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## DEFINING POLITICAL CHOICES:

### Tunisia's Second Democratic Elections from the Ground Up

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# BROOKINGS

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We note that this report in no way reflects the opinions of the organizations or individuals who assisted us, and all errors are our own.

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## INTRODUCTION

**O**n October 26, 2014, some 3.5 million Tunisians voted in the country's second parliamentary elections since mass demonstrations in January 2011 prompted former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to flee to Saudi Arabia, formally ending more than half a century of single-party rule. Comprising 217 representatives from 33 districts and 16 electoral lists,<sup>1</sup> Tunisia's unicameral Assembly of the Representatives of the People appears quite different from the National Constituent Assembly elected in October 2011, which was elected to draft a constitution for the transitioning country. Key players in the government of 2011-2013 have seen their vote shares dwindle, while new parties and alliances formed in the interim have quickly gained constituencies. Final tallies saw Ennahda, Tunisia's mainstream Islamist movement, cede its plurality to the Nidaa Tounes, whose leader Beji Caid Essebsi was later elected president in a two-stage run-off election.

Though the electoral results showed a majority of ballots cast for two parties, the diversity of electoral options available to voters speaks both to the vibrancy of Tunisia's political life as well as to the surfeit of social, ideological, and economic divides facing the Arab Spring's lone "success story." If first elections are to be analyzed and evaluated in terms of the procedures adopted to ensure democratic competition, as



<sup>1</sup> 18 seats were allocated to six districts representing Tunisians living abroad.

TABLE 1: VOTE SHARE BY PARTY, 2014

Party	2014 Vote Share	Number of Seats
Nidaa Tounes	37.56	86
Ennahda	27.79	69
Free Patriotic Union (UPL)	4.13	16
Popular Front	3.64	15
Afek Tounes	3.02	8
Congress for the Republic	2.05	4
Democratic Current	1.95	0
People's Movement	1.65	0
The Initiative	1.35	0
Democratic Alliance	1.27	0
Current of Love	1.20	0
Ettakatol	0.71	0

Ellen Lust wrote in a 2012 Brookings report, then second elections may be characterized as the moment in the process of democratization when the substance of parties' platforms and voters' preferences take center stage. In this paper, we explore Tunisia's second elections "from the ground up," using unique survey data to focus our inquiry on those political actors that democratization seeks to empower—voters. With challenges ranging from border security to employment, how do Tunisian voters decide how to cast their ballots? And to what extent do the policy

programs of Tunisian parties mirror the views and commitments of their constituents?

On the day of the parliamentary elections, we partnered with Tunisian non-governmental organization *Sawty, Sawt Chebab Tounes* to survey 1,157 Tunisian voters as they exited polls in the governorates of Beja, Gafsa, Sfax, Tataouine, and Tunis. Each survey respondent answered a battery of open- and closed-ended questions about her or his social background, policy preferences, past political behavior, and priorities for Tunisia moving forward. Their answers tell us a great deal about who votes in Tunisia and why, and about the fault lines and shared commitments coming to define Tunisia's emergent political sphere. Exit surveying for public opinion data is a new methodology in the Middle East, and we believe that capturing the attitudes and perceptions of voters at the time of voting provides the clearest possible snapshot of this crucial election on the grassroots level. This report focuses on three issue areas identified by parties and voters as key challenges facing Tunisia today: religion and politics, economic growth and development, and security.

Tunisian politics are often said to include a strong regional dimension, where geopolitical divides between northern and southern states, and between coastal and inland areas, reflect the legacies of developmental and repressive strategies practiced by previous regimes. From the colonial period until

TABLE 2: VOTE SHARE BY DISTRICT, 2014

	Beja	Gafsa	Sfax 1	Sfax 2	Tataouine	Tunis 1	Tunis 2
Nidaa Tounes	38.35	20.97	31.29	37.88	7.5	35.87	54.93
Ennahda	21.24	27.16	36.21	31.35	63.9	31.74	20.17
Free Patriotic Union (UPL)	5.55	2.83	2.40	1.94	3.6	8.16	3.15
Popular Front	3.25	5.44	4.68	3.24	0.6	3.17	2.97
Afek Tounes	1.10	0.71	3.17	3.64	No list	2.98	4.35

the present day, Tunisia’s state-led economic and social development strategies have heavily favored the country’s north-east (including Tunis) and the eastern Sahel coast (including Sfax), resulting in chronic disparities between these urban centers and Tunisia’s peripheral regions (represented in this survey by Gafsa, Beja, and Tataouine). A great number of Tunisia’s opposition leaders and social movements under autocracy emerged from the south and the interior, underscoring the historically fraught relationship between these marginalized regions and Tunisia’s central state. These legacies are also visible in the relatively higher support of northern and coastal districts for Nidaa Tounes, the party most often understood as representing some prominent members of the “old regime.” One goal of this survey is

to investigate the extent to which Tunisian politics may indeed be explained as a contest between an industrial, cosmopolitan center and an impoverished, conservative periphery. Our survey targeted voters in five governorates emblematic of Tunisia’s geopolitical diversity, representing divergence in key social and political factors including urban-rural distribution, economic base, and historical legacies of activism and regime favoritism (see Survey Appendix for more details on the methodology). Districts in the sample also present clear variation in 2011 voting returns. The extent to which long-standing historical legacies of regional marginalization and favoritism have shaped voters’ opinions and political choices is one of the key questions driving our inquiry.

## THE PARTIES: EVOLUTION OF THE TUNISIAN PARTY SYSTEM, 2011 TO 2014

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**A**fter the 2011 revolution, Tunisia witnessed a proliferation of political parties registered ahead of the quickly-scheduled Constituent Assembly elections. Well over 100 political parties contested the country's first elections, and in some districts, voters faced a choice between over 60 lists. Yet despite these formal numbers based on registration, a select few parties have become popular choices among the majority of Tunisia's voters.

TABLE 3: VOTE SHARE BY PARTY, 2011

Party	2011 Vote Share
Ennahda	37.04
Congress for the Republic	8.71
Ettakatol	7.03
PDP	3.94
The Initiative	3.19
Democratic Modernist Pole	2.79
Afek Tounes	1.89
Tunisian Workers' Communist Party	1.57
Free Patriotic Union	1.26
People's Movement	0.75
Movement of Socialist Democrats	0.56
Democratic Patriots' Movement	0.83

During the 2011 elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), Ennahda placed first

with 89 seats. The Islamist movement was founded in 1981 but was heavily repressed by the previous authoritarian regimes and had not contested elections since 1989. The Congress for the Republic Party (CPR) placed second with 29 seats. The party, formed in July 2001 but not legalized until after the revolution, is composed of ideologically heterogeneous individuals, united in their opposition to the former regime. During the Troika government composed of Ennahda, CPR, and Ettakatol, one of CPR's founders, human rights attorney Moncef Marzouki, was appointed president. The Popular Petition (*Al-Aridha ash-Shabiyya*) emerged in 2011 under the leadership of millionaire Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi. The group was less a party than a group of independent candidates running on the same lists, promising free health care and transportation, and won 26 seats with a significant portion in Hamdi's home district of Sidi Bouzid.

The two additional parties who fared well were opposition parties remaining from the limited political contestation permitted by the previous regime. Ettakatol was formed in April 1994 by Mustapha Ben Jaffar and other activists as a social democratic party, though it was only officially recognized in 2002. The Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) was founded in 1983 as a secular liberal political party under the leadership of Ahmed Najib Chebbi and Maya Jribi, gaining legal recognition in 1988. Though neither party won any seats in parliamentary elections under Ben Ali and the PDP boycotted

contests throughout the 2000s, both parties served important leadership roles as the small opposition permitted under Ben Ali, most notably during the 18 October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms formed in 2005. In the 2011 election, the parties won 20 and 16 seats, respectively. Other smaller parties that won more than 1 seat included the Democratic Pole (5), Afek Tounis (4), the Tunisian Communist Workers Party (3), The People's Movement (2), and the Social Democrats (2).

The NCA elected in October 2011 was originally charged with drafting and promulgating a constitution within one year of formation. However, polarization between the Ennahda-led Troika government and the largely secular opposition delayed progress, with the parties unable to agree over the appropriate structures of representation for Tunisia and the appropriate place of Islam in public life. Public frustration over the lack of progress lead to frequent protests against the Troika that culminated in the political crisis of August 2013, when mass demonstrations both for and against the government paralyzed political and economic life in Tunisia. In the fall of 2013, the parties entered into a “national dialogue.” Though negotiations stalled several times, Ennahda ultimately agreed in December 2013 to cede power to an interim government lead by Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa. The NCA reconvened, and the new Tunisian constitution was adopted on January 20, 2014.

After the political turmoil of the Troika period, the parties most popular among Tunisian voters look slightly different in 2014. Though a number of the same parties contested the elections, a significant portion of parties are either rebranded, newly formed, composed of new members, or employing new campaign tactics as a result of developments over the past three years. Ennahda remains essentially intact from the first elections, defined by an internal cohesion and discipline among its members that appears to be unmatched in the Tunisian political scene. CPR and Ettakatol similarly contested

the election, but a number of their members and voters defected to newer parties as a result of what was considered a betrayal to their core tenets when the parties’ leadership agreed to participate in the Troika government with Ennahda. As a result, the parties won 4 and no seats, respectively, in 2014. PDP, now the Republic Party, similarly failed to win any seats in 2014. The Popular Petition also remained under a new name (*at-Tayyar al-Mahabba*, or the “Current of Love”), and the party won only two seats.

Four new major players emerged during these elections after significant movement and refashioning of parties. Patterns of division, defection, and co-operation among parties witnessed over the last three years have largely been driven by desires to produce a system less dominated by Ennahda and its allies. The most successful of the new players is Nidaa Tounes. The party was initially formed after the 2011 elections and is composed of many members of the former ruling party (the Constitutional Democratic Rally), secular leftists, and members of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and the national employers’ union (UTICA). The party largely campaigned on an anti-Ennahda platform, offering itself as a secular, ‘modern’, pro-business alternative to balance the system against Ennahda dominance—an approach that clearly appealed to voters, given the recent election results.

Three smaller groups round out the majority of the rest of the parliament. The Free Patriotic Union (UPL), a party offering a platform that promotes a free-market economy and rejects Islamism, placed third and won 16 seats. The party was formed by millionaire Slim Riahi after the revolution, but garnered only 1.25 percent of votes in the first election and credits a more professional campaign with the improved outcome in 2014. In addition, an alliance called Front Populaire (*Al-Jabha Ash-Sha'biya*) was formed in 2012 and brought together a number of leftist parties (including the Workers Party and the Democratic Patriots Movement) in

an effort to consolidate the resources of and better represent left and labor interests in the country. The alliance placed fourth with 15 seats. Finally, Afek Tounes saw its representation rise from 4 to 8 seats between 2011 and 2014. The party, currently headed by Yassine Brahim, was formed in 2011 and has worked with other like-minded players over the last three years to achieve more balance in the system. In April 2012, Afek entered into an alliance with the PDP, the Tunisian Republican party, several other minor parties and independent candidates which spawned the Republic Party, though the party ultimately left that alliance and ran its own list and platforms in the 2014 elections.

Electoral laws permitted official campaigning beginning on October 4, 2014. Over the past few years, the majority of parties participated in trainings offered by international organizations such as the International Republic Institute and the National Democratic Institute (or in the case of Nidaa Tounes, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung). As a result, Tunisian parties collectively employed the various grassroots mobilization tactics emphasized in these trainings, including door-to-door campaigning and town hall-style open meetings,

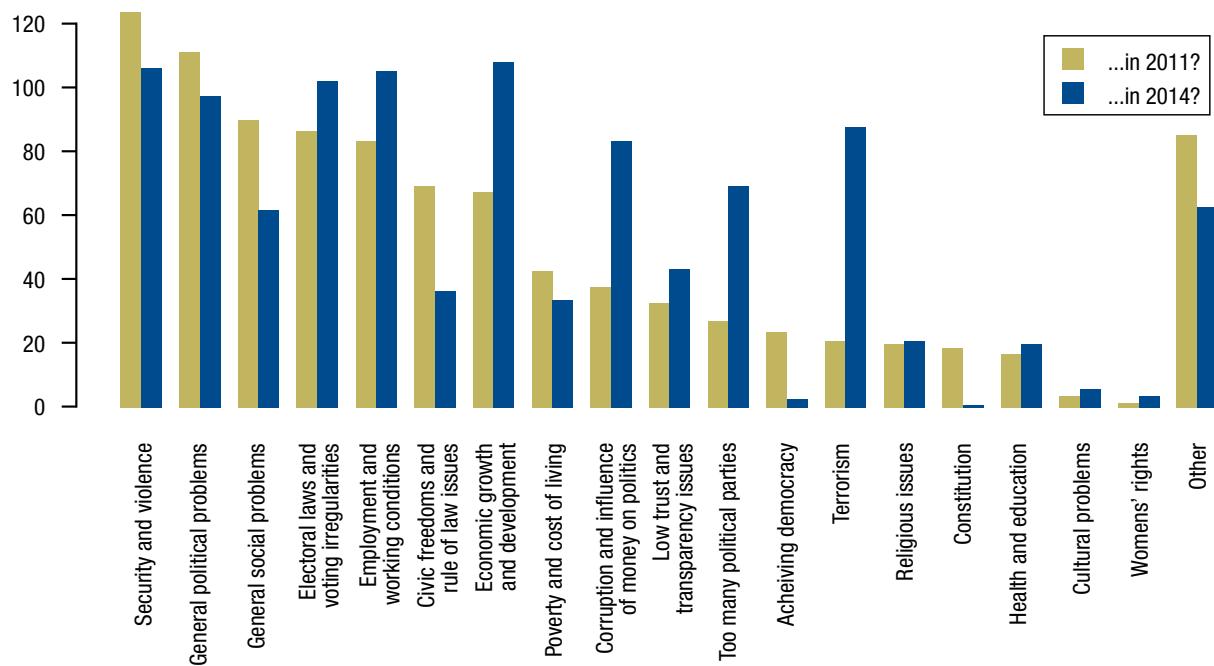
and sought to offer increasingly programmatic (rather than personalistic) messages to their potential constituents. Interviews with the leadership of smaller parties revealed that these parties sought to learn from previous campaign experiences, to professionalize their staffs and seek additional funding in order to create a nationally-recognizable party ‘brand,’ and to sharpen their message to voters in order to articulate their position on important issues rather than negative campaigning. With significantly higher resources, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda were able to run more extensive national campaigns, including large-scale rallies in strong-hold districts. Ennahda, whose campaign strategy was reportedly leaked last fall, approached the elections with a high level of professionalism, and utilized the strength of party discipline for a nationally unified message and extensive grassroots activism. Nidaa similarly ran a professional campaign, including a highly visible and glossy media presence. While the official campaign materials highlighted policy platforms, live campaigning often devolved into negative messages as the party leaders sought to offer themselves as a strong alternative to Ennahda and emphasized the latter party’s failures in order to do so.

## THE VOTERS: PRIORITIES, TURNOUT, AND DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

What do Tunisian voters care about almost four years into the country's tumultuous transition? In an open-ended section at the beginning of our survey, voters were asked to identify the most important issue facing Tunisia at present and during the parliamentary elections of 2011. A snapshot of these choices reveals several key shifts in voter priorities between Tunisia's first and second elections of the democratic era.

Concerns over achieving procedural democracy, civic freedoms, and transitional justice issues declined in importance between 2011 and 2014, as did the new Tunisian constitution. Meanwhile, economic growth, development, employment issues, and working conditions ranked among the top priorities identified for 2014. These issues have climbed significantly in importance since 2011, reflecting widespread concern over post-revolutionary economic stagnation and over failures of progress towards the

FIGURE 1: VOTER PRIORITIES, 2011–2014

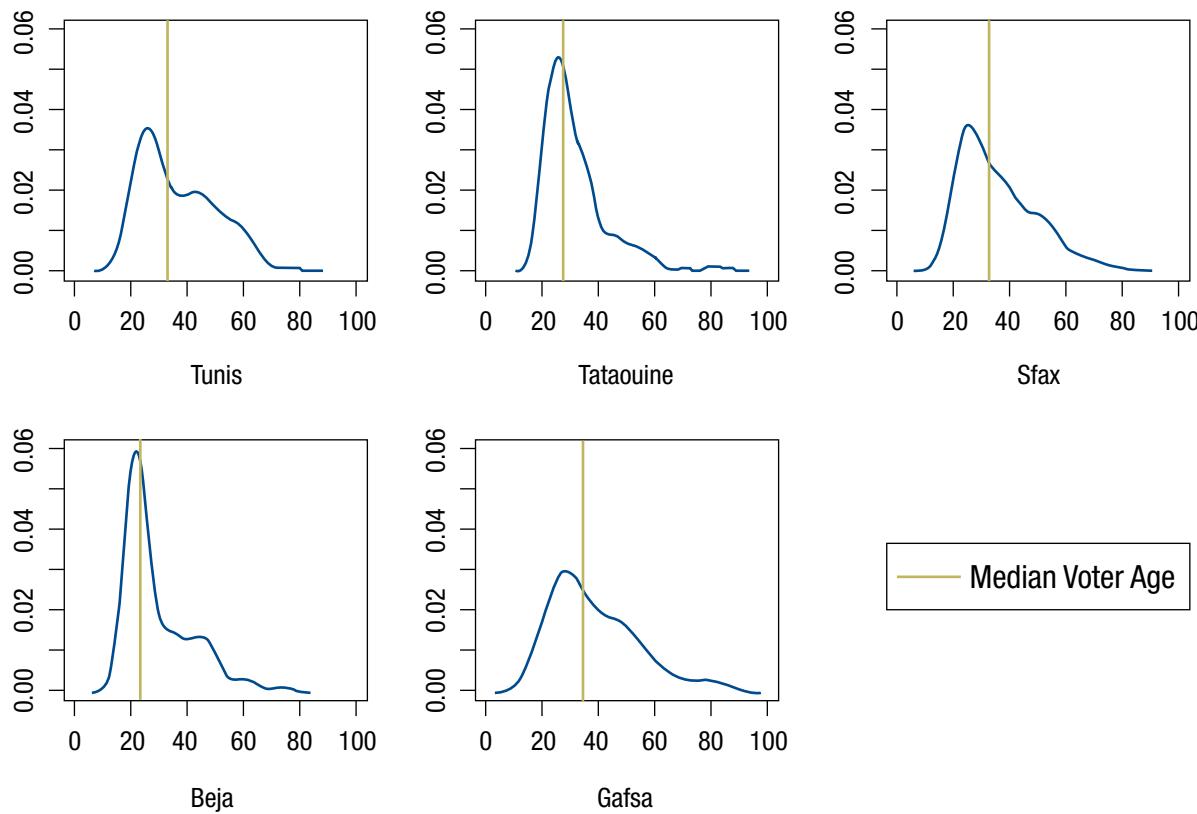


revolutionary goal of a more equitable economic growth strategy. In addition, issues that might be termed concerns over the quality of democracy—namely corruption, voting irregularities, low trust, and transparency—all increased significantly in importance from 2011 to 2014. Finally, while concerns over the general security climate have remained high between both elections, the number of voters specifically identifying terrorism as Tunisia’s most important challenge skyrocketed, perhaps a result of the shootout occurring between Tunis police and an alleged group of extremists two days before voting.

Voter turnout in the 2014 parliamentary elections is estimated at 67 to 69 percent of Tunisia’s voting age population, down from 86 percent during the 2011 parliamentary elections, according to data from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. This drop in turnout has been widely explained as a symptom of alienation and low trust

between the political parties and young voters in particular, with many youths reportedly boycotting the 2014 vote, according to data from the International Republican Institute. Demographic information obtained from our survey respondents reflects some truth to the problem of low youth turnout, but with important regional differences. Given Tunisia’s relatively young population (more than half the working age population is younger than 30), the majority of voters should be between 20 and 30 years old. Voter ages in Beja and Tataouine adhere to this pattern; these governorates more closely mirror the general population, where according to 2004 census data, the median age for each governorate falls in the 25–29 range. Yet in Tunis, Sfax, and Gafsa, the average age of voters in our sample approaches 40, with far smaller peaks in the distribution of voter ages within the youth range. These trends suggest that the “youth boycott” effect was stronger in urban and industrial areas, while in rural districts youths still predominated at the polls.

**FIGURE 2: VOTER AGE**



Although Tunisians are a highly literate and educated population by and large, voters in each governorate emerged as even more highly educated than the average Tunisian citizen. Some 56 percent of voters polled reported holding a bachelor's degree, as compared to a 14 percent of the combined general populations of Tunis, Sfax, Gafsa, Beja, and Tataouine. Likewise, 81 percent of voters reported having completed secondary school, as compared with 50 percent in the general population. These gaps in education between the voting population and the general population are present in each governorate, as indicated in the table below.

Voters in our survey reported higher monthly income than the general population in each governorate, with the income gap between voters and their neighbors much higher in Tunis (a difference of nearly 900 TND, roughly 450 U.S. dollars) and lower in Gafsa and Beja, where voters were only slightly better off than citizens at large. On average, voters reported lowest incomes in Gafsa, with an average income less than 800TND(USD \$405), slightly higher incomes around 1000 TND (USD \$506) in Sfax, Beja, and Tataouine, and much higher incomes in Tunis, where mean monthly income of voters was nearly 1500 TND (USD \$759). Yet distributional curves for each governorate peak

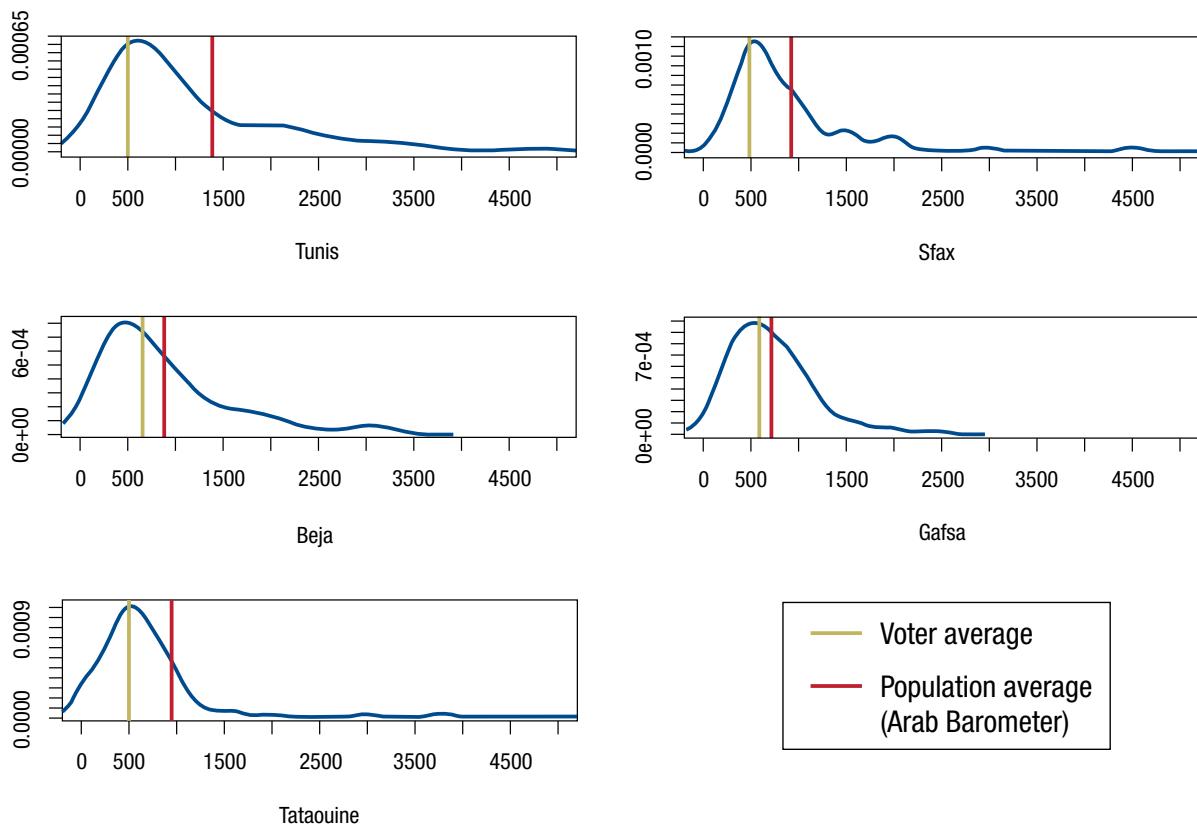
within the 500–700 TND (USD \$253–\$354) range, suggesting that the “median voter” in Tunis may not be that much wealthier than her counterparts outside of the capital. Instead, Tunis boasts a small but significant number of very wealthy voters, whose incomes skew these averages upwards. More than 12 percent of voters in Tunis reported making upwards of 2500 TND (USD \$1265) per month, compared with fewer than five percent of voters in other districts. Even within Tunis, income among voters varied sharply by neighborhood, with wealthier areas including Carthage and El Menzah boasting far higher incomes than lower class neighborhoods, like Sidi Hassine.

Finally, voters reported very high rates of protest participation during the 2010-2011 revolution. Revolutionary protest among voters was highest in Beja at 59 percent, followed by Gafsa at 55 percent, Sfax and Tataouine at 52 percent, and Tunis at 49 percent. Though no precise figures exist, most sources like to the Arab Barometer 2013, estimate that 20 percent of Tunisians participated in revolutionary protests, meaning that despite these small regional differences, voters in each governorate sampled were more than twice as likely to have protested during the revolution as the general population.

TABLE 4: VOTER EDUCATION

	Percent of Voters with BA degree	Percent of Population with BA degree (according to the Arab Barometer 2013)	Percent of Voters with secondary degree	Percent of Population with secondary degree (according to the Arab Barometer 2013)
Tunis	59	11	82	56
Sfax	56	10	80	37
Gafsa	46	13	80	50
Beja	57	31	83	58
Tataouine	56	13	84	63
Total sample	56	14	81	50

FIGURE 3: VOTER INCOME



## KEY ISSUES: RELIGION AND POLITICS

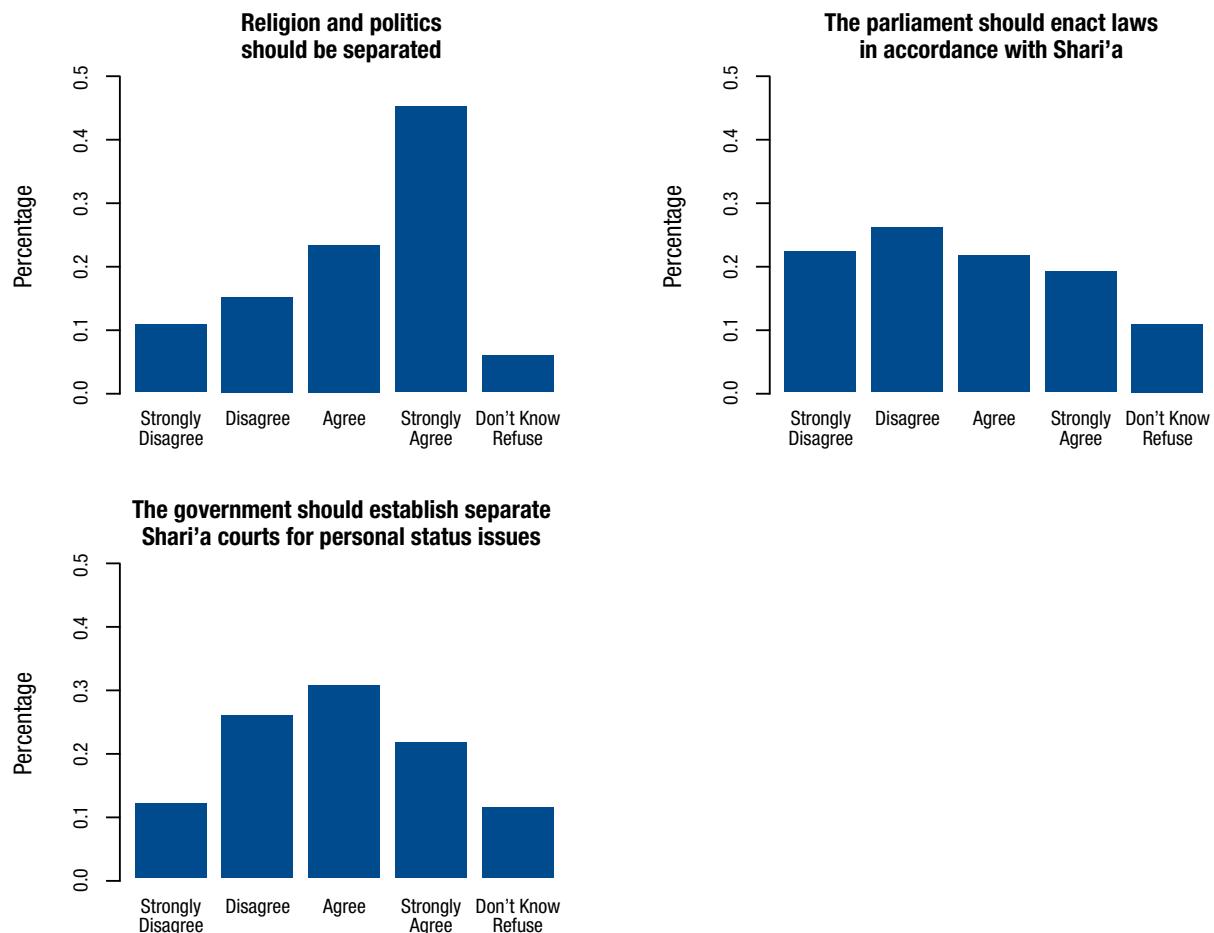
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The role of religion in politics has been a central debate in Tunisian politics since the 2011 revolution. Divisions over this issue emerged during the drafting of Tunisia's post-revolutionary constitution, when politicians vigorously debated and ultimately compromised on the question of how Tunisia would balance its Arab Muslim identity with its civil history, and how these issues would be enshrined through the law and cultural reference codified in the constitution, as discussed in a previous Brookings report by Monica Marks. Tunisian party leaderships largely agree on the establishment of a civil state in principle while disagreeing about where religion should fit into that state, including whether the constitution should specify a state religion, whether Islamic finance is appropriate for Tunisia, and in which domains Islamic courts should have purview over civil law. Ennahda, the country's Islamist party, considers itself a moderate civil party with Islamic references. When compared to other Islamist parties cross-nationally, Ennahda's program focuses more on ensuring space for religious freedoms and practice rather than imposing a state-sanctioned version of Islam on all citizens. The majority of other parties, including Nidaa Tounes, UPL, the Front Populaire, and Afek Tounes, describe themselves as secular civic parties. While these parties often emphasize their defining secular characteristics in platforms and public speeches, their leaderships also acknowledge Islam as a defining identity for many voters and a unifying cultural reference for Tunisia.

In our exit poll, Tunisian voters appear divided on the issue of religion and politics, though this division is more complicated than what is suggested by media reports and voting returns, which tend to paint Tunisian public debate as a straightforward story of contention between monolithic Islamists and "modern" secularists. In our pooled sample, 45.4 percent of voters strongly agree that religion and politics should be separated, showing widespread support for the principle of a secular political sphere. However, when asked more specific questions about legislation and legal jurisprudence, these same voters reveal a more complex picture of preferences regarding religion's role in politics. Voters were evenly split between four answer options when asked whether the parliament should enact laws in accordance with Shari'a, or Islamic law, with 20.1 and 22.7 percent strongly agreeing and agreeing, respectively. Likewise, 51.7 percent either agree or strongly agree that the government should establish separate Islamic courts for personal status issues, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Thus, while the majority of Tunisian voters desire a strong divide between religion and politics in principle, there are also significant portions of the population that want religious influence in the private sphere of personal status issues, where typically Islamic jurisdiction holds sway in Muslim-majority countries.

Stark contrasts appear regarding preferences over religion and politics when our sample of Tunisians

FIGURE 4: KEY INDICATORS



voters is divided by vote choice. These differences may be expected given the clearly differentiated positions of Tunisian parties regarding religion in comparison with other issue and policy areas, where the differences between parties are more opaque. Ennahda included in its 2014 political platform sections stressing its belief in the validity of Islam, its heritage, and its teachings as cultural and moral references—and, most importantly, as a basis for Tunisia's ongoing modernization and reform projects. In contrast, other main parties believe in secular politics drawing from non-religious cultural and moral references. Though they are careful to not appear as atheists or anti-Islam (for example, Nidaa Tounes issued an entire separate political program on religion, which, while it cited Tunisia's Islamic heritage as important,

largely evaluated religious issues under the Ennahda/Troika government, citing a rise in extrapolitical religious extremism under their control), and secular party leaderships acknowledge the importance of Tunisia's Islamic heritage and the role of religion in individual lives and private spheres, these parties all campaigned and presented themselves to voters as having secular approaches to politics in comparison with Ennahda.

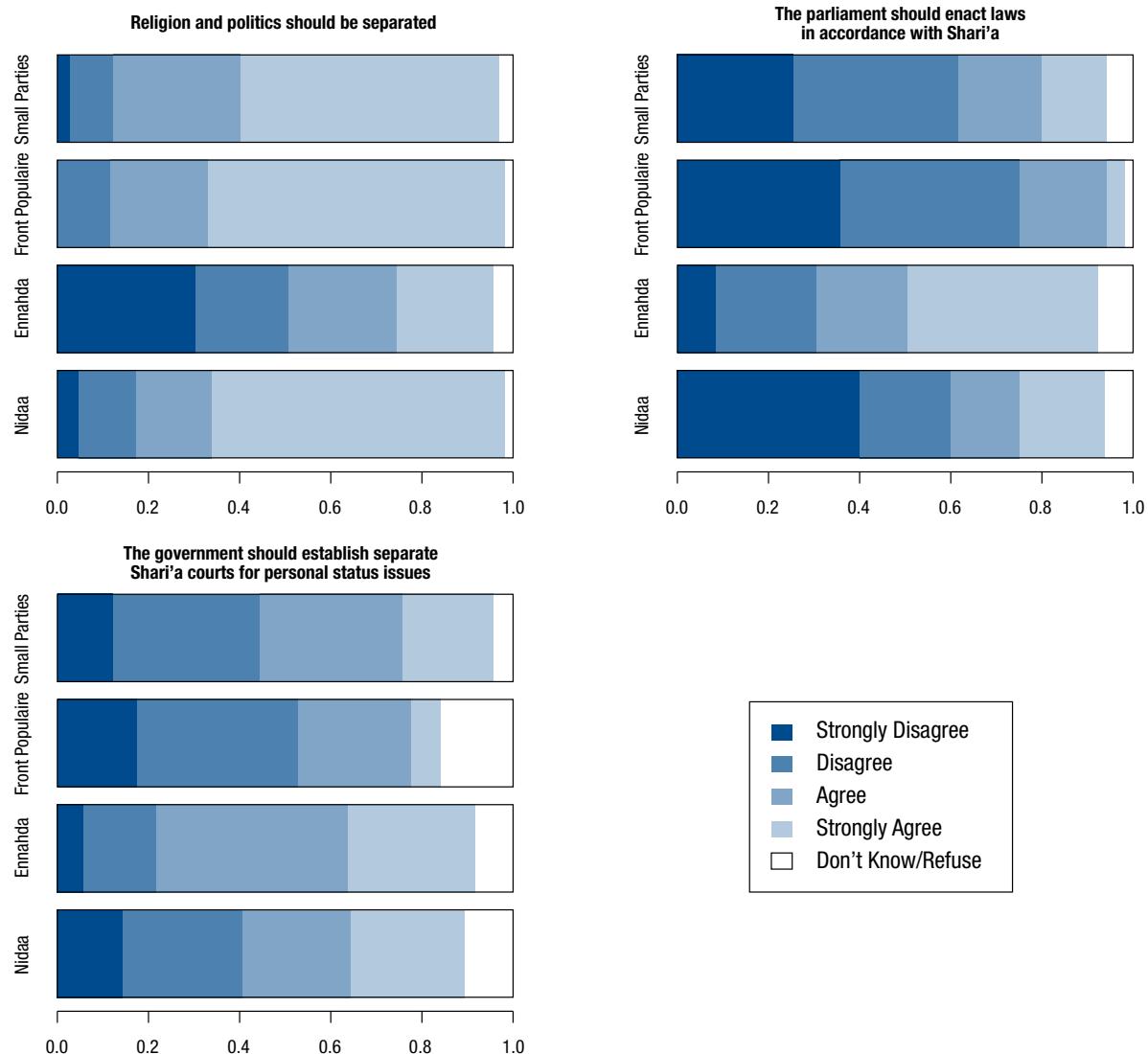
Self-reported Ennahda, Nidaa, and Front Populaire supporters hold almost opposite opinions about the separation of religion and politics; those who voted for small parties, Front Populaire, and Nidaa Tounes overwhelming support secular politics, while Ennahda voters largely oppose this separation. Similar

distributions appear when voters were asked about enacting laws in accordance with Shari'a, with the vast majority of voters for Front Populaire, Nidaa, and smaller parties opposing or strongly opposing, and the vast majority of Ennahda voters supporting the concept. However, on the issue of establishing separate Shari'a courts for personal status issues, there are less clear differences among constituencies. More comparable percentages of both Ennahda and Nidaa voters strongly agree with this proposition (though it should be noted that the distribution of preferences is slightly more skewed

in support of the courts among Ennahda voters). Similarities between Ennahda and Nidaa voters on this issue suggests that Nidaa's constituency may be less rigidly defined by the anti-Islamism of party leadership than is often claimed. In addition, it appears that Front Populaire are the most secular by all measurements.

When broken into regions, beliefs over religion and politics also vary, though less starkly than between parties. In Tataouine, a region where Ennahda won a higher percentage of the vote, voters are significantly

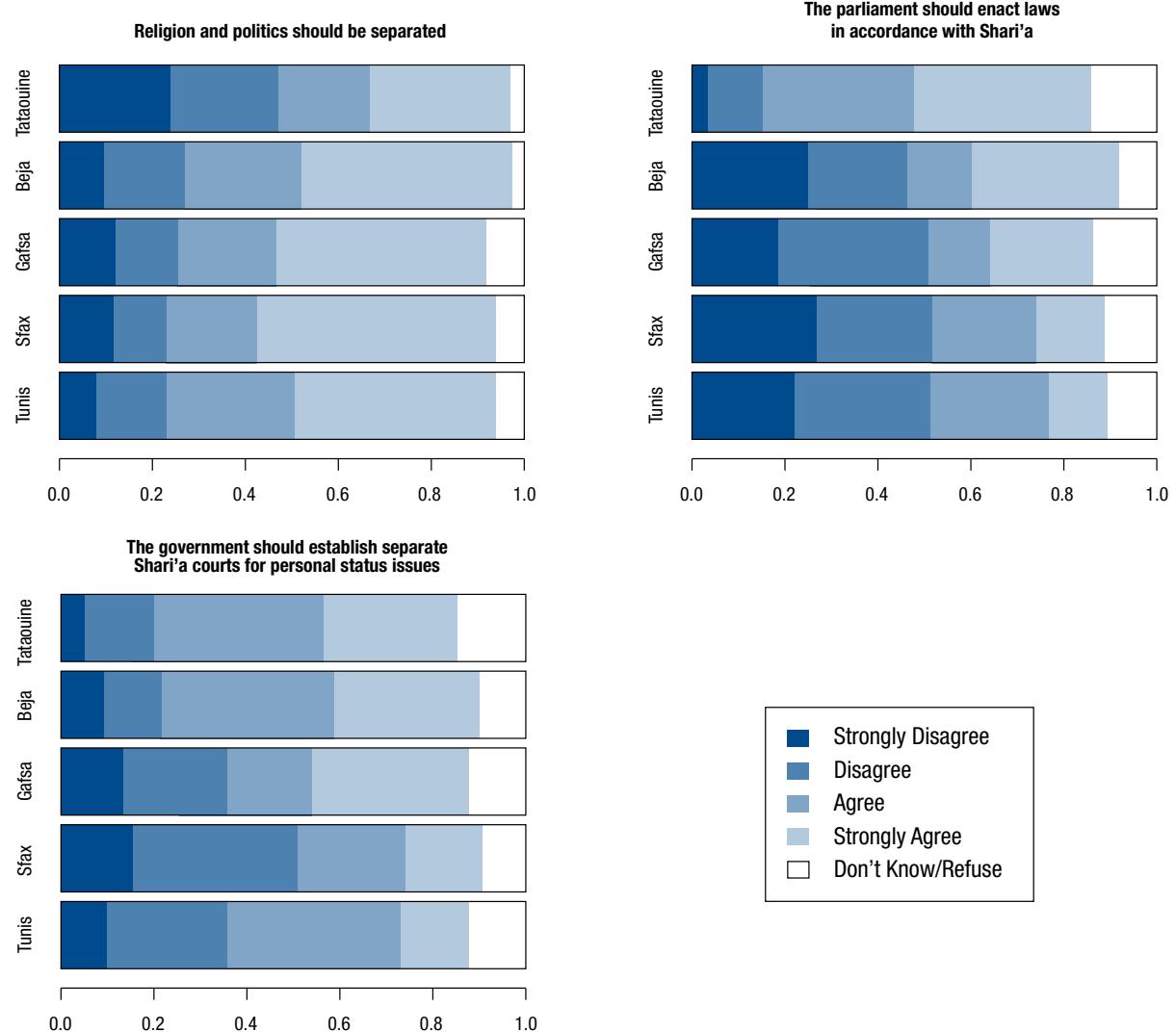
FIGURE 5: KEY INDICATORS BY PARTY



less supportive of separating religion from politics, and significantly more supportive of enacting laws in accordance with shari'a and establishing separate shari'a courts for issues pertaining personal status law than other districts. In fact, Tataouine is the most supportive of these policy issues. There also emerges an interesting relationship—or lack thereof—between support for a division between religion and politics, and support for specific policies combining religion and politics in different ways. For example, though almost 43 percent of respondents in Tunis strongly agree that religion and politics should be

separated, 25.6 and 12.4 percent agree and strongly agree that laws should be enacted in accordance with Islamic law, and 14.5 and 12.2 percent agree and strongly agree that separate Islamic courts should be established for personal status issues. Similarities between states on these issues suggest that the degree of supposed cultural and ideological polarization between Tunisia's "core" and "peripheral" regions may be exaggerated; diversities of opinion exist in urban, rural, wealthy, impoverished, coastal, and inland districts alike. These findings suggest that on issues related to religion and politics, the regional cultural

FIGURE 6: KEY INDICATORS BY REGION



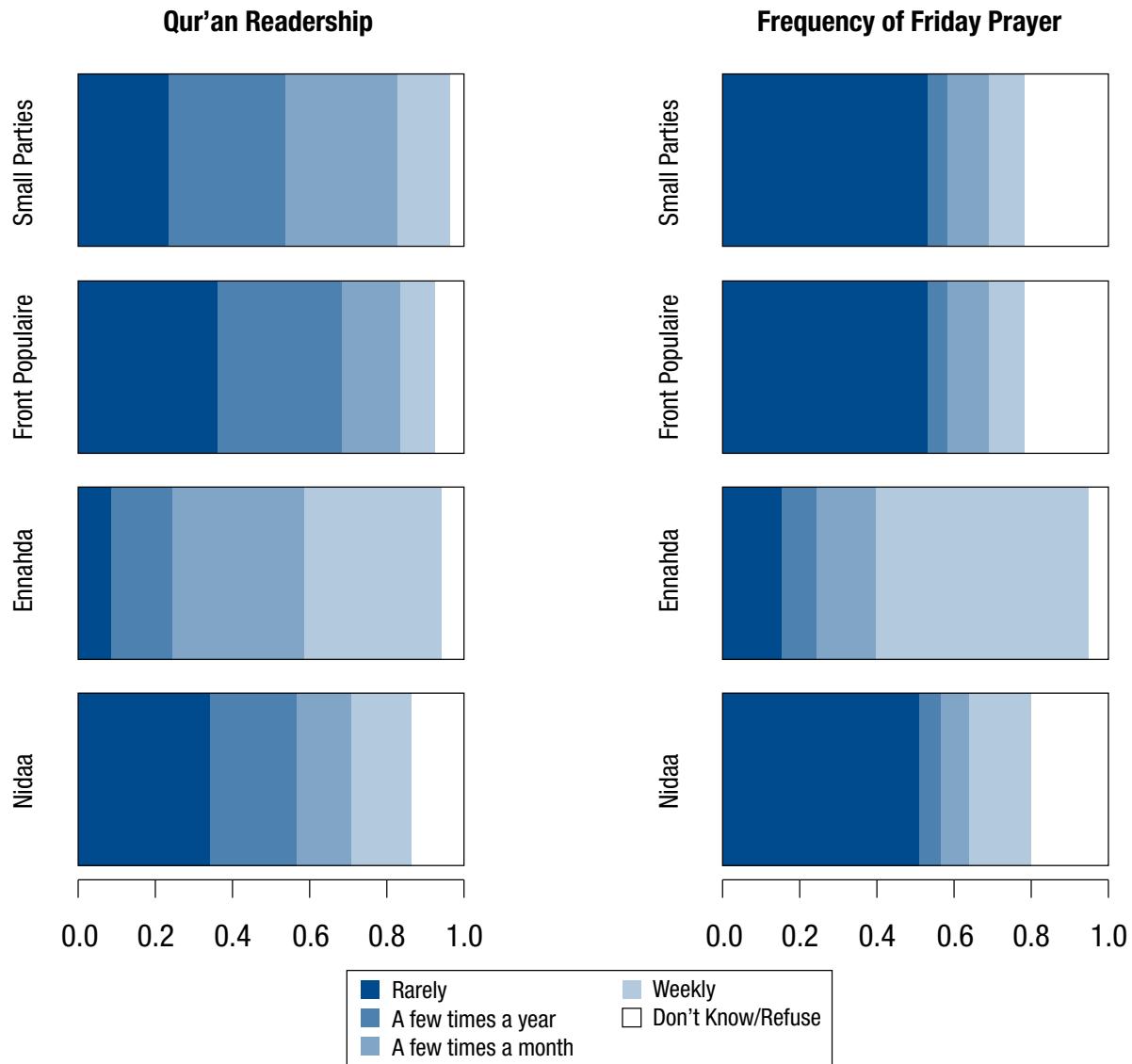
clash may be overstated, and the more important polarization exists between supporters of different parties rather than between geographical areas of Tunisia.

Thus while the majority of Tunisian voters want a division between religion and politics, there is also significant support for the influence of religion over the social issues in which it has domain. In addition, this breakdown by vote choice suggests that on issues related to religion and politics, the regional

cultural clash may be overstated, and the more important polarization exists between supporters of different parties rather than between geographical areas of Tunisia.

A question that often arises during public debates about voter support for Islamist parties is to what extent personal religiosity motivates this behavior. Individuals who are more religious are assumed to vote for Islamist parties at a higher rate. However, the assumption underlying this question is flawed,

**FIGURE 7: RELIGIOSITY BY PARTY**

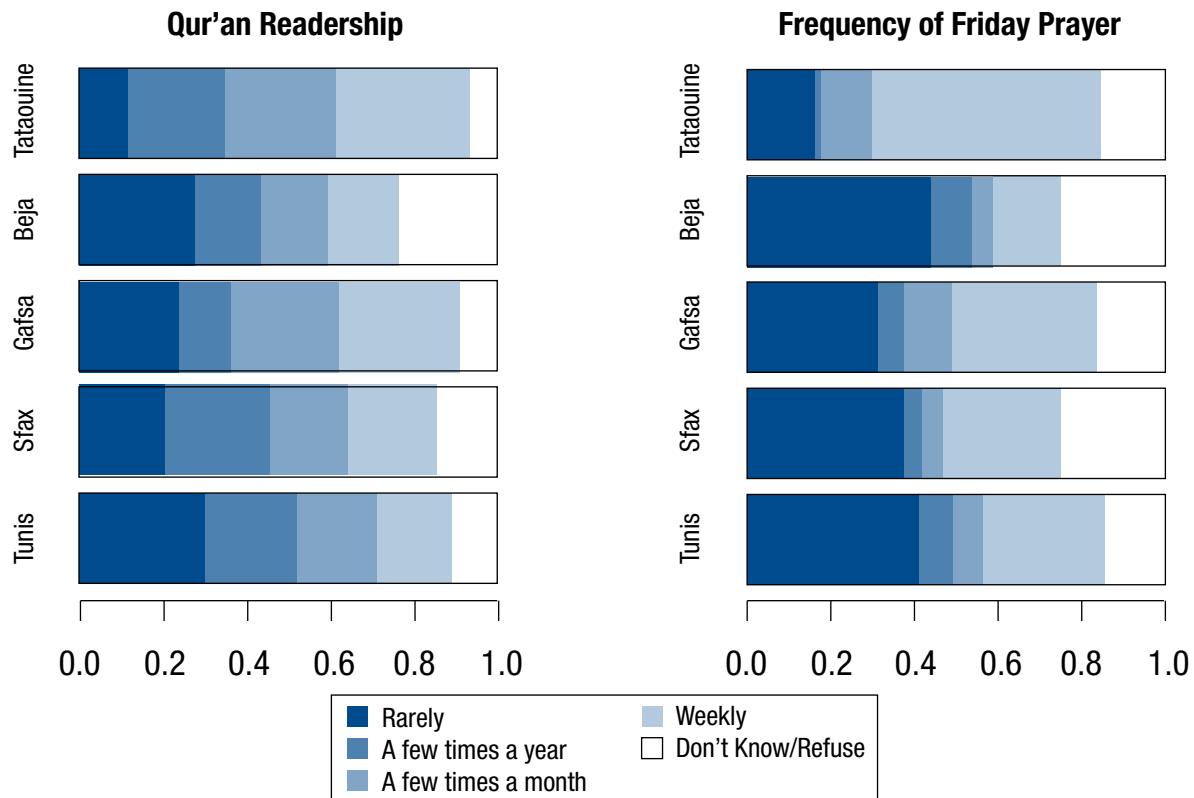


and academic studies have found both that personal practices of religion and voting Islamist are not predictably related. This is particularly true in Tunisia, a country where Muslims attend Friday mosque at a significantly lower rate than the rest of the Muslim world yet continue to articulate support for the implementation for certain aspects of Islamic law. Of course, an individual who is an atheist or rarely attends worship services would not be expected to support a religionization of politics, but among individuals who do regularly practice religion individually (through private prayer) and communally (through attending communal worship services), preferences regarding the extent to which politics should be influenced by religious principles varies significantly. However, there does exist interesting significant differences in religiosity among Ennahda and Nidaa, Front Populaire, and small party

voters. Ennahda voters attend Friday communal prayer and practice personal piety at significantly higher rates than voters for other parties.

Personal religiosity varies by region as well. In terms of private prayer as represented through Quran readership, each district has similarly even distributions—though Tataouine and Gafsa have larger percentages that reads the Quran daily, while Tunis has a larger percentage that rarely reads the Quran. In terms of communal prayer, all districts are divided between two large groups who rarely attend and those who attend weekly. The practice of communal prayer appears to vary by region; Tataouine has the largest percentage of regular mosque-goers, and Beja and Tunis have the least, converging with widely held assumptions about the piety of different regions of Tunisia.

FIGURE 8: RELIGIOSITY BY REGION



## KEY ISSUES: ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT, AND SOCIAL POLICY

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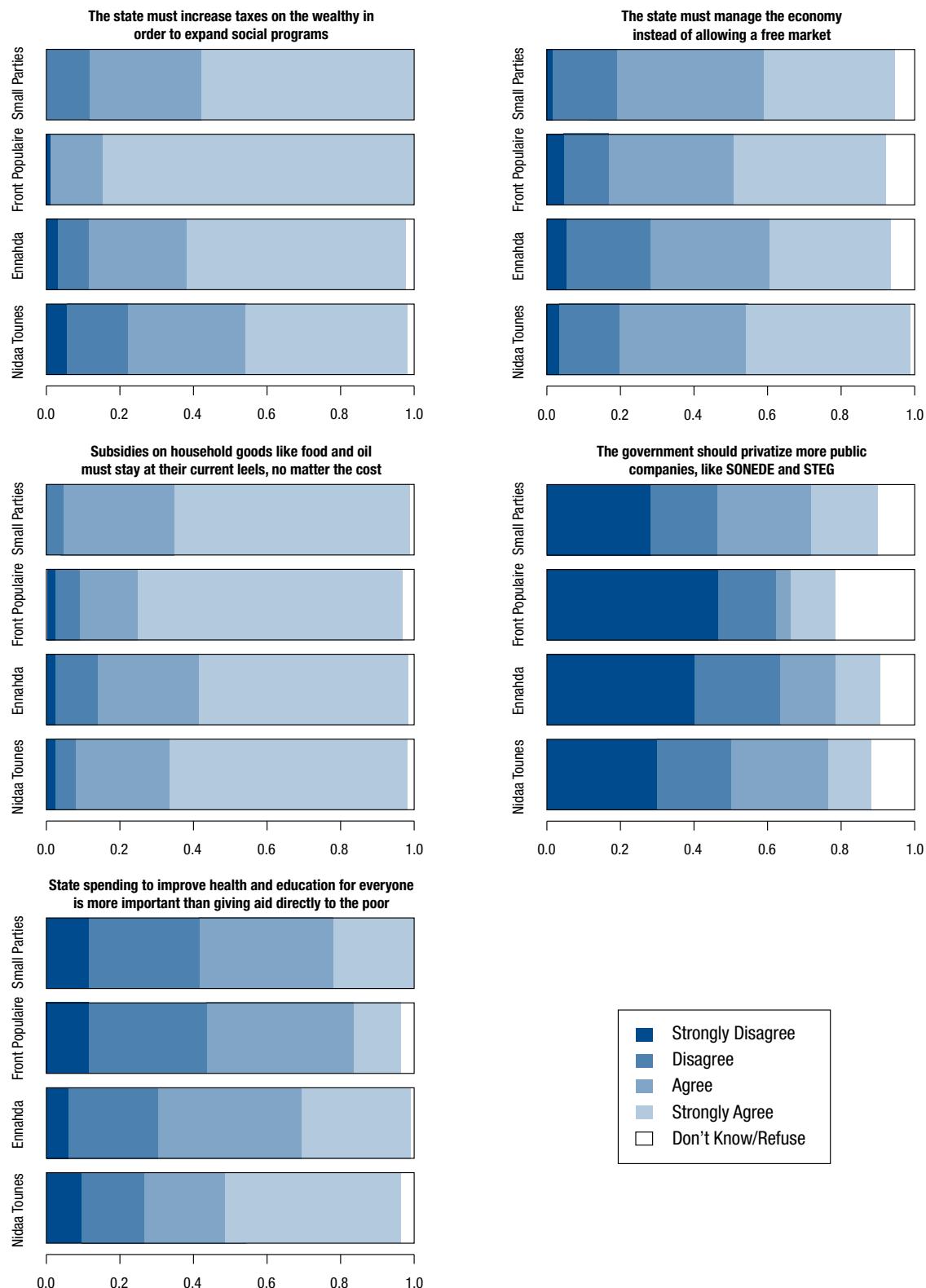
Given the economic stagnation that has gripped Tunisia since the revolution and the persistence of social inequities from decades of imbalanced growth promotion under autocratic rule, it comes as no surprise that voters in our exit survey chose “economic growth and development” as the number one issue facing Tunisia in 2014. The 2014 elections saw noticeable improvement in the organization of left parties, many of which campaigned together under the banner of the Front Populaire, whose presidential candidate Hamma Hammami won 7.8 percent of the vote in the first round of presidential elections. Tunisia’s storied labor union, the UGTT, as well as several smaller, newer unions have been mobilizing to reform Tunisia’s employment and social policies in a manner reflecting the revolutionary goal of a more equitable developmental policy. Most analysts and social campaigners agree that the post-revolutionary period has seen little in the way of improvement to Tunisia’s endemic social and structural problems—but many also point out that the government resulting from the 2014 election cycle will be the first government empowered to bring about much-anticipated reforms.

While voters prioritized economic development as an important issue, voters for Tunisia’s major parties are more at odds over some social and economic issues than others when it comes to principles of governance and preferences over specific policies. Voters for Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda, the Front Populaire, and smaller secular parties hold very similar

positions with regards to the principle of state intervention in the economy. In each party, between 70 and 80 percent agreed that “the state must manage the economy instead of allowing a free market system.” These same voters diverge considerably, however, about whether the state should levy greater taxes on the wealthy in order to expand social redistribution; Front Populaire voters are almost entirely supportive, while progressively larger blocks of en-Nahda and Nidaa Tounes voters respectively “disagree” and “disagree strongly.” Inconsistency in the degree of party divergence between these two questions is notable in terms of defining economic debates. Oftentimes, economic ideologies are measured and compared by the former measure – that is, the extent to which citizens value state intervention (or a “more socialist” orientation) over free markets (or a “more capitalist” orientation.) Yet the opinions of Tunisian voters appear to reflect contention not over the extent of state involvement in economic planning, but rather over questions of on whose behalf, and by what policy mechanisms, the state should intervene.

Voters diverge again in their support for privatization of Tunisia’s public companies, including the major public utilities SONED (water distribution) and STEG (electric and gas distribution). Both companies are major employers, and both have been subjects of pre- and post-revolutionary debates concerning the advantages of selling off public enterprises and of allowing private companies to offer those

FIGURE 9: KEY INDICATORS BY PARTY



same services. More supportive of privatization, Nidaa Tounes voters also favor investment in social services benefitting Tunisians across social classes, such as health and education, whereas Ennahda voters, and Front Populaire voters even more so, are more likely to support direct transfers to poor Tunisians. Voters across parties are essentially united, however, in their support for subsidies on household commodities such as food and fuel. Changes to the subsidy system have historically been a flash-point for social tension in Tunisia, setting off the storied bread riots of 1984 and provoking protest once more during the Troika government, when cuts intended to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund angered low- and middle-income Tunisians already struggling from a post-revolutionary recession.

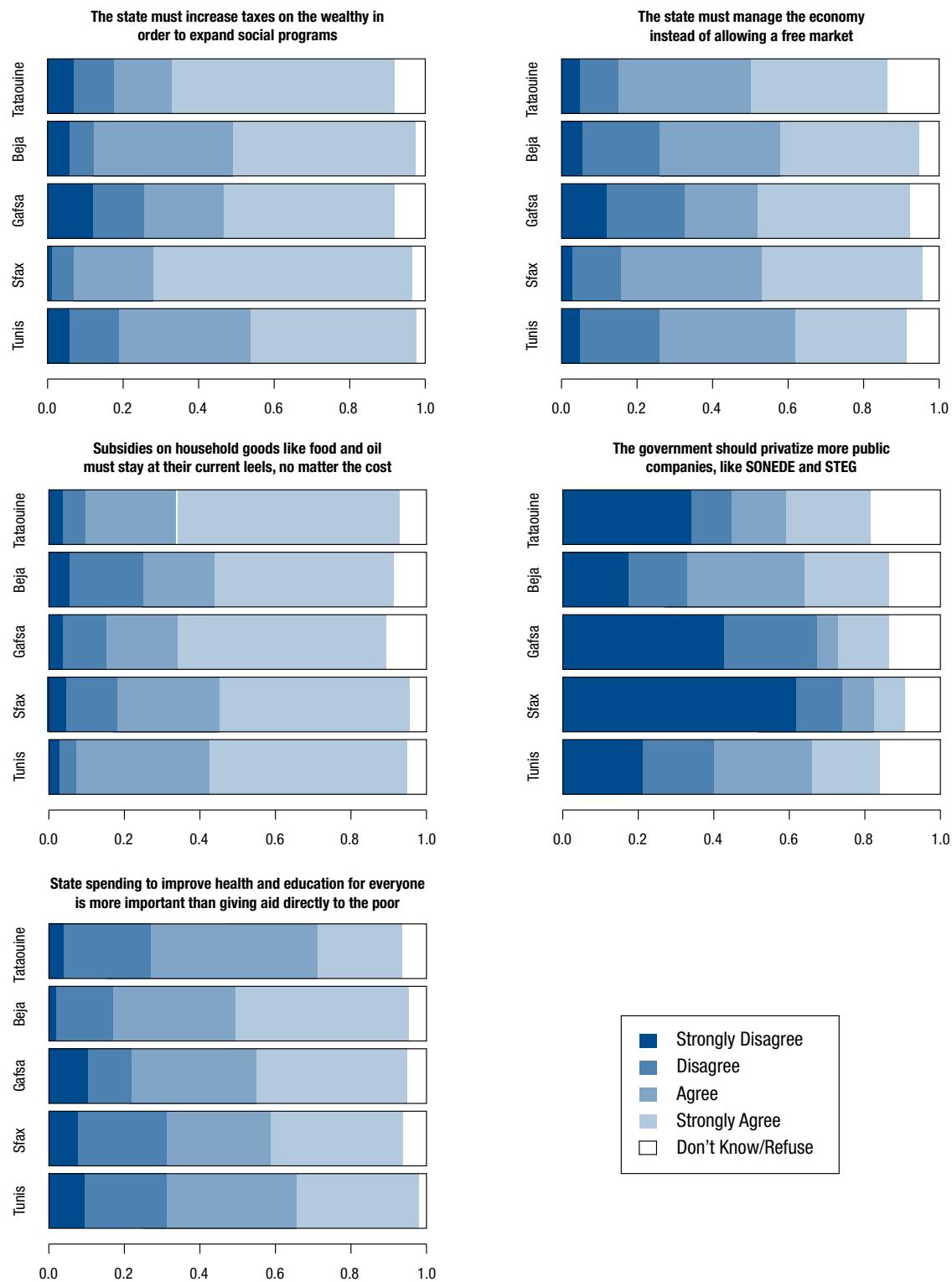
In aggregate, these results suggest a pattern where the Front Populaire and small parties have successfully forged a small coalition of left-leaning voters, Nidaa Tounes voters are comparatively heterogeneous—and on average more right wing—in their social preferences, and Ennahda voters tend to fall between these two ends of the social spectrum. It is worth noting that Tunisia's two main parties, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, do not diverge considerably in their economic and social programs, on paper or in practice. Both campaigns paid ample lip service to the importance of "growing the economy" during the campaign period, but neither party articulated a clear social and economic agenda different from the policies pursued under the 2011-2013 Ennahda-led government and the 2014 Mehdi Jomaa government. Indeed, among other complaints against the Ennahda-led government of 2011-2013, many Tunisians protested an apparent continuation of the widely unpopular neoliberal economic policies of the Ben Ali era. That Ennahda voters land to the left of Nidaa Tounes voters in several key social policy areas likely reflects more about the longstanding social justice commitments of Islamist Tunisians—perhaps also driven by the experience of regional wealth disparities—than it

does about the party's current platforms. The small social divergence between the platforms of Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda constituencies, despite the lack of clarity offered by both campaigns, suggests that these issues may be leveraged in future contests to draw votes away from the two main blocks. The rise of the Front Populaire provides a strong example of this possibility on the left side of the equation.

In addition to partisan differences, we explore whether geographic differences exist over social and economic issues. Tunis voters appear somewhat more conservative on questions of taxation and redistribution, perhaps resulting from the greater percentage of very high-income individuals in the Tunis sample. Opinions about social welfare policies varied much more according to party choice than according to region; in each state, between 70 and 80 percent of voters agreed or strongly agreed that "spending to improve health and education for everyone is more important than giving aid directly to the poor." Like voters across parties, voters across the five governorates surveyed appear united in their support of subsidies on household goods. Yet opinions about the privatization of state-owned companies saw even more geographic variation than party variation. Voters in Tunis and Beja split roughly evenly between the four answer options, while voters in Gafsa and Tataouine opposed privatization by wider margins. In Sfax, more than 62 percent of voters "strongly disagreed" with the privatization of public companies, a high percentage likely driven by Sfax residents' dependence on employment from manufacturing (in private, public, and mixed-ownership firms), and by the governorates' domain over oil and gas fields, which provide a significant proportion of the energy provided by STEG throughout the country.

Voters across regions were also relatively consistent in their support for the principle of state management in the economy. Notably, the largest block of opponents to state intervention comes from Gafsa,

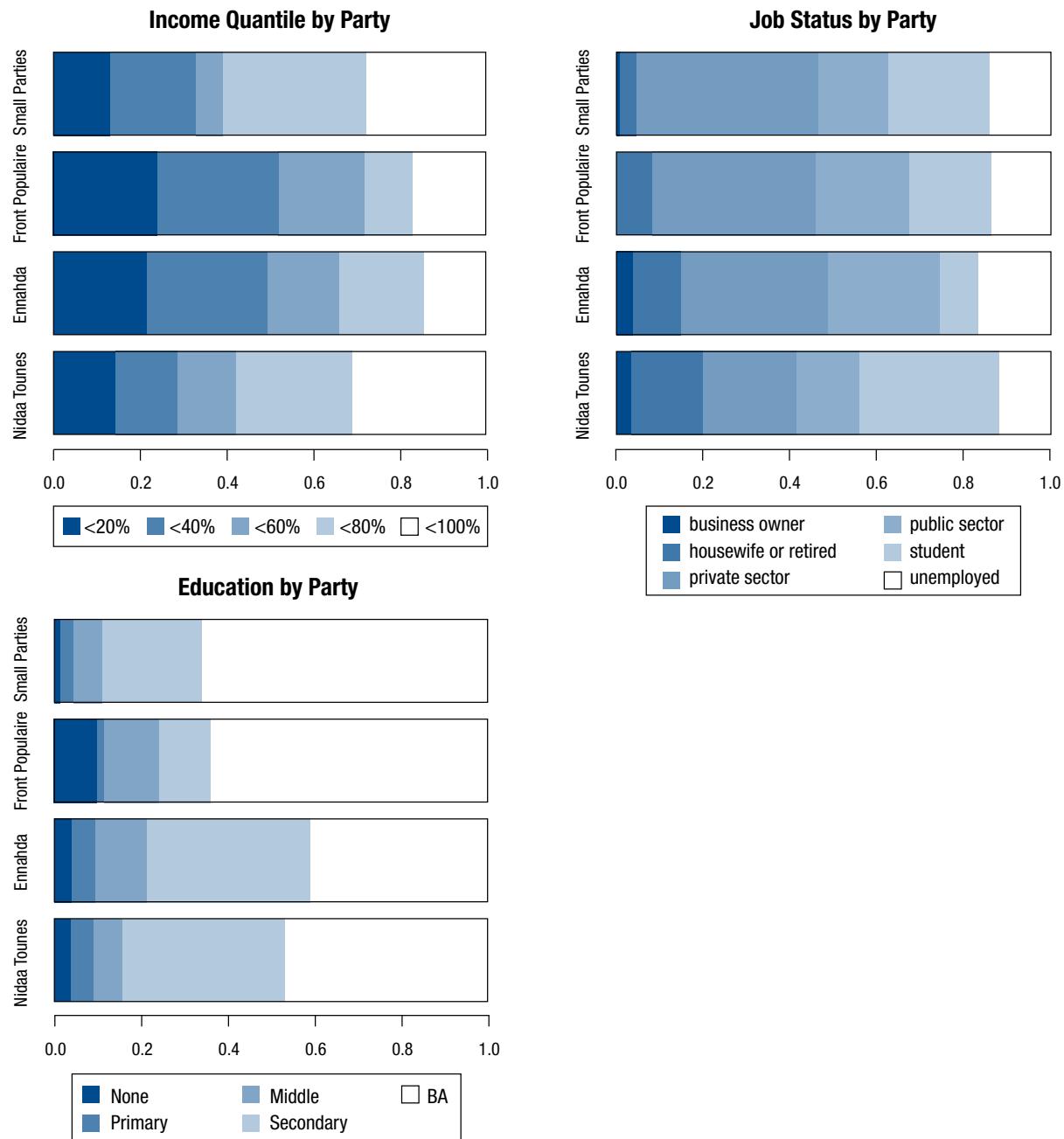
FIGURE 10: KEY INDICATORS BY REGION



where more than 33 percent of voters either “disagreed” or “disagreed strongly” to this proposition. These perceptions likely stem from voters’ experience with or knowledge of the Gafsa miners’ movement, which began in 2008 as a form of protest against hiring contests at the state-owned Gafsa

Phosphate Company, perceived to favor friends of local politicians and union leaders. The campaign of civil resistance in Gafsa is often cited as a fore-runner to the mass mobilization that deposed the Ben Ali regime three years later. It is reasonable to assume that Gafsa voters are not right-wing ideo-

FIGURE 11: SES BY PARTY



logues, but rather view state intervention in the economic sphere as an expression of corruption and favoritism, unfair to those without the right connections.

Finally, in terms of socioeconomic status, voters for each major party are quite diverse, and hold similarly high levels of education. Nidaa Tounes voters are slightly wealthier than other constituencies, whereas voters for Ennahda the Front Populaire are more similar in wealth to the national (that is to say, voter and non-voter) average income. Voters for each party are within 10-20 percent unemployed, approximating the national unemployment level of roughly 15 percent, according to the National Institute of Statistics, Tunisia. Despite the political importance of high unemployment among both

low-skilled workers and university graduates—voters listed “employment and working conditions” as the second most important issue facing Tunisia in 2014—the unemployed do not appear to be forming a political constituency for any singular party. Nidaa Tounes voters are more likely to self-identify as students, while Ennahda and Front Populaire voters are more likely to be employees in either the public or private sector. Those few voters in the survey identifying as “business owners” are split between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda. Although Tunisian voters rank higher in almost all indicators of social wellbeing than the general population, those Tunisians who do cast their ballots do not appear to be voting along straightforward lines of wealth or job status.

## KEY ISSUE: SECURITY

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Tunisia has faced an increasing number of security issues since 2011, a fact that is reflected in the top concerns of Tunisian voters. The previous regime ruled heavy-handedly with help of a strong and often brutal domestic police force, and the period following Ben Ali's ouster witnessed a period in which a security vacuum initially destabilized the country. Much of this insecurity has emanated from Tunisia's large and porous borders. Over the past four years, the Chaambi mountains on the Tunisia-Algerian border and the Tunisian-Libya border have emerged as havens for armed groups, who use these insecure areas both for training and for smuggling of weapons and other contraband goods. These problems are exacerbated by the deterioration of Libya's security situation.

This security vacuum culminated in a terrifying period during which two left-wing politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, were assassinated, in February and July 2013, respectively. In response, the Ennahda-led government named the militant Salafist movement Ansar al-Shari`a, which was implicated in the assassinations, a terrorist organization, and state security forces increased their focus on confronting armed groups. The result has been an increasing number of clashes between security forces and militants around the country, including major incidents in February 2014 and just days before the election in October 2014 close to Tunisia's urban capital. A March 2015 terrorist attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis—which left 21

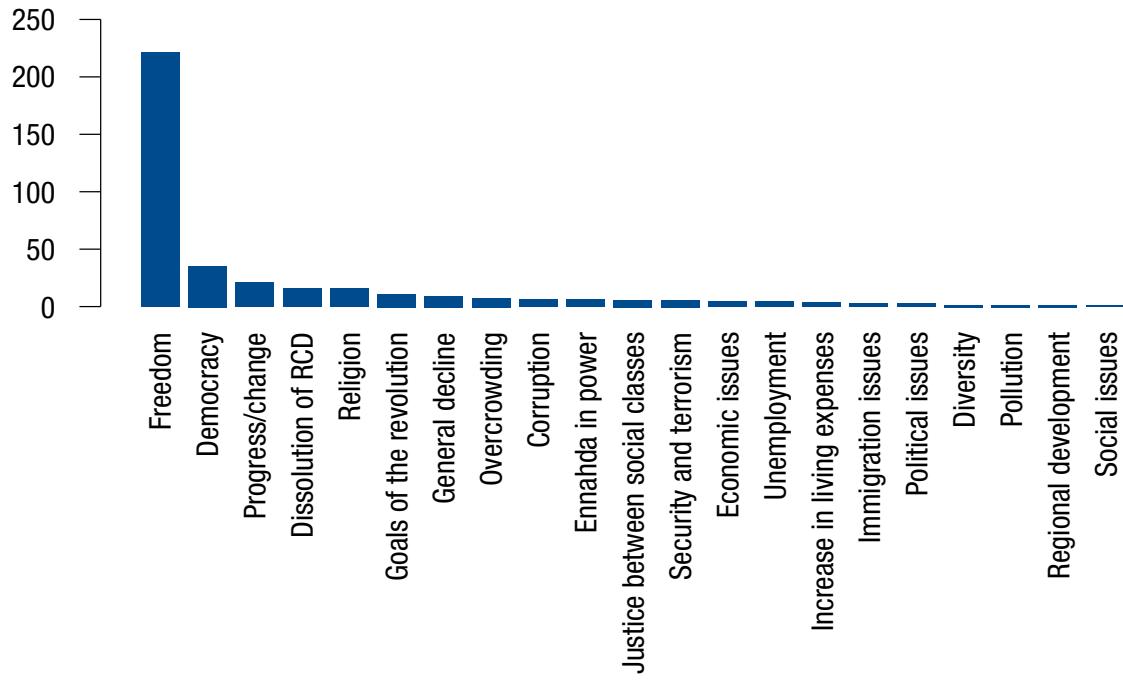
people, the majority of whom were European tourists, dead and at least 50 other people injured—again highlighted the country's security issues and the ongoing spillover effect of conflict in regional neighbors. Though maintaining security is important for Tunisians, many local initiatives are equally wary of a return to the policing practices of the previous area through violations of civil liberties that often accompany increased police interventions. Security is thus an increasingly salient and fraught issue for Tunisian voters, due to a combination of continued terrorist attacks, a modicum of support among specific sections of the population for some insurgent movements, and a general lack of trust in police forces due to their lingering reputation for cruelty, injustice, and torture from the Ben Ali regime.

Mirroring these problems on the ground, a significant portion of the discourse surrounding the 2014 elections has speculated about the effects of violence on electoral results. The main parties likewise focused on this issue in their political platforms and campaigns. Nidaa Tounes leaders recalled the security incidents that occurred under the Troika government and offered their collective experience with security issues under the Ben Ali regime as a positive attribute to contain and reverse such developments. Ennahda's political program for 2015-2020 similarly dedicated a section of its plans for combating terrorism, trafficking, and extremism, religious and otherwise.

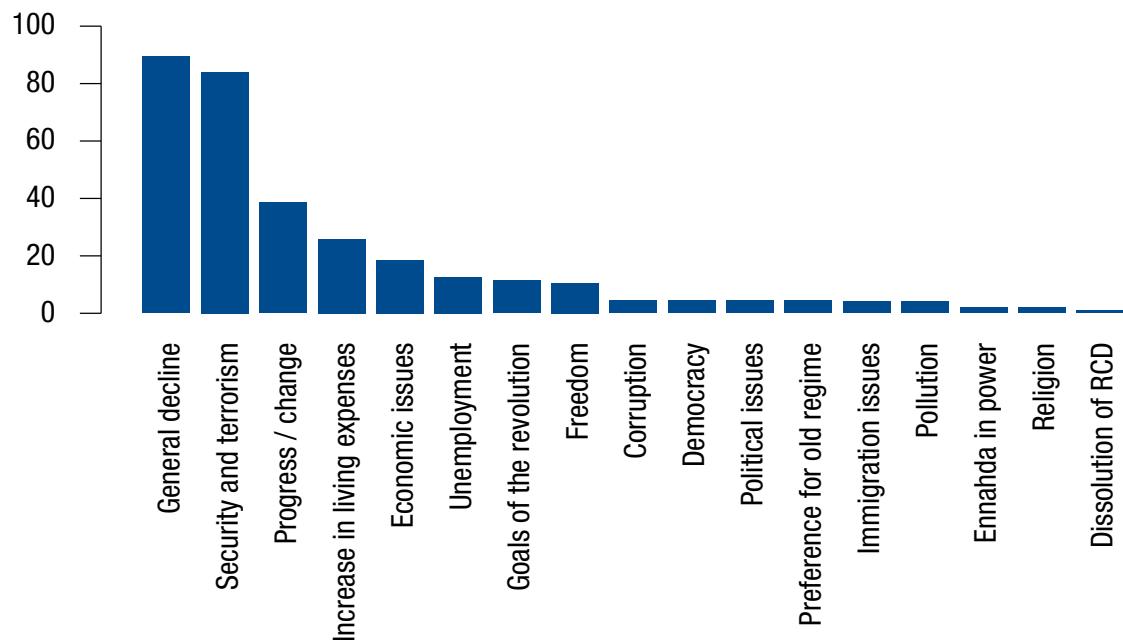
How do concerns over security—and concerns over the consequences of anti-extremist campaigns for justice and civil rights issues—shape voters’ preferences and behavior? Responses to our exit poll indicated that security and stability remain at the forefront of voters’ minds. When asked about the most important issues facing parties and voters in 2011 and 2014 (see figure in section 3), there was a slight increase in respondents who answered security, violence, and terrorism as the most important issue facing the country, from 12.3 percent in 2011 to 16.7 percent in 2014. Though mentions of security and violence decreased slightly, mentions of “terrorism” more specifically quadrupled during the same time period. This spike in voters’ concern for terrorism is likely driven by both domestic and international trends—by attacks taking place in Tunisia’s border regions as well as the much-reported trend of young Tunisians leaving the country to fight alongside the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Security also emerged as a main issue when we asked respondents to determine whether, given developments since 2011, the revolution was a positive or negative event, and to explain the reasoning behind their answers. Voters were divided; 407 respondents (35.2 percent) answered that the revolution has been a negative thing and 521 (45.0 percent) aid it has been a positive thing. Those who consider the revolution a positive development overwhelming cited freedom as the reason, while among those who responded that it was a negative development, a 20.6 percent cited issues related to a decline in security and stability, and an increase in terrorism. More than twice as many of these security-concerned, revolution-regretting voters supported Nidaa Tounes than supported Ennahda, demonstrating the electoral salience of declining security in the post-revolutionary period.

### The revolution was a positive thing because...



### The revolution was a negative thing because...



## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

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This snapshot of Tunisia's political landscape at the time of the country's second free elections holds significant implications for U.S. policymakers committed to supporting Tunisia's ongoing democracy transition.

First, these findings shed light on the social bases of support for (and opposition to) the unity government formed in February 2015. The cabinet led by Prime Minister Habib Essed of Nidaa Tounes represents four of the five highest-placing parties from the legislative elections in October, including members of Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda, Afek Tunis, and the Free Patriotic Union (UPL). The Front Populaire announced its opposition to the line-up, echoing popular concerns that the new government would be overly heterogeneous and incapable of acting on a clear popular mandate. In the present configuration of government, the ideological rift between Nidaa Tounes voters and Ennahda voters arguably creates larger liability for the leadership of Nidaa Tounes, whose voting constituency on matters of religion and politics more closely resembles the constituency of its opposition, the Front Populaire, than that of its new coalition partner, Ennahda. Nidaa Tounes representatives have already broken ranks to air their dissatisfaction with Ennahda's participation in the government, diminutive as the latter's portfolio may be, and voters in future polls may follow suit.

The popular basis for the coalition and opposition line-ups makes more sense on issues of taxation and

social spending. Still, a holistic review of attitudes towards social and economic policy shows that voters overall are unified in their preferences for a more equitable growth strategy, despite the fact that the parties have not been clear in delineating plans to combat Tunisia's social and economic crises. Should voters' demands run up against a political leadership committed to fiscal austerity or hamstrung by the conditions of international lenders, Tunisia will likely witness more protests on issues of social justice, like those that started the revolution more than four years ago. To date, the United States has been economically supportive of Tunisia, providing loan guarantees of \$1 billion and a cash transfer of \$100 million to the Tunisian government. Moving forward, policymakers should be careful to temper their support for macroeconomic growth with insistence on stabilizing social programs and plans to enable Tunisia's economically disadvantaged regions, including Beja, Tataouine, and Gafsa in this survey, to share in future development.

Second, cumulative priorities and concerns about the trajectory of the revolution articulated by Tunisian voters illustrates that *both* reestablishing security and stability *and* guaranteeing personal freedoms are crucial moving forward. The combination of these two issue areas is important. Typically, maintaining security has come at the expense of personal freedoms in the region, and the United States does not have the best track record when it comes to supporting regimes and governments who

behave as such. As Tunisian voters and politicians continue to debate and reform the security sector and related policies, the U.S. government has the opportunity to reverse its past support and actively encourage the Tunisian government to achieve balance between security and personal freedoms. This includes promoting a significant reform of the police and prison systems, which were responsible for the arrest and torture of political prisoners under the previous regime and which have reportedly continued to operate with little reform since 2011.

Third, a large proportion of English-language press during the 2014 elections focused on the phenomenon of young Tunisians leaving to fight in Syria, most recently in service of the Islamic State. In many outlets, stories about disempowered youths becoming radical jihadists eclipsed analysis of Tunisia's parties, its electoral system, and its policy challenges. Yet the dangers posed by ISIS recruitment to Tunisia and the broader North Africa region should not be overstated, and neither should the necessary breadth of international response in this particular security area. Rather than attempting to target radicalized groups or individuals, as the U.S. has done elsewhere, the international community must support the much greater number of Tunisians expressing demands to their state through

civil society organizations, peaceful protest, and online and traditional media. Pressing the new Tunisian government to avoid crackdowns on non-violent political organization, even on sensitive topics such as accountability for deaths occurring during the revolution, will be a crucial means of avoiding those cases where frustration can lead to radicalization.

Finally, the United States should continue its support for programs run by organizations such as the such as the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, which have provided invaluable training to local parties and contributed towards professionalizing electoral contests. Though Nidaa Tounes, the major winner of the 2014 elections, still largely framed the election along the Islamist—anti-Islamist divide, this year's electoral campaigns were increasingly programmatic when compared to 2011's contest. Increased and on-going party training can help to institutionalize programmatic electoral contests by further steering elections away from identity issues, limiting negative campaigning, and focusing party platforms on concrete differences in social and economic policies, an issue area in which Tunisians strongly desire progress but have yet to debate the best way forward in achieving this progress.

# SURVEY APPENDIX

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## ABOUT THE SAMPLE

We strategically sampled five governorates representing important variation across dimensions of Tunisian politics that are often said to drive division across the country. Our survey does not amount to a nationally representative sample of Tunisians, but rather a representative sample of Tunisian voters in these five diverse and politically important regions. Additionally given 2011 electoral returns, these governorates demonstrate variation on whether an area appears to be or might be becoming an Ennahda stronghold, or whether it is a more tightly contested area.

The Beja governorate is located in Northwest Tunisia and is home to 303,032 Tunisians. The region is rural and its industry largely agricultural, serving as the center of the fertile Majardeh valley wheat-growing region for centuries. Gafsa is the capital of southwest Tunisia with a population of 337,331 and its industry is centered on mining.

Important anti-regime protests began in the region in 2008 and, in hindsight, have been considered to be the beginning of and inspiration for later mobilization against Ben Ali. Sfax, the country's second largest city, is located in southeast Tunisia and has a population of 955,421. Sfax's most important industries include phosphate processing, agriculture, and fishing. Tataouine is located in southern Tunisia, and borders both Algeria and Libya. It is a large rural district with an agricultural economy and a population of almost 150,000. Finally, Tunis is the country's capital and the largest urban center, home to 2.6 million of the country's 10.9 million inhabitants. Tunis serves as the seat of the national government and hosts the headquarters of the country's financial and tourism industries.

## SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

Electoral districts in Tunisia are most often concurrent with governorates or, in the case of major

## 2011 VOTING RETURNS: TOP 5 PARTIES BY DISTRICT

	<b>Beja</b>	<b>Gafsa</b>	<b>Sfax 1</b>	<b>Sfax 2</b>	<b>Tataouine</b>	<b>Tunis 1</b>	<b>Tunis 2</b>
Ennahda	31.1	40.38	44.13	37.85	59.38	46.2	30.4
Aridha	8.34	5.35	7.43	8.85	5.68	2.15	0.98
Shabiyya							
Ettakatol	6.96	1.67	4.55	6.04	1.71	13.26	19.20
CPR	6.89	7.71	9.44	13.02	3.37	8.91	10.83
PDP	7.58	2.78	2.65	1.81	4.58	3.39	5.89

cities, governorates are split into two electoral districts. Districts are further divided into delegations, the smallest administrative units through which polling stations are assigned. Delegations range in population from under 10,000 to over 90,000 inhabitants, but most contain between 20,000 and 40,000 residents.

For each of seven electoral districts chosen for our survey (Tunis 1, Tunis 2, Sfax 1, Sfax 2, Gafsa, Beja, and Tataouine), six delegations were selected through weighted random sampling, with weights constructed from national census population data at the delegation level. From each delegation selected, a polling station was chosen randomly from lists provided by the Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections, or ISIE. In total, 42 polling stations were surveyed.

Interviewing was conducted by trained Tunisian enumerators using paper and pencil surveys. One

enumerator was placed outside each selected polling station for the duration of voting hours. Enumerators selected interview candidates using a randomization technique wherein the enumerator approached every third voter leaving the polling station until a voter agreed to be interviewed. Enumerators repeated this technique for each interview. Interviews on average lasted 15 minutes each. Each enumerator collected between 25 and 30 surveys, for a total of 1157 surveys collected.

For the purposes of this report, the data were analyzed using post-stratification survey weights constructed from national census population data at the delegation level.

Data will be made available for replication and reuse after scholarly publication.

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