Country Report

Tunisia

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November 2019

This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. Published by the GREASE project, this report is part a series covering 23 countries on four continents. Each report in the series has a corresponding Country Profile (issued separately) offering more basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in the given country. Both the reports and profiles are available on the GREASE project website.

Countries covered in this series:
Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

This report was produced by the partners of GREASE, an EU-funded research consortium investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

http://grease.eui.eu

What is the GREASE project?

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in 23 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Racius from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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Governing the religious sphere in Tunisia after 2011

Introduction

While Tunisia is the only Arab country undergoing a successful democratic transition, it is still faced with two interrelated challenges: first how to govern the role of religion within both the state and society in the post 2011 era, and second the deep wave of violent radicalisation that the country has been witnessing since 2011.

As the Ben Ali regime fell, religion has been freed from the control of state institutions, namely the security services. The transitional period has henceforth opened a new space for religious actors that were banned under the old regime, to reappear on the public scene, to get organized in political parties, charity association or preaching movements. Hence, opening a debate among the Tunisian political elite, both religious and secular, over the question of how to regulate the religious in the new republic.

In connection to the debate on how to govern the religious sphere, Tunisia has been also witnessing a home-grown Salafi-jihadi movement since the fall of Ben Ali in January 2011. Ben Ali's monopolization of the religious sphere and the socioeconomic grievances after the debacle of his regime opened the door to radicalisation after 2011. The fall of the regime created a vacuum that allowed radical groups to preach their ideas and recruit new members.

Within this frame, this report seeks to analyse the interconnection between these two issues: governing the religious sphere and violent radicalisation processes. The report will be divided into five main parts. The first part will offer a socio-economic profile of Tunisia after 2011; the second will present an overview of religion-state relation prior to 2011, and the third will look at the debate over religion within the state, political society and civil society after 2011. The fourth part will analyse the process of radicalisation and its drivers; and the last part will examine the approach adopted to face this wave of violent radicalisation.

Current composition of the population and challenges arising from it/ Overview of economic and cultural factors that relate to the above

Demography

 Tunisia is often regarded as a homogenous society with an overwhelmingly Arab Sunni population, however the Tunisian society knows both religious and ethnic diversity. On the religious level, Tunisia has Sunni, Ibādī, Baha'i, Christian and Jewish communities. On the ethnic level, the country contains: Arab, Amazigh and black communities. However, the only minorities currently recognized are the Christian and Jewish

communities. There are between1,500 to 2,000 Jews remaining in Tunisia. Estimates by NGOs suggest that the total Christian population does not exceed 5,000 (Quattrini, 2018: 16). The exact number of both Baha'i and Ibādī in Tunisia are unknown. No official figures exist on the number of Amazigh and black communities either. However, according to the Association for Equality and Development (ADAM), the black community represents between 10 and 15 per cent of the total population (Quattrini, 2018: 21). Although the successive Tunisian governments prior to 2011 have defined Tunisia's national identity as Arab and Muslim, ethnic and religious minorities have benefited from the new political environment after 2011 to express themselves and defend their interests as is the case for example with the establishment of Amazigh associations and the passing of the anti-racial discrimination law in October 2018.

In terms of the total population, Tunisia ended 2018 with a population of 11565204 people.

 Tunisia's first president Habib Bourghiba (in office from 1957 to 1987) took several steps to decrease the population growth in order to ensure socioeconomic development in the country after its independence. These measures included the introduction of a national family planning program and raising the legal age of marriage. Bourghiba's policies succeeded in reducing Tunisia's total fertility rate from about seven children per woman in 1960 to only 2 in 2018, with an average annual population growth rate between 2010 and 2018 of around 1% as shown in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1: Tunisia Population growth (annual %)**
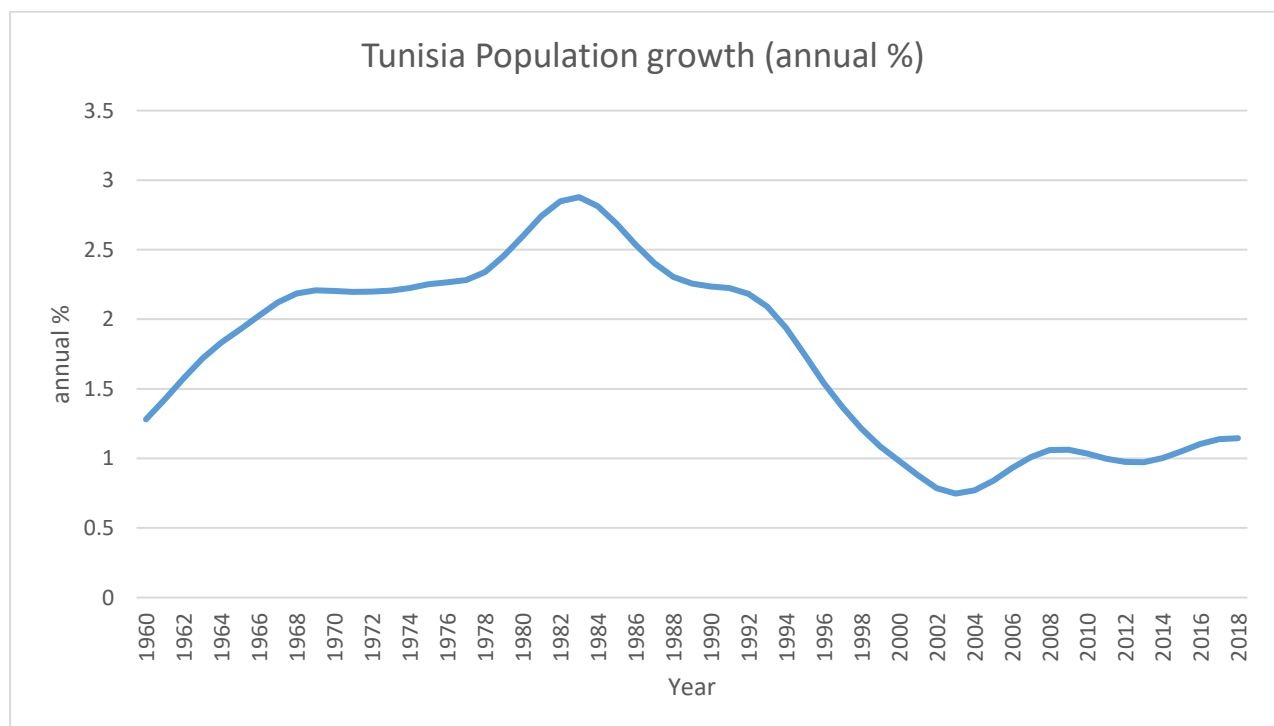
Source: World Bank data

As shown in **Figure 2** below, more than a quarter of the population is under the age of 15, 56.78 per cent of the population is aged 15-54, while 9.75% is aged 55-64. Those who are 64

years old and over make up 8.22% of the population. As these numbers show the sizable young working-age population from 15- 64 years has reached more 66.5% of the total population, and is hence straining Tunisia's labour market, as well as its education and health care systems.

Persistent high unemployment among Tunisia's growing workforce, particularly its increasing number of university graduates, was a key factor in the 2011 uprising that led to the overthrow of the old regime. Prior to 2011, Tunisia's youth unemployment rate was particularly high at 30.7 percent (for ages 15–24), while the overall unemployment rate was 14 percent.

Figure 2: Tunisia's population pyramid
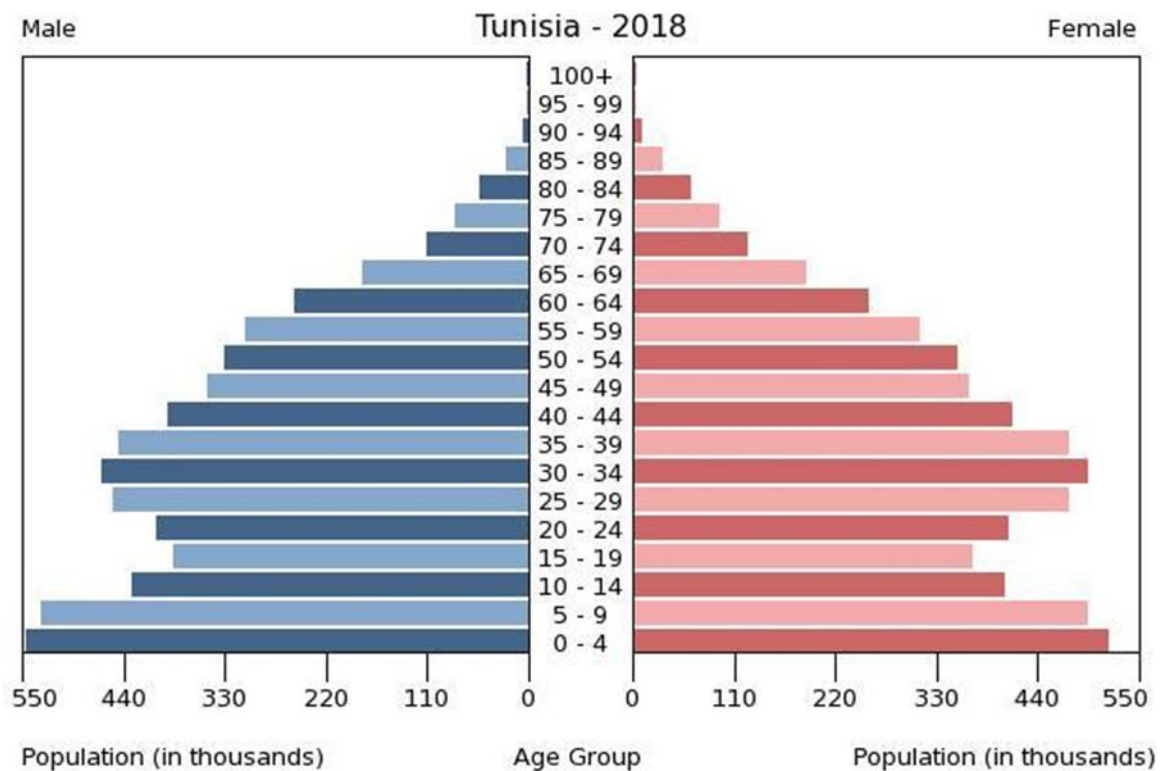

Source: CIA World Factbook 2018

Even if Tunisia has been able to maintain its political transition, its large number of jobless young, working-age adults; could contribute to future social unrest or to deepen Tunisia's Salafi Jihadi movement.

Socio-economic profile

Under the regime of Ben Ali, Tunisia had been praised by international institutions for its substantial progress in economic growth and poverty reduction. As shown in **figure 3**, Tunisia enjoyed an annual average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 5 percent between 1997 and 2007. It witnessed a strong recovery following the 2008 global recession and a 3.7% GDP growth in 2010. Nevertheless, Tunisia experienced a revolution in January 2011 driven in large measure by longstanding grievances about social, economic, and political exclusion. In a poll conducted after the revolution, the majority of the respondents believed that the revolution was induced by young people

(96 percent), the unemployed (85.3 percent), and the disadvantaged (87.3 percent) (SIGMA Group, 2011).

**Figure 3: Tunisia GDP growth (annual %)**
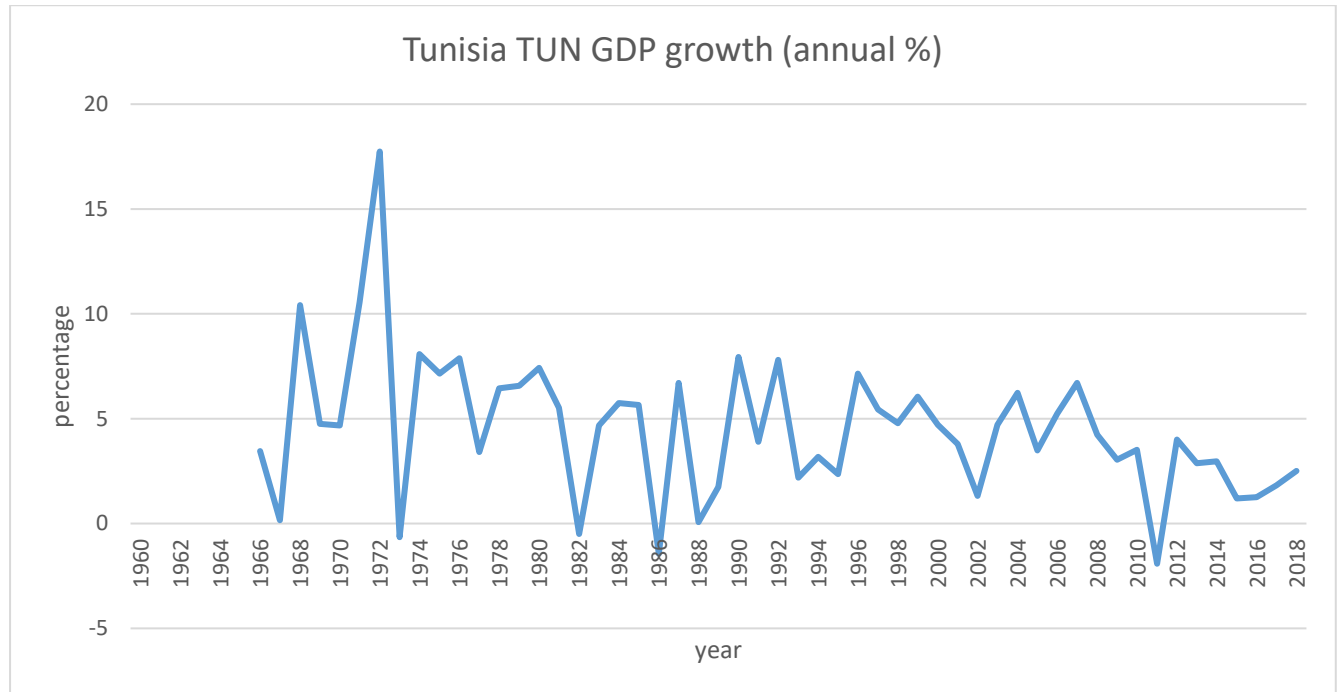
Source: World Bank data

In the post-2011 era, while important progress has been made on the political transition, making the country a unique example in the MENA region, economic transition has not kept pace.

However, in recent years, some sense of recovery has come. After recovering modestly to 2 percent in 2017, growth accelerated to 2.5 % in 2018. As shown in **figure 4**, the 2015 poverty rate in the country was 15.2 percent, significantly lower than the rate of 20.5 percent in 2010 and 23.1 percent in 2005. Nonetheless, significant regional inequalities in terms of living standards and employment are evident with the North West and Center West showing much higher poverty rates than the national rate: 28.4 percent and 30.8 percent, respectively.

Figure 4: poverty rate

Poverty rate
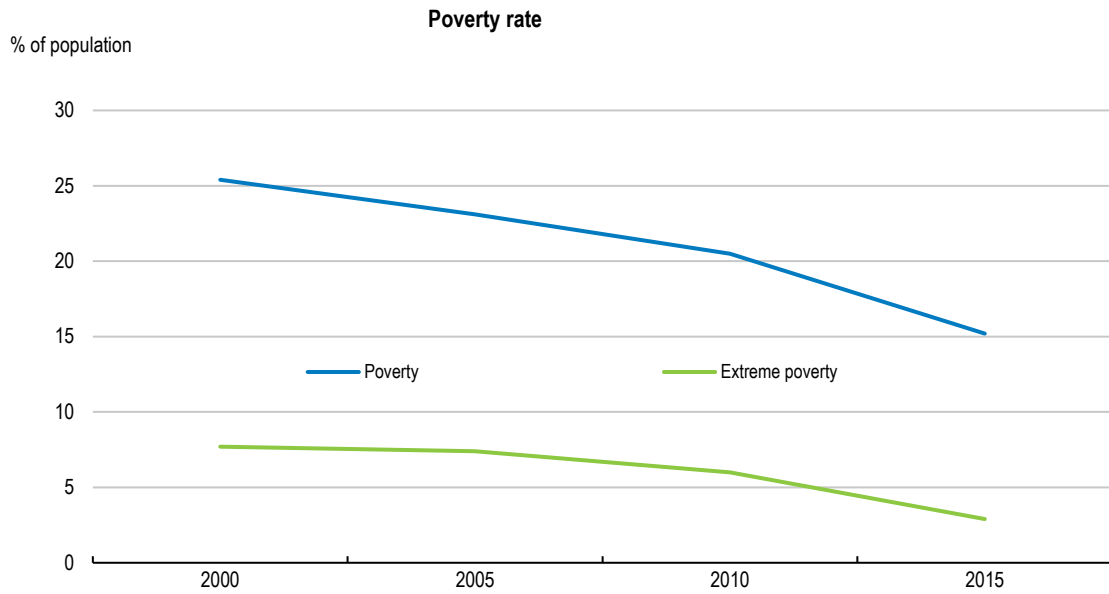
% of population

Source: World Bank Data

Social trends

Tunisia has been witnessing a number of shifts in its population's attitudes as shown by the fifth wave of the Arab Barometer conducted in 2018-2019. Three important trends are relevant for our analysis here:

1- As shown in **Figure 5**, economic challenges remain the primary challenge facing Tunisia as argued by 48% of the respondents.

Figure 5: primary challenge Tunisia

% saying the primary challenge is...
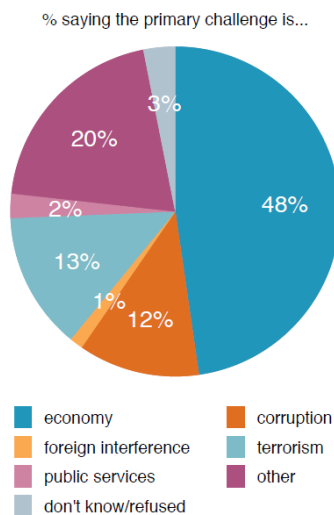
Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

2- Trust in Islamic groups, and particularly Ennahda party has declined by 24% in Tunisia since 2011 to drop from 40% in 2011 to only 16% in 2019.

Figure 6: Trust in Ennahda
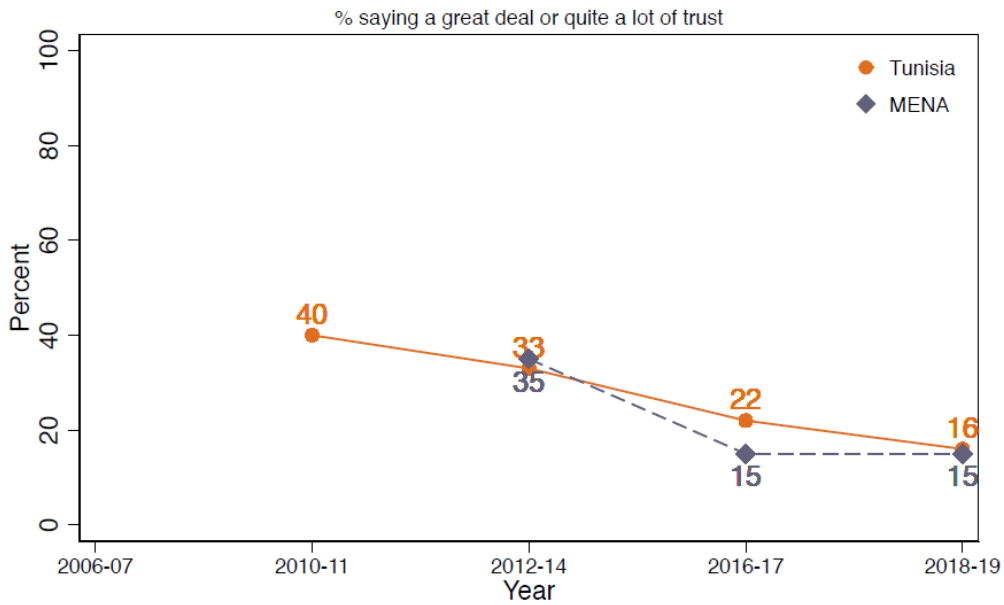
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer.

3- The number of Tunisians identifying as "not religious" has risen from 15% to 30% since 2013.

Figure 7: portion of people who said they were not religious

Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer.

Islam and State in Tunisia before 2011

Tunisia witnessed a process of modernization starting from the 19th century with its first reforming monarch Ahmad Bey (1837-55). Although Ahmad Bey's project aimed mainly at modernizing the Tunisian military, his reforms also reached the religious sphere, as is the case with his Act known as the mullaqa in 1842 organizing the recruiting of teachers and other personnel of Al-Zaytouna Mosque. This reform pro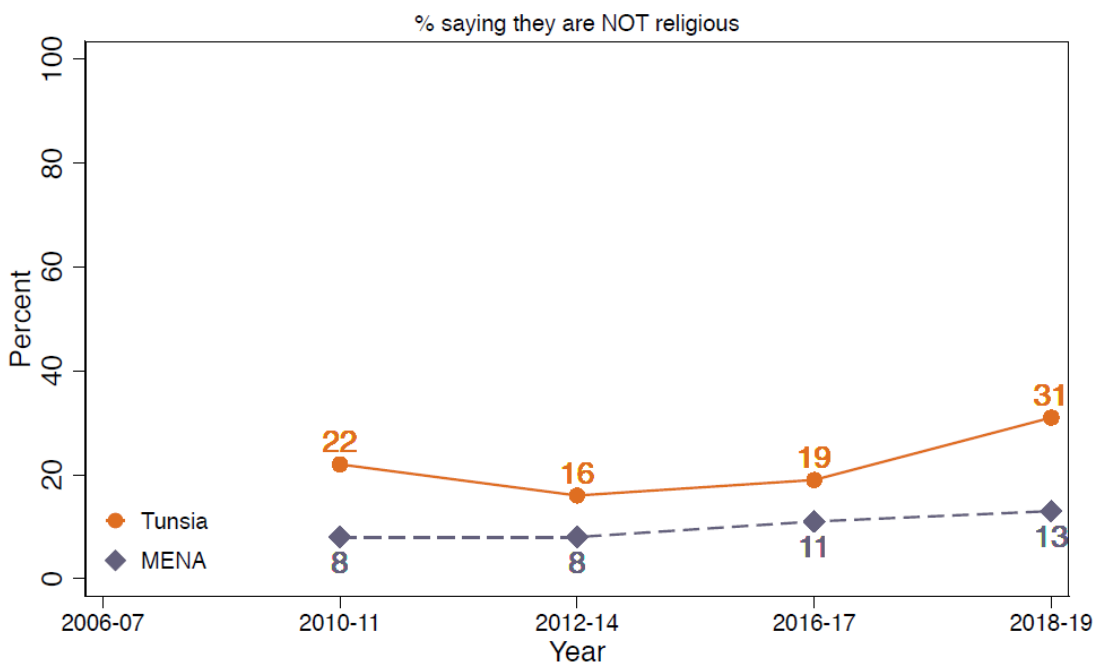cess continued with Mahammad Bey (1855-9) and al-Sadiq Bey (1859-81), including drafting Tunisia's first constitutional document in 1861, creating a consultative assembly as well as a penal court and a court of appeals.

Khayr al-Din Pasha is often considered Tunisia's greatest reformer. Although He served as prime minister for only 4 years, from 1873 until 1877, he made this short term a period of intense reformist activities. In 1874, he issued his ministerial decree downsizing the Shari'a Courts so that no court would include more than one qadi and one mufti. One year later, he reorganized educational procedures at Al-Zaytouna Mosque, introducing modern subjects into its curriculum and giving the prime minister's office stronger control over its management. He created also a central bureau (Jam'iyat al-awqaf) to administer public endowments. He founded a secondary school (Sadiqi College) to give potential civil servants an adequate background in modern subjects, including European languages. In 1876, he asserted his control over the elementary Quranic schools by re-organizing the recruiting of their teachers. In the same year, he also he appointed a commission to draft a comprehensive law code in harmony with the Shari'a (Green, 1976).

Although his strategy aimed at shifting the relation between Islam and state institutions, Khayr al-Din viewed the Ulama's cooperation as essential to the success of their projects. He involved them as much as possible in his reforms. For example, The president and vice-president of the Awqaf Administration were respectively two sheikhs; Of the nine-man commission that created Sadiqi College and reorganized Al-Zaytouna Mosque, six members were Ulama themselves; and of the four-man commission appointed to codify Tunisian law, three were Ulama. As a result, when this indigenous phase of development ended with the French occupation in 1881, the Tunisian Ulama continued to enjoy traditional privileges and authority.

Under the French rule, the French authorities worked to impose its control over the Ulama.   The French sponsored the creation of the jami'ya al-Khaldounia in 1896 to introduce the teaching of "modem sciences" at Al-Zaytouna. They also succeeded in subjugating to its rule the primary Qur'an schools, the madrasas, and Sadiqi College. However, they failed to do the same with Al-Zaytouna Mosque due to the Ulama's resistance. In the realm of jurisprudence, a number of Tunisian civil tribunals were created and hence leading to further diminishing of the role of Shari'a (Ghozzi, 2002)

The Ulama's strategy aimed at avoiding political confrontation with the new political authorities, while resisting only moves against their power. Hence, they withdrew as much as possible from the political movements of the nationalist period, resisting only when seriously threatened. The actions of the Ulama gave the impression sometimes that they had entered into a modus vivendi with the French in order to defend the status

quo against the nationalist. The allegation that the Tunisian Ulama sided with the French against the nationalists largely explains the ruthlessness with which the religious leaders were stripped of their remaining functions and authority after the independence (Green, 1976).

Tunisia achieved its full independence from France in March 1956. In July 1957, the Tunisian republic was declared, and one of the most prominent figure of the struggle for independence, Habib Bourghiba became Tunisia's first president and stayed in power for 30 years. Bourghiba led a process of modernization in all sectors, including in terms of religion-state relations. He understood secularism not as separation between religion and the state, but rather as placing religion under the strict control of state institutions. To Bourguiba's mind the Ulama had failed to stand up to the French colonial power and failed to reinterpret Islam to adapt to modern necessities. Hence, he adopted a number of measures in order to ensure all religious institutions in the country were dependent on and subordinate to the political institutions of the new republic.

Bourghiba abolished the religious Shari'a courts in favor of one unified secular judicial system. He abolished also the religious endowments, both private and public, that considered the main source of funding for religious organizations. He issued a number of laws promoting women's rights including abolishing polygamy, requiring mutual consent before marriage, entitling women to start divorce proceedings, to enjoy an equal division of goods after divorce, and forbidding husbands from unilaterally ending their marriages.

The new regime dismantled Al-Zaytouna University, founded in 737. He closed down its primary and secondary educational systems and moved its higher education faculty to a faculty of theology at the University of Tunis. He also established a Department of Religious Affairs, which was responsible for the coordination of government's action in religious affairs, appointment and training of Imams, as well as the regulation of religious rituals and education programmes.

Bourghiba viewed all his measures as a way to reconcile Islamic tradition with modern requirements. These policies were welcomed by a part of the Tunisian society as required steps to modernize the then new republic. However, other Tunisians viewed Bourghiba's policies as an attempt to destroy Tunisia's Muslim Identity and to impose the French secular model on the Tunisian society. That was the case with many of those who established the Islamist movement in the 1960s, including the leader of the movement Rachid Ghannouchi (Wolf 2013: 561).

The regime relied on its struggle for independence in order to push for this secularisation process in 1950s, however the situation has started to shift in the 1960s as the regime faced a number of economic difficulties that impacted its political legitimacy. In order to face this legitimacy crisis, the regime relied on religious claims in order to strengthen its political legitimacy. It was Bourghiba himself who established in 1968 the National Association for the Preservation of the Qur'an to promote the teachings of Islam and encourage the presence of mosques in schools and factories (Dell'Aguzzo & Sigillò 2017: 512). The regime also relaxed some of its previously implemented strict rules towards religion as for example allowing for a space for state

employees to pray. Moreover, Bourghiba reintroduced religion as a specific subject separated from that of civic education.

These new policies offered a favourable environment for Islamic forces, mostly inspired by the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, to reappear on the public sphere, first through religious activities, and later it adopted a political platform.   One of the main figures of this movement is Rachid Ghannouchi. The movement started first by focusing on religious and preaching activities during the 1970s. However, it shifted to also become a political movement under the name of Mouvement de la tendence islamique (MTI) in 1981. In a few years, this new movement managed to establish itself and compete with the official religious institutions in the religious sphere and the political regime in the political one. Feeling threatened by this organized movement, the regime answered through a number of measures to control it; however, it mostly failed leading the way for a bloodless coup by the then minister of interior Ben Ali against the rule of Bourghiba in November 1987 citing his health status as the reason.

In order to legitimize his new rule, Ben Ali offered a limited political opening through a process of national reconciliation with the political opposition including the Islamists under the frame of the National Pact. As did his predecessor, Ben Ali sought also to use religion in order to legitimize his rule. He allowed for a certain degree of Islamization of society, in an attempt to neutralise Islamic contestation by adopting their same discourse. According to this logic, if the state itself adopt a religious discourse, Islamic forces will have nothing to use against the regime.

Ben Ali granted the leader of the Islamic movement, Rashid al-Ghannushi, amnesty in 1988; and promised to guarantee the Islamic movement the license for a political party. In an interview with the French newspaper Le Monde, Ben Ali confirmed that nothing stood in the way of recognizing the MTI, if the group abided by the party law. The Islamist movement took advantage of this new political environment in order to increase its political presence. The MIT rebranded itself under the name of Ennahda (renaissance) in order to be consistent within the Tunisian law of political parties, banning religious parties (Chouika and Gobe 2015).

As part of limited political openness, Ben Ali held slightly competitive elections in 1989 and the Islamists were allowed to participate with an independent list. However, the relative success of the Islamist movement achieving around 15 percent of the nationwide vote (and 30 percent in greater Tunis) led Ben Ali to change his approach and to adopt a severe policy toward religious actors. He banned the Ennahda in 1992, and chassed its leadership who ended up either jailed, in exile, or went underground and stopped all their activities. Great Britain granted political asylum to Ghannushi in 1993.

The strict policies of Ben Ali against the opposition have led intendedly to a process of rapprochement between Islamist and secular parties. In 2003, Ennahdha together with Congress for the Republic (CPR), the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties, known as Ettakatol, and the Progressive Democratic Party PDP (all of which held seats in the Constituent Assembly established after 2011) signed The Tunis Declaration of 17 June 2003. The declaration represented a compromise between Islamist and secular forces with secularists accepting the right of Islamist groups to participate in democratic politics, and Islamists agreeing that popular sovereignty, not religious texts, is the only

source of legitimacy. In 2005 these four political parties took one-step further and met with representatives of smaller parties and agreed on 'The 18 October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia' declaration after 3 months of negotiations. The document stressed that any future democratic state would have to be a 'civic state", and that 'there can be no compulsion in religion. This includes the right to adopt a religion or doctrine or not' (Stepan 2012).

As for the situation of the religious sphere inside Tunisia, with Ennahda going underground in the 1990s, Salafism started to rise. Salafism generally refers to a literal and puritanical version of Islam that emphasizes following the path of the Islamic ancestors (*salaf al-salih*) in order to apply the prophetic model by the companions of the Prophet and their followers. It is often classified into two categories: scripturalist (*al-salafiyya al-'ilmiyya*) and jihadi (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*). The former is generally apolitical and refuses to go against its rulers as long as rulers do not prevent the practice of Islam, while the latter believes in armed struggle to establish an Islamic state.

Scripturalist Salafism grew through private meetings, books and audio-visual materials and the religious satellite channels that attracted many Tunisians striving for religious knowledge due to the "religious desertification" under Ben Ali. These apolitical activities were relatively tolerated by the regime as Ben Ali thought Salafism could offer an apolitical alternative to Ennahda (Fahmi and Meddeb 2015: 5).

Tunisia also witnessed the emergence of a Salafi jihadist trend during the 1990s. This movement began to grow in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2011 and the subsequent war on terrorism led by the USA. Young Tunisians joined Salafi jihadist groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia to resist what they saw as a Western attack on the Muslim world. Jihadists have also been active inside Tunisia. In 2002, Tunisian jihadists attacked a synagogue at the Tunisian island of Djerba. This attack led the Ben Ali regime to issue a counterterrorism law in 2003 and to arrest around 2,000 people on charges of belonging to Salafi-jihadi groups.

By the end of the 2000s, and despite the high unemployment and inflation rates, the lack of political freedoms, and the elite corruption, it seemed that the Ben Ali regime is stable and hard to be challenged. However, a small incident in December 2010 has led a huge popular uprising that resulted in ousting Ben Ali in less than a month of demonstrations.

After the escape of Ben Ali, and following article 57 of the Tunisian constitution, in case of vacancy of the President of the Republic because of death, resignation, or absolute incapacity, the speaker and head of the parliament, at that time Fouad Mebazaa, became the interim president. In March 2011, Mebazaa announced a new transitional plan according to which Tunisians would vote for a "National Constituent Assembly" to draft a new constitution. The elections were held in October 2011 with a remarkable turnout of approximately 86.1%. Ennahda got 41% of the votes, The Congress for the Republic came second with 13, 4%, and in third place came the Popular Petition with 12% and fourth Ettakatol with 9.2% of the votes. The victory of Ennahda has increased the fear among the secular circles of the Tunisian society. They feared that Ennahda might try to establish a religious rule. However, Ennahda aware of these fears and its possible implication on the transition process decided to form a troika government with the CPR, and the leftist Ettakatol in which Ennahdha would take the premiership, the CPR would

fill the presidency, and Ettakatol would determine the chairmanship of the constituent assembly.

The debate over the place of religion after 2011

The debate over the place of religion in post 2011 Tunisia has revolved around how to regulate religion on the three levels of a polity: State, political society and civil society. First the level of the state and mainly the issues of the identity of the state and the role of Shari'a in the legislation process. Second on the level of political society, and mainly the issue of religious parties and if these parties should be allowed, and how these parties should manage the relationship between the political and religious activities. Third, on the level of civil society, and particularly with the case of religious groups engaged in preaching activities. Should these groups be given access to mosque, or mosques should rather be under the strict control of state institutions as was the case under the old regime.

The debate over Shari'a in the constitution

During the process of drafting the new Tunisian Constitution, which started in February 2012, there was considerable debate between Islamic political groups, represented by Ennahda and secular movements, represented by the CPR and Ettakatol over the role of Shari'a in the legislation process. After winning more than 40% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, some representatives of Ennahda proposed a constitutional provision declaring Islam to be the main source of legislation. One of the prominent member of Ennahda, Sahbi Atiq, declared that Islam should be incorporated in state institutions and not be just a slogan. The debate over this issue has increased the level of tension within the constituent assembly but also within the society between secularists and Islamists. Representatives of Ennahda's allies the Congress Party for the Republic and Ettakatol announced that Ennahda's proposal emphasizing Islam as the main source of legislation is unacceptable. After months of debate and negotiations, and as polarization reached worrying levels, Rached Ghannouchi interfered and convinced members of his party that there is no need to explicitly refer to Islamic Shari'a in the constitution, and it will be enough to keep the pre-existing first clause of the old constitution, stating that "Tunisia is a free, sovereign and independent state, whose religion is Islam ".

According to one of Ennahda prominent members, Ghannouchi approached the issue both rationally and ideationally. Rationally, Ghannouchi argued that Ennahda is unlikely to have the two-thirds majority inside the constitution assembly to pass the constitution with this article as even its partners in the coalition, CPR and Ettakatol are most likely to vote against it. In this case, it will look like the issue of Sharia has been rejected once and for all. Ideationally, Ghannouchi argued that the debate over the issue of Shari'a has divided the Tunisian society, and might be a source of instability and chaos, which according to Shari'a itself should be avoided at any cost (personal communication, Tunis 7 March 2019).

The case of religious parties

Tunisia has seen the establishment of religious parties during the transitional period as it the case with Ennahda party and the Salafi the Reform Front Party. The establishment of religious parties has been one of the debatable issues during the transitional period.

From its side, Ennahda has taken huge steps to differentiate between its political and religious activities. In its 10th general assembly held in May 2016, Ennahda successfully enacted important internal reforms, including drawing a clear differentiation between its political and religious identities. After a few years of debate within both Ennahda's leadership and between the leadership and its rank-and-file members, the reformist voices won. The assembly agreed to implement a division between the political party and the preaching activities that would practically prevent the political party leaders from also holding senior positions in religious associations or even from preaching in mosques. Even more, the assembly final statement insisted that the party no longer belongs to the category of political Islam, but rather it seeks to establish a larger coalition of Muslim democrats that would include non-Islamist voices as well.

However, these changes within Ennahda came with a price that often went unnoticed: it damaged Ennahda's position within the religious sphere. First, the political compromises Ennahda had to make during the constitutional writing process in matters of Shari'a damaged its image within religiously conservative youth. In an interview with a Salalfi youth activist, he said "So what's Islamic about Ennahda, if they cannot even add an article about Shari'a to the constitution?" (Personal communication, Tunis, March 2015). Along the same line, the decision of the 2016 general stating that the movement does not belong to the category of political Islam anymore has also disappointed many Islamist youth.

While many people perceive Ennahda as a political party and hence assess its experience during the transitional period as a success, others perceive it as a religious movement and hence think it failed completely in achieving its role in upholding the principles of Islam. As Ennahda is both a political party and a religious movement, both evaluations should be taken into consideration. Ennahda's decision to focus on the political side has deprived the religious market of a strong religious player that would have balanced the presence of radical religious movements. It would have been far better it the movement would have undertook a reform of religious interpretation toward a more innovative and modernist understanding, rather than dropping the religious altogether (Meddeb 2019: 12).

The debate over the neutrality of mosques

The debate over the regulation of religion on the society level involve the issue of who has the right to preach in mosques and if it should be all under the control of the state or to allow religious movements also to have access to mosques to preach for their religious ideas.

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, the security apparatus lost control over the religious sphere. Unlike the case in Egypt, where the religious "market" was characterized by relatively strong state religious institutions, such as Al-Azhar, Egypt's

oldest center of Sunni teaching, and a strong presence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups under the rule of Mubarak, the market in Tunisia was almost empty when the regime fell (Fahmi and Medded 2015:11). Moderate groups, like Ennahda, but also more radical ones, like the Salafi-Jiahdi Ansar Al-Sharia, took advantage of this religious vacuum to spread their ideas and recruit new members. Mosques turned into battlefields in which several religious players competed for control. For those players, mosques were the best channel through which they could influence or control the entire religious sphere.

From their side, State religious institutions were weak and ill-equipped to compete with these newcomers to the religious sphere, either because they had been weakened by the policies of the old regime, as in the case of the religious university of Al-Zaytouna , or because they were delegitimized in the post–Ben Ali era because of their support for the old regime, as is the case with the official imams affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. For example, during the Friday prayers that followed Ben Ali's departure, Islamists, whether proponents of political Islam or Salafists, took over mosques and expelled imams appointed by the state. Estimates point to approximately half of the mosques in the country had their Imams expelled during this period (Donker, 2019: 507). Some mosques even witnessed violent clashes between political Islamists and Salafists who competed for controlling the same mosque. During the months after the revolution, the Ministry of Religious Affairs lost control of a large number of Tunisia's 5,000 mosques, including historic ones such as Al-Zaytouna, the Great Mosques of Kairouan, Msaken, and Sfax.

As state institutions have started to regain their strength and legitimacy, since 2013 successive ministers of religious endowments have been determined to extend the ministry's control over all mosques and imams and to close down all illegal mosques. The Ministry also relieved a number of unlicensed Salafi preachers from their duties, including the famous Salafi preacher Bechir Ben Hassan, and appointed other imams affiliated to the Ministry in their place. These measures even went beyond the Salafi preachers to include religious figures close to Ennahda, including the former minister of religious affairs Nouredlin Khadmi himself, who was the minister of religious affairs under the government of Ennahda.

The debate over the neutrality of mosques started as part of the dialogue that took place in the transitional stage about the identity of the state and society and the relationship between religion and politics. The neutrality of mosques was one of the most debated issues during the national dialogue and was included as a part of the road map agreed upon by different political factions to resolve the 2013 political crisis. The members of the National Constituent Assembly stressed the importance of the neutrality of mosques in the new Tunisian constitution issued on January 26, 2014. The sixth chapter of the constitution states that the state state protects religion, guarantees freedom of belief and conscience and religious practices, protects sanctities, and ensures the neutrality of mosques and places of worship away from partisan instrumentalisation.

Supporters of the neutrality of mosques argue that mosques are religious spaces that should not be involved in politics and should not be used by any faction to get political or electoral gains. Critics of this demand, on the other hand, argue that it is not possible

in Islam to separate the religious from the political, that religious discourse cannot be confined to spiritual matters, and that imams have the right to discuss worldly affairs that concern the Muslim public.

The Salafi Jihadi movement

While Tunisia is the only Arab country undergoing a successful democratic transition so far, it has also been home to a growing Salafi-jihadi movement since the fall of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. This is evidenced by the number of deaths due to terrorism per year, which increased from four in 2011 to eighty-one in 2015. Moreover, Tunisia has been one of the top exporters of Salafi jihadist fighters, with more than 5,500 Tunisians fighting with jihadist groups in Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria, and Yemen as estimated by the UN in 2015.

The most organized group within the Tunisian post 2011 Salafi jihadism scene was Ansar Al-Sharia. The movement was established in April 2011 as a group following the Salafi-jihadi ideology, but with a specific focus on the strict implementation of the Islamic Sharia law. However, unlike other cases, most Ansar al-Sharia leaders rejected the use of violence inside Tunisia, calling Tunisia a land for preaching, not combat. Ansar al-Sharia founder Abu Ayadh is a prime example of this trend. He insisted that violence was a trap and that the focus should be on preparing society for the rule of Islam through religious and social activities, not fighting.

While some of the Salafi jihadists who formed Ansar al-Sharia previously believed in the need for armed struggle to establish an Islamic state, including Abu Ayadh himelf, the Arab Spring led them to change their tactics and to focus instead on preaching religious ideology to prepare the ground for the establishment of the Islamic state. The movement took advantage of the security vacuum the country witnessed after the fall of Ben Ali's regime to take control over a number of mosques in order to preach for its ideas and recruit new members. Their preaching and charitable activities allowed them to expand their influence in the public sphere and to recruit militants in the suburbs of Tunis and the inland regions, especially Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba, Kairouan, and Kasserine to reach according to the movement spoksperson Bilel Chaouachi more than 50.000 supporters.

However, despite the position of the leadership, some members of Ansar al-Sharia have indeed engaged in violence, either outside Tunisia by joining the jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq or inside Tunisia by targeting security forces and secular political figures. the decision of some members to take up arms resulted in a series of attacks against the Tunisian police and the assassination of two political figures from the opposition, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, in February and July 2013, respectively. The assassinations put the post-revolutionary political transition process at risk because secular political forces accused Ansar al-Sharia of being behind the assassinations and the ruling Islamist party Ennahda of protecting it.

Two approaches competed within Ennahdha in how to deal with this crisis. The first argued that by allowing Jihadi Salafists to work publicly, they would moderate their ideas through interaction with other Islamic groups, and thus could be an asset to the Islamic movement in their competition against the secular forces. That was the case of Ghannouchi himself who said that Salafi Jihadi youth remind him of himself when he was

young. The second perceived them as a threat not only to the Tunisian political process, but also to the Islamic experience of Ennahda. That was the case of the back then Prime Minister Ali Larayedh, also back then Ennahda's secretary general. The rise of political violence in 2013 gave the second group the legitimacy to act. In May 2013, the government refused to allow Ansar al-Sharia to hold its third annual meeting. In August 2013, then Prime Minister Ali Larayedh declared Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization. According to Larayedh's official declaration, Ansar al-Sharia was involved in the killings of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi and other security officers. The declaration led to the arrest of more than 6,500 young people who were members of or sympathized with Ansar al-Sharia and prompted many other Jihadi Salafists to leave the country for Libya or Syria. These members mainly joined ISIS in these two countries.

During 2014, ISIS began to establish a presence in Libya. With its largest Libyan group based in Sirte. The group also established a camp at Sabratha, near the Tunisian border, that focused on training Tunisian fighters. Among this group, were the members responsible for attacks in 2015 against two prominent tourist destinations: the Bardo Museum in Tunis (where 22 civilians were killed) and the beach resort of Sousse (where 38 civilians, including 30 British tourists, were killed). Tunisians who had joined ISIS in Libya led also the armed attack on the Tunisian border town of Ben Guardane in March 2016, when a number of ISIS fighters crossed the Libyan Tunisian borders and attempted to control the city to create an Islamic emirate as was the case in Mosul (Iraq), Raqqa (Syria), and Sirte (Libya). However, the local population of Ben Guardane resisted this invasion and supported the Tunisian security forces that rushed to protect the city.

Two factors are playing an important role in fueling the Salafi Jihadi movement in Tunisia: the monopolization of the religious sphere and the frustration of the socio-economic situation after 2011, particularly among the youth.

While the Ben Ali monopolization of the religious sphere has led to an almost religious vacuum after the regime fell in 2011, and hence allowing for the Salafi-jihadi movement to take advantage of this situation to preach for its ideas after 2011 with little resistance or competition from other religious actors. One other consequence, although in the different direction, of the lack of credible religious voices has been the growth of those who identify themselves as non-religious as shown in figure 7 in the first section. The movement also took advantage of the socio-economic frustrations after 2011 to expand its presence, in particular among the youth. The worsening of the lower and middle classes' economic and social situation after the revolution has led to deep frustration particularly among university graduates. 90 percent of the youth living in the suburbs of Tunis ((Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen) estimate that their situation has not changed since 2011, and 46 percent consider it even worse than it was under Ben Ali's regime (Lamloum et al, 2015). The optimism occasioned by the revolution has therefore soured— In this context of general disappointment, leading some of them to join the salafi-jihadi movement in a sign of protest (Fahmi and Meddeb 2015).

Policies and practices addressing / preventing violent radicalisation

Tunisia announced in 2016 its National Strategy for Counter-terrorism adopted by Tunisia's National Security Council. The strategy insisted that fighting extremism requires a multidimensional approach built around four main axes: prevention, protection, judicial proceedings, and retaliation. However, while the Tunisian authorities have focused on measures to enhance its security forces capabilities to combat terrorist groups, little has been done to address the root causes of radicalisation in order to prevent Tunisian youth from joining these violent groups in the first place.

On the security level, the Tunisian authorities created the Agency for Defence Intelligence and Security. It has also launched the National Commission on Counter-Terrorism, which joined the National Security Council in developing the new, comprehensive strategy on counterterrorism and extremism unveiled in 2016. In 2017, Tunisia set up the National Intelligence Centre, an institution designed to overcome problems with coordination and information sharing between intelligence agencies that had plagued the country's counter-terrorism efforts since the revolution.

However, preventing violent radicalisation requires also a discussion over how to manage the religious in post 2011 Tunisia. The policies adopted by both former presidents of Tunisia, Habib Bourghiba and Ben Ali relied on putting the religious sphere under the strict control of the security services. As the security regime of Ben Ali fell in January 2011, the religious sphere looked more like a chaotic space with no rules to organize it, and hence allowing for Salafi jihadi groups, such as Ansar al-Sharia to rise.

Tunisian secular and religious actors have made important compromises during the constitutional writing process in order to protect Tunisia's transition to democracy; however, Tunisia still needs to face the questions related to the institutional rules to govern the presence of religion on the levels of the state, political and civil societies.

On the state level, Islamic political actors, including the religiously inspired Ennahda party, have tried to avoid any discussion on Shari'a out of fear of being labelled as religiously conservative movement. However, Shari'a remains the key concept linking Islamic religious values to governance. By avoiding the debate over Shari'a, the main political actors have allowed more conservative religious voices to monopolize the speech in name of Islam and Shari'a, as is the case with Salafi groups.

On the political society level, religious parties such as Ennahda movement don't need to give up completely on its religious role, but rather it needs to draw an institutional differentiation between the political party and the religious movement. Although, Ennahda 10th general assembly agreed in May 2016 to separate between the political party and the preaching activities, the movement still needs to find the right balance between the religious and the political, as most of its cadres went to the political branch and ignored the religious one.

On the society level: the different governments during the transitional period have been trying to regain control over the religious sphere. Some of the religious figures expressed their fear that these measures might put the religious sphere under the strict control of the state, as it was under Ben Ali, and hence will not stop violent radicalisation, but might rather reinforce it as it delegitimize preachers and make them look as only mouth piece of the state. The Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to find its way between these two extremes: chaos as was the case after 2011 and strict control of the religious sphere as was the case under ben Ali. The Ministry needs to manage, but not control, the religious sphere.

The Islamic religious field is characterized by a diversity of ideas and organizational structures, which makes it impossible to apply uniform nationalization policies to it. The state's desire for control leaves some populations—particularly the youth—with no room to express their opinions and beliefs, driving them to other outlets.

Instead of allocating state religious institutions a monopoly over the religious sphere, the regime needs to strengthen the ability of state religious institutions to compete within a competitive religious market, where any religious actor that does not practice or call for political violence or adopt a hatred speech should be allowed to operate.

if the state grants state religious institutions a monopoly over the marketplace, it damages its legitimacy and paradoxically allows for the emergence of a parallel marketplace of religious ideas where the state has no control and state religious institutions are not even players. These parallel religious spheres that develop can create breeding grounds for violent religious movements.

Conclusions

While Tunisia is the only Arab country undergoing a successful democratic transition, it is still faced with two challenges with regard to the governance of the religion in the new republic: first how to govern the role of religion within both the state and society in the post 2011 era, and second how to face the deep wave of violent radicalisation that the country has been witnessing since 2011.

The transitional period that followed the ouster of Ben Ali in January 2011 has opened a new space for religious actors that were banned under the old regime, to reappear on the public scene, to get organized, preach for their ideas, and to recruit new members. Hence, opening a debate among the Tunisian political elite, both religious and secular, over the question of how to regulate the religious on the three levels of a polity: State, political society and civil society. In connection to this debate, Tunisia has been facing since 2011 a wave of violent radicalisation that is much deeper than under the old regime.

The paper argues that these two challenges are connected. The debate over how religion should be regulated in post 2011 Tunisia either could reinforce the current radicalisation movement or could contribute to preventing it from growing.

Preventing violent radicalisation requires a discussion over how to manage the religious in post 2011 Tunisia. On the state level, Islamic and secular political actors have tried to avoid any discussion on Shari'a. However, by avoiding the debate over Shari'a, they have allowed more conservative religious voices to monopolize the speech in name of Islam. On the political society level, while Ennahda agreed in 2016 to differentiate between the political party and the preaching activities, the movement still needs to find the right balance between the religious and the political, not to focus on the political and ignore the religious one, hence allowing again radial voices to spread their ideas with no resistance. And finally, on the society level, the Tunisian authorities have been trying to regain control over the religious sphere. However, this tight state control delegitimizes official preachers and paradoxically allows for the emergence of a parallel marketplace of religious ideas that could offer breeding grounds for violent religious movements.

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Project name:

Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Project Acronym: GREASE

Project Coordinator: Professor Anna Triandafyllidou

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