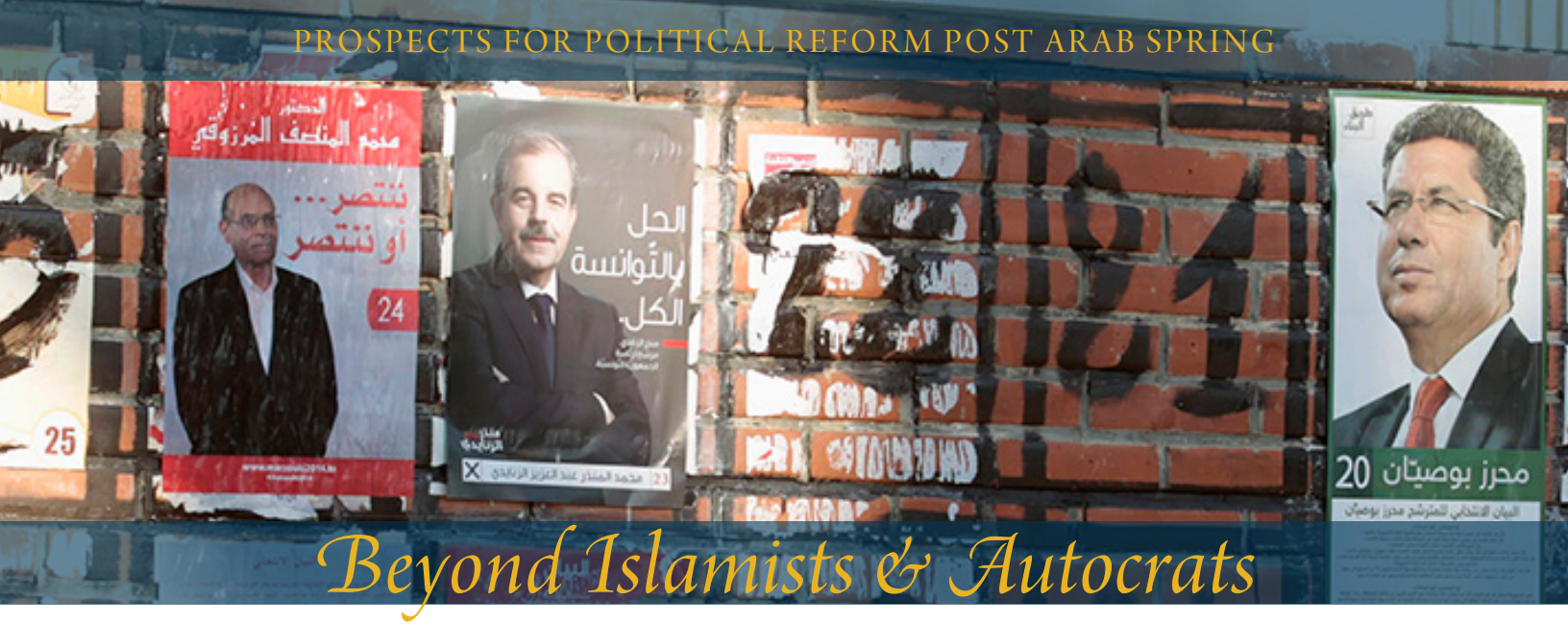

Beyond Islamists & Autocrats

Post-Jasmine Tunisia

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ONE of the more dramatic Arab Spring plotlines has been the rapid turn of fortune for Islamist movements throughout the region. If the tumult of 2011 initially paved the way for Islamist parties to assume power in places like Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, by 2014 the pendulum had swung decidedly back and Islamists were on the defensive, if not wholly defeated, in most of the affected countries. Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab uprisings, was no exception. There, the Islamists of the Ennahda Party who swept into power after the 2011 parliamentary elections were, by late 2013, struggling to negotiate a departure from the government that would preserve the party's future political relevance. Ennahda's stinging defeat in the parliamentary election of October 2014, and the election of an avowedly anti-Islamist president two months later, ostensibly spawned an Arab democracy in which non-Islamists are the dominant actors.

The resultant political landscape in Tunisia challenges a prevailing narrative among analysts of the Arab uprisings, according to whom the region faced a choice between non-Islamist autocrats and Islamist democrats. This binary framework captured some dynamics at play throughout the region, but it always obscured more than it enlightened the unfolding realities in Tunisia. There, democracy-minded forces emerged on both sides of the Islamist/non-Islamist divide, and autocratic or otherwise illiberal tendencies could be found in Islamist and non-Islamist circles alike.[1] Consider the country's dominant Islamist party: after emerging from the 2011 parliamentary election as a leading political force, Ennahda demonstrated a commitment to key components of a democracy, including the separation of powers and broad participation in elections and office holding; at the same time, the party promoted policies that would have restricted free speech and undermined the country's progressive statutes on women's rights.[2] In the non-Islamist realm, parties like Ettakatol (Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties) and the Congress for the Republic—members of the transitional government alongside Ennahda—had strong democratic credentials, having opposed the regime of former president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and advocated human and civil rights for decades before the country's Jasmine uprising. Newer formations like the Nidaa Tounes (Tunisian Call) party brought together remnants of the former regime with little affection for democratic governance and democratic leftists active in opposition politics throughout Ben Ali's tenure. The simple dichotomy of Secular Autocrat versus Islamist Democrat, therefore, does not offer much insight into such configurations. Indeed, one reason Tunisia remains on a recognizable path away from authoritarianism is that *reformist actors on both sides of the Islamist/non-Islamist divide have continued to exert pressure on political elites in both camps to abide by their stated commitments to a successful democratic transition*.

Tunisia's relative success over the past four years has

prompted observers to label the small country a "model" for other Arab states still struggling to shed authoritarian governance. But Tunisia has never really been a model. From the beginning of the uprisings, the country had crucial advantages over many of its Arab peers: a homogeneous (majority Sunni Muslim) population, a relatively well-educated citizenry, and a small and accountable military establishment. Demographically, too, Tunisia had an important edge over its Egyptian, Levantine, and Gulf counterparts: at the time of the uprising, scholars noted that Tunisia's median age of twenty-nine placed it above the "youth bulge" bracket and in the same intermediate bracket as countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Chile, and Taiwan—all of which had successfully transitioned to democracy within five to fifteen years' time.[3] Even on the economic front, a 2014 World Bank report highlighting structural obstacles to growth acknowledged that in terms of human capital and basic infrastructure, "Tunisia has everything it needs to become the 'Tiger of the Mediterranean.'"[4]

Despite such advantages, the country's democratic transition came close to unraveling on several occasions, and today Tunisia is grappling with issues such as a severely crippled economy, an insurgency along its border with Algeria, the threat of violence spilling over from neighboring Libya, and a security sector in need of reform. How Tunisia's political decisionmakers respond to such challenges, and the degree to which allies such as the United States continue to lend constructive support, will determine whether the nascent democracy not only survives but thrives in the coming years. The recent conclusion to the country's transitional period presents a valuable opportunity to identify and assess the emerging political landscape, with a view to assisting U.S. policymakers seeking productive partnerships in post-Spring Tunisia.

This paper, the first in a series exploring non-Islamists throughout the Middle East and North Africa, focuses on the leading non-Islamists in Tunisia's political system and civil society, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, and offering recommendations for U.S. policymakers seeking to ensure the success of Tunisia's experiment in democracy. The paper proceeds in four parts. Following a recap of the Tunisian transition, the paper delves into non-Islamists in the political system, focusing on the four leading non-Islamist parties. It then turns to non-Islamists in civil society, assessing the opportunities and challenges facing organized labor, women's rights organizations, and groups promoting government transparency. The concluding section summarizes the main findings and considers policy implications.

THE TUNISIAN TRANSITION

Following the January 2011 ouster of Tunisia's autocratic president, Ben Ali, the formerly ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party was dissolved and a series of interim governments culminated in the election of a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) on October 23, 2011. The NCA was charged with drafting a new constitution and preparing the country for the election of a permanent legislature within one year's time. In a development that would become the regional trend, Tunisia's formerly banned Islamist movement, Ennahda ("Renaissance," in Arabic), emerged from the October 2011 election in a dominant position, capturing 41 percent of the popular vote and obtaining a plurality of seats in the transitional parliament. The remaining 59 percent went to more than a dozen non-Islamist parties and independents. Ennahda entered into a governing coalition with two secular parties—Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol—and this troika became Tunisia's new government.

The NCA's one-year mandate was unrealistic from the outset, given that the elected body had to assume responsibility for day-to-day legislating alongside its work on the new constitution and electoral law. The coalition ended up governing for roughly two and a half years, during which time Tunisians enjoyed broadly expanded political rights; however, the country's economy continued to deteriorate and the security situation worsened. Following the assassinations of two leftist politicians in February and July of 2013, massive protests that summer brought the NCA to a standstill and the Tunisian transition to the brink of collapse. A national dialogue organized under the auspices of the Tunisian General Labor Union, the Tunisian League for Human Rights, the Tunisian Union of Industry and Commerce, and the National Bar Association facilitated a series of negotiations between the political factions throughout fall 2013. That December, Ennahda yielded to public pressure and

agreed to step down, ceding power to an interim government of technocrats. In January 2014, the NCA ratified a new constitution enshrining freedoms of speech, association, and press; gender equality between men and women; and checks and balances between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

From January to October 2014, the interim cabinet of Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa governed to broadly positive reviews as the country's precarious security situation stabilized somewhat,[5] and the NCA adopted the long-awaited electoral law to govern future parliamentary and presidential elections. On October 26, 2014, Tunisians went to the polls to elect a new 217-seat legislature, which resulted in a parliament dominated by five blocs: the secularist Nidaa Tounes with 85 seats, the Islamist Ennahda with 69 seats, the anti-Islamist Free Patriotic Union (UPL by its French acronym) with 16 seats, the leftist Popular Front coalition with 15 seats, and the neoliberal Afek Tounes with 8 seats. The remaining 24 seats went to independents. On December 21, 2014, Tunisians elected as their new president Beji Caid Essebsi, an eighty-eight year-old statesman and the leader of Nidaa Tounes. Both elections, widely praised by international and domestic observers, represented significant achievements for the relatively small country that had sparked the Arab Spring, all the more so given the growing chaos next door in Libya and the overall regional upheaval.

In line with procedures outlined in the new constitution, President Essebsi named as prime minister a member of the leading party in parliament, his own Nidaa Tounes. The party's choice was Habib Essid, whose portfolio included time in the agriculture and interior ministries under Ben Ali, a stint as interior minister in Essebsi's 2011 transitional government, and service as a security advisor to Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda) during the first troika government. Following weeks of negotiations, including one failed attempt to form a government, Essid secured parliamentary approval of a broadly representative government on February 2, 2015. Of the twenty-seven ministerial portfolios, six went to Nidaa Tounes, three to UPL, three to Afek Tounes, one to Ennahda, and the rest to independents. Of the fourteen state secretariat (subministerial) posts, three went to Nidaa Tounes, three to Ennahda, and the rest to independents.

The results of the 2014 parliamentary elections and the dominance of Nidaa Tounes, UPL, and Afek Tounes suggest that while the Islamists of Ennahda will continue to occupy an important space in Tunisian politics, they do not represent its principal force. Some have interpreted Ennahda's loss of twenty parliamentary seats as a severe blow to political Islam in Tunisia. For others, the fact that Ennahda retained one-third of the parliament is remarkable given the rapid descent of Islamists throughout the region, most glaringly in Egypt but elsewhere as well. Both interpretations have merit, but either way, Tunisia's Islamists face a sizable majority of non-Islamist forces occupying the political landscape today. Some non-Islamist groups, including factions within Nidaa Tounes, the Popular Front, and Afek Tounes, have strong democratic leanings; others, including pockets within Nidaa Tounes and Slim Riahi's Free Patriotic Union, are either decidedly antidemocratic or have yet to demonstrate a commitment to democratic principles, though they have all opted to participate in a democratic political system. The following section reviews these forces and assesses their near-term prospects.

NON-ISLAMISTS IN TUNISIAN POLITICS

Four main blocs constitute non-Islamist political influence in Tunisia: Nidaa Tounes, the Free Patriotic Union, the Popular Front, and Afek Tounes.

The Secularists of Nidaa Tounes

Following Ennahda's strong performance in the 2011 parliamentary election, Essebsi—who had served as a minister under President Habib Bourguiba (r. 1957–1987), speaker of the parliament under Ben Ali (r. 1987–2011), and interim prime minister following Ben Ali's exit—created a new party and began rallying Tunisians around a broadly anti-Islamist message. As early as March 2012, the party was holding rallies attracting several thousand people, suggesting at least a growing fascination with, if not support for, the emerging rival to Ennahda. By the fall of 2014, Essebsi was pegging the party's membership at 110,000.[6]

Essebsi's rhetoric emphasizing "modernism" (in implied contrast to Islamism), democracy, and the restoration of state prestige (*haibat al-dawla*) attracted three main constituencies: former RCD members, leftists af-

filiated with a handful of smaller parties that had fared poorly in the 2011 parliamentary election, and secularly oriented academics and other intellectuals who were formerly apolitical but gravitated to Nidaa out of a desire to stop the Islamist ascent. The shared determination to counterbalance the Islamists of Ennahda held together these three otherwise ideologically disparate groups. Of the three, two—the leftist camp and the secular professionals—had democratic bona fides; the ex-RCD faction—a minority—could not properly be termed democratic. In Essebsi, these factions perceived a charismatic leader who could undo the damage of what many had come to view as the troika's lackluster governance, particularly in the economic and security realms.[7]

Nidaa opened regional offices in twenty-four of the country's twenty-seven governorates and established around 200 municipal cells (out of 264 municipalities).[8] Funding for the party's operations came from four principal sources: donations from business interests, particularly in the tourism and agriculture sectors; private contributions from individual members; public financing during the campaign period; and donations from foreign governments before and during the campaign period. Foreign funding took various forms, including contributions from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, a foundation affiliated with the German government, which reportedly paid for Nidaa's headquarters and office materials; and a gift from the government of the United Arab Emirates in the form of two armored cars for Essebsi in July 2014 after he began receiving death threats. The UAE's gift was controversial, as it fed the narrative that Tunisia's anti-Islamists were being funded by the UAE while Ennahda enjoyed financial support from Islamist-friendly governments in Turkey and Qatar.

Public skepticism about foreign funding did little to slow Nidaa's momentum. Instead, frustration with the troika's (mis)management of the political transition, a growing concern that political Islam posed a threat to the country's future, and Essebsi's charisma propelled Nidaa to its October 2014 parliamentary victory and ultimately carried Essebsi to Carthage Palace that December. But Nidaa's "big tent" has also been one of its greatest liabilities, because beyond the shared—and now ostensibly achieved—goal of diminishing Ennahda's clout, the three constituencies drawn to Nidaa diverge considerably in their policy preferences. On economic questions, for example, the leftist wing of Nidaa arguably finds more in common with the socialists and communists of the Popular Front (discussed later) than with their free-market capitalist peers in the party. This diversity likely accounted for the party's reluctance to spell out specific policy prescriptions during the campaign beyond vaguely worded promises to promote job growth and revive Tunisia's economy,[9] and it almost certainly accounted for Nidaa's decision to put off convening a formal party congress until after the 2014 election cycle. Since January 2015, when Essebsi formally left the party to assume the presidency, the party's competing ideological trends have only become more glaring in their differences, presenting a major future challenge for Nidaa.

A second, related liability for Nidaa has been organizational. The party has at one time or another boasted a founding committee, consisting of individuals within Essebsi's inner circle; a hundred-member executive bureau; a now-defunct national executive council with four hundred members; and a similarly short-lived thirty-person political bureau. Nidaa members—among both the older generation and younger activists—report that final decisions were consistently taken by Essebsi himself, who remained reluctant to authorize decisionmaking bodies within the party lest they generate competing power bases. The party's lack of a democratic decisionmaking apparatus was partly to blame for a spate of high-level defections in 2014, including the August 2014 resignation of several regional office managers who were angry that they had not been consulted before party lists were disseminated in anticipation of the parliamentary elections. The lack of internal organization also hampered the party's ability to manage more mundane, but no less significant, tasks such as managing its website and maintaining a social media presence.

Nidaa members are aware of the party's structural weaknesses. In March, the party elected a new twenty-member political bureau, and in May, Mohsen Marzouk, Essebsi's fifty-year-old campaign manager, became Nidaa's new secretary general. The party has also created three vice-presidential posts, currently filled by a member of the party's leftist wing, a leading businessman,

and Essebsi's son, respectively. In the coming months, a major task confronting the party will be to create viable decisionmaking structures and ensure that those structures allow democratically inclined voices within the party to continue calling Nidaa their political home.

The Anti-Islamists of the Free Patriotic Union

The anti-Islamist sentiment unifying the diverse factions of Nidaa Tounes also permeates the third-place winner of the 2014 parliamentary election, the previously little-known Free Patriotic Union, or UPL (*al-Ittihad al-Watani al-Hurr*). As with Nidaa, UPL is closely associated with its founder, Slim Riahi, a wealthy businessman who grew up in Libya and made his fortune in the energy and real estate sectors. Upon his return to Tunisia in 2011, Riahi began investing in large-scale development projects, became president of a popular Tunisian soccer club, and founded a political party on a platform emphasizing "modernist" values, free market liberalism, and opposition to Islamist movements. In the 2011 legislative election, Riahi portrayed Ennahda as UPL's chief rival, but his party performed dismally. UPL's strong showing in the most recent election partly reflected the more general souring with Ennahda in the interim.

Still, anti-Islamism alone cannot account for UPL's recent success. Arguably the more salient factor has been Riahi's wealth. Paradoxically, Riahi's fortunes, in addition to bankrolling the party, endeared him to lower-income Tunisians who became convinced he would spread his wealth and be less likely to steal from average citizens. UPL reinforced this narrative through its campaign promises to increase public assistance to underprivileged families, build soccer stadiums in blighted neighborhoods, and establish a ministry responsible for rooting out corruption. Setting aside the viability of such promises, they undoubtedly tapped into economic realities many analysts outside Tunisia failed to acknowledge in the decades preceding the Arab uprisings. Assessments of Tunisia's economy in the 1990s and 2000s tended to highlight the country's impressive performance on macroeconomic indicators such as overall growth rates and poverty reduction. More recent analyses have suggested the traditional focus on macroeconomics obscured deeper and ultimately more consequential trends, such as increases in relative poverty, growing regional disparities, and rampant corruption, that precluded more evenly distributed economic growth.[10] Such trends fueled a growing sense of marginalization among Tunisians living outside the capital and far from the coast, and this marginalization partly explains the appeal of a party like UPL, which otherwise remains largely devoid of ideological affiliation. For Riahi's detractors, however, the populist orientation of UPL's campaign masks the party leader's own perceived corruption, and some have accused the party of buying votes. Now that UPL has emerged as a leading bloc in parliament, it will have to deliver on its promises if it hopes to remain a key political player.

The Leftists of the Popular Front

In early 2013, eleven secular parties formed an electoral bloc in the NCA known as the Popular Front (*al-Jabha al-Shabiyah*). The coalition won the fourth largest number of seats (15) in the most recent legislative election and chose not to join Essid's government, preferring to remain the dominant opposition party. This decision partly reflected strong pressure from the Popular Front's base not to affiliate with a government of Islamists (i.e., Ennahda) and former regime members (i.e., Nidaa). The Front may have also calculated that it had more to gain from remaining in the opposition, as the new constitution requires that the leader of the parliament's Finance Committee hail from the opposition. Ideologically, the Front's member parties are socialist or communist in orientation, with a strong commitment to social justice and the democratic process. The Front's spokesman, Hamma Hammami, is a former communist and longtime labor activist who was imprisoned, tortured, and forced into hiding on numerous occasions throughout the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras.

The Popular Front's greatest strengths lie in its ideological cohesion and its relatively unified base of support. The roots of Tunisia's leftist politics stretch back to the period surrounding the country's independence in the 1950s, and even as the country tilted toward economic liberalization in the 1980s and 1990s—privatizing state-owned enterprises, cutting public subsidies, and embracing other structural adjustment policies aimed at securing loans from international financial institutions—such shifts left a sour taste for many lower- and middle-income Tunisians. The left may be diminished, but it is

still very much alive in Tunisia, lending the Front a hefty dose of legitimacy on which it has sought to capitalize by presenting itself as the leading alternative to both the Islamists of Ennahda and the secularists of Nidaa. In a recent interview, for example, the leader of a Front member party ruled out reconciliation with either Ennahda, which he characterized as a persistent "danger" to Tunisia, or with President Essebsi, whom he accused of lacking a concrete policy agenda and entering into a "pact with the devil" by forming a coalition with Islamists.[11]

But the strategy exemplified in such statements is not without risks, and the Front has come under criticism for alleged intransigence in its dealings with the other political parties, earning it the nickname "Party of No." Given the consensus among most parties in the government that deep (read: liberalizing) economic reforms will be necessary to get the country on a path to economic stability, a key challenge facing the Front will be to remain true to its base while not appearing to obstruct economic reforms many have concluded will be necessary, if painful.

The Young Liberals of Afek Tounes

In the wake of the 2011 uprising, a new political party called Afek Tounes (Tunisian Horizons) was created under the leadership of Yassine Brahim, a minister of transportation in Essebsi's interim government who had spent years working in finance and business management in Europe and Tunisia. At forty-nine, he is the youngest party leader to emerge from the Jasmine Revolution, and this youth has characterized much of Afek's leadership and support base. In 2012, Afek briefly merged with nine other democratically oriented parties under a coalition calling itself al-Joumhouri (Republican), but the coalition did not last long, and in August 2013 Brahim announced the reconstitution of Afek as its own party. In the 2014 parliamentary election, Afek set a goal of attaining four to five seats. That Afek ultimately won eight, and took control of three crucial ministries, reflected the party's cohesive message and solid organization—Afek's two greatest strengths.

Ideologically, Afek self-identifies as a center-right party and has promoted a platform emphasizing free market economic reforms and liberal social policies. On the matter of religion in public life, Afek falls somewhere between the secularists of Nidaa and the Islamists of Ennahda. The head of a local association of imams sits on Afek's national council, and unlike Nidaa and UPL, Afek does not take an overtly anti-Islamist stance. (Ideological differences make it much more difficult for Afek to contemplate collaboration with the socialists of the Popular Front.) However, unlike Ennahda, Afek's leadership believes religious identity and practice are best left as private affairs. As one member of the party's political bureau expressed, "Islamists believe religion is a duty, while Afek believes it is a right."[12]

Of the non-Islamist parties, Afek is by far the best organized. In addition to its ten-person political bureau, which oversees the party, Afek boasts its national council, whose hundred members sit on committees responsible for communications, economic policy, and other issue areas. The party also has a strong regional presence. In the 2014 election, Afek fielded candidates in twenty-nine of the country's thirty-three electoral districts, and in all twenty-nine regions the party opened an office, below which were 150 local cells of roughly five persons each. Through such structures, the party managed to knock on 50,000 doors in the four months leading up to October's parliamentary election, a grassroots operation unmatched by the other secular parties. Afek is also the only non-Islamist party to have implemented a membership fee for those wishing to join, though the actual amount is minimal. The party also relies on private donations. Although the finance background of Afek's leadership produced a widespread impression that the party benefits from wealthy business interests, it is, in fact, one of the poorer parties on the Tunisian political scene. Given its recent electoral successes, and the likelihood that democrats within Nidaa will gravitate to Afek in the coming months, a challenge for the party will be to develop a more comprehensive funding strategy to permit continued growth in its staffing and operations.

NON-ISLAMISTS IN TUNISIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

After a brief experiment with political liberalization in the late 1980s, Ben Ali changed course and began clamping down on sources—real and potential—of political opposition. The Islamists of Ennahda became prime regime targets, but Ben Ali also went after non-Islamists, ranging from members of the leading communist party

to civil society organizations (CSOs) like the Tunisian League for Human Rights, labor union activists, and student groups on college campuses. The few CSOs that were permitted to continue functioning faced persistent harassment as Ben Ali's Tunisia became a veritable police state.[13]

The 2011 uprising led to the emergence of a vibrant civil society, one that deserves much credit for keeping the democratic transition on track at critical junctures.[14] Key segments of this civil society predated the Jasmine Revolution—and some, like the national labor union, even predated the independent state—but the vast majority of today's roughly 4,000 CSOs emerged after the Ben Ali–era restrictions on free assembly and free association were lifted in 2011. Broadly speaking, five categories of CSOs predominate in Tunisian civil society today: (1) organized labor, (2) women's rights groups, (3) organizations promoting government transparency, (4) student unions, and (5) human rights organizations. In some arenas, like the student unions, Islamists constitute sizable minorities.[15] In others, such as women's rights organizations, Islamists are gradually finding a voice. Still, the aims of Tunisia's CSOs remain largely secular in nature, and to speak of Tunisian civil society is to speak of predominantly non-Islamist groups and individuals pursuing reforms in a public space between family and state that remained elusive for decades. Each category of CSO would merit a study unto itself, but a brief assessment of the main labor union, women's rights groups, and organizations promoting government transparency will shed light on the opportunities and challenges facing non-Islamist democrats in Tunisian civil society today.

Organized Labor

Most contemporary press accounts of the Arab Spring trace the uprisings to the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, in December of 2010. Compelling as it was, this popular narrative obscured the fact that Bouazizi's suicide had *followed* a period of deep social unrest, the likes of which Tunisia had not seen since the early 1980s. In 2008, a group of unemployed youth and temporary workers at the state-owned phosphate mines in Gafsa, located in the country's midwestern region, launched a series of strikes to protest the lack of access to jobs and unfair hiring practices.[16] Simmering below the surface of the drama in Gafsa and its environs was a dispute between the local affiliates and the regional leadership of the country's largest and oldest labor union, the Tunisian General Labor Union, or UGTT by its French acronym.

This was not the first time the UGTT had been at the center of social unrest in Tunisia. Since its founding in 1946, the UGTT has been more than a simple labor union; it has been the only broad-based, national, and independent organization functioning parallel to—and thus rivaling—the state in its ability to mobilize the Tunisian public. At times, the UGTT enjoyed harmonious relations with the state. In the early days after independence, for example, eleven out of seventeen government ministers hailed from the UGTT's leadership. In other periods, however, the UGTT's insistence on preserving its autonomy brought it into conflict with the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, which alternately sought to repress and co-opt the organization in an attempt to bring it to heel. The 2008 Gafsa protests, sparked partly by tensions between a co-opted regional leadership and oppositional local affiliates, spoke to the Ben Ali regime's success in weakening the UGTT's internal coherence. Still, by the time protests spread from Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid to the outskirts of Tunis in 2010 and 2011, the UGTT was firmly in the emerging anti-regime camp. Indeed, it was the UGTT's call for a national strike that precipitated the decisive protests of January 14, 2011. The ensuing mobilization demonstrated the union's widespread national legitimacy, local disputes in Gafsa notwithstanding, and this legitimacy enabled the UGTT to serve as a crucial arbiter in disputes between the political parties in 2013.

Reinforcing the UGTT's legitimacy is its extensive organizational structure. The union encompasses forty-six sectorial syndicates in areas such as telecommunications, agriculture, education, and finance/banking, and twenty-four regional syndicates reporting to an executive bureau comprising the secretary-general and twelve additional members who are elected to five-year terms. UGTT leaders report that total membership across the country is between 800,000 and 900,000, of whom the majority (roughly 500,000) are public sector employees who pay monthly union dues directly out of their pay-

checks. There is also an à la carte membership option, popular among private sector employees, which requires a lower monthly contribution but does not grant full voting rights at the national congresses.[17]

The UGTT's high legitimacy and solid organizational foundation ensure that it will remain a powerful social force in post-Spring Tunisia. It recently concluded negotiations with the Essid government over public sector salaries, and it will undoubtedly be a key player in policy discussions concerning issues such as the informal economy, tax code, solvency of public sector pension funds, and corruption. Much like its leftist allies in the Popular Front, however, the UGTT will operate under the constraints of a political climate that increasingly favors economic austerity and liberalizing reforms anathema to much of its base. In the coming months, a central challenge facing the UGTT will be to choose its political battles wisely as the country continues to navigate rough economic waters. An additional challenge will be to contend with new syndicates that have sprung up since the 2011 uprising. In February and May 2011, two former UGTT leaders announced the establishment of the General Confederation of Tunisian Workers and the Union of Tunisian Workers, respectively.[18] These newer syndicates do not yet rival the UGTT's broad base, but they have broken the UGTT's longstanding monopoly on organized labor in Tunisia—a monopoly effectively mandated by the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes' refusal to legalize any other syndicates. Insofar as the Jasmine Revolution has opened up a space for labor pluralism in Tunisia, the 2011 uprising may yet prove to be a mixed blessing for the UGTT.

Women's Rights

Well before the tumultuous events of 2011, women in Tunisia enjoyed legal protections unparalleled in the Arab world.[19] Two key developments accounted for Tunisian women's relatively advanced legal status. The first was the 1956 promulgation of a Personal Status Code that outlawed polygamy, granted women the right to sue for divorce, established alimony, and increased women's rights to child custody.[20] The second was the emergence in the late 1980s of women's rights groups—chief among them the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (TADW) and the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (ATWRD)—which successfully lobbied the government on various women's issues. For example, in the early 1990s these groups compelled the Ben Ali regime to reform the country's citizenship code and grant women the right to pass their Tunisian nationality on to their children, a right previously reserved to Tunisian fathers.[21]

The older generation of Tunisia's women's rights movement has remained active since the 2011 uprising. In the months following Ben Ali's exit, veteran groups such as the TADW were instrumental in urging the 2011 transitional government to adopt a gender parity law that required candidate lists in that year's parliamentary election to alternate between men and women. Likewise, following a 2012 proposal by several Ennahda parliament members to include a constitutional provision defining women as "complementary" rather than "equal" to men, the TADW and others mobilized public protests that ultimately defeated the proposed measure.[22] With an increase in freedom, however, veteran women's rights groups face a challenge of adapting their goals and purposes from those conceived in the context of political authoritarianism to those more suited to an emerging democracy.

A related challenge for the older generation of women's advocacy groups has been to contend with younger potential rivals in post-Spring Tunisia. A 2014 report by the government-affiliated Center for Research, Study, Documentation and Information on Women listed 244 local CSOs employing some 2,000 Tunisians and working on issues related to gender equality.[23] At the local and national levels, three kinds of women's advocacy CSOs dominate the scene: (1) those inspired by the older generation of groups like the TADW and ATWRD, (2) Islamist women's groups, and (3) collaborative groups eschewing ideological affiliation and emphasizing the use of technology to engage women in reform efforts. A prominent example of the third is Aswat Nissa (Women's Voices), a nonpartisan CSO created in 2011 with the mission of empowering Tunisian women to combat discrimination through initiatives ranging from local workshops to national lobbying efforts.[24] CSOs like Aswat Nissa, which rely on funding from international donors such as Oxfam and the United Nations, and on support from the United States and various European governments, represent a new branch of the Tunisian women's movement.

Though led by non-Islamists, they tend to eschew the anti-Islamist rhetoric and policy focus that characterize some veteran groups. Groups like Aswat Nissa in Tunisia's emerging civil society carry tremendous promise for the women's movement, because as inclusive organizations they stand a greater chance of reaching and mobilizing larger numbers of women. However, a challenge for all these groups—old and new—will be to coexist without risking redundancy or destructive competition, both of which could undermine the broader cause of women's advancement in a democratic Tunisia.

Government Transparency

Yet another bright spot in the Tunisian transition has been the creation of CSOs promoting government transparency. Whether established as Tunisian affiliates of international transparency organizations or founded as wholly indigenous operations, these CSOs have vigilantly monitored various aspects of the political process over the past four years and deserve much of the credit for keeping Tunisia's transition on track. Often founded by young adults, and relying largely on funding from international donors, they will likely remain critical to ensuring that the seeds of government transparency and accountability planted in 2011 take root over time.

Consider the example of Mourakiboun (Observers), an organization founded in 2011 to monitor the country's first legislative election following Ben Ali's departure. On October 23, 2011, Mourakiboun dispatched 4,000 volunteer observers around the country; three years later, the group managed to send 6,000 observers around the country for both the legislative and presidential elections. In the interim, Mourakiboun had become a leading pressure group on all matters electoral, issuing periodic assessments—including critical ones—of the Independent High Commission for Elections, and proving instrumental in shaping the emerging electoral law. It was largely Mourakiboun's lobbying efforts, for example, that produced the law's accommodations for illiterate voters.

In a similar vein, I Watch—a Tunisian branch of Transparency International founded in 2011—tackled three primary issues in the 2011 and 2014 election cycles: vote buying, illegal influence on voters, and campaign finance. By 2014, the group had created an online platform for citizens to obtain accreditation as election observers; launched a website through which citizens could report on instances of corruption; trained and dispatched 750 fixed-location election monitors; and issued recommendations to the NCA concerning the electoral code. With assistance from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the group also began tracking the expenditures of political parties with a view to ensuring that these parties respected campaign finance laws.[25]

Or consider Al Bawsala (Compass), a watchdog CSO established in 2012 to monitor and publicize NCA members' attendance, debates, voting, and other forms of participation in parliament. Al Bawsala also published the evolving drafts of the constitution, encouraging and enabling citizens to remain engaged in the process. More recently, the group has launched projects monitoring the national budget negotiations in parliament and tracking the activities of municipal authorities, all while continuing to publish transcripts—often in real time—of debates in parliament over proposed legislation. Such projects have brought unprecedented government transparency to Tunisia, and organizations like Al Bawsala are to thank for the widespread perception that, challenges to democratic consolidation notwithstanding, there is no turning back in Tunisia. These organizations will require continued domestic and international support if they are to survive.

NON-ISLAMISTS, DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION, AND U.S. POLICY

The small country that sparked the Arab Spring has had its share of tumult since 2011, and it faces formidable challenges, particularly in the economic and security realms. If the country's democratic stakeholders—among non-Islamists and Islamists alike—remain vigilant and invested in the current process, there is reason for optimism about Tunisia's transition from a nascent to a consolidated democracy, one in which public institutions uphold and abide by the rule of law and in which citizens are free to pursue a dignified life. The March 18, 2015, attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis underscored the terrorist threat confronting the fragile democracy. Still, Tunisia's long-term prospects

remain relatively positive, in no small part because sizable segments of the population have demonstrated a determination and an ability to keep the country on a path toward democracy. In the coming years, the country's main Islamist movement will remain a key player, but as this paper has shown, Ennahda will share the stage with a host of non-Islamist parties and civil society groups that together arguably command greater popular support.

For U.S. policymakers eager to see the Tunisian experiment succeed, the challenge is to broaden the assistance package to help strengthen the country's antiauthoritarian trends. Thus far, the bulk of U.S. assistance has targeted the economic and security sectors, partly because these are the arenas in which the country has most suffered and partly because these are the primary forms of assistance Tunisians have requested. In both realms, U.S. support has been constructive, but limited resources and the fires (literal and figurative) burning in other parts of the Middle East will likely continue to limit U.S. attention and assistance to success stories like Tunisia. Still, the Obama administration's recent designation of Tunisia as a major non-NATO ally signaled an ongoing desire to strengthen the U.S.-Tunisia partnership. To that end, even small amounts of assistance, if thoughtfully conceived, can make a difference. Policymakers would do well to keep the following considerations in mind when crafting this assistance in the months and years ahead.

Economics and Politics

On the economic front, most American assistance has come in the form of loan guarantees, investments in entrepreneurship programs, and grants for programs targeting small- and medium-sized businesses. All are worthy recipients, but in light of the Obama administration's request that Congress more than double assistance to Tunisia for 2016, a strong case can be made for reprograming or augmenting current U.S. assistance to the benefit of political parties and civil society groups, including ones cited in this paper, that have demonstrated a commitment to implanting and nurturing the country's democratic roots. In civil society, for example, CSOs such as those highlighted earlier often report that the most effective assistance would come not in high dollar amounts but in targeted capacity-building programs aimed at imparting skills related to nonprofit management such as program evaluation, fundraising, and communications. Channeling assistance into capacity building for existing organizations, rather than into seed funds that can remain dormant for long periods, would increase the likelihood these groups can continue to grow and help safeguard the country's delicate democracy. In politics, lending assistance that would enable members of parliament to perform such mundane but crucial tasks as renting office space and hiring staff—currently luxuries that too few members enjoy—would go a long way. So, too, might the establishment of a Tunisian version of the U.S. Congressional Research Service, providing nonpartisan research and information to lawmakers.

Security

In the security realm, Tunisia offers something of an exception to the regional rule that has so often found the United States engaging in security cooperation with Arab regimes that share strategic interests but remain decidedly undemocratic. If Tunisia continues along its current trajectory—and pressures continue to be exerted on the government to avoid returning to the pre-2011 days of a heavy-handed police state—then U.S. policymakers can and should continue to provide security assistance to the new democracy on the Mediterranean without facing a heavy moral dilemma. This assistance would ideally continue to focus on helping Tunisia secure its borders; root out the insurgency in the country's western mountain region; keep close track of the thousands of Tunisian citizens fighting for jihadist groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS); and reform the country's security sector in a manner that allows the country's leaders to attend to the pressing economic and political demands that fueled the 2011 uprising.

Even if U.S. security assistance to Tunisia is not as morally fraught as elsewhere, the prospect of lending such aid does present a challenging paradox because the institutions with the greatest functional capacities and thus the greatest ability to absorb assistance (e.g., the police and Ministry of Interior) also suffer the greatest legitimacy deficit, while those enjoying high public esteem and therefore presenting ideal recipients of U.S. security assistance (e.g., the armed forces and Ministry of Defense)

are sometimes the most poorly equipped to absorb this assistance. U.S. policymakers will need to remain cognizant of this paradox in the months ahead, particularly in light of the Obama administration's announcement following the Bardo attack that it will increase military aid to Tunisia. Alongside the "harder" forms of security assistance, such as equipment and training, American policymakers should continue to think broadly about security sector reform in Tunisia. In this vein, programs like the Security Governance Initiative—a $65 million program launched in August 2014 to help countries like Tunisia reform their security sectors while maintaining transparent, accountable governance—are promising and deserve to be expanded in future years.

NOTES

1. The paper adopts a broad definition of democracy to include not only the familiar procedural mechanisms of power sharing, such as regular elections and open contestation for political office, but also attendant freedoms of expression, association, and press, and legal protections for minorities.
2. For more on Ennahda's democratic credentials, see Sarah J. Feuer, *Islam and Democracy in Practice: Tunisia's Ennahda Nine Months In*, Middle East Brief 66 (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, August 2012), http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/meb66.html.
3. Richard Cincotta, "Tunisia's Shot at Democracy: What Demographics and Recent History Tell Us," *NewSecurityBeat*, Wilson Center, January 25, 2011, http://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2011/01/tunisias-shot-at-democracy-what-demographics-and-recent-history-tell-us/.
4. Antonio Nucifora and Bob Rijkers, "The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs and Greater Wealth to All Tunisians," World Bank, *Development Policy Review* (May 2014), p. 300.
5. An August 2014 poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) found that 67 percent of Tunisians believed the security situation had improved under the Jomaa government. See "IRI Poll: Tunisia's Democratic Transition at a Crossroads," August 19, 2014, http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-poll-tunisia%E2%80%99s-democratic-transition-crossroads. Indeed, an October 2014 International Crisis Group (ICG) report noted that the Jomaa government had "practically eradicated" Ansar al-Sharia from the country, although violent confrontations between jihadist groups and security forces continued along the border with Algeria. See ICG, "Update Briefing," Middle East and North Africa Briefing 41 (Tunis/Brussels, October 21, 2014): p. 2.
6. Membership numbers for Nidaa Tounes are difficult to independently verify. For Essebsi's remarks, see "L'interview integrale de Beji Caid Essebsi à *Leaders*: J'irai jusqu'au bout!" *Leaders*, September 1, 2014, http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/14929-l-interview-integrale-de-beji-caid-essebsi-a-leaders-j-irai-jusqu-au-bout.
7. Throughout 2013, IRI polling data revealed that 77–79 percent of Tunisians believed the country was headed in the wrong direction. These percentages would drop to 48 percent with the appointment of Jomaa's interim government in February 2014 and rise again to 67 percent by the eve of the 2014 parliamentary elections. See "IRI Poll: Tunisia's Democratic Transition at a Crossroads," August 19, 2014, http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-poll-tunisia%E2%80%99s-democratic-transition-crossroads.
8. Ennahda is the only party that maintains regional offices in all twenty-seven provinces, and cells in all 264 municipalities.
9. For more on Nidaa's economic platform released during the campaign, see Sarah Feuer, "Tunisia's Economic Challenges," *Fikra Forum*, October 24, 2014, http://fikraforum.org/?p=5835.
10. See, for example, the World Bank's mea culpa in Antonio Nucifora and Bob Rijkers, "The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs and Greater Wealth to All Tunisians," *Development Policy Review* (May 2014), p. 26; see also African Development Bank, *Poverty and Inequality in Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania*, Economic Brief (2011), http://washin.st/2e2dmNc.
11. The statements were made by Zuhair Hamdi, the head of the Popular Current, a left-leaning party in the Popular Front. (*al-Tayar al-Shabi*). See "Zuhair Hamdi (Al-Jabha Al-Shabiya): Essebsi Lacks a Program, Ennahda is a Danger to Tunisia, and We Reject Calls for Reconciliation." *Al-Sabah News*, April 3, 2015, http://washin.st/1H9RGVi.
12. Kabil Daoud, member of Afek Tounes's Political Bureau, interview by author, February 3, 2015.
13. For more on Ben Ali's contentious relationship with civil society, see Christopher Alexander, "Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia: Back from the Democratic Brink," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 205 (Winter 1997), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer205/authoritarianism-civil-society-tunisia.
14. For more on civil society's role in keeping Tunisia's democratic transition on track, see Shelley Deane, *Transforming Tunisia: The Role of Civil Society in Tunisia's Transition* (International Alert, February 2013), http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/Tunisia2013EN.pdf; and Hamadi Redissi, *What Role for Tunisia's National Dialogue under the Interim Unity Government?* (Arab Reform Initiative, July 2014), http://www.arab-reform.net/what-role-tunisia%E2%80%99s-national-dialogue-under-interim-unity-government.
15. Whereas in 2012 the leading non-Islamist student union captured 88 percent of seats on the country's roughly forty university scientific councils, by early 2015 the main Islamist student union had nearly caught up, garnering 46 percent of seats. See "L'UGET, Grande

Vainqueur des Elections dans les Conseils Scientifiques," *Leaders*, March 16, 2012, http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/7947-l-uget-grand-vainqueur-des-elections-dans-les-conseils-scientifiques.

16. For more on the 2008 revolt in Gafsa, see Eric Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin between Riots and a Social Movement: Meaning and Significance of a Protest Movement in Ben Ali's Tunisia," working paper, HAL (archive), 2010, https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/557826/filename/Tunisia_The_Gafsa_mining_basin_between_Riots_and_Social_Movement.pdf

17. The membership dues are minimal, at roughly 2 Tunisian dinars (about 4 U.S. dollars) per month. Mohamed Mongi Ben M'barek, secretary-general of the telecommunications syndicate, interview by author, October 29, 2014. For more on UGTT's historical significance and organizational structure, see Eva Bellin, *Stalled Democracy: Capital, Labor, and the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), especially chapter 4.

18. Habib Guiza's General Confederation of Tunisian Workers (CGTT by its French acronym) was founded in 2006 but remained largely inactive until after Ben Ali's departure in 2011.

19. The progressive status of Tunisian women was especially visible in the urban coastal areas, but in many parts of the country Tunisian society has remained profoundly conservative. For example, CSOs report that practices such as polygamy persist, especially in the country's southern regions.

20. Mounira Charrad, "Family Law Reforms in the Arab World: Tunisia and Morocco," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Social Policy and Development (May 2012), p. 4, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm12/PAPER-CHARRAD.pdf. For a history of family law reforms in Tunisia, see also Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

21. Mounira Charrad, "Family Law Reforms in the Arab World: Tunisia and Morocco," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Social Policy and Development (May 2012), pp. 5–6.

22. For more on these episodes, see Sarah J. Feuer, *Islam and Democracy in Practice: Tunisia's Ennahda Nine Months In*, Middle East Brief 66 (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, August 2012), pp. 3–4, http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/meb66.html.

23. Center for Research, Study, Documentation and Information on Women, "Tunisian Associations Working for Equality of Opportunity Between Women and Men" ("Dalil Jam'iat Takafu' al-Fars Bayna al-Nisa' wa'l-Rijal fi Tunis,") 2014. http://www.credif.org.tn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64:projet-who-is-she-en-tunisiecredif-kvinfoen-cooperation-avec-le-centre-danois-d-information-sur-le-genre-l-egalite-et-la-diversite-kvinfo-le-centre-d-etudes-de-recherches-de-documentation-et-d-informations-sur-la-femme-credif-est-en-cours-de-mise&catid=17&Itemid=305&lang=ar-AA.

24. See the Aswat Nissa website: http://www.aswatnissa.org/.

25. By most accounts, the country's campaign finance laws have been overly restrictive, practically inviting violations. On the matter of public funding for campaigns, for example, a representative of I Watch noted that "the laws should be realistic to be respected." Moueb Garoui, interview by author, October 23, 2014.

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