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Islamists' Travails in Tunisia

Anouar Boukhars

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About the Author

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Summary

Tunisia is struggling with insecurity, social tensions, and ideological divisions three years after President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali was ousted during a popular uprising. But the country is making progress on the path to democracy. Islamist and secular politicians have struck a potentially landmark agreement that could get Tunisia's democratic transition back on track. To solidify gains and ensure that a successful Tunisian experiment reverberates across the Arab world, socio-economic struggles that fuel protests and radicalism must be confronted.

Deep Divisions

- Tunisia's major Islamist and secular political forces reached a general accord on the institutional bases for completing the democratic transition.
- The agreement is a major victory for pragmatism over divisive politics. It required political actors who have long deeply mistrusted each other to overcome their enmity and forge nonideological agreements.
- Political struggles between Islamists and secularists are fueled by a tension between individual and religious rights, not competing political doctrines of government.
- Islamist-secularist tensions are exacerbated by the rise of Salafism, a more conservative form of Islamism than that advocated by the Ennahda movement, which led the government from November 2011 to January 2014.
- Political infighting and Ennahda's inexperience hampered government efforts to design and implement a strategy to reduce the country's unemployment rates and economic disparities between the impoverished interior and the more developed coastal areas.
- Failure to address Tunisia's socioeconomic problems deepened the divide between the people and the politicians and contributed to the rise of radical Salafism in the most economically distressed areas of the country.

Implications for Tunisia's Future

The economy is key. The incoming interim government needs to generate the means necessary to finance the budget and provide targeted investments to the most restive and marginalized regions of the country. Social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement of the communities in the interior and border regions is breeding social unrest, criminality, and angry radicals.

Security sector reform should be expedited. The professionalization of the Ministry of Interior, internal security services, and the justice sector is necessary to gain the trust of citizens and stem the deterioration of law and order. These organizations must be more accountable and legitimate.

Outside support is needed. The United States and its European allies with a direct interest in Tunisia can encourage reforms in the security and economic sectors. By mobilizing investments and financial support for development efforts, Tunisia's Western partners can promote job creation in the most marginalized areas of the country.

Introduction

Three years after the ouster of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia continues to limp along the tortuous road to democracy. The year 2013 was marred by two dramatic political assassinations, a suicide blast, and multiple deadly confrontations between Salafi militants and security services. The spike in insecurity aroused public indignation, poisoned the political climate, and polarized society. Political parties, the media, and civil society organizations seemed stuck in a vicious pattern of mutual recriminations, manipulation, and distrust.

In an important first step toward resolving the crisis paralyzing the country since July, when leftist politician Mohamed Brahmi was assassinated, at the end of 2013 the major political forces reached a general agreement mediated by the country's powerful labor union on the institutional bases for completing the democratic transition. Politicians set the month of January 2014 as the deadline to finalize a new constitution and select an independent election commission. The move paved the way for the resignation on January 9 of the government led by the moderate Islamist party Ennahda and its replacement by a caretaker cabinet led by Mehdi Jomaa, an independent technocrat and former minister of industry.

Months of difficult backroom bargaining between the leaders of the two major political parties in Tunisia appear to be paying off. Seventy-three-year-old Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, and eighty-seven-year-old Beji Caid Essebsi, a former prime minister and head of the secular party Nidaa Tounes, are credited with working out the broad framework that led to the deal between Islamists and about half of the opposition parties.¹

This is a potentially landmark accord between bitter enemies—the Islamists and secularists. Essebsi and the moderates in the secular camp recognized that Islamism is a social and political reality and that the alternative to dialogue and compromise is political chaos and social unrest. Ghannouchi and other moderate Islamists realized that Ennahda would be better off if the process of democratic transition were rapidly completed and power left to an interim independent government. After heated internal debates within the party about the conditions of compromise, the moderate and consensual line won out over the more confrontational strategy preferred by an appreciable portion of Ennahda's activist base that viewed the negotiations as a life-and-death struggle.²

But Tunisia is not out of the woods yet. Several challenges lie ahead. The most difficult are Tunisia's socioeconomic struggles that fuel protests and radicalism. In the last three years, the government, occupied with political infighting and ideological tensions, did not seriously reflect on how to address the country's unemployment rates and economic disparities between the impoverished interior and the more developed coastal areas. The outgoing Islamist-led government's

lack of experience in governing, the country's successive strikes, and Europe's anemic economic growth amplified the distress in Tunisia, with dramatic consequences.

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The failure to improve the economy and reduce social and economic marginalization has deepened the chasm between the youth and state institutions.³ It is also a reason some have turned to radical Salafism in the most economically distressed areas of the country. In the impoverished suburbs of the big cities and the country's poor peripheral regions, a small minority of Salafists is increasingly dabbling in contraband and criminality and resorting to violence—potentially a

major threat to Tunisia's security and stability.⁴

To deal with the problem of radical Salafism, the Tunisian government has to undertake security sector reform and address the socioeconomic conditions that drive people toward extremist positions. The Ennahda-led government came up short on both counts. Its strategy toward radical Salafists was contradictory and inconsistent. This led to a fractured Islamist movement and made political compromise with the opposition very difficult.

The new government will also face pressure to confront radical Salafists. Firmness will be necessary to weed out the most dangerous extremists. But a purely security-based approach will risk further radicalization and confrontation with state institutions. The challenge now for Mehdi Jomaa and his security cabinet is how to restore state authority without falling into the traps of overreaction, abuse of human rights, and indiscriminate repression.

Pragmatism and compromise have served Tunisia well. But if the current government is to succeed in restoring security, achieving political stability, and steering the country toward democratic consolidation, it also needs urgent help from its international partners.

Old Fault Lines

The formation of a coalition government led by Ennahda and two secular parties in 2011 gave reason for hope that Tunisian politics might be transcending decades of poisonous acrimony between Islamists and secularists. The regimes of both Habib Bourguiba, who was president until 1987, and Ben Ali, who was overthrown in 2011, excelled at exploiting and harnessing secularists' fear of Islamists as a principal mechanism to exert social control and sustain their authoritarian reign.

The Islamist movement in Tunisia became politicized in the mid-1970s and then institutionalized in 1981 under the banner of the Islamic Trend Movement. When Ben Ali, a former army general and interior minister, took over power from a senile Bourguiba and promised to open up the political system to more competition and democracy, Islamists—a mass movement by 1988—sought legal recognition under the name Ennahda (renaissance).⁵ “As it turned out, though,” writes Middle East analyst Michael Koplow, “the prospect of a strong Islamist opposition, and especially of an Islamist government at some point down the road, was too much for Ben Ali and the Tunisian state to bear.”⁶ Initially supportive of opening up the political system, secular politicians balked when their limited electoral appeal became evident in the parliamentary elections of 1989. Despite allegations of fraud, the Islamists, running on independent lists, managed to score the second-highest number of votes (17 percent) after the ruling party. In some big cities their share reached 25 to 30 percent.⁷ This marked a turning point, ushering in a long period of repression of Ennahda. Several of the party’s members, including Ghannouchi, spent time in exile in Europe.

Ben Ali, like Bourguiba, portrayed Islamists as dangerous reactionaries who manipulated religious symbols to exploit the gullibility of the poor, uneducated, and misinformed. Islamism was caricatured in the media as a foreign import and a great menace to the national essence. Islamist thoughts and conceptions were products of the local consciousness and have always manifested themselves, either independently or in combination with others, but state propaganda denied this.

Both presidents scoffed at the notion that there are in fact different shades of Islamism. Reformist Islamism of the kind advocated by Ennahda was seen as an oxymoron; in the eyes of the regimes, there were only doctrinaire Islamist reactionaries and violent extremists, no reformist middle ground. Islamism was maligned as a repugnant ideology that was unfit for political life and that deserved to be confined to obscurity.

Fearful of radical social change and violence if Islamists came to power, an appreciable part of the secular elite under Ben Ali opted to come under the protective wings of authoritarianism, safely abiding by the regime’s rules rather than risking disorderly sweeps of democratization.

It is this fear of Islamism, writes Tunisian political scientist Taoufik Medini, that led some secularists to condone Ben Ali’s attempts to uproot political Islamists from Tunisia.⁸

A relative lull followed the January 2011 revolution that led to Ben Ali’s ouster and the October 2011 elections in which Ennahda won the highest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly, which drafted the constitution. But fear of Islamism among some self-defining secularists soon resurged. The tension over freedom versus regulation or ideology versus pragmatism has

The tension over freedom versus regulation or ideology versus pragmatism has deeply shaped the nature of politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

deeply shaped the nature of politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia.⁹ Islamists and secularists argue incessantly over the social models of life they want to preserve or promote. Each camp fears that its individual ways of life (dress codes, dietary habits like alcohol consumption, and so on) might be jeopardized in the absence of absolute constitutional guarantees of individual liberties and religious rights. In these debates, the principles of political rights figure less prominently. “Politics was defined around interrogations inherent to belief and conduct,” writes Harvard University’s Malika Zeghal, “rather than around ‘models’ or blueprints for a social and political order.”¹⁰ In other words, the political warfare witnessed among the political parties and civil society is not fueled by competing political doctrines of government or divergences over the appropriate social contract.

The old, deeply engrained battle lines over the role of religion in the public space and the conception of freedom and values quickly resurfaced after the brief post-revolution respite as secularists and Islamists argued over the meanings and limits of those principles. The modernist camp, as non-Islamists like to refer to themselves, wanted freedom of speech and expression to be completely liberalized except the manifestations that they believed infringed on their individual ways of life or promoted the Islamization of society. Many elites were, for example, shocked when, at the end of 2011, female students demanded their right to wear the face veil on the campus of Manouba University. Such an act was seen as the beginning of a deliberate campaign to destroy the progressive values of modern Tunisia.

The Islamists, too, supported free speech that protects political rights and liberates religious institutions and discourse from the state’s control. But they were deeply distrustful of the secularist project for society, which Ennahda’s Ghannouchi depicted as authoritarian and driven by a desire to exclude religion from the public arena and politics.¹¹ So like secularists, many Islamists wanted to impose proper constitutional safeguards to prevent religion from being marginalized and religiously “offensive” free speech or expression from being propagated.

The eruption of several controversies over the extent of freedom of expression heightened the mistrust among Islamists and secularists and intensified the culture wars that continue to hamper the democratic transition. Some members of Ennahda have, for instance, pushed unsuccessfully to criminalize blasphemy. Others resorted to the judiciary to punish behavior they deemed as constituting an offense against religion. For example, the director of the journal *Attounissia* was ordered on March 8, 2012, to pay a fine for publishing a photograph of a naked woman on the journal’s cover page. Several artists were also targeted for offending public morality.

Ennahda’s leadership tried to steer clear of these controversies, but that opened the movement up to criticism from secularists who accused it of surrendering to pressure from its right wing and Salafists.

Ennahda and the Secularists

To mollify fears, both camps tried to negotiate a legal framework that provided adequate guarantees for civil liberties, human rights, and religious freedoms. Unfortunately, a series of miscalculations and shock events have reinforced the rift between secularists and Islamists.

Concessions and Missteps

Once it ascended to power after winning elections in October 2011, Ennahda was handed the opportunity to put into practice its theoretical commitment to democracy. But its lack of experience in governance, internal divisions, and ambivalence about the relationship between state and religion complicated its efforts to reassure its non-Islamist adversaries.¹²

The party wanted religion to be free from the control of the state but at the same time insisted that the state must engage and organize religion. This emphasis on the centrality of religion to the polity allowed Ennahda to defend to its supporters its commitment to a civil state that is democratic but not divorced from religion.

In governance, however, this desire to legislate based on religious references and values created tension.¹³ At its extreme, Ennahda's stance on the role of religion in public life intensified the secularists' fear about the "sinister" motives of Islamists. Debates within the party about constitutionalizing sharia law, institutionalizing the complementarity of man and woman, and criminalizing blasphemy ratcheted up Ennahda's clashes with secularists to the point of intractability. Ennahda issued a draft law calling for the political exclusion of senior members of the former ruling party and for personnel changes in the security and judicial sectors that were interpreted by the party's opponents as further evidence of Islamists' designs to control the main levers of the state and impose their radical ideology on society.

In interviews, several Ennahda parliamentarians conceded that they have made errors but insist that the party has governed in coalition with two secular parties (Ettakatol and the Congress for the Republic) and has a track record of seeking compromise and consensus on social and political issues. The party opposed attempts by some of its members to criminalize blasphemy and constitutionalize sharia, they have asserted, and partially yielded on its preference for a parliamentary system of government.

Ennahda has been making concessions to help break the stalemate.¹⁴ It agreed to cede major ministries to independent technocrats after secular leader Chokri Belaid was shot dead on February 2, 2013. During a national dialogue that began in October 2013, it accepted the opposition's demands of handing over the reins of power to an independent and technocratic caretaker government, provided that it receives guarantees that the rules of the political game will not be stacked against it.¹⁵ Ennahda also agreed to enshrine in the new

constitution guarantees for freedom of conscience and a broad array of rights for women, as well as a prohibition against accusations of apostasy and calls for violence. Making any further concessions is seen as committing political suicide. In interviews in August, several Ennahda parliamentarians evinced a genuine fear that the country would return to the old oppressive order. Many were convinced that secularists were determined to crush them.¹⁶

Ennahda's attempts to ease tensions have been stymied by dramatic political violence and terrorist activity.

Ennahda's attempts to ease tensions were stymied by dramatic political violence and terrorist activity. The instances of violence were timed to coincide with important political benchmarks. On February 2, 2013, secular opposition politician Chokri Belaid was assassinated, just when talks to broaden the ruling coalition were at an advanced stage and a controversial law to ban former regime politicians was gaining momentum in the Constituent Assembly.

The second political murder on July 25 of leftist politician Mohamed Brahmi also came at a critical moment in Tunisia's difficult democratic transition. The country was celebrating its 56th independence day and its politicians were on the cusp of clearing the final hurdles for a landmark constitutional deal.¹⁷ The widely publicized killing of six National Guard service men on October 23 marked both the one-year anniversary of the first free and fair elections held in the country's history and the beginning of the national dialogue.

Various forces have been blamed for the violence. President Moncef Marzouki, a secular centrist and a longtime defender of human rights, publicly blamed counterrevolutionary forces inside and outside the country for fomenting chaos and manipulating Salafi-jihadi groups.¹⁸ In interviews, two Ennahda members of the Constituent Assembly seemed convinced that the old regime manipulated some violent Salafists to commit acts of violence.¹⁹ Others pointed to foreign hands, especially Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Algeria, arguing that those forces used or infiltrated Salafist organizations to sow trouble and destabilize the democratic transition.²⁰ Many in the opposition, however, blamed Ennahda for either laxity in security or outright collusion with religious extremists. They dismissed the party's concessions as underhanded maneuvers to cling to power.

Whether purely coincidental or not, the violence raises concerns that saboteurs are determined to derail the last democratic transition under way in the Arab world.

Secularist Entrenchment

Before the compromise deal of December 14, 2013, to dissolve the Ennahda-led government and form a caretaker government led by Mehdi Jomaa, the desire to roll back the Islamists seemed for some secular politicians to supersede fears of a descent into political chaos or a return to the old authoritarian order.

Since Brahmi's July assassination and the military's overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the positions of Tunisia's secular opposition have hardened considerably. Despite their small numbers, the most radical seemed ascendant and exhibited a disturbing instinctive recourse to undemocratic impulses. This authoritarian reflex manifested itself in a compulsive reliance on anti-Islamist elements in the security forces and the old powers of the pre-revolutionary state.²¹ Unable to enlist the army in upending the Islamists' rule, some secular elites hoped to see a coup emanating from within the Ministry of Interior and national police.

In an editorial in *Le Monde*, a group of Tunisian academics and civil society actors warned that the dangerous game that the political elite were playing risked crushing the revolution. The authors likened the elite's role to that of pyromaniac firefighters. They stoke the crisis, then rush in with a radical solution that advances their own interests.²²

Secular politicians calculated that anti-Islamist ideology might be enough to win them the votes of some of those disenchanted with Ennahda's rule. But the maximalist demands of a hardline but vocal minority ended up creating divisions within the secular opposition. Systematic opposition to pragmatic efforts led by the most powerful unions and business groups to resolve the political crisis gave the impression that some elements in the secular camp were consumed more by their singular focus on Islamism as a mortal enemy than on the success of the national dialogue.²³

The Rise of Competing Forms of Religiosity

The Islamists, too, were split. One of the major factors that heightened the tensions in post-revolution Tunisia was the surge of Salafism in the public sphere and Ennahda's internal divisions over how to deal with a phenomenon that most Tunisians perceive as a threat to security and the democratic transition.

A History of Conflict

The ideological struggle between Islamists and Salafists has been an organic part of the Tunisian Islamist debates for decades. For reformist Islamists, Salafists have always posed a theoretical and ideological challenge as well as a hindrance to their political project. The rupture between the two currents played out openly in doctrinal, ethical, and political battles that Rached Ghannouchi led against the Salafists from his exile in England.²⁴

Islamists long assumed that their reformist Islamist ideology presented a solution to the malaise that Tunisia endured under Ben Ali. The former president's politics of depoliticization and de-Islamization along with the contradictions of his economic development policies created a social crisis that had a profound disorienting effect on many Tunisians. Most youths were frustrated by the wrenching social transformations triggered by the moral hazards of

globalization and their regime's pursuit of public policies detached from moral practices, accountability, and social justice.

Ennahda members believed that Ghannouchi's charisma and his employment of a democratic Islamist narrative would appeal to the marginalized and socially excluded. As agents of political and ideological socialization, Ennahda believed initiation to Islamism passed naturally through their movement. Ennahda hoped that its attempts at rationalizing its value-norm system and assigning a pragmatic function to Islamist thought in politics would appeal in an increasingly differentiated social setting.

While this was largely true, in its efforts to build an ideological construct that is pragmatic and capable of speaking to large swathes of society, the movement lost ground in the most neglected areas of the country. Secularists depict Ennahda as the embodiment of the poor and Arabicized lower classes, but the party's supporters are mostly educated and urban.²⁵ During its two decades in the wilderness, Ennahda tried to reassure the middle class and its secular critics that it did not have a radical religious agenda or redistributive economic plan. That effort created a disconnect between the party and the poor communities it claimed to represent.

The party lost some of its monopoly on religious social activism as it scrambled to survive both the ruthless onslaught of state repression under Ben Ali and the concomitant rise of new forms of religiosity and ideological production. In addition to this, the confines imposed by exile forced the party to concede terrain to other emerging brands of religious populism that benefited from deepening social malaise and a gaping ideological void.

As a result, a new generation of disaffected Tunisians grew up with little exposure to Ennahda. Some of the most desperate and insecure found in Salafism and its social structures a refuge from social and moral dislocations.

The Many Faces of Salafism

Salafism is a Sunni intellectual tradition that offers a particularistic understanding of theology, not a homogenous force. Salafists preach the same doctrines; all Salafi currents have as objectives the imposition of sharia law, the elimination of impious behavior, and the establishment of an Islamic state in Tunisia. But their strategies are tailored to specific individual needs and circumstances. Depending on the local and international context, Salafism can take different forms, ranging from peaceful proselytizing and political quietism to violent moral policing and armed struggle. Under Ben Ali, Salafism was practiced by a minority, and it had two primary currents: apolitical Salafiya Ilmiya and a jihadist, political strand.

Salafiya Ilmiya (Scientific or Scripturalist Salafism) was undergirded by a literalist understanding of Islam and was closely associated with Saudi scholars. It was nonviolent and nonconfrontational toward the regime. Its followers avoided "godless" politics, concentrating instead on the more fulfilling

and purposive acts of proselytizing for their creed. Only when proper belief is embedded in people's minds and practice can the prophetic model of political experience materialize. Salafists were fond of reminding their followers that it took the Prophet Muhammad thirteen years of patient proselytizing and strategic engagement to weaken pagan rule and invade the political realm.²⁶

The apolitical orientation of this Salafi tendency shielded it from the wrath of the security services. Its small number of preachers and limited places of learning were not harassed as long as they avoided inciting political controversies, sedition, and violence. These Salafists in a way got a boost in organizing grassroots operations from the same state authorities that harshly repressed political Islamists.

Under Ben Ali, a small number of disaffected Tunisians converted to this type of Salafism. They congregated with like-minded religious soul mates in discussion groups (*balaqat ilm*), designated cafes, and mosques in areas where discontent was widespread and focalized, such as the popular suburbs of the capital (Ettadhamen and Intilaka), the neglected center-west (Sidi Bouzid), and cities like Bizerte, Menzel Bourguiba, Rades, and Ezzahra.²⁷ Others gathered virtually in Internet chat rooms or other online spaces where they bypassed the regime's control of information and circumvented its censorship of Salafi literature.²⁸ These virtual experiences, supported by local charismatic preachers, helped generate feelings of identification and solidarity. They also provided the religious framework to understand their "corrupt" settings.

Gradually, this closed mindset based on linked fate led to the formation of small, radical cliques intent on aggressively and at times violently challenging the status quo. This jihadist current is rejected by apolitical Salafists and the Islamist camp.

Virtual spaces became mediums through which initiation into violent extremism took place. Radical preachers and jihadi recruiters urged Muslims to defend their beliefs and values by joining the battlefields where Islam was under siege. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, dozens of Tunisians answered these calls for violence and militancy abroad, and these holy warriors also "began to entertain links with people back home."²⁹

Because of the repressive state apparatus, violent jihad was mainly carried out abroad, namely in Iraq. Domestically, Salafi jihadists were implicated in the April 11, 2002, terrorist attack on Djerba as well as the "Soliman affair" in 2006–2007, the first serious terrorist threat in the history of Tunisia.³⁰

Another group of Salafists does not fit neatly into either the apolitical or the jihadist current. Most were young, self-taught, and influenced by satellite television channels.³¹ They were more individualistic and had different social leanings and political orientations.

Across the board, most Salafi recruits followed a similar pattern. They were between sixteen and thirty years old, came from the same socially disadvantaged neighborhoods, had a low level of education, and possessed weak religious

grounding. They were often a town's petty traders and hawkers with histories of dabbling in a wide variety of illegal and criminal activity. After stints in jail, some stumbled into Salafism as a new conduit for self-affirmation and as an outlet from social marginality.³²

Salafism After the Revolution

Salafism did not just emerge with the 2011 revolutionary ferment, though before the January 2011 revolution the majority of Salafists avoided politics and treaded carefully in their actions. After the stunning overthrow of Ben Ali, they saw an opportunity to shed their caution and push to implement the law of God. Some youths who had "Salaficized" clandestinely under Ben Ali came out of the shadows dedicated to the unfinished work of spreading their ideas. Even Salafi jihadists attempted to enter the political fray, renouncing the use of force and forbidding jihadi violence in the new Tunisia.

Salafists undertook a fast and furious drive to reshape the Tunisian religious and social landscape after hundreds of Salafists were released from prison and several prominent sheikhs returned to Tunisia from their sanctuaries in Western Europe. Their spiritual awakening manifested itself in greater religiosity (distinct dress codes and rituals) and in the adoption of a strict black-and-white discourse (the good versus the bad, licit versus illicit, and so on).

Scripturalist Salafists set up several charities and schools to reclaim Islam's preeminence in society. And newly founded associations ratcheted up pressure on Tunisia's new rulers to carve out a bigger role for Islam in politics.

But it was Salafi jihadists who took the most advantage of the political transition.

The Appeal of Salafi Jihadism

The Salafi jihadists employed a two-track strategy in the new political context, broadening their support base in poor urban neighborhoods through social activism and the propagation of Salafi ideology while at the same time aggressively recruiting disaffected Tunisians into international jihadi squads fighting in Algeria, Syria, and Mali. At home, they promised not to wage violence against the state because it had shed authoritarianism and ceased repressing religion. Only in abodes where God's law was still besieged and preaching was restricted did *qital* (fighting or killing) remain a duty.³³

Their effort was widespread. They set up shop in several Tunisian mosques, forcefully pushing out imams and religious figures imposed by the former regime. Out of 5,000 mosques, as many as 1,000 fell under the control of radical Salafists.³⁴ They turned these places of worship into spaces where they railed against the evils of secularism and Westernization. In their zeal to prevent vice and promote virtue, these Salafi vigilantes attacked art shows, desecrated mausoleums, and burned liquor stores. In some neighborhoods where they were dominant, they pressured residents to conform to a strict Salafi code

of conduct. In others, they formed morality squads to enforce codes of moral strictures, especially dress codes and the separation of men and women.

In poor urban zones marked by social malaise, isolation, and high unemployment, they positioned themselves as agents of order and purveyors of transparent justice. They also volunteered to resolve interpersonal disputes and other civic issues. During disturbances, they deployed their men to protect vital economic assets, public buildings, and private property.³⁵ The part of the underground economy that they controlled became not only a means of subsistence but also of order and social connectedness.

Jihadists stressed the contrast between their activism, charity work, and economic relations and the political polarization and partisan gridlock that rocked state institutions, hurt the economy, and created social unrest. They argued that their overlapping religious, social, and economic agendas fostered a sense of communal bonding that transcended petty squabbles and destructive political divides.

The jihadists invested heavily in social activism, providing jobs, Islamic education, alms to the poor, and a simple justice system—a quite successful approach. “One new adherent to the movement,” writes Tim Whewell of the BBC, “joined after Salafists found and brought back property that had been stolen from his premises.”³⁶

The appeal of Salafi discourse and radical activism can be attributed to the disillusionment of a small but significant minority of Tunisian youth in the most marginalized communities with a democratic transition that has struggled to meet their aspirations for jobs and social justice. Most feel betrayed by the post-revolutionary political process, which they perceive as dominated by a coterie of old politicians intent on reproducing the same exclusionary economic policies of the old regime. Salafism offers them a way to further their political and social preferences through revolutionary methods.

Salafi jihadism provides the promise for youths to acquire an authentic individual identity and new self-worth to respond to their social marginality and exclusion. It also provides an avenue for fame and adventure. Most of the converts to Salafism after the revolution embraced Salafi jihadism because of its revolutionary fervor and confrontational street tactics. It “is a subculture that represents an alternative form of political protest and lifestyle, but does not necessarily manifest itself in violence,” writes Tunisia expert Monica Marks.³⁷

Salafi jihadism became appealing in poor areas because it posited a dynamic, radical agenda that stood in stark contrast to the anemic agendas of the left and old-fashioned political Islam. It became almost a psychological phenomenon with its own constructed myths about how alienated Tunisians can conceive of their identities and gain acceptance in social settings where they express themselves and nurture their spirituality. To adherents, this market of significance

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with its own doctrines and practices provided an escape from social dislocations and the compromised Islam preached in state-controlled mosques.

The media has depicted Salafi jihadism as a monolithic movement, but events on the ground show that the movement is fragmented. Even when they adopt Salafi social norms and lifestyles, some Salafi jihadists are resistant to joining organizational structures that they see as divisive and contradictory to Salafi teachings. According to Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, since the revolution, “a number of younger sheikhs operate outside any organizational structure and lead the ‘local’ group, as they see fit, relying on ideological inputs from a number of different sources, both national and international.”³⁸ Each group has its own leadership that devises messaging and recruiting strategies. The top spot in each group usually goes to battle-hardened veterans who fought in Afghanistan and other conflict areas. Former prisoners also hold leadership positions, as they are regarded as symbols of resistance and inspirational figures.³⁹ The proliferation of these groups has posed problems of coordination and control, despite attempts at informal collaboration.

Attempted Institutionalization

Salafi jihadism has not yet been transformed into a coherent movement. In fact, the only serious attempt at institutional collective action came with the radical Salafi group Ansar al-Sharia, which the government labeled a terrorist organization in May 2013.

Abu Iyadh, the head of the organization, captured in Libya in late December, has defended the path of formal structuration based on the necessities of the moment. He argues that Salafi jihadism has grown exponentially and needs to be structured and managed. Without formal organization and mobilizing structures, the connections between the jihadi sheikhs and followers are frayed, and this lack of central control over strategy and organization might lead to counterproductive actions that hurt the movement. Unplanned and untargeted violence has proven costly for the Salafi jihadists, for instance, shocking most Tunisians, alienating target constituencies, and inviting state repression.

To broaden its base of followers, Ansar al-Sharia embedded itself into the social fabric of poor areas where state authority was absent by concentrating on charitable activities and the provision of law and security. The weakening of the state’s authority and the disorganization of its security forces after the collapse of the Ben Ali dictatorship facilitated the organization’s drive to create social spaces where it could impose social and moral order.⁴⁰ Ben Ali relied on the police and legions of paid informants to monitor Salafi radicals and political opponents, and after his ouster, this network of spies was disbanded, opening space for Salafi mobilization and action. Some members of the police force across the country either defected or were reluctant to exercise their duties for fear of revenge or prosecution for their past functions in Ben Ali’s hated security apparatus. As Monica Marks stated, “the revolution upended Ben

Ali's authoritarian pyramid, disrupting chain of command structures at the national and municipal levels."⁴¹

Ansar al-Sharia aggressively marketed itself as a rational organization committed to promoting human capital. It targeted its recruitment effort at the third current of Salafists—the mainly young group that was neither apolitical nor jihadist. In several instances, Iyadh lambasted political and business elites for imposing on society an imported and failing economic model. To bring about social justice and economic fairness, he said in May 2012 that the financial system needed to be fundamentally changed. As if in campaign mode, Iyadh called for strengthening the role of workers through the establishment of Islamic unions and watchdog associations. He outlined new development opportunities through the introduction of different forms of tourism that are, according to him, morally superior to and more lucrative than current alternatives that pollute local cultures and damage communities.⁴²

On the other side of the coin, some Salafists are completely opposed to any forms of institutionalization. They argue that it is not allowed under Salafi doctrine because it divides the community of believers and violates the sacred principle of *tawhid* (the unity of God). There are also strategic reasons for opposition, as institutionalization makes Salafists easily identifiable targets for repression.

To bridge the differences between the extremes, a third group calls for the creation of “a much looser association with a clear hierarchical structure dominated by older sheikhs.”⁴³ But for now, the movement remains divided. And Salafi jihadism's structural heterogeneity and the absence of clearly identifiable leaders complicate the government's attempts to engage, negotiate with, or suppress Salafi jihadists.

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Dealing With the Salafi Surge: Competing Visions

When it came to power, Ennahda was confronted with the challenge of handling Salafi radicalism and violence. The revolutionary moment brought the ideological struggles between reformist Islamism and Salafism into the open. Despite Ennahda's consciousness of the ideological challenge that Salafists posed, Islamists were surprised after the revolution to discover that Salafism had become a social reality in the country, especially in the most disaffected areas.

There were three contradictory views within the party over how to address the challenge of Salafism: engage with the Salafists, collaborate with the nonviolent adherents, or take a hardline stance against the radical wing of the movement.⁴⁴

Engagement

The first and dominant one is a centrist strategy that emphasized engagement and persuasion. Its proponents have contended that being hard-nosed on radical Salafists would be highly ineffective and would increase the likelihood of recruitment into violent extremist organizations.

Ennahda's Rached Ghannouchi is the chief defender of this soft-side approach. He has warned that it was Ben Ali's repression of political Islam and social exclusion of peripheral communities that drove some Tunisians into religious radicalism.⁴⁵ Ghannouchi was cognizant that tempering Salafism's rise would require operating on a long time horizon, but he was confident that a state strategy that focused less on coercive demands and more on integrating marginalized groups would end up forcing Salafists to moderate their behavior.⁴⁶

According to Ennahda, Salafism's excess of religious emotionalism and desire for cultural confrontation were attributable to youth's fervent zeal.⁴⁷ Outraged and constrained by the old regime, young radicals saw in the revolution an opportunity to forcefully articulate their cultural expressions and promote their militant understanding of Salafism. Many were unwilling to tolerate any restrictions on their religious and cultural activities or give in to "narrow-minded" pragmatism, Ennahda's Osama Al Saghir, a member of Tunisia's Constituent Assembly, told me in Tunis last August.

Ennahda saw this youth militancy as a passing phase. The new freedoms present a cathartic chance to release pent-up frustrations and anger. Once the youth realized the impracticality of their goals, they would temper their ardency. Ghannouchi likes to point to his own party's trajectory as a primer in the evolutionary ideological moderation of religious movements.⁴⁸ The moment Ennahda's leaders discovered that ideological purity was leading to a dead end, they began a radical rethinking of their political and ideological views. In a democratic Tunisia, he says, Salafists will be forced to initiate ideological revisions once their utopic experimentation hits a wall.

Ghannouchi genuinely believes that in a free market of ideas, Salafists will see the wisdom of adopting a gradual and pragmatic approach to promoting Islamic values and morals. In one of his controversial remarks, he pleaded with young Salafists to adjust their tactics, proceed with caution, and most importantly appreciate how far they have come. If they overreached, he warned them, the freedoms they enjoy could be fleeting. As a cautionary tale, Ghannouchi used the Algerian tragedy of the 1990s to show Salafists the dangers of moving too fast. Algerian Islamists misread the balance of power and tried to quickly dominate the political system, alarming secular parties, civil society organizations, and several intellectuals and media personalities. Ghannouchi warned that the resultant military coup to "save the republic" could also happen in Tunisia, where visceral opponents of Salafists and Islamists still hold powerful positions in the military, security services, media, and judiciary.

The Ennahda leader was trying to convince impatient Salafi preachers and leaders of Islamic associations to pick their battles carefully. When they escalated their street protests for the inclusion of sharia in the constitution, Ghannouchi asked them not to lose sight of the big picture: “Why are you still insisting on sharia when you can open a [Koranic] school?” He argued that such demands were unnecessary and counterproductive, stemming from superficial thinking and serving only to distract from the goal of reassuring the people and cementing Islamist political and social gains.⁴⁹

Ghannouchi consistently denounced Salafi violence. “We must be firm with those who break the law,” he said, “but some of our opponents, they want us to adopt the same methods as Ben Ali, opening prison camps, arresting thousands of people, and using torture and kangaroo courts just because they belong to this group.” Ghannouchi insisted on making a distinction between ideological belief and criminal acts. “If a driver doesn’t stop at a red light, he should not be asked what his ideology is, but told he has broken the law.”⁵⁰

In the dozen discussions Ghannouchi had with Salafists, he encouraged them to invest in peaceful social activism and follow the path of Jabhat al-Islah, the first Salafi experiment in politics.⁵¹ The party’s founder, Mohamed al-Khouja, is a reformed jihadi who renounced support for violence and terrorism, and he is usually held as an example of behavioral and ideological deradicalization.

The recent jihadi returnees from Iraq and other theaters of conflict have not followed a similar trajectory. Veteran jihadists in the biggest and most notorious Salafi organization—Ansar al-Sharia—have, for example, refused to heed these calls. Iyadh scoffed at Ennahda’s overtures, insisting that preaching and radical activism are the best ways to implement God’s law.

Complicating matters further for Ennahda is that the new Salafi parties that have renounced violence and are taking part in the political process have struggled to gain footing in traditional Salafi strongholds. For instance, Jabhat al-Islah, a party that was formed in 2012, is unwaveringly committed to the application of sharia law, which offers the disenfranchised youth the promise of justice and equality for all under the law.⁵² Still, the younger generation sees the party as the representation of an older generation of Salafists that is disconnected from the needs and demands of the disenfranchised youth. The party’s emphasis on political structures and the slow and unsure process of legislative institutionalization of Salafi demands have little appeal in Tunisian Salafi circles.

So far, most young Salafists reject involvement in divisive politics and the democratic disconnect it engenders in favor of social activism and “street politics.” Many young Salafists are still uncomfortable with initiating a dramatic turnaround that risks making admissible what has until now been impermissible according to a number of adherents—institutionalizing divisions through forming or joining organizations or political parties. The fact that the leadership of the new Salafi political parties is largely viewed as old and aloof made the case for participating in partisan politics all the more daunting.

Until the assassination of secular leader Chokri Belaid in February 2013, Ghannouchi's conciliatory approach constituted the majority view within Ennahda. The preference was to dissuade radical Salafi factions from extremism and to possibly integrate them into Ennahda or other, already-existing Salafi parties.⁵³

But in the end, Ghannouchi overestimated his ability to exercise moral influence on young Salafists and build a political consensus on how to deal with their challenge.⁵⁴ His attempts to deploy his charismatic skills and religious authority failed to connect with a new generation of youth that is deeply disenchanted with the government and a political transition that they view as class biased and managed by old politicians. Ghannouchi also misjudged the infectious influence that the jihadi returnees had on a new generation of Salafi activists who spent their culturally and ideologically formative years exposed to radical preaching from Saudi Arabia.⁵⁵

Collaboration

The second strategy for dealing with the Salafi challenge is one of collaboration with nonviolent Salafists. The main proponents of this line are ultraconservative Islamist leaders who consider Ennahda and Salafists as part of the same Islamist family.⁵⁶ The strategy is based on the politics of identity and populism. It supports electoral and doctrinal alliances between Islamists and Salafists.

Collaboration between Salafists and Islamists started in the early 1990s with the destruction of Ennahda's formal structures and the penetration of Salafism into Tunisia. While the spread of this new ideology did not fully supplant the established system of political Islam, a number of Islamists embraced Salafi beliefs and practices.⁵⁷ Over time, a subset of Ennahda emerged that blended Salafi thoughts with Islamist politics.⁵⁸

The most important representative of this approach is Sadok Chourou, an influential preacher and a member of the Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting Tunisia's new constitution. He spent twenty years in captivity and has impeccable ideological credentials, earning him the respect of Salafists and the sympathy of political Islamists.⁵⁹ He is the voice of Ennahda's purist camp, a watchdog pressure group that advances an absolutist message and militates for the implementation of sharia law. He uses the threat of Salafi radicalization and violence to extract concessions from the state on the role of religion in society. The application of Islamic laws would pull the rug out from the strident religious extremists who have long relied on the government's relegation of religion to the sidelines of social and intellectual life and to the role of public parasite as effective recruiting tools.⁶⁰

Some within this camp would like to see the Salafization of Ennahda because this would unify the whole Islamist spectrum and marginalize those that advocate violence.⁶¹

Hardline Opposition

The third strategy is the one preferred by the outgoing prime minister, Ali Laarayedh, who has advocated a hardline stance against radical Salafists. He has warned Ennahda that it needs to distance itself from Salafi groups. Laarayedh has argued that failure to stem the propagation of radical Salafism will threaten the political and electoral hegemony of his party, and might end up destroying the democratic transition.

This confrontational strategy was in the minority in Ennahda, as many feared the return of the repressive state tactics of the past. After the security situation deteriorated, this position has become the official party policy.⁶²

Hardliners Win Out

The government was initially reluctant to take on radical Salafists, and it had limited capacity to do so. But Ghannouchi's strategy of selective engagement went off the rails with the political assassination of Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013 and the concurrent rise in terrorist activity.

The uptick in Salafi violence exacerbated the suspicions that secularists had about Islamists' democratic bona fides. Some criticized the engagement approach as a political ploy to appeal to Salafists to vote for Ennahda. Others saw it as a Machiavellian way to Islamicize Tunisian society and roll back the country's progressive legacy.

Ennahda was forced to change strategy. The hardening of the party's approach began in earnest with the branding of Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization in May 2013 and the banning of the organization's annual conference on May 12, 2013. Since then, more than 2,000 Salafis have been apprehended for direct or indirect involvement in violence.⁶³

The challenge now is how to take on the radical extremes in Salafism without falling into the trap of overreaction.

There is no generalizable solution to the Salafi challenge. Lumping all Salafist currents and young Tunisians who identify as jihadists into the basket of violent extremists and terrorists is a simplistic and dangerous approach.

Branding a whole organization as a terrorist group might make good politics but not smart policy. There is a real danger that stigmatizing the tens of thousands of Ansar al-Sharia supporters as terrorists will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Isolated and under attack, the organization has nothing to lose now and might engage in terrorism to disrupt the political transition.⁶⁴

Moreover, repressing Ansar al-Sharia will not solve the problem of Salafi jihadism in Tunisia. There is a plethora of small Salafi groups that act independently of Ansar al-Sharia or use its name to commit acts of violence.⁶⁵

The key is determining how to differentiate between violent Salafists who are the real enemies of the state and nonviolent radicals who just reject the status quo. Many young Salafists have a visceral distrust of politics, feel disconnected

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from their local communities, and hate Western foreign policy. They present a social problem that needs to be kept separate from the terrorism threat posed by violent extremists that preach, incite, and use violence that require a security and judicial response.

Conclusion

Disillusionment in post-revolution states is a hardy perennial. After the initial euphoria fizzles out, depression quickly sets in. This is the plight that Tunisia faces.

The public policies and the grand bargains required to jump-start the transitional process have been difficult to reach because of the absence of basic trust and reciprocity between much of the secular opposition and Ennahda. Shock events, insufficient information about the conflicting groups' motives and interests, and the existence of spoiler groups have reinforced the rift between secularists and Islamists.

In particular, the explosion of Salafism into public life has created deep divisions within Tunisian society over the Salafi agenda and how best to deal with the movement's surge. The Ennahda-led government struggled to manage the radical strand of Salafism, and it paid a heavy political price for its failure. The party's popularity and political standing suffered greatly with every act of violence perpetrated by Salafists. Ennahda dug itself into a deeper hole by failing to quickly fill the security vacuum after the fall of Ben Ali—the absence of central control allowed violent Salafists to operate freely and take advantage of the socioeconomic problems, fueling the movement's growth. In the end, the violence of a small minority of radical Salafists threatened the political fortunes of Ennahda and the very survival of the democratic transition.

Tunisians have grown frustrated with lurching from one political crisis to the next. They are dismayed by the performance of Ennahda in power; the party has failed to contain the Salafi threat, reduce regional economic imbalances, and implement transitional justice. Tunisians are also frustrated with the secular opposition, whose political opportunism does not elicit much confidence.

Politicians' failure to find common ground has negatively impacted the livelihoods of those who need normality to be restored. It has also sapped public trust in the political transition. Increasing numbers of Tunisians now declare that they would trade democracy for political stability and security. In some quarters, there is even nostalgia for strongman rule.⁶⁶

Despite these major challenges and setbacks, Tunisia has managed to limp along. The country has a fairly homogeneous, well-educated population, its army does not have a history of military coups, and its political Islamists are accommodationists—all positive signs for the transition. Both Islamists and their secular opponents know that they lack enough leverage and power to make their adversaries comply with their demands. The pragmatists in the secular opposition realize that they cannot force the Islamists out of power

through popular street actions or a military coup as happened in Egypt. Ennahda is also aware that the alternative to making concessions is political chaos and civil strife. The longer the political impasse persists, the greater the risk that a major terrorist attack or high-profile assassination will doom the talks and drive the country into the unknown. This would be a devastating outcome for Tunisia and the whole region. Fear of this lose-lose scenario is what has so far kept the disputants at the table, negotiating a road map to the completion of the protracted transitional period.

The incoming interim government needs to take distinct steps to move the country forward, including addressing the social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement of some communities that is breeding social unrest, criminality, and angry radicals. Raising the means necessary to finance the budget and launching targeted investments in the most restive and marginalized regions of the country are both necessary.

Urgent government attention is also needed to expedite security sector reform in order to make the actors and institutions tasked with protecting the state and its citizens more professional, accountable, and legitimate. A top priority is to reorganize the Ministry of Interior and establish democratic oversight over its budget and practices. The internal security services and the justice sector also need restructuring and reform. The professionalization of these organizations is necessary to gain the trust of citizens and stem the deterioration of law and order.

The United States and its European allies with direct interest in Tunisia can encourage these reforms in the security and economic sectors. By supporting investments in social and economic development projects, Tunisia's Western partners could promote job creation in the most marginalized areas of the country.

On the domestic political front, hammering out the details of the final deal had been excruciatingly difficult, but the accord struck between Islamists and the secular opposition at the end of 2013 was a victory for pragmatism over divisive ideology and politics. If it is respected, it has the potential to be a seminal moment in Tunisia's history that could reverberate throughout the Arab world.

Notes

- 1 Carlotta Gall, "A Political Deal in a Deeply Divided Tunisia as Islamists Agree to Yield Power," *New York Times*, December 16, 2013, <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/world/africa/a-political-deal-in-a-deeply-divided-tunisia-as-islamists-agree-to-yield-power.html?from=world>.
- 2 In an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps*, Ghannouchi defended his accommodationist approach as necessary in a country "where Tunisians have pushed since the nineteenth century for the construction of a moderate and modernist state that best reconciles universal human values with the precepts of Islam." Ennahda, he asserted, has to coexist with its secular opponents and share power with the most moderate ones. See Angélique Mounier-Kuhn, "La Tunisie a besoin de l'alliance entre islamistes modérés et laïcs," *Le Temps*, January 14, 2014, www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/60eee41a-7c8c-11e3-87e1-5f55d2b2d249/La_Tunisie_a_besoin_de_lalliance_entre_islamistes_mod.
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- 4 See International Crisis Group, *Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, International Crisis Group, Middle East and North Africa Report no. 148, November 28, 2013.
- 5 See Malika Zeghal, "Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition," *Constellations* 20, issue 2, June 2013, 254–74.
- 6 Michael J. Koplow, "First They Came for the Islamists," *Foreign Affairs*, August 28, 2013, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139872/michael-j-koplow/first-they-came-for-the-islamists.
- 7 Khadija Mohsen-Finan, "Changement de cap et transition politique au Maroc et en Tunisie," *Pouvoirs* 145, April 2013, www.revue-pouvoirs.fr/IMG/pdf/Pouvoirs145_p105-121_Transition_Maroc_Tunisie.pdf.
- 8 Taoufik Medini, *History of the Tunisian Political Opposition From the Beginning to the Revolution* (Tunis: Massiliana Editions, 2012), 362.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 539–52.
- 10 Zeghal, "Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition."
- 11 For an in-depth analysis of Ghannouchi's views on Islamists and democracy, political pluralism, and freedoms and human rights, see his book in Arabic, *Democracy and Human Rights in Islam* (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies and Arab Scientific Publishers, 2012).
- 12 For an internal critique of Ennahda's mistakes in government, its inexperience, and its internal ideological divisions, see the interview given in Arabic by Ennahda Vice President Abdelfattah Mourou, "Ennahda Will Sacrifice Ghannouchi and He Is Besieged," *Attounissia*, September 16, 2013, www.attounissia.com.tn/details_article.php?t=42&a=100544&ttemp=1.

- 13 See Zeghal, "Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition."
- 14 See Moumen Bsisou, "Experiment Worthy of Respect," Aljazeera Arabic, January 10, 2013, www.aljazeera.net/home/print/6c87b8ad-70ec-47d5-b7c4-3aa56fb899e2/a4e05b6f-c5b8-4d75-8564-8a4f0db2aaf4.
- 15 See Rached Ghannouchi, "Will the National Dialogue Save the Tunisian Spring?" Al Jazeera Arabic, November 11, 2013, www.aljazeera.net/opinions/pages/f24480c0-db23-4033-8c0a-4fb3c0a9b58e.
- 16 Almost all interviewees point to the calls by some secular elites for prosecuting Ennahda members for their "responsibility" in the degeneration of security in Tunisia. Such threats of prosecution could also be heard in street protests against Ennahda.

Fear led many in Ennahda to sometimes perceive their critics in the opposition as either belonging to or being manipulated by the old regime. The reality is that some were, but an appreciable number were genuinely concerned about the potential Islamization of the country. See "Trois ans après, la Tunisie toujours dans l'ombre de Ben Ali," France Info, January 14, 2014. Ennahda's fault is that it dismissed this fear as exaggerated or concocted to delegitimize Islamists. By underestimating its impact, the party allowed it to fester for too long. Ennahda, as Ghannouchi acknowledged in an interview with the Swiss daily *Le Temps*, should probably have tried much harder to include more secular parties in its government coalition. See Mounier-Kuhn, "La Tunisie a besoin de l'alliance entre islamistes modérés et laïcs."
- 17 Isabelle Mandraud, "Tunisie: la crise politique tourne au chaos," *Le Monde*, October 24, 2013, www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2013/10/24/tunisie-la-crise-politique-tourne-au-chaos_3501949_3210.html.
- 18 Jean-Louis Le Touzet, "En Tunisie, le processus démocratique sera achevé," *Libération*, November 6, 2013, www.liberation.fr/monde/2013/11/06/en-tunisie-le-processus-democratique-sera-acheve_945155.
- 19 According to two observers close to Ennahda, in the aftermath of the revolution, several criminals, hoodlums, and informants of the old regime began to identify as Salafis, and adopted their dress codes. This observation was buttressed by a Crisis Group report on Salafism and violence. "Less than one month after Ben Ali's fall, the jihadi Salafis were infiltrated by gangsters and small-time informers from the ex-ruling party," an officer in the Special Intervention Brigade told the Crisis Group in September 2012. "A year later in a country practically without security, every rascal had become a Salafi," he added. To be sure, radical Salafi preachers have encouraged such pursuit of religious redemption whereby "reformed" criminals make amends for their guilty soul and that of their community by joining the struggle against the forces of injustice. But the abrupt conversion raised several doubts that the new converts were using the Salafi identity to carve out a role of themselves in the informal economy and the lucrative trafficking of drugs and alcohol in peri-urban zones. See International Crisis Group, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report no. 137, February 13, 2013, 20–21.
- 20 For an excellent report on how Saudi Arabia is suffocating the Arab Spring, including in Tunisia, see Christophe Ayad et al., "Le 'grand jeu' de Riyad pour étouffer les 'printemps arabes,'" *Le Monde*, January 13, 2014, www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2014/01/13/le-grand-jeu-de-riyad-pour-etouffer-les-printemps-arabes_4346993_1496980.html.
- 21 Vincent Geisser, "Lettre à mes Amis (es) de L'Opposition Tunisienne," *Le Quotidien Algérie*, July 26, 2013, <http://lequotidienalgerie.org/2013/07/26/lettre-a-mes-amises-de-lopposition-tunisienne>.
- 22 Hèla Yousfi and Choukri Hmed, "Non à l'assassinat de la révolution tunisienne," *Le Monde*, July 29, 2013, www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/07/29/en-tunisie-la-revolution-ne-doit-pas-mourir_3455077_3232.html.

- 23 Farida Dahmani, “Tunisie: qui est le nouveau chef de l’exécutif, Mehdi Jomâa?” *Jeune Afrique*, December 30, 2013, www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2763p058.xml0.
- 24 Interview with Vincent Geisser, *El Kasbah*, December 2, 2012, www.facebook.com/notes/el-kasbah/10-questions-%C3%A0-vincent-geisser/493425510697021.
- 25 As was clearly demonstrated in the 2011 elections, Ennahda fared poorly in the marginalized communities of Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine, winning a paltry 14 percent of the vote. The party scored its highest in urban areas, however. See Zeghal, “Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition.”
- 26 Author’s interview with Mohamed Khouja, July 2012.
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- 28 By the late 1990s, many downloaded and distributed the outlawed books of Ibn Tamiyya and Muhammad Al Maqdisi.
- 29 Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, “Tunisian Salafism: Between Institutional Politics, Dawa and Jihadism,” *Orient* 54, no. 3 (2013): 31.
- 30 Sami Ghorbal, “Comment les salafistes ont été neutralisés,” *Jeune Afrique*, January 7, 2008.
- 31 Geisser, “Ennahdha et les salafistes, radioscopie d’une relation.”
- 32 Ibid.
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- 39 International Crisis Group, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*.
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- 41 Ibid.
- 42 See Wafa Sdiri, “Vidéo: La nouvelle Tunisie aux yeux d’Abou Iyadh, leader des salafistes jihadistes,” Tunisie numérique, May 21, 2012, www.tunisienumerique.com/video-la-nouvelle-tunisie-aux-yeux-d%E2%80%99abou-iyadh-leader-des-salafistes-jihadistes/125679.
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- 44 See Perrine Mouterde, “Au congrès de Kairouan, les salafistes seront tentés de provoquer Ennahda,” France 24, www.france24.com/fr/20130517-tunisie-rassemblement-kairouan-salafistes-tentation-provoquer-Ennahda-geisser.
- 45 See Ghannouchi’s interview with *Al Hayat*, “Attack on Embassies Is Conspiracy Aimed at Stopping U.S. Dialogue With Islamists,” September 30, 2012, <http://alhayat.com/Details/439628>.

- 46 “Rached Ghannouchi: ‘Si nous diabolisons les salafistes, dans dix ou quinze ans, ils seront au pouvoir,’” *Le Monde*, October 10, 2012, www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/10/18/m-ghannouchi-si-nous-diabolisons-les-salafistes-dans-dix-ou-quinze-ans-ils-seront-au-pouvoir_1777448_1466522.html.
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