# The Role of Political Islam in Tunisia's Democratization Process: Towards a New Pattern of Secularization?

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**ABSTRACT** *As far as the discussions on the Muslim world have been concerned with the process of secularization, a major focus has been the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible. The religious-opposition-al-civil movements that have been revived since the 1980s, has prompted a reformulation of the question as follows: "are secularization/laicism and democracy compatible?" or, put differently, "are the enemies of democracy in the Middle East, not the Islamic parties, but the secular regimes" From this perspective, there has been a shift from the dominance of the French type of authoritarian, exclusivist and monopolistic laicism to a pluralistic understanding of secularization, influenced by the resurgence of political Islam in Tunisia after the Jasmine Revolution.*

**S**ecularization, which is mainly used to explain the relation between modernity and religion in European societies,[1] has become an indispensable concept in discussions of the recent democratic uprisings in the Muslim world. No analysis of the Arab uprisings can neglect the concepts of Islam, secularization, laicism, modernity, civil society, pluralism, authoritarianism and democracy. We can say that Tunisia is one of the best examples in which all these concepts can be analyzed together in the new era.

Following the uprisings that began with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, and Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali's abandonment of the country after twenty-four years of power, a temporary government was set up. In 2011, the first multi-party elections were held in Tunisia, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014 in the wake of a year of crisis in Tunisian politics marked by the assassination of two political figures in 2013. The reconciliatory reactions of the Muslim democratic Ennahda Party to the rise of the nationalist-secularist Nidaa Tounes Party in the 2014 elections were important in terms of the change of the patterns of secularization in the Islamic world in general, and the relationship between democracy and secularization in Tunisia in particular.

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As far as the discussions on the Muslim world are concerned with the process of secularization, the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible has been a major focus, driven by the assumption that a linear relationship prevails among modernity, secularization and democracy. However, the pattern created by the secular-nationalist-authoritarian regimes that dominated the entire Islamic world in the 20th century and the religious-oppositional-civil movements that have been revived since the 1980s has prompted a reformulation of the question as follows: "are secularization/laicism and democracy compatible?" or, put differently, "what kind of a relationship is there between secularization and a country's level of democratization?" Or, are "the enemies of democracy in the Middle East, not the Islamic parties, but the secular regimes?" as John Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll have stated.[2] When we formulate the basic questions in these ways, we can understand the developments in the Middle East without reducing them to an Islamist versus secularist dichotomy, and at the same time, we can clarify the transformation that took place in the relation between secularization and democracy in Tunisia.

Within this framework, my research questions are why, until now, have economic backwardness, corruption, oppression of the opposition and elimination of freedom of religion and conscience, as well as restrictions on the freedom of expression and press, not been seen as an integral part of the secular/laic-authoritarian pattern in Tunisia? Do the political developments and specific role of Ennahda after the uprisings in Tunisia have the potential to reveal a new pattern of secularization? My argument in this article is that there has been a shift in Tunisia from the dominance of the French type of authoritarian, exclusivist and monopolistic laicism to a pluralistic understanding of secularization, in which the resurgence of political Islam has made a significant contribution. In this shift, in addition to the Ennahda Party and its leader Rachid al-Ghannouchi's democratic stance, Ennahda's coalition partners after the first general elections and the coalition partners of the Nidaa Tounes Party, the democratic left Ettakatol (Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties) and the secular-liberal CPR (Congress Party for the Republic) have also contributed. In this context, I argue that Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali's escape from the country and the democratization that has taken place since the time of the interim government have opened up a more pluralist understanding of secularization in

the country. The transition to this pluralist understanding shows, in the case of Tunisia, that secularization emerges in an exclusive and monopolistic form in the absence of democracy and freedom of political participation.

The two different patterns in Tunisia are represented by two political wings, both of which participated in the 2014 elections. The authoritarian-laic pattern, which constitutes the dominant secularization pattern in Tunisia, is represented by the winning party of the 2014 elections, Nidaa Tounes and its leader Essebsi, who led the liberals, leftists and the former regime factions. The Islamist Ennahda and its leader Ghannouchi, who were in favor of a different understanding of secularization, represent the second pattern. Although the secularist-Islamist polarization in politics has become more prominent in the last six years, the issue of religion is, of course, not the only factor that influences electoral behavior. As Ghannouchi stated, the "Parliamentary elections in Tunisia on October 26, 2011 were not about the role of Islam in society. It was an opportunity to address issues such as unemployment, more inclusive economic growth, security, regional development and income inequality; in other words, earning bread is an important issue for ordinary Tunisians. There was no sad atmosphere in the party center when Ennahda was defeated by Nidaa last month in the parliamentary elections; we were happy that it was a victory for Tunisian democracy."[3] Ghannouchi has argued that Islam can live in reconciliation with modernity, and contrary to the secular and authoritarian conception of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, his understanding of secularization presents itself as more compatible with the Tunisian culture and its Islamic identity.[4]

## The Secularization Debate

As José Casanova states, in the modern world all religions are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them… "We are witnessing the *deprivatization of religion* in the modern world."[5] This rejection forces us to rethink the complex relationship between modernity and religion in the context of non-Western societies as well as Western ones because the role of religion has increased in politics, society and the public sphere all over the world since the 1970s and 1980s. Although the existing literature on secularization, mostly focusing on Western Europe and the U.S., says very little about the non-western world, it is still significant in responding to the question "is secularization an irreversible process which every society has experienced in a same way?"[6] –a question that has been raised specifically to discuss the relations between religion and politics in Muslim societies. As a matter of fact, many problems have been created by the adaptation of the concept of secularization, especially in the Islamic world, and criticisms of this process have become more audible in the recent period.[7] S. Parvez Manzoor says that as a reality or a doctrine it

is not possible to consider secularism isolated from the theory and practice of secular power. Seeing secularism as a very philosophical paradigm in a sociological theory, Manzoor argues that it is more an ideological discourse than a factual reality. Manzoor distinguishes the "secularization process" from secularism as an ideological concept that forms the basis of sociology. He defines the secularization process as the liberation of certain sectors of society from religious institutions and symbols, the separation of church and state from each other, the expropriation of church properties, and especially the liberation of education from the authority of religion.[8]

The inspiring works and conceptual frameworks of David Martin and José Casanova may provide significant openings for understanding secularization in non-European societies as well as within the European paradigm. Casanova's thesis of the deprivatization of religion, which is specifically based upon Catholic societies (Poland and Spain), enables us to rethink the relationship between religion and the public sphere and civil society –which have been defined as secular spheres by theories of modernization– and also explains the different patterns of secularization. Casanova compares the third wave of democratization movements in Catholic countries and the recent political and social transformations in the Islamic world. He focuses on the question of whether Islam has played a similar role to that of Catholicism in the democratic movements in Eastern Europe and Latin America, in the democratization process in the Middle East, and in the emergence of Muslim civil societies. He points out that:

**The conventional literature is still based on the assumptions that Islam and democracy are incompatible, that Muslim societies are resistant to secularization, or that Islam is a "secularization resistant" religion**

The Tocquevillian argument can easily be applied to Islam. More perhaps than any other religion, Islam stresses discursively and ritually the equalization of all Muslims before God. Moreover, in comparison with the clerical, hierarchic, and hierocratic centralized administrative structure of the Catholic Church, the Islamic *umma*, at least within the Sunni tradition, has a more conciliar, egalitarian, laic, and decentralized structure. Moreover, in comparison with the canonical and dogmatic modes of official "infallible" definition and interpretation of the divine doctrines, Islam has more open, competitive, and pluralistic authoritative schools of law and interpretation with a more fluid and decentralized organization of the *ulama*. According to the prophetic injunction, only the uncoerced consensus of the *umma* is guaranteed no error. The pluralistic and decentralized character of religious authority that had always been distinctive of traditional Islam has become even more pronounced in the modern age. Actually, if there is anything on which most observers and analysts of contemporary Islam agree, it is that the Islamic tradition in the very recent past has undergone an unprecedented process of pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority, comparable to that initiated by the Protestant Reformation and operative ever since within Protestant Christianity. Unlike the sectarian tendency of Protestantism to fragment into separate communities, however, Islam has been able to preserve its identity as an "imagined community."[9]

The works of Martin and Casanova are important in terms of seeing the very different patterns of secularization, but their works speak little about the Muslim world. The conventional literature is still based on the assumptions that Islam and democracy are incompatible, that Muslim societies are resistant to secularization, or that Islam is a "secularization resistant"[10] religion.

## The Dominant Authoritarian Pattern of Secularization in Tunisia

The scholar who has made the most important contributions to the literature of religion, modernity and democracy in the Islamic world is, of course, John L. Esposito, co-editor of the seminal *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* together with Azzam Tamimi. Without reference to Esposito's works, it is impossible today to discuss this burning issue. Esposito has pointed out that the Western secular paradigms and models which accompanied the na-

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tion-building processes until the 1980s in modern Muslim countries have also dominated during the post-independence period; for him, Islamic politics emerged as an important challenge to secular politics in Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia and Turkey since the 1980s.[11]

Esposito conceptualizes the pattern which I have described as the 'authoritarian/laic pattern,' prominent in Tunisia in the Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali eras, as *militant secular fundamentalism*. Esposito argues that this anti-religious French pattern also held prominence in Turkey until the 1990s.[12] Ennahda's leader Ghannouchi refers to this model as *pseudo-secularism* and *secular theocracy* in his writings on Tunisia.[13] For him *pseudo-secularism* not only in Tunisia but all of the Arab Maghreb, created by the secular elites who graduated from French schools,

> …is what this model of secularism should be called; it is a counterfeit that takes from Western secularism its most negative aspects and discards the positive ones… Instead of establishing a separation between what is mundane and what is religious, or merely marginalizing the role of religion in society, pseudo-secularists seek to impose full control over the institutions and symbols of religion, and not only to claim, but even to monopolize the rights to reinterpret religion. In other words, the Arab Maghreb version of secularism has been turned by its advocates into some form of a 'church,' which one may compare to the church in medieval Europe. …The Tunisian regime is undoubtedly the most radically secularist in the region.[14]

The distinguishing feature of the practices of the Bourguiba era, named for the first president of the independent republic, in which the first authoritarian/laic pattern emerged, was the legitimization of all his secular policies under the name of Islam. In Bourguiba's policies, Islam is not marginalized but reinterpreted. Although he had used religion as a tool for political mobilization during the struggle for independence throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, he initiated policies to transform Tunisia into a full-fledged modern secular state. He eliminated religious schools and unified the educational system. He integrated the Zaytuna Mosque into a new modern secular university, the Université de Tunis, which had a Western-style curriculum. Arabic was replaced by French as the official language of instruction. Abortion was legalized in 1965.[15] Muslims were encouraged by Bourguiba not to fast during Ramadan; he argued that fasting is not an obligation and that work is more important than fasting. He prohibited the woman's veil and rejected the ban on pork and wine –in the name of Islam again. He accepted that the religion

of the state is Islam in the Constitution, but insisted that the monopoly of the interpretation and application of Islamic principles lay in his hands.[16] Bourguiba's policies, conceptualized as "state Islam or forced modernization,"[17] aimed to create a single Tunisian Islam in which religion was reconciled with modernity. Everything that could relate to religious conservatism had to be removed. The closure of Ez-Zitouna University and other Islamic Institutions that had a thousand years of history was important in demonstrating how far his policies and restrictions could reach.

With these developments, along with the policies implemented by Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali following Bourguiba, Tunisia became one of the most secular and authoritarian states of the whole Arab world. The Ben Ali era was also a secularist period in which authoritarian practices, economic backwardness, corruption and bribery were intertwined. At the same time, Ben Ali's rule was an era in which all kinds of political freedom, especially freedom of expression, was suppressed and in terms of religious freedoms, the name of the country was frequently cited to with reference to headscarf bans. Although Ben Ali attempted to differentiate himself from Bourguiba with some policies to protect the Islamic heritage in the country, the line he followed was basically the same. He set up the Islamic Bank, established the Radio Zitouna and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and opened Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali Mosque in the center of Carthage. Islamic symbols became more visible, especially in the 1990s, but besides all these, the representatives of the Islamic opposition were either in jail or in exile during this period.[18] Serious pressure and restrictions on the headscarf and beard continued during the time of Ben Ali. On the one hand, he pursued more flexible policies for the fulfillment of religious rituals; on the other hand, he banned any representation of political Islam in the public and political spheres.

## Political Compromises: Toward a New Pattern of Secularization after the Revolution

The contribution of the oppositional Islamist movements in general, and Ennahda's understanding of democratization and secularization in particular, have always been described as a learning process by the secular segments of the Tunisian elite and the elites in the West. According to this approach, the Islamic movements that experienced political inclusion, through their learning process, would have to revise their ideological stance over time. In short, these movements or parties would be exposed to a unilateral learning process when they interacted with other parties, and it was only these parties that would have to change unilaterally. Being moderate requires being more democratic and more secular. Whereas, being secular and democratic is a given in terms of other sections of the society, in terms of Islamists, it is a perspective that

needs to be learned. Interestingly, there is almost no question of whether the secular parties and social sectors are democratic or not, while the Islamist parties' dedication to democracy is always questioned. Moderation is a relational concept, but in this view, it implies a process in which only the Islamic actors compromise, rather than a mutual interaction among all the actors. At the end of the process, the extent to which the Islamists make concessions, how flexible they are, and the scope of their reconciliatory attitudes, are always perceived as superficial, transient and tactical by others.

According to this line of argument, when looking at the case of Tunisia, the Islamist movement under Ghannouchi's leadership accepted the secular constitutional principles through the ideological learning process, but acceptance of them does not mean that they believe in these principles. The concessions that Ennahda has made in adapting to political realities and in the process of forming the Constitution are not ideological concessions. Since the former regime supporters remain influential and the secular opposition is strong in the media and the bureaucracy, this argument continues, Ennahda had to support the constitutional process.[19] According to this perspective, every step taken by Ennahda in the name of reconciliation must be met with suspicion and the true intention behind it must always be questioned.

Just two weeks after the regime's fall, on January 30, 2011, Ghannouchi, accompanied by some other Ennahda leaders in exile, returned to Tunisia. In his first statement, he expressed his gratitude for the revolutionary Tunisian people by saying that, "the revolutionary martyrs liberated us." Although Ennahda had been out of the public eye in exile for two decades, the Tunisian people recognized its victimization, and its long history of activism against the repressive regime. This gave it a certain degree of legitimacy even in the eyes of secular segments of the society:

> Ennahda, though in exile, was not politically dormant. When Ghannouchi returned home to Tunisia in January 2011, the movement was well organized despite its suppression, had charismatic leaders (in particular Ghannouchi), and most importantly, had a long history as the primary opposition to Bourguiba and Ben Ali and bore the battle scars that gave them popular legitimacy. In the absence of comparably strong political parties and the emergence of so many new but weak parties, they were capable of immediately rising to power.[20]

Just after the uprising, Ennahda quickly re-established its organizational structures throughout the country before the Constituent Assembly elections took place. In the early 2000s, the movement's structures had already been revived secretly by Abdelhamid Jlassi who had traditionally been responsible for overseeing the movement's countrywide institutions. The Ennahda's organizational leverage along with its electoral strategies gave it an important advantage over

its secular counterparts, whose areas of concentration were limited to the coastal areas and the capital.[21]

After the 2011 parliamentary elections[22] –the country's first free election since independence and also the first election in the Arab world after the Arab Spring– took place in a fair and transparent environment, a new constitution, judicial independence and human rights issues constituted Ennahda's most important agenda. With the change of legal regulations allowing for the re-establishment of parties, the door to free and transparent elections in Tunisia opened, along with a new era for the country. The participation of a great number of parties in the first elections right after the toppling of the old regime is a very positive development, considering that many political movements had been banned under Ben Ali's rule for years.

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Although the Islamist-secularist polarization settled in the center of political debates during the election campaigns, the parties representing these two main patterns of secularization managed to come together as coalition partners after the elections. The main reason why Ennahda was seen as the guarantor of stability in the country was its comprehensive rhetoric and continuous emphasis on national unity in the aftermath of the Jasmine Revolution. Ennahda formed a coalition with the secular centrist parties CPR and Ettakatol, thinking that the national unity government should have a comprehensive character. After the three-party coalition talks in 2011, they agreed on naming Hamadi Jebali, Secretary General of Ennahda as Prime Minister, Moncef Marzouki, the leader of CPR as President, and Ben Jafer from Ettakatol as President of the Constituent Assembly. Actually, the Tunisian voters' views on religion's role in politics and public life were reflected in the conciliatory attitudes of political elites from both sides. According to the polling data conducted after the first elections, "while many Tunisians believed that religion should inform politics, most reported that they did not seek an active role for religion or for religious officials in public life. For example, 78.4 percent of respondents agreed that "men of religion" should not influence how citizens vote in elections, and only 30.6 percent said that they believed it would be better if Tunisia had more religious officials in office. Moreover, 78.5 percent agreed with the statement that religion is a private matter and that it should be separate from social and political life. Some 94 percent said that they believed the revolution would bring about better economic opportunities and an improvement in human rights, and 63 percent said that the primary cause of the uprisings was economic dissatisfaction.[23] These results show that the urgent issues for Tunisian voters concentrated on

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economic issues such as unemployment, poverty and corruption. The question of the role of religion in the public and political life was not high on the voters' agenda.

The coalition that was established after the elections in 2011 had some roots. In 1991, former Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali, who was exiled in France at that time, accused the Ben Ali regime of being no better than Bourguiba's and started to defend Ennahda. Mzali's criticisms of Ben Ali opened the door for the reconciliation between Ennahda and other opposition figures in exile. Mzali and other dissenters published a statement in May 1991 together with Ennahda in which they denounced the regime's violence and called for a national alliance against Ben Ali. In 1995 they published another communiqué in which they called for democracy, freedom of expression, free and fair elections, and an independent judiciary in Tunisia.[24] Another rapprochement of different oppositional groups within the exile community including Ennahda, CPR (headed by Marzouki) and some other dissidents resulted in the *Call of Tunis Agreement* in June 2003. It called again for democracy, the liberation of all political prisoners, and a continuation of the fight against corruption. This *Agreement* constituted "the basis of later deliberation and compromise between Ennahda and secular opponents, including the *18 October Movement*, arguably the most extensive attempt at cross-ideological collaboration under Ben Ali."[25] Ennahda established the *18 October Movement* (a month of hunger strikes) in conjunction with the two opposing parties (CPR and the Worker's Communist Party POCT headed by Hamma Hammami) against the authoritarian regime calling for human rights and political liberalization in the wake of the Arab Spring, in 2005.[26]

Despite the public opposition against the élites considered in the continuity of the old regime before the 2011 elections, Ennahda accepted the nomination of Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi to head the interim cabinet that took over on March 15, 2011.[27] The appointment of Essebsi, who had served as Minister of Interior between 1965-69; as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1981-86; and President of the National Assembly between 1990-1991, shows that Ennahda had not only reconciled with the new secular elite, but also the elite of the old regime. Anne Wolf states that, "after assuming office, Ennahda leaders had decided not back the persecution of former RCD senior members (Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally), probably to avoid making powerful enemies who might challenge its power… Some even alleged that the leadership had struck a deal with former Ben Ali officials: Ennahda would not prosecute them, and in exchange ex-RCD members would not try to reveal information

(L-R) Ennahda Movement's leader Ghannouchi, Tunisian President Essebsi and Ennahda Party's vice-President Mourou wave to the crowd at the opening of Ennahda's three-day congress in Tunis on May 20, 2016.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES / FETHI BELAID

about the movement's contentious activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s… Ennahda's reconciliatory stance facilitated the comeback of former regime figures, most importantly through Nidaa Tounes."[28] This reconciliatory stance towards the old elite caused disturbances in both Ennahda and the secular parties' base and led to some criticisms and fragmentations. For instance, the promotion of some former RCD leaders to key party positions led to eruptions between different ideological factions in Nidaa Tounes. When in September 2013 Mohammed Ghariani, the last secretary general of the RCD, joined the party as the adviser to Essebsi, Nidaa Tounes leaders tried to prevent internal tensions by improving the image of former RCDists, calling them 'Destourians,' but with limited success.[29]

We know that discussions on secularization came onto the agenda again during the political crisis that took place in 2013 and was the main motive for Ennahda's fall from power. However, the growing discontent and animosity between Ennahda and hardline Salafists also heavily influenced the political crisis.[30] The Salafists opposed the coalition government between Ennahda and the secular parties as well as the principles of secularism in the new constitution. Therefore, one of the most important issues that put Ennahda at risk and harmed the political process was the attitude of the Salafists. On February 6, 2013, the assassination of the leftist opposition political leader, Chokri Belaid, led to an increase in pressure on Ennahda. Numerous anti-Ennahda protests were held in the country. On July 25, another secular opposition leader, Mohammed Brahmi (leader of the People's Movement Party), who was critical of Ennahda was assassinated

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outside of his home. The Interior Ministry noted that Brahmi was killed with the same gun that was used to kill Belaid just six months earlier. Early indications pointed to Salafist hardliner Boubacar Hakim as the assassin.[31]

The main reason for the electoral defeat of Ennahda in 2014 was not only the religious-secular polarization in the country, as we have already emphasized, but the failure of the economy, continued unemployment, and the two assassinations that destabilized the country in that period. The assassinations of Belaid and Brahmi increased pressure on Ennahda. Secular segments of the society accused Ennahda of turning a blind eye to the rise of the Salafists. In August 2013, the "Initiative for Discovering the Truth about the Assassinations of Belaid and Brahmi," launched by family members of the victims, accused the government of collusion with terrorist movements. Although such accusations were not based on hard evidence, they reflected the extent to which a mounting number of Tunisians distrusted the state officials. One day after Brahmi's assassination, Nidaa Tounes created the *National Salvation Front* with the aim of forcing the government out of office.[32]

Moreover, on July 3 (between the two assassinations), the coup against Morsi, the elected president of Egypt, intensified religious and political debates in Tunisia, increased pressure on Ennahda, and negatively affected the democratic transition process. In the wake of Morsi's overthrow, a series of bomb blasts shook Tunisia's urban centers and the opposition groups intensified their criticisms and demonstrations. The animosity between hardline secularists and the Ennahda-led government grew and the public sphere became increasingly polarized. A rebellion group (Tamarod) emerged in Tunisia, calling for parliament to be dissolved immediately; Tamarod issued a statement calling on Tunisians to occupy the streets until the fall of the government. The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) called for a technocratic government.[33] The coup d'état by Abdel Fatah el-Sisi and the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt encouraged Tunisia's secular voices, specifically Nidaa Tounes, to describe political Islam as outmoded, and a leader of Nidaa Tounes announced that, 'all the Muslim Brotherhood's regional branches, including Ennahda, will close automatically.'[34] After the military coup in Egypt, the coalition government in Tunisia became the only Islamist led government in the region until Ennahda withdrew from the government on September 28, 2013. Both Ghannouchi and Marzouki denounced the military coup, along with the violence and repression in Egypt. Ennahda faced problems similar to those of the Mus-

lim Brotherhood in Egypt, but was able to resolve the crisis through peaceable means, rather than facing a military coup.

Essebsi's party, Nidaa Tounes, seized the opportunity of the crisis of 2013, having already presented itself as a neutral, technocratic, democratic and secular alternative to Ennahda:

> Reinforcing the anti-Islamist, secular alliance approach, in December 2012 Essebsi announced the establishment of a new coalition: the Union for Tunisia (UFT). This anti-Ennahda front –consisting of Nidaa Tounes and the center-left coalition Al-Jamhouri (Republican) party, formed by Chebbi's PDP, the Socialist Party, the leftist Patriotic and Democratic Party and al-Massar– allowed Essebsi to position himself as a central actor despite not being elected. As ANC members from other parties, among them Ettakatol and the CPR, joined Nidaa Tounes, the party gained de facto representation in the ANC without having participated in elections. The UFT provided a forum in which representatives of the former regime normalized their relationships with former leftist and opposition enemies. During the 2014 election campaign, Chebbi would even declare on Tunisian television that although Essebsi 'had supervised his torture' he still regarded him with 'esteem.' The coalition around the charismatic leader was driven more by fear of a common threat than an agreement to a common agenda. Meanwhile, decisions in Nidaa Tounes and the UFT were being taken by a restricted circle around Essebsi, with his son among the most influential figures.[35]

Nidaa Tounes gained 86 of 217 seats in the parliamentary elections held on October 26, 2014. It was followed by Ennahda which received 69 seats, the UPL (Free Patriotic Union) with 16 seats, the leftist Popular Front with 15 seats, and the liberal Afek Tounes with 8 seats. It was impossible to form a stable government without the support of Ennahda. The cabinet was formed by Habib Essid, a former Ben Ali official close to Nidaa Tounes. UPL and Afek Tounes and independents also joined the cabinet. When we look at the Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes-led governments comparatively in terms of compromise and comprehensiveness, we can undoubtedly say that the Ennahda-led governments and its rhetoric has been always more inclusive towards oppositional actors. Although Nidaa Tounes always presented itself as a neutral, democratic and secular alternative to Ennahda, and promised to form a broad coalition, it did initially exclude Ennahda from the government. After a wave of criticisms, Prime Minister Habib Essid formed a new government that included Ennahda on February 2, 2015. Nidaa Tounes got six ministries and three deputy ministers, while Ennahda got only one ministry, the Ministry of Employment, and three deputy ministers.[36] After the resignation of 22 deputies of Nidaa Tounes due to differences of opinion, Ennahda became the first party in the Assembly with 69 seats. Ennahda still has one ministry in the cabinet. Contrary to the exclusive and suspicious stance of Nidaa against Ennahda, the two secular

(L-R) President of the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly Jaafar, then Tunisian President Marzouki and outgoing Islamist PM Larayedh pose with copies of the new constitution on January 27, 2014.
AFP / GETTY IMAGES / FETHI BELAID

partners of the 2011 coalition formed by Ennahda show that Ennahda operates with an understanding of political compromise, not with ideological concerns. During its election campaign, Ghannouchi clearly expressed his views about Islam and politics and made it clear that Ennahda had no intention of implementing Sharia. The effort of establishing a balance between secularism and its own religious-political identity placed Ennahda in a crucial position in terms of religion-politics relations in the country.

The new Tunisian Constitution, revolutionary for the Islamic World, was passed by the Parliament, the majority of which was composed of Islamists, on January 26, 2014. The new Constitution process was carefully followed by the outside world. Ennahda which emerged as an intellectual movement in the 1980s, turned into a political party and played an active role in the new Constitutional process. Although the secularization issue was at the center of debate in the constitutional commission, which was composed of 22 members, including 9 members of Ennahda, the works of the commission served as a platform for bringing Islamist and secular parties together. It cannot be denied that the discussions of women's rights and gender roles became particularly heated when the Constituent Assembly published the first draft constitution in the summer of 2012. Many secular unveiled women strongly opposed to Ennahda took to the streets in response to Article 28, which described women as the 'complements' or 'associates' of men. The actual draft Article 28 read as follows, "the state guarantees the protection of women and supports their achievements, considering them as men's true partners in building nation, and

their roles complement one another within the family. The state guarantees equal opportunity between men and women in carrying out different responsibilities. The state guarantees the elimination of all forms of violence against women." By keeping the concerns and fears of secular Tunisian women in mind, we can say that during the Ennahda-led government, women's participation in politics was encouraged and they were given important political posts. For example, Meherzia Labidi's appointment as Vice President of the Constituent Assembly was the highest political post held by a woman in the Arab world at that time. [37]

**Ennahda's stance and policies have a more important place than those of their secular counterparts as a guarantee of reconciliation between religion and democracy and a search of a more pluralistic and democratic understanding of secularization**

## Conclusion

The bargaining process between Ennahda and Nidaa in 2014 changed the internal dynamics of both sides, but specifically affected the strategies of Ennahda from reconciliation to concessions. As a result of the political crisis and the coup against Morsi in Egypt in 2013 the political pressure on Ennahda to leave power increased by a sort of counter-revolution. Along with these developments, Ennahda's subsequent defeat in the 2014 elections led to the party's weakness in bargaining with Nidaa. The concessions made by Ennahda in this process were also the result of this fact. In that regard, Ennahda's abandonment of the demand for trial of the old regime elites in this process led to reactions within the Party. Since 2011, there have always been debates among those who are in favor of bargaining and those in favor of rivalry, but since mid-2014, those who favored bargaining within Ennahda have started to prevail. In the preparation of the candidates within Ennahda, lawyers and human rights activists were mostly preferred as candidates in the 2011 elections; however, in the elections of 2014 more technocratic candidates were preferred.[38] As a continuation of its increasing gradualist strategy, Ennahda did not put forward any presidential candidate during the presidential ballot in December 2014 as a sign that it didn't want tension in politics. However, during the presidential ballots, Marzouki was perceived as the candidate who was closest to the Islamists.

In any case, as a result of the establishment of the coalition governments between the Islamist and secular parties after both the 2011 and the 2014 elections, and the adoption of a new constitution at the end of the hard debates on Sharia, women's rights, and freedom of expression, Tunisia has become a

country that showcases the possibility of transforming the Arab Spring into a genuine democratic transition in the Middle East and North Africa.[39] The military coup against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the political crisis in Tunisia at the end of 2013 turned the hopes of revolution to frustration in both countries. Unfortunately, it seems that the frustration of Egypt continues to be impossible to reverse in the near future. In Tunisia, however, the hopes for a democratic future continue with the significant contributions of political pragmatism and reconciliation strategies followed by Ennahda. Although Ennahda lost its base in the parliamentary elections of 2014, it will continue to shape the country's new pattern of secularization and socio-political environment as a major player. Ghannouchi, who was re-elected as chairman of Ennahda's tenth general congress on May 21, 2016, declared that "the political and religious activities will be separated. We should refrain from political propaganda in the mosques. The imams may speak about politics, common and national interests and they may call on the nation for resistance only if the country is under occupation. Religion should not divide the society. Before the Revolution we used the mosques, labor unions and charity organizations for our activities since our activities were banned, but now we can be political actors explicitly." In the wake of Tunisia's authoritarian legacy, Ennahda's stance and policies have a more important place than those of their secular counterparts as a guarantee of reconciliation between religion and democracy and a search of a more pluralistic and democratic understanding of secularization. ◼

## Endnotes

**1.** See Larry Shiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1967), pp. 207-220, for the historical background of the concept of secularization.

**2.** John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll, "In the Middle East, Islamists Are Not the Enemies of Democracy," *Huffington Post*, (June 22, 2015), retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-l-esposito/middle-east-islamists-democracy_b_7623660.html.

**3.** Rachid al-Ghannouchi, "Tunus Demokrasisi Nasıl Başarılı Olacak?," *Süreç*, (November 27, 2014).

**4.** Anne Wolf, "An Islamist 'Renaissance'? Religion and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2013), pp. 566-567.

**5.** José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 5.

**6.** The very well-known scholars of secularization, David Martin, Grace Davie and José Casanova concentrated on this question in their works: David Martin, "The Secularisation Issue: Prospect and Retrospect," *The British Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 42, No. 3 (1991); David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

**7.** For critics please see, Azzam Tamimi and John Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

**8.** S. Parvez Manzoor, "Desacralising Secularism," in Tamimi and Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, pp. 81-82.

**9.** José Casanova, "Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam," *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2001), pp. 1058-1059.

**10.** Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty*: *Civil Society and Its Rivals*, (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

**11.** John L. Esposito, "Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century," in Tamimi and Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, p. 3.

**12.** Esposito, "Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century," pp. 9-12.

**13.** Rachid al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," in Tamimi and John Esposito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, pp. 98, 105.

**14.** Al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," p. 98.

**15.** Abdelkader Zghal, "The Reactivation of Tradition in a Post-Traditional Society," *Daedalus* Vol. 102, No. 1 (1973), p. 230; John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 177.

**16.** Pierre-Jean Luizard, İslam Topraklarında Otoriter Rejimler, translated by Egemen Demircioğlu, (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013), p. 128.

**17.** Anne Wolf, "An Islamist 'Renaissance'?," p. 561.

**18.** Anne Wolf, "An Islamist 'Renaissance'?," pp. 562-563.

**19.** Kasper Ly Netterstrom, "The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (October 2015), pp. 110-124. This article discusses the weaknesses of the "moderation-inclusion" paradigm. It is also a good example of the skeptical approach to the transformation of the Islamic movements.

**20.** Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, p. 189.

**21.** Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 133.

**22.** In the October 23, 2011 elections, Ennahda won a strong plurality of 89 seats (41 percent) in the 217-seat Constituent Assembly. Among the secular parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) gained 29 seats (13 percent), Ettakatol (Democratic Forum of Labour and Liberties, FDTL) won 20 seats (9 percent), the Progressive Democratic Party secured 16 seats (7 percent), the Modernist Democratic Pole (PDM) had 5 seats (2 percent), Afek Tounes secured 4 seats (almost 2 percent) as quoted by Andrea G. Brody-Barre, "The Impact of Political Parties and Coalition Building on Tunisia's Democratic Future," *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013), pp. 212-213.

**23.** Michael Robbins and Mark Tessler, "Tunisians Voted for Jobs, Not Islam," *Foreign Policy*, (December 7, 2011); quoted in Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, pp. 190-191.

**24.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, p. 100.

**25.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, p. 101.

**26.** Amel Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition," *Mediterranean Politics*, (December 1, 2015), p. 4.

**27.** Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition," p. 5.

**28.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, pp. 153-154.

**29.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, p. 157.

**30.** Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, p. 193.

**31.** "Tunisian Opposition Figures 'Shot by Same Gun,'" *Al Jazeera*, (July 27, 2013), retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/07/201372611531821363.html.

**32.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia,* pp. 152, 154.

**33.** Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, p. 196.

**34.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia,* p. 154.

**35.** Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia," pp. 10-11.

**36.** Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, p. 200.

**37.** Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia,* pp. 140, 141.

**38.** Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia," pp. 14-15.

**39.** Netterstrom, "The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia," p. 110.

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