

Arab Uprisings and the Outstanding Return to Democracy: Tunisia as a Model

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ABSTRACT: *In the wake of the Middle Eastern crises, the Tunisian case in focus has been doted as a unique phenomenon being that it was the Genesis of the revolution that ultimately spread across the Middle East like wild fire, but has eventually heralded a new dawn as democracy has incidentally returned to the Empire. This literature therefore looks closely at the extent to which the ‘DignityRevolution’ has been instrumental in the Middle East uprisings, which have brought an end to dynastic autocracies. The literature zeros in on the Tunisian uprising which has attracted global concerns, sympathy and has sparked interests in the international arena. The literature finds that the people hold colossal prospect in the uprising and its resultant effect, as it paved the way for the revolutionist to generate, gather and disseminate information on the condition of the entire region to the international community. The people in this context were of utmost importance and played a very crucial role in the creation of awareness, mobilization of protesters and utmost determining the direction of the uprising and also ensuring a speedy return to democratic rule. The paper submits that the role of the people in ensuring that the ruins of the uprising is not left littering around and democracy restored is highly commendable and should be a model for all other Arab countries involved in the revolution.*

Keywords: Uprisings, Outstanding, Revolutionists, Autocracy, Democracy.

I. Introduction

There is a scuffleuncontrolled around the Arab world and itsupshot is of utmost importance for the entire world. This struggle between marines of democracy and authoritarianism, modernity and stagnation, is not so different in kind from the titanic conflicts that have shaped the lives of so many other lands. But the specific Middle Eastern version of such events is also quite distinctive from what happened elsewhere. For example, Europe’s political, social, and ideological throes during the nineteenth and twentieth century’s gave rise to international tidal waves that carried violence to every corner of the planet. Three world wars, including the Cold War, as well as Fascism and Communism arose in the strife of that great debate over how peoples should and would live their lives. Apparently, it always seemed as if Arab countries were ‘on the brink.’ It turns out that they were. And those who assured us that Arab autocracies would last for decades, if not longer, were wrong. In the wake of the Tunisian revolution, academics, analysts and certainly Western policymakers must reassess their understanding of a region entering its democratic moment.What has happened since 2011 disproves longstanding assumptions about how democracies can and should emerge in the Arab world. Even the neoconservatives, who seemed passionately attached to the notion of democratic revolution, told us this would be a generational struggle. Arabs were asked to be patient, and to wait. In order to move toward democracy, they would first have to build a secular middle class, reach a certain level of economic growth, and, somehow, foster a democratic culture. It was never quite explained how a democratic culture could emerge under dictatorship.Kaplan (2010)

Perhaps the case of Tunisiawhich is in its fourth year of transition since the January 2011 “Dignity Revolution” ended the authoritarian regime of then President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and sparked a wave of unrest in much of the Arab world. In practice, civil and political liberties have expanded, and Tunisia has experienced far less violence than some other transitional countries.Many analysts view Tunisia as having the best hope of any “Arab Spring” country to complete a peaceful transition to fully democratic rule. A National Constituent Assembly was elected in October 2011 in Tunisia’s first-ever open, multiparty contest. The Islamist Al Nahda (alt: Ennahda) party won a plurality of seats and formed a so-called “Troika” coalition with two centrist, secular parties. The Assembly’s mandate, initially expected to last no more than a year, stretched into two as the Troika confronted a series of political crises. In January 2014, the Troika was dissolved in favor of a technocratic government that has overseen preparations for new elections. The Constituent Assembly then finalized and voted to adopt a new constitution which has been widely hailed as exemplary. National elections scheduled for late 2014 represent a key and arguably final step toward a democratic system. Legislative elections that took place in October, 2014, and presidential elections that followed in November, and a run-off in December have all culminated to buttressing the above argument as the elections were successful; Tunisia has crossed one more threshold that has eluded other transitional states in the Middle East and North Africa. Perhaps

attention may now turn toward the details of constitutional implementation and the advancement of economic and governance reforms. Alternately, the electoral process may be challenged and the anticipated transition set back if, for example, parties dispute the outcome, low turnout undermines the legitimacy of the vote, or terrorist threats overwhelm the country's fragile security institutions. The leading contenders in the elections represent the two poles of Tunisian post-revolutionary politics: Al Nahda, whose leaders have called for the reconciliation of democracy and Islam, and the ardently secularist NidaTounes party, which represents a mix of former regime figures and leftists. More stridently leftist parties have also made a strong showing. The return of former Ben Ali-era officials is contentious, but Tunisia has avoided adopting laws that would exclude them. Overall, a large range of parties have contested the elections, and upsets also appear possible. A gulf of mistrust between Islamist and secularist ideological factions have been fed by rising insecurity and by mutual suspicions that one side sought to manipulate the rules of the political process to exclude the other. Alexander (2014)

II. Tunisia: The Rise and fall of Ben Ali

Tunisia, which had been a French protectorate since 1881, gained its independence in 1956. The country was then ruled for more than 30 years by President Habib Bourguiba, a secular nationalist who favored economic and social modernization along Western lines but severely limited political liberties. Bourguiba succeeded in advancing women's rights and economic development, and his government maintained strong relations with the West and fellow Arab states. In 1987, Prime Minister Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali ousted Bourguiba and seized the presidency in a bloodless coup. Ben Ali's rise to power had little effect on state policy. He continued to push market-based economic development and women's rights, but he also repressed political opponents. Independent journalists, secular activists, and Islamists faced imprisonment, torture, and harassment. Many Islamists, particularly supporters of the banned movement Ennahda, were jailed following sham trials in the early 1990s. Ben Ali's hold on government institutions remained strong over subsequent years, and he won a fifth five-year term in the October 2009 presidential election, taking nearly 90 percent of the vote amid tight media and candidacy restrictions. The government's repressive measures continued through 2010 and included a harsh crackdown on critical journalists and bloggers. In June, the parliament passed a law that criminalized opposition activities deemed to be fomented by "agents of a foreign power." A state media campaign during the year advocated constitutional amendments that would allow Ben Ali to run for a sixth term in 2014. The strict state controls enforced by the Ben Ali regime, combined with an economic environment marked by high unemployment and few opportunities for young adults, led to nationwide antigovernment protests in December 2010 and January 2011. The uprising was triggered by the self-immolation of a fruit vendor protesting police harassment. As a result of the protests, which led to at least 219 deaths as demonstrators clashed with police, Ben Ali was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia on January 14. Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi assumed the role of head of state after Ben Ali's departure, but he too was forced from office by the continuing protests. Ben Ali's party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), was dissolved by court order in March, all members of the party were forced to resign from the transitional government, and a court decision in June found Ben Ali guilty of theft and sentenced him in absentia to 35 years in prison and a \$65 million fine. Alexander (2014)

III. A Return from the Brink of Authoritarian Democracy

Ben Ali's November 7, 1987 coup inaugurated the heady period of political reform that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in the late 1980s. The new president promised to establish the rule of law, to respect human rights and to implement the kind of democratic political reforms that Habib Bourguiba had steadfastly refused. Along with Algeria, Jordan and Yemen, Tunisia rode the leading edge of what many hoped would be a wave of democratic transitions in the region. Ten years later, it would be difficult to find another country that has moved so far in the opposite direction. That Tunisia stood at the forefront of political reforms in the late 1980s came as no surprise to many observers. Since the 1960s, scholars had held up the small country as one of the region's best hopes for democratic politics. Tunisia's tradition of reform and openness, its Western-oriented elite and its progressive social policies suggested the kind of trajectory that would culminate sooner or later in multiple political parties, competitive elections and respect for human rights. Moreover, state and society in Tunisia had developed what Cherif (2013) describes as a unique form of "self-regulation." During periods of economic or political crisis, Tunisians accepted a strong state that intervenes to restore order and prosperity. But that state also generated countervailing social forces that kept it in check when it became too powerful. Against this backdrop, the prospects for political reform under Ben Ali seemed good. If the president balked at his democratic promises, it seemed Tunisia possessed the kind of muscular civil society that would force him to follow through.

During his first year in power, Ben Ali seemed bent on establishing himself as the country's most dedicated reformer. He amnestied thousands of political prisoners, revamped Bourguiba's Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD) into the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique (RCD), abolished the state security court and the presidency for life, reformed laws governing pretrial detention and ratified the United Nations'

convention on torture. Ben Ali also supported new legislation that made it easier to form associations and parties, and he negotiated a National Pact with the country's principal social and political organizations. By late 1988, however, the bloom had begun to fade. Ben Ali refused to legalize Hizb al-Nahda (The Renaissance Party), the country's largest Islamist organization even though the party pledged to accept the rules of competitive democracy. And despite opposition demands for proportional legislative elections, the 1989 electoral code maintained the old majority list system. Those rules, combined with restrictions on media access and other interferences, allowed Ben Ali's RCD to win every seat in the April 1989 elections. Those elections marked the end of Ben Ali's honeymoon and the beginning of Tunisia's slide into deeper authoritarianism. Angered by their exclusion from parliament despite strong support for their candidates who ran as independents, Nahda activists intensified protests at the university and in working class neighborhoods. The government, in turn, stepped up its repression against Nahda and the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party. Late-night raids and house-to-house searches became commonplace in some neighborhoods. Stories of torture under interrogation and military court convictions multiplied. The campaign to crush Nahda intensified in 1991 following an attack on an RCD office in the Bab Souika area of Tunis and after the government claimed that security forces had uncovered a plot to topple the regime. Waltz (2012) reports that the government's extensive dragnet hauled in more than 8,000 individuals between 1990 and 1992.

Most Tunisians tolerated the government's repression. As the press never ceased to remind them, a vigorous economy that could generate new jobs depended on Tunisia's ability to attract foreign investment in a competitive regional environment. Ben Ali and other officials pointed to Algeria and Egypt and argued that tolerating any kind of Islamist party would lead only to economic chaos. Better to be done with them quickly and create the kind of stable investment climate that Tunisia's neighbors could not provide. In terms of Cherif's(2013) model, the 1989-1992 periods seemed to offer another example of Tunisians' willingness to tolerate a strong state that claimed to act on behalf of national wellbeing. By late 1992, Tunisia had reached an important crossroads. Economic growth had climbed above 8 percent, and most observers agreed that Nahda no longer posed a serious threat. Some portion of the rank and file certainly remained. But for all practical purposes, Nahda had become an offshore operation sustained by supporters in Europe and North America. By his fifth anniversary in power, Ben Ali could legitimately claim to have saved Tunisia from economic bankruptcy and civil war. Many opposition figures had held their fire during economic and political crisis. Once those crises passed, they called on the government to make good on its earlier promises. This pressure did move Ben Ali and the National Assembly to pass a new electoral law in December 1992, but it only allowed the legal opposition parties to share a pitifully small handful of seats. Mabrouk (2011)

At the same time, however, Ben Ali stepped up his campaign to quash any form of opposition. Some of the methods for coopting and manipulating the press, unions, and other organizations harkened back to the Bourguiba days. But Ben Ali's authoritarianism, had betrayed the kind of heavy-handedness that students of Maghribi politics generally associated with Algeria and Morocco rather than Tunisia. Over the past years, Ben Ali dramatically expanded Tunisia's internal security apparatus. Critics claim that much of this growth had taken place outside of the Interior Ministry and other official police forces. They argued that Ben Ali had used a slush fund, labeled the "sovereignty fund" in the budget, to build up a parallel security apparatus run directly from the presidential palace. Along with the Interior Ministry, this organization had implemented a ruthless campaign whose tactics run from surveillance and phone tapping to fabricated videocassettes, threats against family members, passport confiscations, beatings and even assassinations. In addition to rank and file workers, human rights activists and university professors, this strategy had targeted some of Tunisia's most prominent opposition figures. Tunisia's slide into deeper authoritarianism raises interesting questions. Why did a government that worked hard to establish a reputation as a bastion of human rights and civil liberties, and one that had eliminated serious political opposition, feel compelled to intensify its repressive methods? Why hasn't this authoritarian turn generated a countervailing "civil society" response? Has Ben Ali broken Tunisia's self-regulating system? Finally, what are the prospects for more extensive political change in Tunisia? To answer these questions about repression and state-society relations in Tunisia, the analysis must be dispensed by two pieces of conformist insight. The first is the widely held impression that Ben Ali is essentially Bourguibareincarnation. Although similarities exist, important differences distinguish the two leaders' strategies for consolidating and holding power. The second piece of conservative understanding is the equally popular notion that Ben Ali's political strategy -- including the repression -- is simply a product of the fight against Nahda. Although Islamists clearly have been the regime's single greatest preoccupation, it is misleading to reduce Tunisian politics under Ben Ali to a simple state versus Islamists dynamic. Ben Ali has always viewed Nahda as part of a broader and more complex political game and there is good reason to believe that this game involves players that Ben Ali fears as much or more than Nahda. Gobe (2011)

IV. Comparing both Governments

In the struggle for Tunisian independence, Habib Bourguiba emerged as the nationalist movement's principal spokesman and negotiator. But he was not its only source of power and influence. Indeed, he survived a serious threat to his position as the neo-Destour's leader in 1955-1956 only with the support of organized labor and other key party officials. As Tunisia's first president, Bourguiba consolidated control over the party and state bureaucracies by co-opting and manipulating clientele networks in ways that would concentrate power in his own hands without alienating his bases of support. Rather than becoming Tunisia's sole political patron, he set out to become its chief patron. Bourguiba accomplished much of this through an ongoing game of political musical chairs. He intentionally gave and withdrew important posts to powerful individuals who could use their positions to service their own clienteles. In this way, Bourguiba established himself as the maker and breaker of political careers. He created tangible incentives for loyalty that consolidated his personal power much more effectively than a system based solely on repression and fear. Bourguiba also recognized early on that protest and contestation could play an important role in the effort to coopt individuals and organizations. In the 1950s and again in the mid-1980s, Bourguiba discreetly supported worker unrest designed to undermine the union leadership. On both occasions he supported breakaway unions, and then reunited the labor movement under leaders who owed their positions to Bourguiba rather than to the rank and file. He tried unsuccessfully to use this same tactic to bring the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) to heel in the mid-1980s. Robbins (2011)

Bourguiba was not the only politician who exploited popular unrest. Indeed, the intermingling of elite politics and popular protest became a staple of Tunisian political life after the government established a prime ministership in 1969. Party elites discreetly encouraged unrest as a way of discrediting competitors, and then tried to negotiate alliances with the student and worker movements in order to secure a popular base for their own ambitions and also getting the militants to back off allowed politicians to demonstrate their ability to deliver social peace. The onset of Bourguiba's health problems in 1967 sparked a great deal of speculation and jockeying for position in a system that lacked a clear successor and a method for choosing one. In addition to relieving himself of the more technical tasks of government, Bourguiba used the prime ministership as a tool for turning this elite competition to his advantage. At his direction, the National Assembly passed legislation that gave the president the power to select the prime minister and designated that person as the automatic successor if the president died or became incapacitated. By establishing his personal control over the succession, Bourguiba reinforced his power by creating what William Zartman aptly describes as "position politics." Rather than building alliances against Bourguiba, party barons conspired against one another to earn his favor and a chance to become prime minister. As Bourguiba aged, Tunisian politics devolved into a collective wager on his mortality. Everyone wanted either to be prime minister or to be on good terms with the person who was when Bourguiba passed on. Through the early 1980s, this intricate political theater channeled elite competition away from Bourguiba. And while the radicalization of the labor movement in 1977 demonstrated that he could not completely control this messy game, two factors did help Bourguiba to keep social conflict from spinning totally out of control. First, strong economic growth in the 1970s supported a succession of wage increases and an extensive system of consumer subsidies. Second, the worker and student unions' reliance on public funds allowed Bourguiba to intervene in and manipulate their internal politics. Alexander (2012)

By the mid-1980s, these conditions no longer obtained. Economic deterioration eroded the government's ability to buy social peace. Bourguiba became less tolerant of labor's wage demands and cracked down hard on the union in 1984-1985. The Islamic Tendency Movement -- Nahda's precursor -- stepped into the void created by the union repression and became the social force that politicians publicly reviled and privately courted. But the Tendency was an independent entity whose clandestine organization provided few openings for external manipulation. For Bourguiba, allowing it to become the force that elite courted was too risky. His campaign to destroy the Tendency set Tunisia on the course that brought Ben Ali to power in 1987. Thus, the vibrancy of Tunisia's civil society and its ability to generate pressure on the state in the 1970s and early 1980s did not reflect a deep-seated political culture. Rather, it was a product of pragmatic political choices. Bourguiba's strategy for consolidating and holding power created new opportunities for protest, and workers, students, Islamists and others tried to use them to their own advantage. Ben Ali's strategy for consolidating and holding power has produced a very different state-society relationship. Unlike Bourguiba, Ben Ali did not rise to power at the forefront of a well-organized movement. Prior to becoming interior minister in 1986, Ben Ali had spent his entire career in the military and security forces. When he seized power, he stepped into the void at the center of a paralyzed political system. The deepening economic and political crisis had discredited the ruling party's traditional elite. Internal divisions and government repression had crippled the opposition parties and other organizations. Gobe (2011)

These conditions gave Ben Ali a degree of freedom that Bourguiba did not enjoy. He faced no organized challenge and he did not have to court or compensate powerful constituencies that had contributed to his rise. Most Tunisians were simply relieved to see Bourguiba ushered offstage with minimal trauma. At the same time, however, Ben Ali realized that this freedom from the entanglements of traditional party politics could be an important handicap. This brings us to a point that is central for understanding Ben Ali's authoritarianism. Battling Nahda clearly has been the government's single greatest preoccupation over the past ten years. But this is precisely the kind of contest for which Ben Ali is eminently qualified. From the 1970s on, he had supervised Bourguiba's successive crackdowns on labor, students and Islamists. This experience, and those of other countries in the region, suggested a simple, sober lesson. The Islamists would become a serious threat to his position if he followed Benjadid's example in Algeria and offered them access to the ballot box. But if he played to his strengths and remained committed to destroying Nahda, he could probably win. A revival of position politics, on the other hand, would have posed a much more serious threat. Many long-time party barons resented Ben Ali for preempting their own plans for stepping into the presidency. From the beginning of his rule, Ben Ali feared that one of these established politicians, or one of his own ministers, would use their networks in the party, the state bureaucracy, and other organizations to undermine him. As a relative newcomer to ruling party politics, Ben Ali lacked the social bases and patronage networks so vital to Bourguiba's style of political management. He did not have the political resources to referee and manipulate effectively an ongoing competition between powerful politicians and the social actors they rallied to their camps.

To protect his own position, Ben Ali has tried to do two things. First, he has worked to prevent state and party officials from developing into centers of power that they became under Bourguiba. He abolished the office of party director -- a position of considerable power in the 1970s -- and reduced the autonomy of his ministers. His dismissal of HediBaccouche in 1989 demonstrated that Ben Ali has no tolerance for a prime minister who shows any sign of becoming a power in his own right. Throughout his cabinet, Ben Ali has carefully selected individuals who are technically competent but come from non-political backgrounds or lack extensive connections in the ruling party or the state bureaucracy. He is involved in the operations of individual ministries much more deeply than Bourguiba ever was, and he has used frequent cabinet shuffles to prevent ministers from establishing lasting clientele bases. Second, Ben Ali has worked diligently to break the tie between elite and popular politics that was so vital in the 1970s and 1980s. Ill-equipped to play position politics, he has tried to ensure that "civil society" remains unavailable as a political weapon. Initially, Ben Ali relied on old-fashioned cooptation, exercised with considerably less finesse than his predecessor, to put the opposition parties and other organizations on short leashes. Outright repression became more important after evidence emerged in 1989-1990 of a broad opposition front built around former Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali and other longtime Destour politicians. In April 1990, the political bureau of a group calling itself the Tunisian National Salvation Front issued a communique claiming to represent all opposition groups inside and outside of Tunisia. The communique condemned with equal vigor the government's repression of everyone from Bourguiba to the Communists and Nahda. It called on all democrats, regardless of ideology and affiliation, to unite in a common effort. From his new headquarters in London, Nahda's leader, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, made a similar comment that would push Ben Ali to establish a meaningful, multi-party democracy. Murphy (2011)

This challenge became Ben Ali's chief concern. He became -- and remains -- terribly afraid that this front, headed by former politicians with extensive ties throughout the country, is conspiring to unseat him. Ben Ali fears that this front will establish alliances with Nahda, the LTDH, militant portions of the labor and student movements, the legal opposition parties and anyone else who might provide a useful striking arm against him. From his perspective, then, a strike, a student demonstration, or an opposition communique could be much more than it appears to be. Because any kind of contestation could be organized and manipulated by the opposition front it must be repressed. This repressive strategy has stunted Tunisia's formidable civil society in two ways. Most obviously, it has elevated the risks of engaging in protest and made collective action much harder to organize. Beyond this climate of fear and intimidation, Ben Ali's effort to break the connection between elite and popular politics has also created a profound strategic malaise for the organizations that long constituted the bedrock of associational life. As elsewhere in the region, the struggle for meaningful autonomy from state control has dominated the lives of workers' and students' unions, human rights groups, women's groups and Islamist organizations in post-independence Tunisia. At the same time, though, these organizations have always understood that the line between state and civil society is blurry at best. For more than 30 years, establishing alliances with individuals and factions of the governing elite and playing on tensions within party and state bureaucracies was a fundamental part of these organizations' strategies for influencing government policy. The dissolution of these ties, the end of position politics as it operated for so long, has left Tunisia's traditionally vigorous civil society adrift.

To be sure, adrift does not mean broken. Pressure from the legal opposition parties has helped to prompt electoral reform. The trade union has reduced some of the social costs of privatization and economic reform. The LTDH has fought valiantly to protect its independence and to make respect for human rights a value that the government must at least profess to support. These accomplishments are not trivial. By the same token, Ben Ali's effort to break the link between elite and popular politics has weakened the ability of these organizations to act as the engines of dramatic change anytime soon. What, then, might the future hold? Three scenarios seem likely. One scenario can be called "Ben Ali's nightmare." A broad opposition front succeeds in establishing a clandestine organization inside the country. It lays low until a downturn in the economy or some other development heightens public dissatisfaction. Unrest erupts and Ben Ali gets moved aside by someone from inside the ruling party or perhaps by one of the old party barons. Some of the likely participants in such a plan do, indeed, think in these terms. But none of them believes that such a plan can succeed in the near future. A second, particularly ironic, scenario involves Ben Ali's own security apparatus. Some observers believe that Ben Ali has created a force that he may not be able to control. If he ever becomes unwilling or unable to continue their economic favors, or if he ever agrees to political reforms that undermine their power, these forces might move against him. The third scenario, and the most likely for the foreseeable future, continues the schizophrenic combination of reform and repression that has marked the past ten years. Ben Ali continues to repress criticism and contestation that he does not orchestrate. The legal opposition parties continue to participate in an electoral system that is stacked against them because it is the only game in town and because it gives them an opportunity to build their own organizations. They work to slowly expand their foothold in the National Assembly, and the LTDH continues to press the government on human rights. Ultimately, this scenario may be the most likely to produce the kind of multi-party democracy that Ben Ali promised a decade ago. But on the tenth anniversary of his "tranquil revolution," it still looks a long way off. Murphy (2011)

V. Tunisia's "Jasmine or Dignity Revolution"

The 2011 popular uprising began in December 2010 with antigovernment protests in the interior. On January 14, 2011, it culminated in the decision by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, in power since 1987, to flee the country for Saudi Arabia. Protests were first reported in the interior town of SidiBouزيد, after a 26-year-old street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire. The protests quickly spread to nearby towns, and eventually reached the capital and wealthy coastal communities associated with the ruling elite. Police opened fire on protesters and made sweeping arrests; an estimated 338 people were killed, Al-Jazeera (2013). The army, however, reportedly refused an order to use force against demonstrators, and reportedly played a significant role in Ben Ali's decision to step down. The early months of the post-Ben Ali transition were marked by ongoing waves of unrest, partly because street demonstrators rejected the continuing role of former regime officials in early interim governments. A security vacuum additionally raised fears of violence and chaos. In February 2011, a more stable, if weak, interim government took shape under Prime Minister BéjiCaïdEssebsi, an elder statesman from the administration of founding President HabibBourguiba. CaïdEssebsi introduced the idea, popular with protesters, of electing an assembly to write a new constitution—that is, forge a new political system—before holding parliamentary and/or presidential polls. Prior to January 2011, Tunisia was widely viewed as exhibiting a stable, albeit authoritarian, regime that focused on economic growth while staving off political liberalization. It had had only two leaders since gaining independence from France in 1956: HabibBourguiba, a secular nationalist and former independence activist, and Ben Ali, a former interior minister and prime minister who assumed the presidency in 1987. Ben Ali cultivated the internal security services and the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party as his power base, and harshly repressed political participation, freedom of expression, and religious activism. This repression, along with the ruling elite's corruption and nepotism, undermined the regime's popular legitimacy, despite relatively effective state services and strong economic growth. Another factor driving popular dissatisfaction was the socioeconomic divide between the developed, tourist-friendly coast and the poorer interior. Anti-government unrest, particularly rooted in labor and economic grievances, has often originated in the interior—as did the 2011 protest movement. Al-Jazeera (2011)

VI. Tunisia's Uprising and the Return of Democracy

The Tunisian uprising of late 2010 culminated with the departure of Ben Ali and his family on 14 January 2011, signaling the end of his regime of 23 years and, at the same time, raising the possibility of the end of authoritarian rule in the country for the first time since independence from France in 1956. The march towards the establishment of an accountable, democratic system has been strengthened with the first free and fair elections in the country's history held in October 2011 to elect 217 members of a constitutional assembly that for little more than a year would have the double role of running the country and drafting a new constitution. The formation of a three-party governing coalition between three of the historical opposition parties furthered the expectations that democracy would indeed take hold in Tunisia. Having been the country

where the so-called Arab Spring originated it is not surprising that much has been written about the Tunisian transition to democracy despite the short time that has passed since the day Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight sparking the uprising. For instance, there have already been studies attempting to identify the causes of the collapse of Ben Ali's regime, which was deemed to be one of the most stable in the Arab world (Schraeder&Redissi, 2011; Chomiak&Entelis, 2011).

It would be an unfortunate understatement to discount the impact of the events that transformed the political landscape of Tunisia in the lead up to January 14, 2011. Not only did these events instigate dramatic shifts to national parameters of Tunisia's social, economic and political constructs, but they ushered in a (delayed "third" wave) of political reforms that led to the downfall of entrenched authoritarian regimes across North Africa and pioneered a new political identity for the Arab World, defined by the efforts of ordinary citizens who challenged and ended prolonged periods of dictatorship. Beyond the circumstantial evidence that underscores Tunisia as the unique impetus in which the Arab World's regional anomaly of authoritarianism was finally challenged, the Tunisian case is relatively sterile and continues to leave onlookers puzzled in explaining the preconditions that eventually marked it as the first example of a successful popular revolt against a tyrannous regime that represented one of the most notorious of the region's durable authoritarian examples. Students of international relations of the Arab World have grown familiar with regional themes that have long dominated the scholarship, like the absence of democracy, resilience of durable authoritarianism, underdeveloped civil society and the broad pervasiveness through which these characteristics are shared by countries in a single unique region – ultimately preempting the following question – one yielding a political paradox that remained unsolved for decades: why did the wave of democracy fail to break on the shores of not a single country in the Arab World? The commendable attempts to answer this question over decades demarcated with signposts, vantage points, and paradigms that have guided the trajectory of the scholarship spurred a myriad of credible, yet unsatisfactory studies to decipher this regional quagmire. Ironically, despite this unwavering devotion embodied by years of scholarly contributions, political scientists failed to predict the dramatic events that unmistakably underscored a monumental blip on the region's historic timeline, manifested in rumblings of revolution. That unmistakable "blip" – Tunisia on January 14, 2011 brought an end to an unwavering trend following the forced departure of Tunisia's former president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and ending a 23-year dictatorship. After a month of incremental demonstrations, Ben Ali and his family were deposed from Tunisia's government in a coordinated popular revolution linked to grievances reflecting universal discontent over the country's economic stagnation, unemployment, poverty, lack of political freedom, and consistent disregard for fundamental human rights. In the subsequent weeks, we witnessed the deconstruction of the former regime, as Tunisia's interim governments laid the groundwork for an entirely new, inclusive system that strives to be absent of former regime leadership or bare any resemblance to it. We have yet to witness the consequences of this dramatic restructuring of Tunisia's entrenched authoritarian government until a new constitution is indoctrinated and national elections are held. To be certain, Tunisia turned the Arab World's "authoritarian anomaly" on its head. Attributed with one of the leading works on the subject of "dense" authoritarian durability, Posusney and Angrist highlighted that although "democratic stirrings" had begun to be seen in very specific examples across the Middle East, it was "too soon to herald the dawn of a Middle Eastern 'democratic spring,'" since the region was "home to the world's most tenacious authoritarian rulers, whose very longevity [called] into question the potential for rapid transformation." The prerequisites that are laid out in explicit detail throughout their work reflect on the region's regressive tendencies toward democratization – attributed to, among other things, weak institutions, security apparatuses, cultural and economic influences, and calculated political reform – an analysis supported by Sadiki to explain Ben Ali's political "reform" strategies. He argues that "Ben Ali's reforms [represented] yet another phase in the reproduction of a hegemonic political practice" based on control, not democratic power sharing. Previously, these factors drove regional scholars to conclude that there was "little cause for optimism that authoritarian countries in the Middle East [would] undergo transitions to democracy in the near future." Angrist again in 2007 independently verified that Ben Ali's assumption and consolidation of power "[looked] viable for the foreseeable future." The events that unfolded in Tunisia challenged the views of the field's leading experts and proved to the world that enduring authoritarianism had in fact, failed in a region that seemed immune to political liberalization. The traditional means through which Arab rulers were capable of subverting these "stirrings" (for an additional five years in Tunisia) were grounded in fundamental practices that sustained regimes for decades. As Schlumberger (2012) puts it; the source of authoritarianism stems from its "working mechanisms and inner logic," and did not necessarily require analysis that seeks to understand why democratic transitions had failed to occur. Still, Schlumberger and his contributing authors were on to something in their collective work published in early 2007, noting immediately in the introduction that consensus had been met by the field's scholars that the new millennium had brought about significant political developments across the region, and that "the winds of change" were beginning to blow; however, disagreement remained over whether this political reform would resemble democratization.

Alexander described Ben Ali's Tunisia as a "deeply authoritarian place" that was dominated by a president who faced no serious institutional constraints and who directed a ruling party that was essentially indistinguishable from the organs of the state. The "rules of the political game" as he adds, made it impossible for opposition parties, alone or in coalition, to replace it. Maintaining consistency with his colleagues, Alexander describes how the government regularly violated "a broad range of individual and collective rights," and believed (incredibly as recently as 2010), that since Tunisians had never changed a president or ruling party by ballot box or by violence, that "they [were] not likely to do so anytime soon."⁸ A leading expert on Tunisian politics, Alexander's inability to foresee Ben Ali's removal from power is not only indicative of the opinions surrounding Tunisia's perceived stymied politics, but the Arab World's entrenched propensity to robust authoritarianism. Hibou notes that the Ben Ali regime exercised an "undeniable repression" that fused mechanisms of oppression and domination to furbish a quintessential authoritarian system, or dictatorship. Hibou's impressive study of Tunisia's "political-economy of repression" reinforces Eva Bellin's research from the early 1990s on Tunisia's "stalled democracy" and the Ben Ali regime's normalization of authoritarian legitimacy via "economic mechanisms and techniques" that allowed people to live "normal lives" while assuring allegiance to Ben Ali through "concrete" measures of force that authorized "control, economic security, surveillance, and wealth creation" – balancing the country's championed "economic miracle" and "repression." When considering the latter, coupled with the regime's reliance on its omnipresent "coercive apparatus" to compel enduring acquiescence, this work intends to demonstrate that it was these very factors that prolonged the life of the regime, that ironically, contributed to Ben Ali's ultimate demise, with regard to the president himself, Hibou and Hulsey highlight that there has been a tendency in the scholarship to personalize power and emphasize Ben Ali's responsibility for state repression, looking specifically at, "the breadth of arbitrary decisions that perturb administrative functions; the existence of a system of loyalty founded on fear of, and gratification by, the chief; and the lack of a social basis for political power associated with the perceived apathy and passivity of the given society."

Similarly, expanded analysis noted by the authors focuses on the "importance of the police and institutional repression, as well as the absence of freedoms of expression," fixated on the policies that were disseminated directly by the president himself. This thesis supports this assessment and will attempt to sustain the argument that Ben Ali's indispensable role as "chief" of the Tunisian state should not be underappreciated, and that his removal from power explains the subsequent collapse of the authoritarian system that coddled him. In his 2007 work "Tunisia's 'Sweet Little Regime,'" Clement Henry did not consider Hibou and Hulsey's mechanisms of oppression as necessary quantifiers to further the argument that Ben Ali led a "rogue" or even "repressive" state, instead it was the extent to which "the political leadership (...) [deviated] from applicable social norms" exposing the vulnerability to combinations of internal and international pressures for change. Henry predicted that the regime's "irrational nature of repression" eventually would delegitimize Ben Ali's authority to rule – even for those closest to him, but as this thesis argues, repression represents only one of several factors that can be highlighted to explain the regime's downfall.

VII. Dichotomizing the Contentious notion of democracy

The conservative insight within development and democratization theory has traditionally insisted on social and political, cultural, ethnic cohesiveness and unity as prerequisites for reproducible stability and democracy. In Tunisia however, the straightjacket of national unity has historically compromised pluralism and plurality. Continuing with a model of electoral politics that is informed by the primacy of national unity offers nothing more than the reproduction of the status quo. Thus elections argued by some cannot be considered an adequate test of Bin Ali's dicing with democracy. Whatever the definitional requisites ascribed to the notion of democracy, it remains an essentially contested concept. There is no single definition or practice of democracy that can be taken as normative (Held, 1996; Sartori, 1987). However, a set of broad standards must be obtained for a genuine transition from authoritarianism to stand a good chance of success. The relevance and significance of proceduralism (periodic elections), legality (independent judiciary; fundamental liberties), and institutionalism (non-personalist institutions; separation of power) cannot be stressed enough when democracy is under construction. It is, however, the standard of equal opportunity for organizing and representing difference that renders a particular liberalizing experiment congenial to or at odds with democracy. Thus conceived, democratic community reads as 'one which permits and perhaps also encourages every man and woman individually or with others to choose the course of his or her life – subject to recognition of the right of others to do likewise – (Parry and Moran, 1994, – emphasis added). The practice of political pluralism in key 'liberalizing' Arab states is read political conformism and monism. Salamé notes how insistence on national unity has meant persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab World (Salamé, 1994). National unity is seen as a prerequisite for stability and development. Thus Owen notes how stability as a political value is more important than democracy in many Middle East polities (Owen, 1992). No challenge therefore is perhaps greater than the building of an autonomously associational milieu that breathes life into the fledgling processes of

democratization. Norton and Ayubi stress the importance of civil society for the maturity of democratization (Ayubi, 1995; Norton, 1993, 1995). The Arab state's 'authoritarian corporatist' approach to ruling state-society relations interferes in this space theorized from Hegel (1952) to Gramsci (Femia, 1981; Bellamy and Schecter, 1993) to be outside the state's coercive apparatus.

Democratization theory presents the student of Arab transitions with more problems than answers. Rustow's transitional model presupposes a set of three sequences for the realization of democracy (Rustow, 1970). These are authoritarian decay and collapse; institution-building; and democratic habituation. However, a prerequisite for this transition is national cohesion. In practice, national unity has become symbiotic with an expectation by Arab ruling elites for their peoples to rally around the state, direct all loyalty towards central government and be politically deferential. National unity is spelt singularity. Generally, there is broad consensus within democratic theory that homogeneity is far more conducive to democracy than heterogeneity. Like Rustow, Dahl in his *Polyarchy* (1971), as Przeworski notes, produces substantial empirical data correlating democracy with national and ethnic homogeneity (Przeworski et al., 1995). Multinational or multiethnic states are written off as good candidates for democratization, a view that Przeworski rightly questions (1995). The primordialist idea of being born into an identity suggests fixity and permanence. In a sense this view writes off the possibility of multiple layers of identity, and says very little about the imagining and constructing of identity. The view of a manipulable and changing identity strikes a chord with the instrumentalist conception of identification. This conception rejects anchoring identity in historical experience or reducing them to blood affinities or immutable loyalties. Identities are not objective givens operating outside space or time. They are constructed and mobilized by events and myths and myth inventors in specific contexts. They do not obtain from generalized categories. Reducing identity to a single underlying category, such as ethnicity, nationality or religion, is both essentialist and reductionist.

VIII. Tunisia's First Democratic Elections in More Than 50 Years

Tunisia's first free elections since independence in 1956 were held on October 23, 2011. Voter turnout was estimated at 90%, and the election was deemed fair. Voters selected an assembly that will write a draft constitution and establish the procedure for upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. Ennahda (Renaissance), a moderate, formerly banned Islamist party, prevailed, taking about 41% of the vote. Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, said the party is committed to democracy and pluralism and would not implement strict Muslim moral codes on citizens. In November, Hamadi Jebeli, secretary general of the Islamist Ennahda party, was named prime minister, and longtime dissident Moncef Marzouki became president. Ennahda formed a coalition government with center-left secular parties and vowed to refrain from implementing Islamic law or mentioning it in the new constitution. However, unemployment has increased under the new government, the economy has tanked, and Islamic extremism has spread, fueling popular discontent. In addition, the ultraconservative Salafis, who promote Islamic law, burned down bars and have threatened to demolish shrines that they deem sacrilegious. Ennahda has been accused of condoning the violence against secularists and secularist institutions carried out by the Salafis. Popular discontent with Ennahda grew during the summer of 2013 because the government made little progress on the constitution and had not set a date for elections, and it intensified after the ouster of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, an Islamist member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in July 2013. Ennahda responded by working diligently on a draft constitution and establishing a committee to oversee elections. However, the opposition, made up of secular parties, thwarted Ennahda's attempts to make headway on both. In October, Ennahda agreed to step down and hand power to a caretaker government, led by technocrats that will run the country through elections in the spring of 2014.

The violence continued through 2012 and reached a peak in early 2013 following the assassination in February of the leftist opposition leader Chokri Belaid, who had been critical of the Islamists. Tens of thousands of anti-government protesters marched through Tunis after his death, saying the government and its religious platform fueled the killing. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a leader of Ennahda, called on the Islamic-led cabinet to resign and be replaced by nonpartisan technocrats, but the party rebuffed him and he resigned. Interior Minister Ali Larayedh took over as interim prime minister and formed a government. Mohamed Brahmî, a National Assembly member and the head of the opposition People's Party, was assassinated in July 2013. The government said a militant group linked to al-Qaeda was responsible, and the opposition blamed the government for allowing such Islamic extremists to continue operating in the country. As Tunisia was on the brink of spiralling into political chaos, political foes Ghannouchi, the leader of the Islamist party Ennahda, and Beji Caid Essebsi, a former foreign minister who served as interim prime minister in the transition period after the 2011 uprising, met several times and hashed out a deal in December 2013 that named industry minister Mehdi Jomaa as prime minister. He will preside over the government until elections are held sometime in 2014. The compromise was a stunning show of political fortitude on the part of Ghannouchi and Essebsi, who put the country's future over their own. Al-Jazeera (2014)

IX. Governments' Approval of a New Constitution

After two years of painstaking negotiations between secularists and Islamists, the National Constituent Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of the new constitution in January 2014. Ennahda abandoned its requirement that the constitution recognize Tunisia as an Islamic state that observes Sharia law and the secularists agreed that the document would say that Islam is the national religion. The constitution also spells out that Tunisia is a civil state with a separation of powers between the president and parliament, recognizes men and women as equals, calls for parity for women in elected bodies, and protects freedom of religion and expression. Tunisia was widely praised for producing a fair and progressive constitution, one of the most liberal in the Middle East. In October 2014 elections, the secularist coalition NidaaTounes (Tunisian Call) won 85 out of 217 seats in parliament, defeating Ennahda, the governing Islamist party, which took 69 seats. Ennahda came under fire for failing to lift the lackluster economy and for being unable to stem the spread of jihadism in the country. NidaaTounes is headed by BejiCaidEssebsi, an 88-year-old former government minister who headed the interim government in 2011. The election was considered fair and free of irregularities. November's presidential elections were closer than expected. Essebsi prevailed over MoncefMarzouki, 39.5% to 33.4%, and a runoff is necessary. Marzouki, a former dissident, has served as interim president since 2011. He has vowed to preserve the democratic reforms that resulted from the revolution and warned that the country would revert back to authoritarianism if NidaaTounes held both the presidency and premiership. Al-Jazeera (2014)

X. Conclusion:

Many viewed Ben Ali's "constitutional coup" as a sham, orchestrated by an opportunist intent on inheriting the Bourguiba dictatorship, not transforming it. Ben Ali was simply performing for an eager audience, but probably knew that his legitimacy would always be questioned and forced him to sustain his progressive and authoritative image at whatever costs. After a couple of years, it became obvious that the system was becoming more repressive than it had been under Bourguiba and that many of the individual freedoms that had been promised were not only being unfulfilled but were actually being limited further than they had been in the past. People quickly realized that the cult of personality had returned when Ben Ali took over; many noted that they were happy to see after all that the towering images of Bourguiba had been taken down to close that chapter on Tunisia's period of dictatorship, but no sooner were they replaced with those of Ben Ali. Ben Ali's regime was showing signs that his presidency would also be extensive, and even more corrupt than Bourguiba's had ever been. It is clear now that the regime's longevity and the consecration of a rigid authoritarian apparatus represented the ultimate end goals for Ben Ali and discredits the perceived contrast to Bourguiba, given the extensive period of dictatorship and repression that ensued within just years after his coup. This valuable assessment of Ben Ali's constitutional coup rationalizes the continuation of an authoritarianism that simply passed from "one personalistic leader to another." There is a clear disassociation with the significance attributed to the regime's change in leadership at the most fundamental levels, since the regime's survival and re-stabilization required only a minimal change within the regime's elite (prime minister to president). This "shallow" transition as described; highlighted potentially threatening consequences for a regime ill-prepared for domestic opposition. It is therefore asserted that the penetration of civil and security soft-liners was directly responsible for the removal of Bourguiba; however, even though it seemed to have worked to the opportunistic advantages of Ben Ali in the initial period, it later took a differential twist at the autocratic regime, which left it reign and make left in the hearts and on the lips of Tunisians. Democracy, be it at its fragile form or advancing into a mature stage has finally crawled into Tunisia and will remain a model for other Arab state who have also undergone this rigorous phase of uprisings. Murphy (2011)

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