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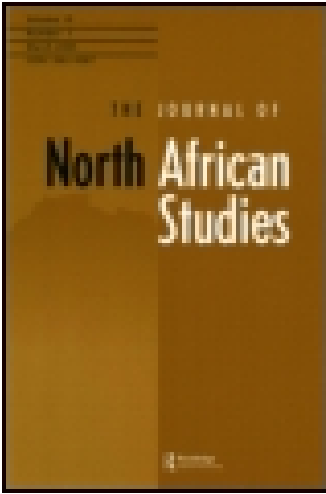
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Gilles Van Hamme<sup>a</sup>, Alia Gana<sup>b</sup> & Maher Ben Rebbah<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> IGEAT, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Brussels, Belgium

<sup>b</sup> Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain, Tunis, Tunisia

<sup>c</sup> Géomatique et santé publique, Unité de Recherche en Epidémiologie Nutritionnelle, Paris, France

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# Social and socio-territorial electoral base of political parties in post-revolutionary Tunisia

Gilles Van Hamme<sup>a\*</sup>, Alia Gana<sup>b</sup> and Maher Ben Rebbah<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*IGEAT, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Brussels, Belgium;* <sup>b</sup>*Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain, Tunis, Tunisia;* <sup>c</sup>*Géomatique et santé publique, Unité de Recherche en Epidémiologie Nutritionnelle, Paris, France*

By giving a comfortable advance to the Islamist party of Ennahdha (around 37% of the votes), the first free elections of independent Tunisia on 23 October 2011 have taken by surprise most observers. In this paper, we identify the social and socio-territorial bases of major Tunisian parties through combining quantitative analyses at different scales and field surveys in specific localities. Although most interpretations have focused on the cultural modernist vs. conservative cleavage, hence obscuring the class cleavage, our analyses highlight very differentiated socio-territorial electoral bases for the main parties and indicate deep social differences in voting behaviour, especially within cities. In addition, the consensus expressed by most parties about the need to reduce regional inequalities hides very dissimilar voting behaviour in peripheral and core areas. While allowing for a better interpretation of electoral results, our analyses also provide tools to understand possible evolutions within the Tunisian political space.

**Keywords:** election; Tunisia; National Constitutive Assembly; party system; socio-economic disparities

## 1. Introduction

The revolutions in the Arab world have revealed deep aspirations for democracy and social justice that were long suppressed by authoritarian regimes. Several countries of the region are currently engaged in a process of political transition, albeit with a future that remains uncertain. In this process, Tunisia appears as a pioneer country. The elections for the National Constituent Assembly,<sup>1</sup> making the Islamist party Ennahdha the first political force of the country by far, were an essential step in the process of democratic transition. The results of the 23 October 2011 elections interrogate the importance of social and territorial inequalities as a key element for the understanding of electoral behaviour. Indeed, the growing phenomena of social exclusion and increasing regional disparities that have accompanied development processes in Tunisia over the past two decades (Belhedi 1992, 2005; Dlala 1999) are among the root causes of the uprising that

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [gvanhamme@ulb.ac.be](mailto:gvanhamme@ulb.ac.be)

have resulted in the ousting of Ben Ali. Also, throughout the transitional period leading to the first free elections in Tunisia, the social question – in particular, employment and regional development issues – has weighed heavily on the terms of the political debate there. The regional issues have continued to generate significant mobilisations and to be the subject of political higher bids, particularly at the time of the implementation of the ‘High Authority for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution’, whose composition has been corrected for a better representation of disadvantaged regions and homes of the popular revolt. Similarly, affirmative action has guided the determination of the number of seats allocated to each electoral district, allowing less-populated districts of Southern and Central Western Tunisia to obtain a number of seats equal to the most populated districts of the coastal areas.<sup>2</sup>

The interpretations of Ennahdha’s success give little attention to the territorial dimension of the vote and are based on conjectures about their social base. We hypothesise that the Tunisian vote of 23 October 2011 can only be understood through combining a sociological approach and a territorial approach. On the one hand, the geography of the electoral results is the expression of uneven development between regions and of their differences in socio-economic structures, as well as of deep social and territorial divisions within major metropolitan areas. On the other hand, the territoriality of the Tunisian vote cannot be reduced to these socio-economic inequalities and encompasses other important dimensions – in particular, socio-historical, cultural and political dimensions. This study is, to our knowledge, the first one to systematically assess the social and socio-territorial bases of the Tunisian parties, allowing us to go beyond the political interpretations and debates surrounding Ennahdha’s success or, its corollary, the modernist failure in the first-ever free Tunisian elections.

In this article, we first present a rough outline of the emerging Tunisian party system (Section 2). In Section 3, we analyse the socio-territorial base of the main Tunisian parties at different scales: the geography of voting is first explained by the socio-economic backgrounds of places; while in-depth, qualitative analyses in some specific localities facilitate the better understanding of the collective dimension of voting in concrete places. In the conclusive section, we try to go beyond the descriptive analysis while developing a more political interpretation of the elections’ results of the National Constituent Assembly.

## 2. The cleavages of the emerging party system

After decades of dictatorship and dominance of the ‘Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique’ (RCD)<sup>3</sup> at all levels of social and political life in Tunisia, the revolution has resulted in a democratic explosion and a confusing political landscape (Bendana 2012; Ferjani 2012): dozens of parties appeared after 14 January 2011 and 11,000 candidates competed for the 117 seats of the Constituent Assembly (Mezghani 2012). It is also true that most important parties already existed in some way before the revolution but they faced the monopoly of the ruling party in the political space and Tunisian society and, hence, had no electoral experience (Braun 2006).

In such a messy and unsettled political landscape, it is useful to refer to the classic cleavages’ model developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). As a reminder, this model analyses the party system in Western Europe through complex combinations of four key oppositions that have structured the social and political history of European countries since the seventeenth century: the religious vs. secular divide, linked to the conflict between the Church and the State; the core vs. periphery cleavage, linked to historical processes of national construction; the urban/rural

divide (or primary vs. secondary sector divide); and finally, the capital vs. labour divide, resulting from the industrial revolution.

The relevance of this model for understanding party systems' dynamics in developing countries since the 1970s has been questioned (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992; Franklin 1992; Inglehart 1993). However, this model is a useful tool in that it allows for consideration of the diversity of party systems and, in particular, the variable combination of divides that characterise these systems from one country to another. In our reading of the nascent Tunisian party system, we draw partially on this theoretical framework, while also pointing out its limits to understanding partisanship in the Arab–Muslim world. The main limit is that, in this uncertain, post-revolutionary political and social context, political cleavages have not crystallised into a stable party system. The interpretation of the cleavages within the Tunisian society, therefore, not only refers to the ideological positions of existing parties but also to the political debates in the post-revolution period and within the social and political elite, as well as in the civil society. From this perspective, we can identify three main cleavages in the post Ben Ali political and societal space (Ferjani 2012).

First, the place of religion in the future Constitution, and more generally as the source of law and as a social norm, generates a secular vs. religious conflict. Second, the debate on the Tunisian identity, which has taken an important place in the debate within the 'High Authority for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution' (Mezghani 2012), has revealed a widening gap between proponents of the Mediterranean, North African and African vocation of Tunisia, and those who, in following the necessary break with post-colonialism, reassert Tunisia's primary, if not exclusive, belonging to the Arab and Muslim world (Ennahdha, CPR, some Arab-nationalist parties) and advocate a stronger anchoring in the influence zone of the Gulf countries. In this debate, the issue of language (classical Arabic/Tunisian Arabic, Arabic/French/foreign languages) is put forward, or manipulated, to reaffirm the cleavage between advocates of the 'Arabo-Islamic identity of Tunisia' and the modernists, who are often assimilated into the francophone elite. The title of a recent book by Ghorbal (2012) expresses well this divide between 'Orphans of Bourguiba' and 'Heirs of the prophet'. This cleavage could also correspond to a divide between 'the elites' and the popular classes, which expresses itself less through socio-economic issues than through symbolic themes.

However, these two cleavages largely overlap the modernist vs. conservative cleavage, which has structured the political space throughout the history of Tunisia, at least since the national movement of liberation (Ghorbal 2012). This cleavage is one that has historically opposed the Old Destour, which is the first nationalist party, to the Neo-Destour, the party that led Tunisia to independence under the leadership of Bourguiba. Modernity, which the Bourguibian model claims to be representing, does not exclude religion and 'arabity', which is considered to be constitutive of the Tunisian identity. Thus, Article 1 of the 1959 Constitution states: 'Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state, its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its regime the Republic.' As emphasised by Ghorbal (2012), the Tunisian state model, a 'secular state, anchored in religion' differs from both the Turkish model of secular inspiration and the Islamic state model, where the source of law is religion (Mezghani 2012). The specificity of the secular and modernist Tunisian model is that it seeks to reconcile respect for fundamental human rights, as well as the religious feelings and identity of the population. Besides the question of the relation of the state to religion, especially that of the source of law (the law of God or the sovereign people), the issue of the social and cultural model of reference (Arab–Muslim world vs. the West) also opposes modernists and traditionalists or conservatives. However, this cleavage is not only associated with dividing lines between political parties; it also opposes political tendencies within parties, as

this was the case in the conflict between bourguibists and youssefists within the Neo-Destour in the 1950s.

In this conflict between modernists and conservatives, the role of religion in politics, and as a social norm, has tended recently to occupy a growing place. The rise of the religious party Ennahdha in Tunisia's political landscape, but also the cultural phenomenon of Islamisation, which was already perceptible in the Ben Ali era, helped to give a central role to this issue, giving way to intense debates before and after the elections for the National Constituent Assembly.

One of the major consequences of the recent focus of the political debate on the issue of the relationship between Islam and the state is the blurring of the dividing lines on economic and social issues<sup>4</sup> and its contribution to obscuring the cleavage, though real, between the proponents of economic liberalism (embodied by both the Islamist party and numerous political formations, including those affiliated to the 'Destourian' tendency) on the one hand and parties pertaining to the social-democratic (Ettakatol, PDP, PDM,<sup>5</sup> etc.) and socialist traditions (POCT, Parti Socialiste de Gauche (PSG)) on the other. In the programmes of the major parties, this cleavage is expressed in many areas: the role of the state in regulating economic activities, taxation and privatisation; the role of foreign investment; the debt issue or the model of integration in the global economy. These issues can represent a dividing line within the current ruling coalition (the Troïka<sup>6</sup>) but can also bring closer parties in power, such as the CPR, and other leftist parties currently in the opposition – going from the Ettajdid movement (former Communist Party) to extreme leftist parties, such as the POCT or PSG. While the popular basis of political parties, which claim to represent the working class (POCT, PSG) remains weak, it is important not to forget the role of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) in providing political guidance to wagedworkers and its ability to influence the balance of power between 'progressive' and 'liberal/conservative' forces, especially with regard to social issues.

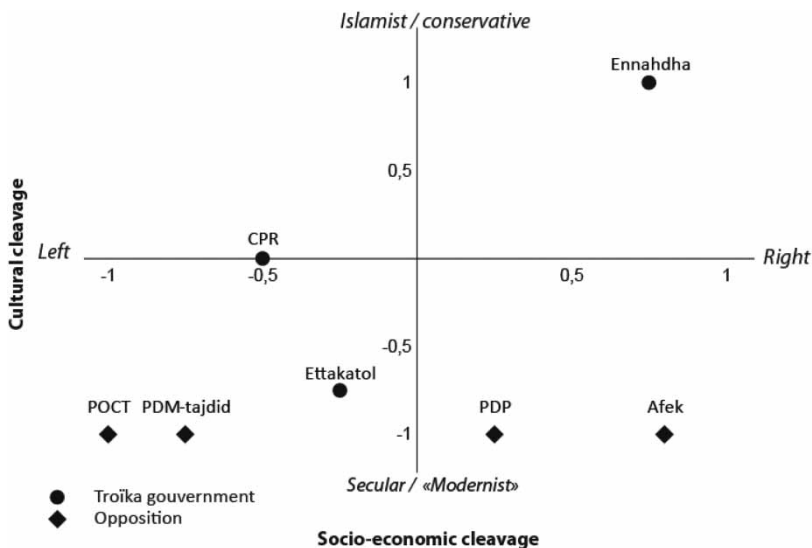


Figure 1. Relative position of the main parties on the most prominent cleavages in the emerging Tunisian party system.

In Figure 1, we present a synthesis of the position of the main parties with regard to these two main cleavages. The basic material comes from the parties' programmes and relates to five different issues: economy and employment, education, health, Constitution and culture. These data have been extracted from an online political programmes comparator<sup>7</sup> based on a survey of parties and independent lists. Consequently, this database is not exhaustive. We selected parties that obtained the most important electoral scores (for the other parties, see also Matri 2011). Most of the points in the programmes are formulated in very general and consensual terms, but some of them do allow for positioning the parties on the two main cleavages. To position each party on the cultural 'modernism vs. conservatism' scale, we choose a very simple method based on their opinion on four issues related to the Constitution: the clear separation of religion and politics; the neutrality of the state in religious terms; the penalisation of homosexuality and the inheritance rules, with some parties defending a strict gender equality, while others want the Chariâ to be the source of law. A clear opposition was observed between Ennahdha, on the conservative Islamic pole, and Ettajdid (PDM), PDP, POCT, Afek and, to a lesser extent, Ettakatol, on the secular modernist pole. Ennahdha's position is also clearly expressed in its intent to reinforce commercial links with the Arab world and to develop Islamic finance, as well as in its willingness to promote private education, which, in practice, is mainly religious education. The CPR is the only intermediate party in this cleavage strictly defending human rights while also putting the emphasis on the Arab–Muslim identity of Tunisia, as can be seen from its programme in the field of education.

Positioning each party on the socio-economic cleavage is a far more complicated task, with one of the reasons being the common message of the necessity to create jobs, to get better territorial balances, and to make health and education accessible to all, while not being very explicit about the means to achieve these goals. However, in each domain, we can identify several points where the party gives a clearer position on the role of the state vs. the private sector, or on the issue of social redistribution. To quantify the position of each party, we classify it as liberal/rightist or leftist on all points of the programme in four domains (economy, employment, health, education); if the liberal position clearly dominates against the leftist one in each of the four areas, the party's score is 1; 0.75 if it only dominates in three areas etc.<sup>8</sup>

In all domains but employment policy, Ennahdha appears as liberal – being, for example, the only party defending the independence of the Central Bank<sup>9</sup> – but also as explicitly defending a competitive Tunisia in the global economy by, for example, making Tunisia a pole of health tourism for both European and Arabic clientele. Afek Tounes is the only party supporting a pure liberal ideology, as it is the only one clearly calling for a vast privatisation programme. On this topic, the PDP remains vague but explicitly defines itself as social liberal. On the other side, the POCT is the party that most clearly supports public services and social redistribution, though being far from old communist parties, since it does not say a word on private property and does not seem very radical about the role of the state in the economy. This moderate left position is even more pronounced in the case of Ettajdid. When we look at the two other parties of the Troïka – the CPR and Ettakatol – they have in common some social concern, supporting the consolidation of a social security system, but never give a clear position on the role of the state or the private sector in the economy.

In this general scheme, Al Aridha is difficult to position in the political space that has emerged after the elections. This electoral list was created from scratch a few months before the elections by a Tunisian billionaire from Sidi Bouzid living in London, Hechmi El Hamdi, who owns the satellite television network Al Mustaquella. Al Aridha created a surprise while obtaining 6.9% of the vote and 12% of the seats (26), and ranking in third place in the elections of October

2011. This party has campaigned mainly on economic and social issues by delivering a series of promises of free transport, access for all to health care, etc. Despite a positioning closer to that of Ennahdha on cultural issues, its campaign has not focused on moral and religious values, but rather on material and concrete matters, which may partly explain its success among a poor and uneducated electorate.

Looking at parties' programmes, the issue of regional inequalities, one of the root causes of the Tunisian Revolution (Gana 2011a, 2011b), does not seem to constitute a dividing line that is likely to structure a core/periphery cleavage. In fact, all parties agree on the need to address regional disparities. It is, however, possible to observe a more pronounced positioning on these issues in the programme of some parties, such as the CPR, which calls for an affirmative action in favour of neglected regions; or the PDP, which emphasises the need for an 'accelerated development policy in areas abandoned by the state'; or the POCT, which denounces the significant discriminations between regions with regard to investment (ICG 2011).

Finally, the willingness to break with the old regime has shaped the political debate in Tunisia. However, in contrast to other authors (Ferjani 2012), we do not consider this as structuring the political space, since this issue brings together most political parties, even if various interpretations are to observe. Nevertheless, this issue has undoubtedly structured the electoral demand insofar as the parties considered the main victims of Ben Ali's regime were viewed as a guarantee for a radical break with the old system, with the first of these parties being Ennahdha, which had suffered harsh and continued repression during the two decades preceding the revolution of 14 January.

To summarise, one cleavage seems to have been predominant in structuring the electoral offer in Tunisia but it combines two main dimensions, particularly the issue of the place of religion in Tunisian society and the question of identity. In contrast, the weakness – or more exactly, the invisibility – of a cleavage structuring the electoral offer on a socio-economic or territorial basis does not mean that this one is irrelevant in explaining voting behaviour. The absence or lack of visibility of parties clearly structured around class interests or around issues of regional inequalities does not mean that voting behaviour is homogeneous between social classes. In fact, we will show how the geography of voting reflects the socio-economic disparities of the Tunisian space, as well as suggests strong class differences in voting behaviour, which are not necessarily expressed through a left–right cleavage as considered in its socio-economic definition.

### **3. The geography of voting in Tunisia: a multi-scalar analysis to apprehend socio-territorial emerging cleavage of the democratic Tunisia**

#### **3.1. *The electoral geography of Tunisia: the emergence of a core/periphery divide?***

In this section, we analyse the geography of electoral turnout and voting at the level of the 'delegations' for the whole of Tunisia. Electoral districts correspond to the 24 governorates, except for the governorates of Tunis and Sfax, which were split in two districts; additionally, we applied our analyses to the 264 delegations of Tunisia, the second level of the administrative division of the country. Although it does not necessarily change the main conclusions of our analyses, this scale allows for a more refined analysis and interpretation of the socio-territorial background of the Tunisian parties.

On average, electoral turnout did not go beyond 50%, depending on the way it is measured. However, the most striking feature of electoral participation is its unequal geography, varying between 21.49% (in Beb Bhar at Tunis) and 79.41% (in Sakiet Ezzit at Sfax) (Figure 2). More

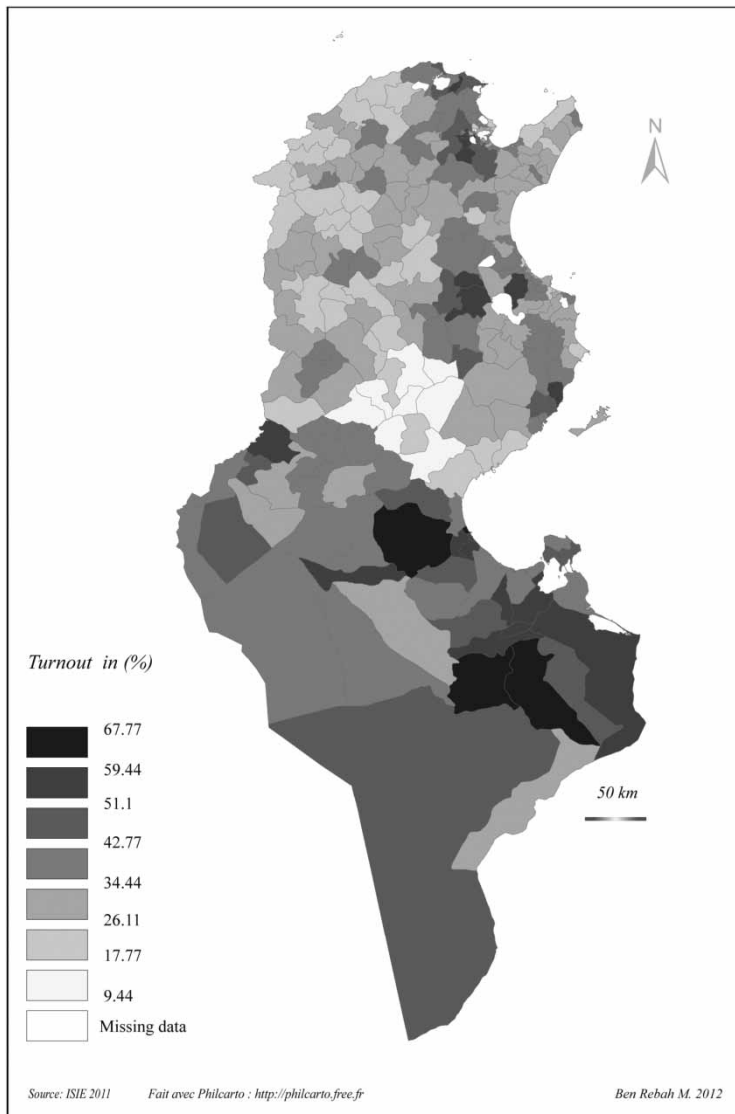


Figure 2. Electoral turnout and Ennahdha scores at the first general free elections of Tunisia, October 2011, at 'delegation' scale.

generally, the map shows the contrast between coastal cities and the Southwest, where the electoral turnout is high; inner territories of the centre, the Northwest and the extreme South, where it is much lower.

The geography of the main parties is illustrated in Figure 3. Ennahdha is the first party in nearly all delegations of the country, except in some delegations of the centre-West, an area that has been superseded by Al Aridha, and of the Southwest in favour of the CPR. In both cases, the party leader originates from the area. Ennahdha is thus the only party able to reach significant scores all over the country, although its highest scores are located in the coastal urban areas and in

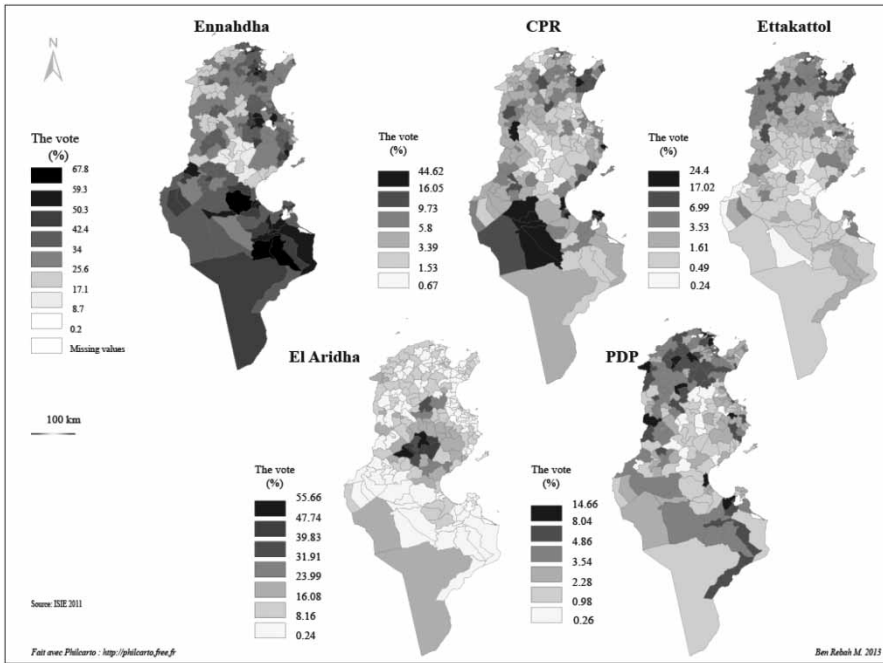


Figure 3. The geography of the votes of the five main parties (delegation scale).

the southern part of the country. The CPR also has good scores in coastal urban areas, as well as in the Northwestern and Southwestern territories. In contrast, it is very weak in the centre-West, notably in Sidi Bouzid, where 2% of the votes is not reached. Indeed, this region is the bastion of Al Aridha, which reaches up to 56% in the Sidi Ali Ben Aoun delegation. Outside the central and Western regions of the country, Al Aridha also reaches good scores in poor suburban delegations around Sfax (Agareb 22%, Thyna 19%) and Tunis, although to a lesser extent. Ettakatol and the PDP reach their best scores in the North, although the former has typically a more metropolitan geography, with high scores in Tunis (El Marsa 24%, Ariana El Madina 22%, Ez Zahra 21%). The latter is more present in the second ring of the Tunis metropolitan region (Ghar El Meleh 13%, Menzel Jmil, 9%, Mejez Elbeb, 8%, Zaghouan 7%), as well as in the Northwest of the country.

To highlight the spatial structure of the voting in Tunisia, we carried out a principal component analysis (PCA), with all parties having at least one deputy in the assembly, with a total of 27 parties. This analysis is based on the electoral results in percentages of all 27 parties in all 264 delegations of Tunisia. It illustrates the complexity of the electoral geography of this new democracy: 12 components reach an eigen value higher than 1, 8 components are needed to keep 50% of the initial information and the two first components account for respectively 12% and 9% of the variance. However, these two first components synthesise the main territorial cleavages emerging from these elections (Figure 4, above). The first component opposes the main parties at the heart of the political stakes, which existed well before the end of the dictatorship, to Al Aridha and more marginal electoral rolls. Spatially, the main cleavage is between core metropolitan areas located on the coast and inner peripheral areas, notably in the central West (Figure 4, below). In other words, parties that lie at the heart of the political game – as either Isla-

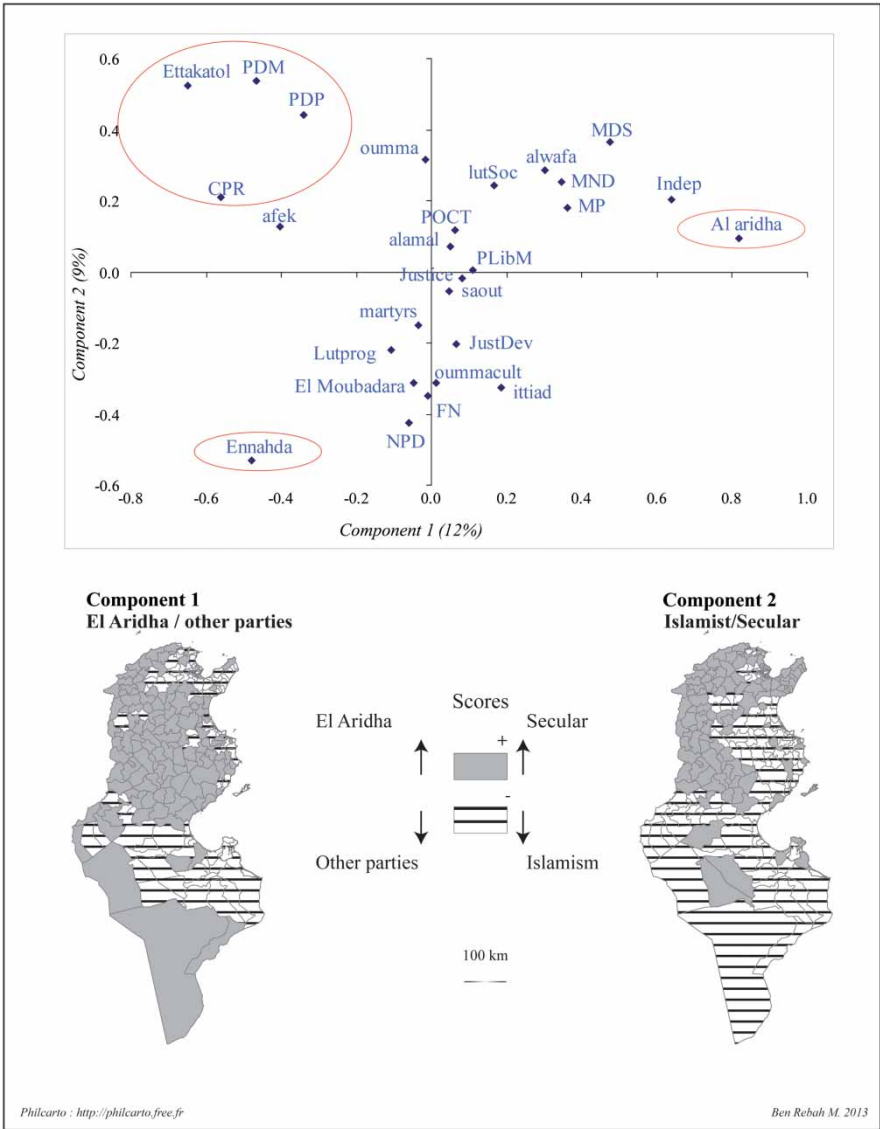


Figure 4. The first components of the PCA on electoral results.

mist or modernist – reach their highest scores in the core of the country, while other parties are more present in inner and rural parts of the country, in particular Al Aridha. The second component illustrates the opposition between the main conservative/Islamist party and the several modernist parties. Although both Islamist and modernist parties have their best results in urban coastal areas and are weaker in the inner parts of the country, they do not have the same geography at a lower scale. Significantly, the different modernist parties show similar geographies with high scores in the same delegations within urban areas, confirming that they largely compete to capture the same socio-geographical electoral base.

Table 1. Scores and number of seats obtained by major parties at the elections for the National Constituent Assembly Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections (ISIE).

Acronyms (or usual names)	French and English appellations	Number of votes	% of votes	Number of seats	% of seats
Ennahdha	Mouvement de la Renaissance (Renaissance Party)	1,498,905	37	89	40
CPR	Congrès pour la République (Congress for the Republic)	352,825	8.7	29	13.4
FDTL (Ettakattol)	Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés (Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties)	285,530	7	20	9.2
Al Aridha	Pétition populaire (Popular petition)	280,382	6.9	26	12
PDP	Parti démocrate progressiste (Progressist Democratic Party)	160,692	3.9	16	7.4
Al Moubadara	L'initiative (the initiative)	129,215	3.2	5	2.3
PDM	Pôle démocratique moderniste (Modernist Democratic Pole) (1)	113,094	2.8	5	2.3
Afek Tounes	'Horizons de Tunisie' (Tunisian Horizons)	64,498	1.8	4	1.8
POCT	Parti ouvrier communiste Tunisien (Tunisian Worker Communist Party)	57,600	1.5	3	1.4

Source: ISIE.

Note: The table includes all parties that have obtained more than 1.5% of the votes and at least three seats in the Constituent National Assembly.

We now deepen the analysis by explaining the electoral geography with the socio-economic differentiation of the Tunisian space. We limit these analyses to the seven main parties emerging from the elections of October 2012 (see Table 1).

We first synthesise the Tunisian socio-economic space through a PCA run on 68 variables from the 2004 census concerning employment, demography, education, urbanisation, economic structures and gender. The PCA enables us to synthesise the 68 variables in a few dimensions, with the

Table 2. Correlation between the socio-economic index of development and the electoral scores of the seven main parties, at delegation scale.

Parties	Pearson's <i>R</i>
Ennahdha	.271(**)
CPR	.535(**)
Ettakatol	.444(**)
Al Aridha	-.591(**)
PDP	.157(*)
Al-Mudabara	.210(**)
PDM	.451(**)
Afek Tounes	.313(**)
POCT	-0.104

\*Significant at 5%.

\*\*Significant at 1%.

first component alone accounting for 40% of the variance and the six initial components accounting for nearly three-quarters of it. The first component can be interpreted as a socio-economic development index, opposing developed urban and coastal areas with high employment rate or strong levels of infrastructures and education; to inner areas, which are much less developed. The second component mainly takes the question of unemployment into account and the third covers the gender gap in activity rates resulting notably in a strong North/South division of the Tunisian space.

As a second step, we calculate correlations between the socio-economic index – the first component of the PCA – and electoral scores at the delegation scale (Table 2). It shows that the geography of the most important parties is positively correlated with the socio-economic index, including Ennahdha, although to a lesser extent. Spatially, it simply means that these parties have better scores in metropolitan and/or coastal areas than in rural, underdeveloped areas. The lower correlation found for Ennahdha indicates its presence in all territories of the country, as well as its high scores in less wealthy districts within metropolitan coastal areas. The main exception is Al Aridha, which has reached much better scores in inner underdeveloped areas and, thus, has a negative correlation with the socio-economic index of development.

To further comprehend the electoral geography of Tunisia, we ran multiple regressions considering the socio-economic development index, as well as other important social dimensions lowly correlated with this index: the share of aged people, the share of manufacturing industry or administration in employment, unemployment rate, migratory balance and the gender gap in the access to jobs and tertiary education. These analyses confirm the impact of the level of development on the electoral geography after controlling for many other dimensions.

The regression models explain between 12% (for PDM) and 61% (for Ettakatol) of the parties' geography at delegation scale (Gana, Van Hamme, and Ben Rebbah 2012). In such, they can be considered as relatively powerful models, knowing that we only introduce socio-economic indicators. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the geography remains unexplained by the socio-economic characteristics of the territories; we interpret this as the 'territorial dimension' of voting.

To conclude, the electoral geography of Tunisia is deeply related to the socio-economic structure of the territories, as well-established parties obtain average higher scores in the most developed coastal areas. This opposition between metropolitan coastal and inner territories may also be interpreted as a core/periphery cleavage, although no party is explicitly positioned on this cleavage.

### ***3.2. Electoral geography within the large Tunis urban area: the importance of socio-territorial cleavages***

Within the greater Tunis metropolitan area,<sup>10</sup> the main territorial opposition between coastal urban and inner territories loses its pertinence. Hence, by changing scale, we look for other explanatory dimensions to understand the socio-territorial structures of voting in the new democracy of Tunisia.

Within the Tunis urban area, we work at the scale of 'imada', corresponding to large neighbourhoods or districts. However, in the absence of socio-economic data at a lower scale than delegation, statistical regressions can only be produced at the scale of delegation. Thus, in this section, we follow the same structure as the previous one: a descriptive section on the geography of turnout and of the main parties, a synthetic analysis of electoral geography through a PCA and statistical correlations between socio-economic characteristics and the electoral results.

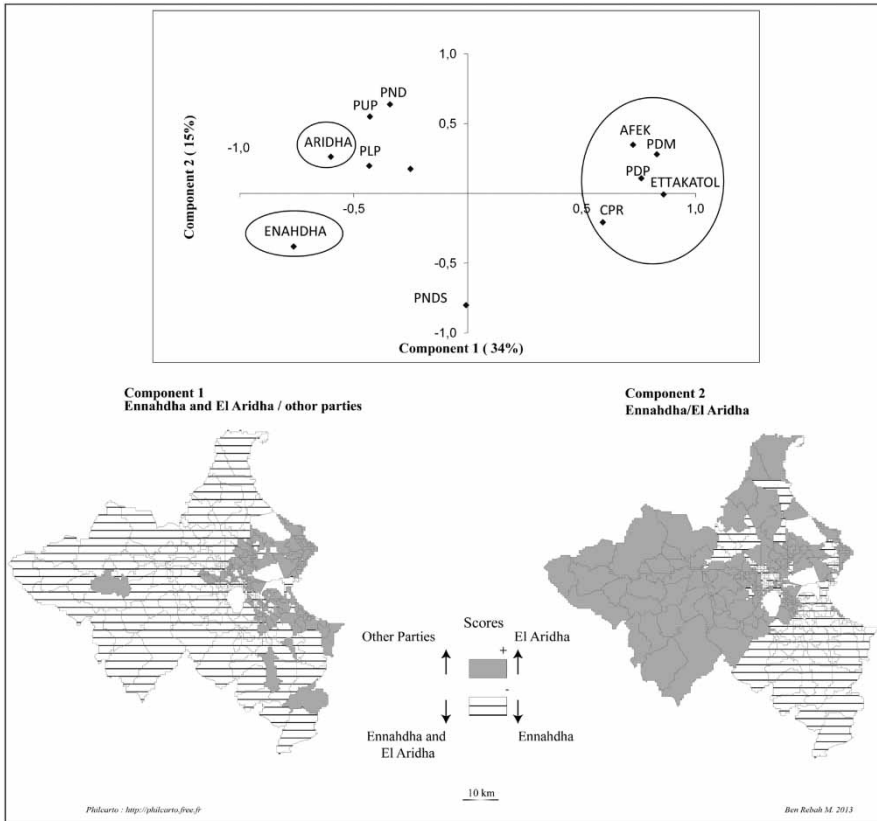


Figure 5. The components of the analysis of Greater Tunis, at the ‘imada’ level.

A PCA has been realised on the electoral outcomes of the 268 ‘imadas’ (or neighbourhoods) of the urban region of Tunis. We consider the 13 parties that have obtained at least one deputy in one of the five electoral districts of Greater Tunis. The geographical coherence seems higher than at national level considering that the first three components account for respectively 35%, 15% and 14% of the variance (64% together). The main opposition lies between the modernist parties and the conservative parties (Figure 5, above). The former get their best scores in the wealthy neighbourhoods, while the latter have more support in poor suburban areas (Figure 5, below). On the second component, Ennahdha is opposed to Al Aridha: The latter reaches its best electoral scores in the most peripheral recent settlements, including the spontaneous districts and the surrounding rural areas, while Ennahdha is also present in mixed areas of more ancient urbanisation, including the historical centre. Finally, we must note that the electoral turnout is only significantly correlated to the fourth component; this might be due to the absence of correlation with the socio-economic differentiation of the city in contrast to what is observed at a national level. It means that deprived neighbourhoods in urban areas did not participate less than average.

Finally, we test the relationship between territorial socio-economic characteristics and electoral results. We must note that this analysis is not possible at the ‘imada’ level shown on the map, and can only be achieved on the 47 delegations of ‘Greater Tunis’. Thus, we aim at testing whether the

correlations identified on a national scale are also found within the Tunis metropolitan area. By focusing on this urban area, we know that the main territorial cleavage identified on a national scale (coastal vs. inner areas) is not pertinent anymore and observe whether other socio-territorial divisions might explain the geography of voting.

Our models explain up to 86% of the variance of electoral results (in the case of Ettakatol) and are, in general, more powerful than models for the entire national territory, meaning that socio-economic differentiation is well correlated with electoral behaviour in Tunis. In such, some important conclusions can be drawn from these models:

- Ennahdha obtains higher scores in younger districts, with high unemployment rates and more manufacturing activities. When compared to the national analyses, the correlation with the socio-economic index is reverse, indicating that Ennahdha is, on average, more present in poor urban areas; and has weaker scores in the wealthiest ones, such as in El Menzah, where it gets its lowest national result (around 10% of the votes).
- The CPR, Ettakatol and PDM get their best scores in the middle-class districts, hence showing strong positive correlation with the socio-economic index, especially in the case of Ettakatol.
- The negative correlation between the scores of Al Aridha and the socio-economic index confirms that this party only reaches significant scores in the most deprived delegations, specifically in areas located at the limits of the metropolitan area.

To conclude, this change of scale highlights the importance of social divisions in explaining electoral results within urban areas. Although we should avoid any ecological fallacy in our interpretations, we find here a first indication of the existence of social cleavages in the voting patterns. However, the socio-territorial structures of voting do not suggest a classical right–left socio-economic cleavage but rather the better capacity of the conservative parties, including Al Aridha, to reach the most deprived urban districts; and, in contrast, the difficulty for the modernist parties to reach voters beyond their natural, middle-class district electoral base.

### 3.3. *First lessons from field surveys: the importance of local social networks*

The conclusion that can be drawn from previous analyses is that the electoral geography of Tunisia cannot be reduced to the socio-economic characteristics of the territories, which reinforces the hypothesis that there is a strong territorial dimension to the vote. In order to apprehend this ‘territorial dimension’ of the vote, we reassert the need to distinguish two relevant scales of analysis.

At the regional scale, we have underlined the contrasted electoral behaviour that opposes metropolitan and coastal areas to inner and rural regions, in particular Centre West. At the local scale, we have to consider individuals’ inclusion in social networks. Contrary to a well-established idea, the vote cannot be reduced to an individual act. To understand its deep motivations, it is necessary to study ‘the social environments in which voters evolve on a daily basis’ and to identify the various influences that shape electoral behaviour (Braconnier 2010; David and Van Hamme 2011). The social embeddedness of electoral behaviour implies the study of local systems of power relations and of people’s involvement into various types of social networks (family, neighbourhood, religious, cultural, political and civil society networks).

In the context of the authoritarian regime that prevailed in Tunisia for several decades, the influence of the ruling party networks has been paramount in shaping social and political behaviour in

local communities. The Democratic Constitutional Rally counted, according to Aghrout (2010), around 3.8 million members, which is nearly half of the adult population; Braun (2006) suggests similar estimations at the end of the 1980s. But most importantly, the RCD, through its local committees, included large segments of the Tunisian society in its own networks (Braun 2006).

The ban and the dissolution of the RCD in March 2011 created a vacuum that was rapidly invested by the Islamist party and other parties, such as El Aridha, which did not hesitate to draw on former RCD networks for their electoral campaign. Although Ben Ali did not allow for the Islamist Party to invest the political space, religious networks and associations expanded during his era, albeit to an extent that cannot be compared to the presence on the field of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt (Ben Nefissa 2012). Despite high surveillance of political Islam during Ben Ali's era, attendance at mosque services and membership in religious associations, in addition to the increasing audience of satellite channels from the Gulf countries promoting a conservative religious ideology, have come to play a growing role in shaping collective consciousness and political opinion, including within local communities. In this context, Ennahdha was able not only to capitalise on this cultural change among a relatively large fraction of the Tunisian population, but also to mobilise religious networks and use mosque services as a tribune for its electoral campaign. Also unlike other parties, Ennahdha was the only one that could draw on strong local connections all over Tunisia. Moreover, Ennahdha was probably the only party to have the financial and human resources to launch a nationwide campaign and to bypass the limited media exposure. In lack of such resources, most other parties had to rely upon their local social and historical networks, hence explaining the importance of the territorial dimension we are looking for in this section.

Another important actor of the sociopolitical arena in Tunisia is the main trade union, UGTT (Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens), whose role in the Tunisian society has been influential since the national liberation movement. Although its independence *vis-à-vis* the political regime has been constantly challenged during Ben Ali's era, UGTT has been actively involved in the protest movement that led to the Tunisian revolution (Yousfi 2012). While claiming officially to be politically neutral, UGTT and its leaders, especially at the regional and local levels, are mostly linked to the social-democratic/secular political forces with which they share common constituencies, in particular, the urban intermediary classes. Finally, some authors also highlight the importance of tribal networks in Tunisia and Maghreb societies as a key for understanding electoral behaviour (Daoud 2011; Hachemaoui 2012).

In order to apprehend this collective territorial dimension of the vote and the role of social networks in local communities (Braconnier 2010; Le Bras 2002), we carried out questionnaire surveys and interviews with voters and key actors (candidates, deputies, associations' representatives, etc.), in both urban and rural areas across the country. A database of 571 individuals interviewed in six field research areas was constituted. In this article, we do not present the results of the quantitative analysis, as we should be careful in trying to interpret them. This is mainly because our sample does not adequately represent the entire Tunisian population. Nevertheless, data collected from the questionnaire survey confirm clearly that Ennahdha and secular parties have socially differentiated electoral bases.

Here, we would like rather to share with the reader some elements that were collected from qualitative interviews and which allow for a better understanding of the social embeddedness of electoral behaviour in local communities. We focus here on the example of two areas in the governorate of Zaghouan.<sup>11</sup>

In the Zaghouan region, interviews were first conducted in a remote rural area and revealed a strong homogeneity in vote declarations and a quasi-hegemonic vote in favour

of Ennahdha. This needs to be explained in relationship to the socio-economic characteristics of the studied area – a marginalised farming area, where pluriactive households still have difficulty accessing basic services (water, health, education, etc.). In the area, big land-owners, most of which originate from and reside in Tunis, are not involved in local community life. As already mentioned, the system of local notability was mainly based on networks linked to the former ruling party (RCD) and its dissolution created a vacuum, which was rapidly filled in by Ennahdha's local activists. Our hypothesis would be that in the absence of a strong system of social and political guidance in local communities, the vote in favour of Ennahdha naturally imposed itself on the members of the studied rural community. These people were sensitive to the religious character of the party and its moral discourse, perceiving it as likely to lead to a radical break with Ben Ali's regime; this is in addition to the fact that Ennahdha was the only party truly known to the people. Interviewees also mentioned that, as poor people, they were in need of social protection and Ennahdha was viewed as being able to provide them with such. In this weakly diversified and small-sized rural community, social control is still very strong and community members have to comply with collective behaviour and decision-making. Considering this, two young female interviewees confessed that they had to hide their votes in favour of a social-democratic party candidate.

This hegemonic nature of the vote in favour of Ennahdha was not confirmed in the other area investigated in the Zaghouan governorate. In fact, in Bir Mcherga, an agricultural and small rural town area, Ennahdha's scores are rather similar to the ones the party obtains at the national level (33%), with the second and third parties in terms of votes being Ettakatol (21.25%) and Al Aridha (13.75%), which obtain more votes than their average score at the national level. This shows: first, that in a more socially and economically differentiated area, the voting pattern is more diversified; second, that specificities are to be observed in terms of parties' implantation at the local level.

When examining the vote in favour of Ennahdha, it is important to highlight that this vote has different motivations and meanings for the elector: A moral obligation to vote for the party of God; an act of solidarity with people who had fought and suffered; a search for protection, mainly expressed by people who have limited access to economic resources; or an adherence to the party's programme. In any case, what interviews revealed is a strong link between an Ennahdha vote and the elector's involvement in social networks and environments where religious ideas and practices occupy an important place. For example, the quasi-totality of Ennahdha voters in Bir Mcherga reported they frequently attended mosque services, where political discussion often took place. Also, interviews with political actors confirmed that mosques were heavily mobilised for the electoral campaign of Ennahdha. Religion-based political discourse and networks have thus played an important role in influencing electors and their impact has been more important in that, among Ennahdha voters, the influence of the family is crucial in determining electoral behaviour. Among this group of voters, we find also the largest share of individuals who vote the same way as other family members.

While, in general, family circles tend to have an important impact on electors' choices, interviews conducted in Bir Mcherga reveal also that involvement in associations' and political networks has some influence on particular electors' groups. This is the case for a rather important number of Ettakatol electors, who reported that interactions with activists and familiarisation with the party's programme determined their choice. However, being poorly rooted in the region, Ettakatol had to rely mainly on a conventional election campaign (rallies, flyers' distribution, etc.) to win a number of votes that still were insufficient to obtain a seat at the Assemblée Nationale Constituante (ANC).

Another important element influencing electors' behaviour is the reactivation of patronage networks of the former ruling party, which were importantly mobilised both by Ennahdha and Al Aridha. In general, proximity relationships and networking, rather than conventional election campaign instruments, had an effective role in rallying electors. Because they could not rely on these proximity networks, both Ettakatol and PDP, whose candidates originated from the capital city and delivered inappropriate messages, were not represented at the ANC. In contrast, Ennahdha's success in the region (two seats were won) appears to be the result of a more diffused and diversified strategy, drawing both on a multiplicity of existing networks (family-based, religious, associative and clientele) and on a moral discourse that led the electors to identify easily with the Islamist party. Al Aridha was also able to capitalise on the popularity of its leader (Hechmi Hamdi, owner of a satellite TV channel) and on its door-to-door campaign, conducted by local connections and using simple slogans, which reached people in the most remote communities of the region.

#### 4. Conclusion

The analysis of social and socio-territorial bases of the Tunisian parties in the first free elections of October 2011 shows two main dimensions, which only partially reflect the emerging political cleavages of the Tunisian political space. From a geographical perspective, the analysis first reveals a strong core/periphery divide: Metropolitan areas vote for the main national parties, while peripheral and underdeveloped areas participated significantly less in the elections and refuted both the modernist parties and the conservative/Islamist party, at least in relative terms. This opposition between the major parties, which obtain their best scores in urban and developed areas, and the rest of the political spectrum – in particular Al Aridha – implanted in the peripheries and in the less developed areas of the country, seems to be out of phase with the cleavages that are emerging within the nascent Tunisian party system. We interpret this as an 'anti-elite' voting of backward inner regions, which feel excluded from both economic and political modernisation.

When changing the scale of analysis, we find clear socio-territorial differences in the voting behaviour within the urban area of Tunis. Our analyses highlight that the Islamist and modernist parties do not invest in the same areas of the city: while the modernist parties get their best scores in the affluent districts, Ennahdha is implanted in more deprived neighbourhoods, although not necessarily in the most peripheral and poorest areas, where the religious party is in competition with Al Aridha. Without falling into the ecological fallacy, this second opposition seems to coincide with class antagonism. This class gap in voting behaviour is also revealed by field surveys carried out in different localities throughout the country. However, this socially segmented vote is not clearly structured around the socio-economic cleavage but rather tends to take the form of cultural cleavage. Hence, the socio-economic cleavage is not reflected in the electoral base of the parties, confirming its low visibility in the Tunisian political space.

We also highlight that the socio-economic territorial differentiation explains only one part of the geography of the main Tunisian parties. To understand the local collective dimension of the vote – that is, this part of the electoral geography that is not explained by the socio-economic characteristics of places – it is crucial to explore the local environments in which electoral behaviour is embedded. Our analyses show very clearly that Ennahdha is the only party that has been able to fill in the vacuum resulting from the collapse of the RCD networks, using mosques and religious associations as well as rapidly developing local representations all over the country (Ben Nefissa 2012). In contrast, the other parties could only rely on limited human resources and poor social networks embedded within places, except in some of their respective bastions,

as illustrated by the strong presence of the POCT in Djebeniëna, in the north of Sfax. Moreover, in this uncertain context where old networks evaporate and new networks are still not in place, Ennahdha appeared as the natural vote for many people, namely because it was perceived as the symbol of a break with the old regime.

In contrast, the failure of the modernist parties is a result of their political divisions, while competing for the same socio-territorial base of urban modernist middle class; and electorally, from their incapacity to enter into contact with the Tunisian people beyond their respective local bastions. The weakness of their territorial anchoring largely explains this incapacity to be convincing beyond the scope of their 'natural', educated, middle-class electorate.

Finally, the relative success of the CPR and Al Aridha can probably be explained by their indifference (or neutrality) to the modernist vs. conservative debate that has dominated the political sphere before and after the first elections, at least until recently. On the one hand, the CPR received its best electoral scores in wealthy, although conservative, neighbourhoods; and by penetrating social circles refusing the 'radicalism' of both Islamist and modernist parties, such as in the conservative bourgeoisie of Sfax. On the other hand, Al Aridha was successful in inner regions, as well as in recently urbanised and deprived suburbs of big cities, where its slogans and socio-economic promises were more appealing than the issue of the model of society, which has dominated the political debate during the election campaign.

More than one year after the accession to power of the coalition formed by Ennahdha, the Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol, Tunisia's political landscape is rapidly evolving.

Ongoing dynamics are characterised by the growing polarisation between two major poles mainly structured around the modernist vs. Islamist cleavage, confirming its predominance in the electoral offer. On the one side are the religious parties; these are formed by the ruling party Ennahdha and its allies, among which the newly legalised salafist parties,<sup>12</sup> whose pressure to impose the Islamisation of legislation and the Sharia as the source of law in the new Constitution has been growing. On the other side, the newly born alliance of secular forces regrouped in the 'Union for Tunisia' and constituted of several parties: Nida Tounes (the Call of Tunisia), created in February 2012 by former interim government prime minister Caïd Essebsi; the Jamhourî party (merging centre-right parties of PDP and Afek); and the Massar (the social-democratic path), regrouping centre-left political forces (PDM, Ettajdid and the Parti des Travailleurs Tunisiens (PTT)). This large political front aims at creating a more settled balance in the current political landscape through unifying opposition parties and overcoming their differences on the socio-economic issue, and is often described as an anti-*nahdha* front. As recent polls reveal, these initiative, unifying political forces of the right, the centre and the moderate left seem to rally the support of a growing number of Tunisians under the banner of the defence of the Tunisian republican model, which is strongly criticised by both the Islamist parties and the CPR.

In front of these two major poles, a new political alliance of left-wing and Arab-nationalists parties, represented by Hama El Hammami (POCT), has formed recently. Reluctant to join the 'Union for Tunisia', they consider that Tunisians should not have to choose between Nida Tounes or Ennahdha and claim to represent the progressive and anti-capitalist alternative to both the 'religious right', represented by Ennahdha and its allies; and the 'liberal right', embodied in particular by Nida Tounes. Capitalising on continuous social mobilisations and protest movements, the Popular Front is successfully increasing its audience among young people and popular classes, and appears to be the only political formation so far to put socio-economic issues in the forefront of its agenda. Most recently, the assassination of Chokri Belaïd, a leading member of the leftist coalition, triggered an explosion of popular anger and crystallised a growing sympathy with the Popular Front, which appears today as the third political force of the country.

While not eliminating the profusion of political parties in Tunisia, the recent evolutions lead to some clarification of the Tunisian political space, confirming the pre-eminence of the modernist vs. Islamist cleavage and, as a secondary cleavage, socio-economic left–right divisions. How these recent evolutions will transform the socio-territorial pattern of the vote is nevertheless an open question, which can be decomposed in important sub-questions. First, will Ennahdha be able to keep most of its poorly educated electoral base, considering the deteriorating socio-economic and security situation resulting in dissatisfaction over the governmental action and its failure to deal with social demands that were at the deep roots of the Tunisian revolution? Second, will the new modernist pole be able to go beyond their well-educated, urban, middle-class electoral base, and hence gather beyond the addition of its political components? Third, what will happen to the ‘peripheral anti-elite’ voters and non-voters, considering the political collapse of Al Aridha? The answers to these questions will have to wait until the next elections, postponed several times and now likely to take place at the end of 2014.

## Notes

1. We recall that this assembly was initially supposed to sit for one year with the objective to write a new Constitution.
2. Article 33 of the Electoral Act 2011 allocates two additional seats to governorates with less than 270,000 inhabitants. It concerns governorates located in the West and South: Zaghuan, Kef, Siliana, Tataouine, Tozeur, Kebili.
3. Constitutional Democratic Rally. In most cases, we use the French acronym of the parties commonly used in Tunisia. When French naming is not commonly used, we keep the Arabic naming (Ennahdha, Al Mudabara, Afek Tounes). Table 1 provides the main acronyms.
4. The blurring of parties’ dividing lines and the lack of visibility of the political landscape by the majority of Tunisians have contributed to assimilating the modernist vs. conservative debate to a dividing line between ‘westernised’ elites and popular classes attached to traditional moral values.
5. See Table 1 for all parties’ acronyms.
6. The Troïka is the governmental coalition regrouping the three parties (Ennahdha, Ettakatol and CPR) that received the largest share of the votes at the ANC elections.
7. <http://www.ajidoo.com/actualites/comparateur-de-programmes-politiques> (accessed 24/01/2013).
8. Other ‘quantifications’ have been tested and give very similar results about the party’s position on the socio-economic cleavage.
9. Since its arrival to power, Ennahdha has changed its position on the independence of the Central Bank.
10. The Greater Tunis metropolitan area includes the governorates of Tunis (split into two constituencies), Manouba, Ariana and Ben Arous, corresponding to 47 delegations and 268 imadas (or neighbourhoods).
11. Zaghuan is a mostly rural governorate, located at around 50–70 km southwest of Tunis.
12. Hizb Al Islah, Hizb Al Aman, Hizb Arrahma, and Hizb Attahrir.

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