

**Tunisia between the Jihadist Threat  
and the Possibility of Slipping Back to Dictatorship**

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Tunisia has been looked at as the model which succeeded in the Arab Spring whereas all other countries that experienced similar uprisings had failed. Ever since the 2011 uprising that ousted Ben Ali from power, Tunisia has been on a positive course which included a new constitution, an influential civil society, and a liberated media; however, this has been marred by two terrorist attacks (Bardo Museum and Sousse attacks). These were not isolated incidents since the country is surrounded by the Libyan war to the East and the attacks on the Algerian border to the West<sup>1</sup>; in addition to the internal Salafist networks and the 7,000+ Tunisians fighting abroad, mainly in Syria, Iraq, and Libya.<sup>2</sup> This paper aims to shed light on the underlying reasons for the rise in jihadist activity, the main militant groups, their areas of operation, their links to Al Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (IS), the response of the government, the role of Ennahda and civil society, and the chances of success in overcoming this threat and maintaining stability without recourse to undemocratic actions.

According to jihadists who came back to Tunisia interviewed by Michelle Dunne, some of the attractions that convince the youths to go fight abroad are being told they would get houses and wives. Unemployment also plays a huge part since youths who do not see any possible prospects of success are more easily lured with promises of status and work. This is applied even more to the youths with university education since their disappointment in failing to meet the expectations they have set out is higher than that of the already disadvantaged members of society. The degree of alienation they suffer from in the Tunisian society pushes them to take that option. They feel that it gives them a sense of purpose in life which is a major motivator; for example, a poor young man stated that he would rather die a martyr in Syria than drinking beer in Tunisia.<sup>3</sup>

Even before the ouster of Ben Ali, Tunisia was a hotbed for jihadist movements especially in the peripheral areas which are underdeveloped and have a higher illiteracy rate than the rest of the country. These poor conditions, along with having a more conservative and religious population,

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<sup>1</sup> Pierini, M (2015) Tunisia After the Bardo Museum Tragedy, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/03/23/tunisia-after-bardo-museum-tragedy/i4wd>

<sup>2</sup> MEE Staff (2015) Tunisia to Reopen Diplomatic Ties with Syria Libya, Middle East Eye, Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-reopen-diplomatic-ties-syria-libya-1877100688>

<sup>3</sup> Dume, M (2015) is Unemployment to Blame for Radicalization, World Economic Forum, Retrieved from <https://agenda.weforum.org/2015/05/is-unemployment-to-blame-for-radicalization/>

provided the appropriate conditions needed to make joining jihadist groups more appealing. The founding of Tunisian Combatant Group in 2000 by Abu Ayad and Tarek Maaroufi which later became part of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007 shows that the jihadist threat in Tunisia has been present from even before the chaos of the Arab Spring and the subsequent rise of fundamentalism in the region. The weakening of the central power and security institutions after the fall of Ben Ali helped these groups to operate more freely and develop until the counterterrorism operation was launched by the authorities against these groups, mainly Ansar Al Sharia in Tunisia (AST) and Katibat Uqba Ibn Nafi (KUIN).<sup>4</sup>

The major factor that cannot be ignored is the decades of tight control over religious activities and brutality used by the Ben Ali regime against Salafist groups. After the fall of the regime, these groups took advantage of the political vacuum to exploit the frustration of the youths. The first major Salafist organization to appear was AST that focused on preaching, social activism, and enforcing their moral code. This was exacerbated by the descent into war in Libya which facilitated drug and weapon smuggling; in addition to training across the border and returning to Tunisia to carry out the attacks. Several small groups have also succeeded such as KUIN in the Chaambi Mountains near the Algerian border who launched several small operations which resulted in the deaths of dozens of security forces.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the lack of concrete evidence, it is believed that the high number of Tunisians fighting abroad is directly related to a tacit agreement between Ennahda and Salafist groups which stated that the government would turn a blind eye towards those who would go fight abroad especially after the attacks against the US embassy.<sup>6</sup>

The rise of the jihadist threat is aggravated by the neglected areas in the east and south, arms smuggling, and drug trafficking. This illegal trade across the borders and the positioning of the militant groups mainly in the bordering regions are leading to the establishment of a form of alliance between the jihadists, drug traffickers, and tribal youths. Jihadists do not control the criminal economy, but they do exert a certain degree of influence through their ability to provide permission and protection to traffickers since they control important trade routes near the

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<sup>4</sup> Stratfor (2015) Tunisia Struggles with Militants, Stratfor, Retrieved from <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/tunisia-struggles-militants>

<sup>5</sup> McCarthy, R (2015) Radicalizing Islamist Youth, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/05/01/radicalizing-islamist-youth/i81c>

<sup>6</sup> Cristiani, D (2014) The Geography of Discontent Tunisia's Syrian Fighter Dilemma, Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Volume 7 Issue 20 pp. 7-9

borders. This is done in return for taxes and receiving food supplies for the fighters. For example, some attacks against security forces were done in order to divert their attention from certain cross-border smuggling routes. These alliances may grow and be more enduring since many jihadists and drug traffickers' hail from the same tribe; in addition, this profitable partnership provides the jihadist groups with the financial ability to attract frustrated and unemployed youths from impoverished areas.<sup>7</sup>

The reasons stated previously indicate the deep problems that face the Tunisian society, and the jihadist threat cannot be dealt with using pure force. The socio-economic conditions and the alienation that push the youths into carrying arms have to be tackled with a long term plan which aims at equity in the development and employment opportunities especially in impoverished and marginalized areas. The relations established with drug traffickers are also a dangerous sign which indicate the jihadist groups' work on having sustainable sources of income. These are all internal situations and conditions that can be improved with a well-planned government policy that is able to find the delicate balance between security and freedom.

AST was founded in April 2011 by Sayf Allah Bin Hussayn (Abu Iyyadh Al Tunisi) who was released from prison in March 2011 after the ouster of Ben Ali. In one year, the number of attendees at their annual conference increased from a few hundreds in 2011 to thousands in 2012.<sup>8</sup> AST's ideology is two-fold: an internal one which aimed at dawa in Tunisia so that people go back to the "correct path of Islam", and an external one which simultaneously encouraged individuals to wage jihad in foreign countries (dawa at home and jihad abroad).<sup>9</sup> This is disputed since the founding members of the group stated that AST does have a military wing.<sup>10</sup> After its formation, it dominated the Salafi landscape in Tunisia and did social outreach in an attempt to further promote their cause while using social media to promote their activities; in addition to some violence by the Hisba that aim to enforce Islamic norms in the community such targeting women not wearing the hijab and anti-islamist artists. This lasted for two years

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<sup>7</sup> Boukhars, A (2015) The Reckoning Tunisia's Perilous Path to Democratic Stability, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/02/reckoning-tunisia-s-perilous-path-to-democratic-stability/i5cj>

<sup>8</sup> Zelin, A (2012) Know your Ansar Al Sharia, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/21/know-your-ansar-al-sharia/>

<sup>9</sup> Zelin, A (2012) Know your Ansar Al Sharia, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/21/know-your-ansar-al-sharia/>

<sup>10</sup> Zelin, A (2013) Tunisia Uncovering Ansar Al Sharia, Washington Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisia-uncovering-ansar-al-sharia>

from 2011 till 2013 when the Ennahda government started a crackdown on the members of the group after a series of tense incidents such as protesters attacking the US embassy, two political assassinations, and ambushes targeting Tunisian soldiers that were blamed on the group. AST was classified as a terrorist organization by the Tunisian government in August 2013, but the group denied having ties to AQ or any other outside group; however, AQIM has publically supported the group, and Abu Iyyadh does reportedly have good connections with the leaders of both AQ and IS. He has tried to stay neutral in the AQ-IS divide which has caused some tensions with the youths in AST who are impressed with the rise of IS and the declaration of the Caliphate.<sup>11</sup> AST was weakened to a large extent by the state crackdown which banned any sympathetic organizations, shut down all mosques, radios, television, and websites accused of backing extremism, and hundreds of youths suspected of being part of radical groups were arrested. It is believed that Abu Iyyadh fled to Libya. Some fragments of the group remain, but it has mostly split into different smaller groups that are more violent and are no longer affiliated with AST. These groups belong to three currents: one that calls for reconciliation and peaceful activism, another which is attracted to IS, and a third which is the largest portion that is linked to AQIM and KUIN.<sup>12</sup>

KUIN, active since 2012, publicly confirmed in January 2015 that it's the Tunisian branch of AQIM. It is believed that the group also has close ties to AST. After a statement showing support to IS was issued, there were rumors that the group might switch its pledge from AQ to IS after the death of its leader Khalid Shaaib (Abu Sakhr Lukman) in March, but the reaffirmation of their original pledge was an attempt to remain strong. They previously maintained a low-profile with the insurgency against the Tunisian army mainly in the Chaambi Mountains, but more recently, they have increased their online presence through social media accounts and an official media outlet.<sup>13</sup> In July of this year, it was announced by the minister of Interior that a raid by the security forces was able to "eliminate most of the leadership of KUIN". The high level group was targeted in the Gafsa governorate, rather than in the Chaambi Mountains which is the natural

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<sup>11</sup> Petre, C (2015) How Ansar Al Sharia Grew in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia, Middle East Monitor, Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/17448-how-ansar-al-sharia-grew-in-post-revolutionary-tunisia>

<sup>12</sup> Boukhars, A (2015) The Reckoning Tunisia's Perilous Path to Democratic Stability, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/02/reckoning-tunisia-s-perilous-path-to-democratic-stability/i5cj>

<sup>13</sup> Zelin, A (2015) Between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in Tunisia, Washington Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/between-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-in-tunisia>

stronghold of the group. This indicates that there was an attempt to expand into more areas. Analysts believe that the several setbacks the group suffered from in recent months have weakened the group, but the logistical support and manpower it receives from AQIM give it the ability to bounce back; in addition, the internal differences and defections that occurred to groups supported by IS also played a part in the demise of the group, especially after the death of its leader Abu Sakhr Lukman.<sup>14</sup>

The first message directed by IS to Tunisia was in December of 2014 through Abu Baker El Hakim (Abu Al Muqatil) who claimed responsibility for the assassination of secular politicians in 2013; in addition to calling for more attacks and for the Tunisian people to pledge allegiance to Baghdadi. This was followed upon by another message in April 2015 by Abu Yahya Al Tunisi from IS's Wilayah Tarabulus who called the Tunisians to receive training in Libya so that they can extend the influence of IS into Tunisia.<sup>15</sup> Jund Al Khilafah, most active in the impoverished interior of Tunisia, mainly in the Kasserine governorate<sup>16</sup>, claimed responsibility for the attack on the Bardo Museum and declared loyalty to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the leader of the IS. They stated in the announcement that further attacks will be made, threatened the leading figures in the counterterrorism operations, and swore revenge against the disbelievers who support secularism and democracy.<sup>17</sup> This coincided with the establishment of Jund Al Khilafah Media Foundation which is similar to the steps taken by Boko Haram before they declared their allegiance to IS; in addition to taking responsibility for several subsequent attacks which indicates the high possibility of IS announcing a new wilayah in Tunisia. The expected establishment of a new wilayah in Tunisia called Wilaya Ifriqiya would pose a challenge to the monopoly of AQIM's Tunisian branch, KUIN. This could lead to an escalation of violence in an attempt by both groups to be the dominant one.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Moheet News (2015) Hal Entahat Katibat Akaba Ben Nafih Fi Tunis (Is the KUIN Done in Tunisia), Moheet News, Retrieved from <http://www.moheet.com/2015/07/24/2293998>

<sup>15</sup> Zelin, A (2015) Between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in Tunisia, Washington Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/between-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-in-tunisia>

<sup>16</sup> Lister, T (2015) After Sousse Tunisia Struggles to Contain Jihadist Groups, CNN, Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/05/africa/sousse/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> Gall, C (2015) Group Linked to Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Tunisia Attack, New York Times, Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/01/world/africa/group-linked-to-islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-tunisia-attack.html?ref=topics>

<sup>18</sup> Zelin, A (2015) Between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in Tunisia, Washington Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/between-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-in-tunisia>

In spite of the loyalty of most leaders of top Tunisian jihadist organization lie with AQ, the appeal and sympathy that a foot soldier has to IS makes it possible for the group to grow. This clash in views between the members and leadership has caused tensions and a complex situation. The attempted expansion of IS has been highlighted through the establishment of Jund Al Khilafah which falsely adopted the Bardo Museum attack, and another group called Tunisian Mujahedin also pledged allegiance to Baghdadi. In spite of having limited information about the formation and internal composition of these groups, their appearance highlights IS's plans to expand into Tunisia. This will mainly be on the low-ranking members, and the exaggeration of abilities to attract members was seen with the false adoption of the Bardo Museum attack. The only advantage IS has over AQ regarding Tunisia is in the foreign fighter numbers since the largest number of Tunisian fighting abroad are with IS especially after their bad experience with Al Nusra Front in Syria where they faced discrimination.<sup>19</sup>

The Chaambi Mountains that are about 2,000 meters high and covered with pine forests are filled with jihadist camps, each with 30 to 40 men. The Tunisian army has struggled in eliminating these groups and has taken heavy casualties in the process. Analysts state that the authorities lack a strong intelligence network since they have previously neglected the Islamist threat and will need significant time to improve in that regard; however, they are racing against time due to the growing activity of jihadist groups.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, there has been an escalation in the tactics used by these groups, starting from violent protests to assassinations to attacks on security forces and finally attacks on touristic sites. This shows a rise in the level of targets and is expected to continue. The militant groups are no longer just contained in the areas bordering Algeria since cells have been discovered in the suburbs of the capital which indicates their infiltration into the vital areas of the country.<sup>21</sup>

There has been evidence of the transnational cooperation between the jihadists in the region which includes the training and weapons that Tunisians receive from Libya. For example, the

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<sup>19</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D (2015) The Islamic State's Varying Fortunes in North Africa, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Retrieved from <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/gartenstein-ross-daveed-the-islamic-states-varying-fortunes-in-north-africa/>

<sup>20</sup> Lister, T (2015) After Sousse Tunisia Struggles to Contain Jihadist Groups, CNN, Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/05/africa/sousse/index.html>

<sup>21</sup> Gall, C (2015) Change in Militant Tactics Puts Tunisians on Edge, New York Times, Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/10/world/africa/change-in-militant-tactics-puts-tunisians-on-edge.html?smid=tw-share&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/10/world/africa/change-in-militant-tactics-puts-tunisians-on-edge.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0)

2013 attack on the Amenas gas facility in East Algeria was executed by an Algerian splinter group from AQIM which included Tunisians and Egyptians. Another example is the Bardo Museum attack where the planner was an Algerian who was a leader in the Tunisian KUIN, and the attacker, Seifeddine Rezgui, received his training in Libya.<sup>22</sup> This connection between Tunisian and Libyan militants goes back to the 1980s but intensified in 2011 with AST and Ansar Al Sharia in Libya (ASL) where ASL learned from the dawa experience of AST members and opened up the chance for Tunisians to go to training camps in Libya. This was also seen with the attacks in Libya targeting Tunisian diplomatic facilities. Beyond the Ansar Al Sharia networks, there has been a rise of Tunisian activity with IS networks in Libya since 2014 where some have stayed to fight while others returned to Tunisia to wage an insurgency campaign.<sup>23</sup>

A serious effort has been put in place by the government to improve their shortcomings such as through increasing counter-terrorism operations, founding a new body that encompasses several state institutions to analyze any terrorism-related intelligence, and the recent adoption of a new anti-terrorism law. This is also coupled with foreign support by major powers such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom which includes security forces training, military financing, weapons, and expertise in building a biometric database.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, plans were announced by the Tunisian government to build a wall with surveillance centers at certain points along the Libyan border in an effort to limit the jihadist threat of the militants crossing the border into country.<sup>25</sup> These efforts to crack down on these groups have pushed them into adopting concealment tactics through splitting into smaller isolated cells that are much harder to control and contain.<sup>26</sup> The counterterrorism strategies taken by the government do not tackle the deep-rooted problems. Relying on security stabilization without acknowledging the need for a political solution that works on improving the socio-economic conditions that led to this crisis will not

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<sup>22</sup> Thorne, J (2015) Fighting Terror in Tunisia Domestic and Foreign Response to Bardo, Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Volume 8 Issue 9 pp. 5-6

<sup>23</sup> Zelin, A (2015) The Tunisian Libyan Jihadi Connection, International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, Retrieved from <http://icsr.info/2015/07/icsr-insight-tunisian-libyan-jihadi-connection/>

<sup>24</sup> Thorne, J (2015) Fighting Terror in Tunisia Domestic and Foreign Response to Bardo, Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Volume 8 Issue 9 pp. 6-7

<sup>25</sup> BBC (2015) Tunisia to Build Anti-Terror Wall on Libya Border, BBC News, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33440212>

<sup>26</sup> Torelli, S (2014) Tunisian Jihadists Establishing New Networks with Libyan Islamists, Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Volume 12 Issue 11 p. 5



lead to the desired outcome.<sup>27</sup> The Tunisian government is unable to completely eliminate these groups or stop their attacks either on the military or touristic sites; however, the Tunisian culture in general, and even the Islamist parties, are against this ideology and will not be a fertile ground for these groups.<sup>28</sup>

Ennahda party is rooted in the revivalism movement that spread throughout the MENA region during the 1970s which was heavily influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. This helped the party attract the conservative population of Tunisia, especially in the marginalized areas under the secular authoritarian regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. After decades of crackdown, the party reemerged after the success of the revolution. According to interviews conducted by Monica Marks with Ennahda leaders, members, and supporters, the vast majority stated that the model they would like to replicate is the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey since it combines both Islam and democracy. Furthermore, they stated that they have taken inspiration from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt but have surpassed them. The aim is to gradually make Tunisia more Muslim through education, economy, and media; as in through convincing the population rather than coercing them. Historically, Ennahda did have similar values to those of quietist Salafism but were never close to the beliefs of Salafist jihadism; in addition, they believed the solution to this trend is through having legitimate sources of religion and inclusion on political, economic, and social levels. Ennahda leaders were strong advocates of Salafist participation in politics since it would help them integrate and become more pragmatic. They also did not want to have a strong stance against them since they themselves were previously oppressed for their ideology.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between Ennahda and Salafist groups in general, specifically Ansar Al Sharia, passed through several stages. After Ennahda won the elections in 2011, it was the first time in Tunisia's history that Islamists took power. This was due to several reasons: the first people who protested against the Ben Ali regime were the conservatives from the poor regions, and they voted for Ennahda in the elections since they were not part of the old regime, were not corrupt,

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<sup>27</sup> McCarthy, R (2015) Radicalizing Islamist Youth, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/05/01/radicalizing-islamist-youth/i81c>

<sup>28</sup> Stratfor (2015) Tunisia Struggles with Militants, Stratfor, Retrieved from <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/tunisia-struggles-militants>

<sup>29</sup> Marks, M (2015) Tunisia's Ennahda Rethinking Islamism in the Context of ISIS and the Egyptian Coup, Brookings, Retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2015/07/rethinking-political-islam/Tunisia\\_Marks-FINALE.pdf?la=en](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2015/07/rethinking-political-islam/Tunisia_Marks-FINALE.pdf?la=en)

and had a religious moral compass. The second reason is the lack of sympathy gained by the elite party candidates from the population. The third and most important reason is the better organization and financial ability of Ennahda compared to other parties which helped them reach out to larger segments of the population especially in the rural areas.<sup>30</sup> The lack of experience they had in running state affairs negatively impacted the performance of the government during the critical transition period which was filled with social protests, trade union pressures, economic challenges, and terrorist attacks. The formation of a coalition government by Ennahda did not lead to success in terms of development, security, and economy; however, it did protect civil liberties, encouraged dialogue, did not crack down on political opposition, and adopted a democratic constitution. One of the main failures of Ennahda was the lenient policy adopted towards Islamic extremists.<sup>31</sup> An inclusion policy was adopted by Ennahda towards Salafist groups so that they become part of the system and adopt more pragmatic stances. This helps it promote itself as a moderate power compared to them and also further Islamic influence in governmental institutions. This led to criticism of Ennahda by the opposition due to its tolerance of these groups even when they used violence and by more radical youths as well who saw Ennahda as being too moderate.<sup>32</sup> This relationship with the Salafist groups was negatively impacted when Ennahda adopted a constitution that did not include Sharia-related clauses. This led its Salafist allies to withdraw their support while others increased their use of force which culminated with the assassination of two leading leftist opposition figures, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi. Fearing going through the same experience as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, they aimed for consensus at any price and preferred reconciliation over political accountability of the figures of the Ben Ali regime.<sup>33</sup> The latest elections that took place in 2014 were presented, albeit in a simplistic way, between secularists and Islamists in spite of the main concerns of the citizens being about economic and security issues. Ennahda tried to portray itself as a mainstream political party willing to work with other parties regardless of their ideology

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<sup>30</sup> Von Rohr, M (2011) Victory for Ennahda Why Tunisians Voted for the Islamists, Der Spiegel International, Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/victory-for-ennahda-why-tunisians-voted-for-the-islamists-a-794133.html>

<sup>31</sup> Jamaoui, A (2014) The Decline of Political Islam in Tunisia, Open Democracy, Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/anouar-jamaoui/decline-of-political-islam-in-tunisia>

<sup>32</sup> Loudon, S (2015) Political Islamism in Tunisia A History of Repression and a Complex Forum for Potential Change, Iowa Research Online, Volume 4 Issue 1 pp. 10-13

<sup>33</sup> Jamaoui, A (2014) The Decline of Political Islam in Tunisia, Open Democracy, Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/anouar-jamaoui/decline-of-political-islam-in-tunisia>

while Nidaa Tunis focused on portraying itself as a party with a reformist Islamic view compared to the other traditional and violent view of Islam which Ennahda failed to control during its rule. Since both parties aimed at a moderate stance and countering extremism, the attention shifted towards socio-economic and security issues.<sup>34</sup> Ennahda lost the Salafist vote after the crackdown on Ansar Al Sharia and the secular vote poured in masse in favor of Nida Tunis with the main aim of defeating them. All these factors coupled with the weak media campaign of Ennahda to counter the stereotypical picture of Islamists and the continuous strikes by the main trade union in the country led to the fall of Ennahda.<sup>35</sup>

A major Salafist party, Hizb ut-Tahrir, received its permit from the Ennahda government. It calls for a Caliphate under Sharia law but has remained nonviolent in its actions. There is no proof that links the party to any terrorist activity after the fall of Ben Ali, and they have condemned the recent attacks; however, Tunisian President Essebsi threatened the dissolution of the party after the Sousse attack. The party leaders criticized this threat as being a crackdown against the party under the guise of fighting terrorism which has brought back memories of the authoritarian practices of the Ben Ali regime. Political analysts such as Youssef Cherif point out that the group highly disregards the state but is not violent and point out that such actions would be counterproductive and lead to even more radicalization.<sup>36</sup>

Civil society played a crucial role in the transition period through playing monitoring the actions of the government and facilitating dialogue to bridge political divides. The influence they had was evident through the protests they called for during the writing of the new constitution, the appointment of political cronies by Ennahda to governmental positions, and the strikes by the unions which heavily pressured the Ennahda government.<sup>37</sup> Analysts point out that the strength of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) is the main factor which balanced out the power of Ennahda. The UGTT has more than half a million members and is spread in all Tunisian provinces which provides it with strong grass roots; in addition to the negotiating

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<sup>34</sup> Young, E (2015) Islam and Islamists in the 2014 Tunisian Elections, Project on Middle East Political Science, Retrieved from <http://pomeps.org/2015/03/12/islam-and-islamists-in-the-2014-tunisian-elections/>

<sup>35</sup> Jamaoui, A (2014) The Decline of Political Islam in Tunisia, Open Democracy, Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/anouar-jamaoui/decline-of-political-islam-in-tunisia>

<sup>36</sup> Petre, C (2015) Is Banning Hiz Ut Tahrir Such a Good Idea Tunisia, Middle East Monitor, Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/19683-is-banning-hizb-ut-tahrir-such-a-good-idea-tunisia>

<sup>37</sup> Bellin, E (2014) Explaining Democratic Divergence Why Tunisia has Succeeded and Egypt has Failed, Project on Middle East Political Science, Retrieved from <http://pomeps.org/2014/12/10/explaining-democratic-divergence/>

experience that they have acquired from bargaining with employers regarding the working conditions and interests of employees.<sup>38</sup> For example, the UGTT proposed the initiative which solved the deadlock between the opposition and the Ennahda government (forming a non-political government and setting a date for general elections). Some have criticized the UGTT for being politically motivated by the left wing which has more influence than others in the union; however, historically and the composition of the union makes it very difficult to be completely controlled by only one political orientation.<sup>39</sup> The UGTT formed a kind of alliance with the employers' union (UTICA), the Tunisian Bar Association, and the Human Rights League (LTDH) which increase their effectiveness and level of influence. This shows the degree of importance of having an active civil society in shaping the political transformation of a country and the future of the state.<sup>40</sup>

The current President Essebsi is from Nidaa Tunis, the largest party in the parliament, which is also part of the unity government with Ennahda and different parties along with independents.<sup>41</sup> The policies adopted by this authority are very strict with the aim of limiting any future attacks as seen with the anti-terror law and the border wall being built. The ongoing conflict in neighboring Libya and the jihadist cells situated along the Algerian border indicate that the threat these militants pose to the Tunisian society is not going to be neutralized anytime soon in spite of the new laws and measures being adopted and implemented. These laws and measures have been criticized by human rights groups due to the high possibility of being exploited to crack down on freedoms, which is why civil society has to be active in monitoring the actions of the government and security forces. The role that civil society organizations played during the Ennahda government has to be replicated under this government as well especially with the rise of the security threat. It is highly unlikely that these groups will have a high span of influence in Tunisia; however, they have enough external support and internal conditions to exploit for them

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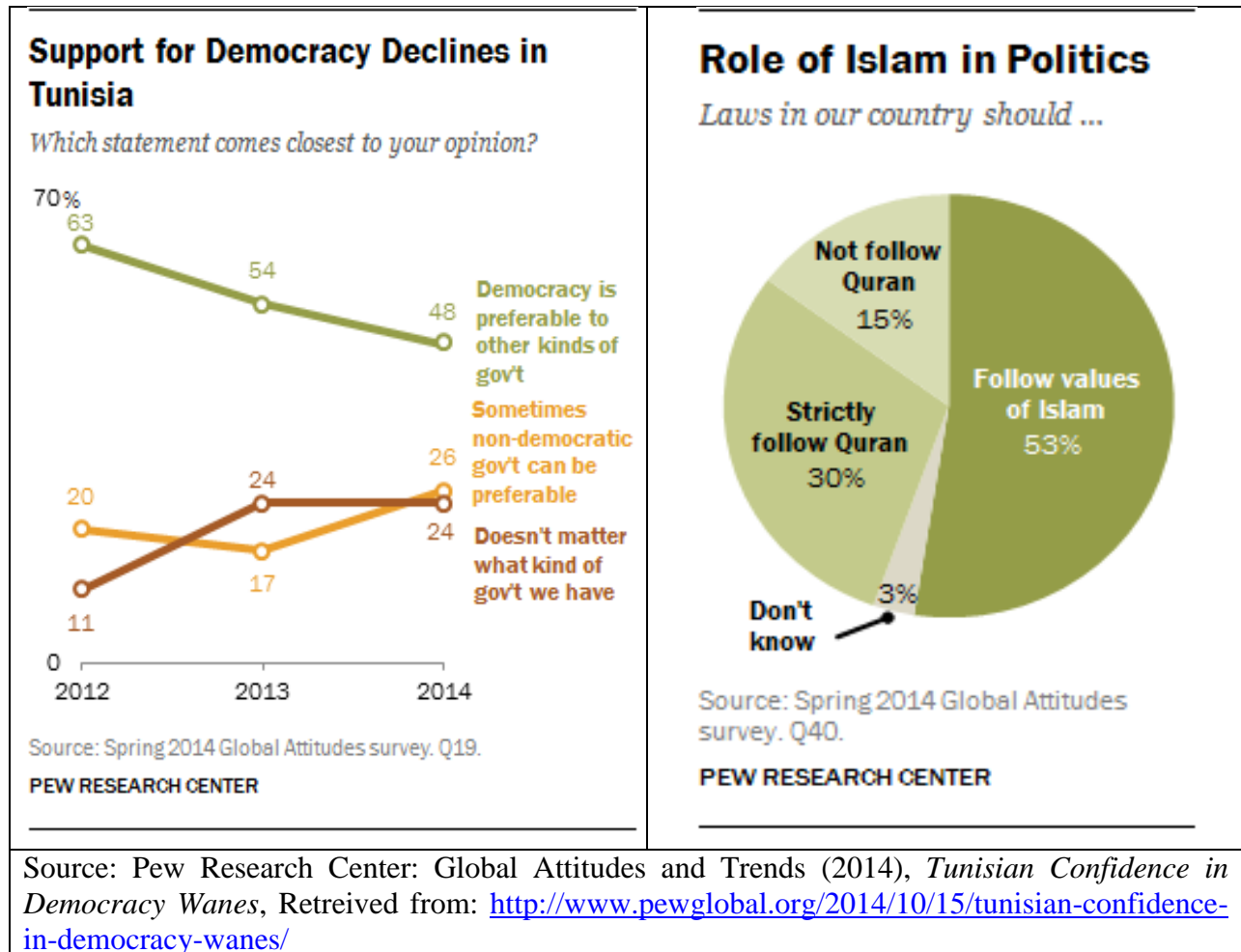
<sup>38</sup> Chayes, S (2014) How a Leftist Labor Union Helped Force Tunisia's Political Settlement, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/27/how-leftist-labor-union-helped-force-tunisia-s-political-settlement>

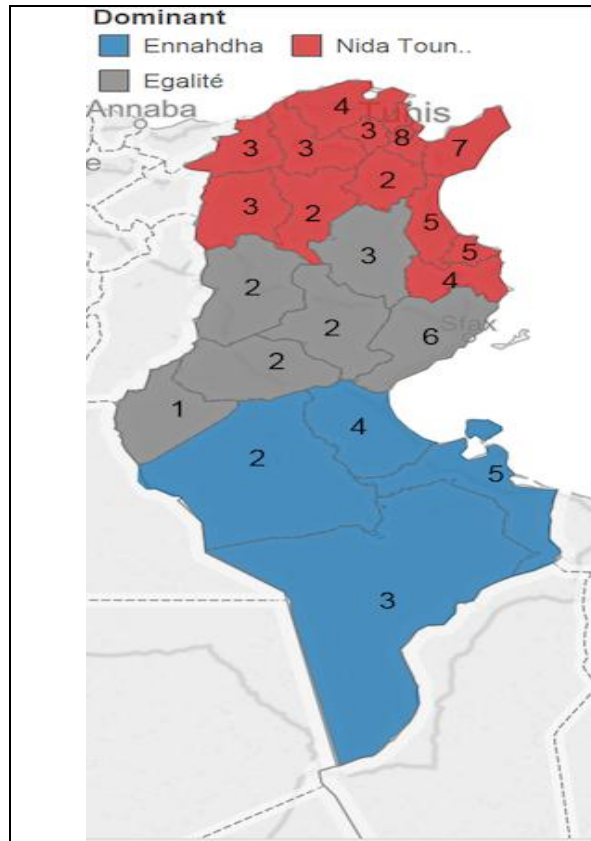
<sup>39</sup> Al Youssoufi, H (2014) Tunisia Labor Union Serves as Political Mediator, Al Monitor, Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/03/tunisia-labor-union-political-balance.html#>

<sup>40</sup> Chayes, S (2014) How a Leftist Labor Union Helped Force Tunisia's Political Settlement, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/27/how-leftist-labor-union-helped-force-tunisia-s-political-settlement>

<sup>41</sup> Al Jazeera (2015) Tunisia Parliament Approves Unity Government, Al Jazeera, Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/02/tunisia-approves-coalition-government-150205123748042.html>

to sustain themselves as a recurrent loophole in Tunisian security. The clash between AQ and IS over the supremacy of global jihad is beginning to appear among the Tunisian militant groups through defections and tensions between foot soldiers and the group leaderships. This could lead both groups and their affiliates to increase their activities in order to gain the upper hand, at the expense of the Tunisian population.





Source: Nawaat Politics (2014), *Strategic vote, non-vote, and the relative victor*, Retrieved from: <http://nawaat.org/portail/2014/11/02/strategic-vote-non-vote-and-the-relative-victor-nidaa-tounes/>



Source: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) *travel advise* (2015), Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/tunisia>