Resisting Change: Tunisia and Algeria Manage Islamism

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Abtstract

A recurrent question is whether Islamist parties surreptitiously capitalize on political change to weaken or establish their own authoritarianism. In this article, we contend that the answer to this question depends largely on how ruling elites in authoritarian systems structure and manage the Islamist marketplace, thus affecting the position of Islam in politics and society. In our comparative analysis of Tunisia and Algeria, we distinguish between a state-dominated Islamist marketplace and a managed, open, pluralist Islamist marketplace. We postulate that Islamist parties in monopolized Islamist marketplaces are more likely to gain ground when they challenge authoritarianism. Thus, the marginalization/repression of Islamist political parties cannot, nor should it, seek to eliminate Islamist sentiments, while the opening of an Islamist pluralist marketplace is less likely to produce a hegemonic Islamist political party. The analysis of the trajectories of the Islamist movements informs on the management of Islamism and provides lessons for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and, conceivably, Islamic States elsewhere. Therefore, both policy makers and academics should renounce "de-Islamizing" an Islamic society and focus instead on judicious approaches to managing Islamism in Muslim-dominated societies and integrating Islamist parties into a democratic polity.

The Orientalist and neo-Orientalist approaches, which hold the myth of "MENA Exceptionalism in Democratization," have long dominated studies of MENA societies.[1] One supporting statement of this myth is that whenever the region has experienced a real weakening of authoritarianism, either in the form of top-down "liberalization" reform or bottom-up protest waves, Islamist[2] parties are inevitably likely to rise concomitantly and conquer powerful positions to capitalize on political change and political opening.

Tunisia and Algeria seem to have challenged this myth. Both countries had long been under authoritarian rule before undergoing political change, albeit more slowly in the case of Algeria. The politics of Tunisia after the "Arab Spring" seem to follow an anticipated path: Ennahda, an Islamist party—albeit one that strives to

reduce religious overtones—soon gained ground after the revolution in 2011 and remained a significant player in the political arena, despite the fluctuations in the degree of support it has received in recent years.

In Algeria, since the forcible removal of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's clan and clients[3] by the military on April 2, 2019—particularly in view of the launch by the new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune,[4] and preparation for new parliamentary elections—some commentators have been anxious about a scenario in which Islamists would exploit the new political vacuum to gain political power. Some also fear that.[5] However, an online survey of 9,000 Algerians between April 1 and July 1, 2019, which the Brookings Institution published in July 2019, tends to suggest the improbability of the Islamist parties' wielding significant political power in Algeria through mass mobilization, as the average level of support that the Islamist parties received is insignificant. Indeed, the survey revealed that Abderrazak Makri, head of the largest moderate Algerian Islamist party, and Abdallah Djaballah, one of the most senior and influential Islamist figures, scored only 0.7 and 0.8 out of 5.[6] Moreover, an interesting scenario in today's Algeria is the intensifying polarization between the "secular" protesters who demonstrated weekly until March 2020, when they suspended their marches due to the pandemic, and the Islamists (a minority during the weekly marches). Although the Islamist parties portrayed themselves as having supported the protesters since the start and although the largest Islamist party, Makri's Movement of Society for Peace, refused to run for the scheduled presidential election of April 2019 under the pretext that it was manipulated by the regime's "gangs," the Islamists were protest movement, known

as the Hirak.[7] Not only were the moderate Islamists marginalized by the majority of the demonstrators, secularists in particular, but Ali Benhadj, deputy chief of the radical Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which had obtained astonishing landslide victories in the municipal election of June 1990 and parliamentary election of December 1991, sought to play a role in the Hirak despite Benhadj's notorious anti-democratic credentials and encouragement in the 1990s of young people to join the armed groups. Of course, secularists and nonsecularists alike have questioned his alleged conversion.[8]

As Resta argues, transitional parties' agency is largely a product of the way in which political competition was shaped under the previous authoritarian regime.[9] The different roles Islamist parties played during and after the Hirak in Tunisia (2011) and Algeria (2019–2020) were largely rooted in the different approaches of the two previous authoritarian systems to management of the Islamist question since 1989. In this article, we investigate the approaches that the two regimes adopted to manage the Islamist question, the ways the Islamic debate shaped politics and society, and the impact of those debates on the building of democratic Muslim polities. We argue that, in the Tunisian case, total exclusion and elimination of Islamist parties have not necessarily undermined Islamist sentiments, whereas in the Algerian case, the opening of the political space for moderate Islamist parties has not necessarily resulted in a strong Islamist opposition—even if social conservatism continued to rise.[10] We also argue that the two cases suggest that a democratic system is more likely to integrate an Islamist party that, in turn, would play by the rules of the political game than is an

authoritarian system that opens the political space for Islamist parties. But, just like European political parties, once integrated in the political system, whether democratic or authoritarian, Islamist parties might inevitably follow what German sociologist Michels calls the "iron law of oligarchy,"[11] leading to the bureaucratization of the party and loss of the support of the rank and file. However, while an Islamist party that plays by the democratic rules in a democratic system may continue to exist with a degree of influence, an Islamist party that is identified with an authoritarian regime is less likely to be integrated when a democratic system comes to life.

To provide an analysis of today's Islamism and its trajectory in Tunisia and Algeria, it is necessary to discuss the historical circumstances of their evolutions. This might provide a rational explanation for Ennahda's success in Tunisia and the failure of Islamist parties in Algeria.

ISLAM AND ISLAMISM IN TUNISIA: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Contrary to Algeria, the French in Tunisia did not dismantle the country's religious structures, and thus the Zaytouna Islamic University continued to play a role in the evolution of Islamic ideas during and after the French protectorate. In the early post-independence years, seeking to undermine the influence of Zaytouna in religious-cultural affairs and perceiving Islam as a backward religion that hindered the country's development, President Habib Bourguiba, inspired by French laïcité, embarked on a secularization of the country. Although Tunisia's first constitution stated, "Tunisia is a republic; its language is Arabic; its religion is Islam," Bourguiba implemented the Personal Sta-

tus Code to guarantee that Tunisian women had full equality as citizens and deprived the Zaytouna of its educational role one year later.

The Islamist movement gained strength in response to the state's religious policies. The movement first appeared as Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (JI, The Islamic Group) in the 1960s as a small religious debate circle in the Zaytouna Mosque/University under Rached Ghannouchi's leadership. It developed into the more politicized Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in 1981. Under Bourguiba's rule, the movement opposed secularization and secularized state control of the religious sphere. A main demand of the movement was the independent, unofficial ability to discuss religious matters. The movement defended "pure Islam" and expressed discontent with Bourguiba's Westernization and deviation from Islamic traditions.[12]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Bourguiba exhibited hostility toward the JI/MTI. This was manifest in multiple arrests of Islamist figures, culminating in September 1987 with Bourguiba's insistence on the death sentence for MTI's leader, Ghannouchi.[13] While there existed few differences between Bourguiba and his successor, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in their repression of the Islamist movement, Ben Ali initially showed more tolerance of the MTI after seizing power in a "medical" coup on November 7, 1987. Indeed, some scholars considered the first two years of his reign as a "honeymoon" between the regime and Islamists.[14] This was because Ben Ali released many Ennahda members, including Ghannouchi, from jail and allowed MTI members to run in the 1989 parliamentary election as independents. Unexpectedly, MTI/Ennahda performed well in that election, becoming second

only to the regime's party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD). According to an anonymous interview in 1993, a minister under Ben Ali revealed to the author (Zoubir) that "the electoral result frightened Ben Ali and compelled him to close the 'marketplace' [our word] for Islamism; Ben Ali expressed complete aversion to the Islamist ideology altogether. The president himself told me this."

CONDITIONS OF ISLAM AND ISLAMISM IN ALGERIA

The cultural legacy that French colonialism had left in Tunisia and Algeria differed considerably. While traditional Islamic institutions, such as the Zaytouna Mosque, remained unhampered under the French protectorate in Tunisia, the French colonizers in Algeria were not so lenient; they uprooted the Arab and Islamic culture by limiting religious education and implementing discrimination policies toward the indigenous Muslim population.[15] Although the French colonial authorities tolerated some *ulama* (religious scholars) in Algeria, they prevented the expression and expansion of religious debates. Consequently, Islam became the most prominent constituent of Algerians' national identity,[16] and defending Islamic values became an important symbol during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) that mobilized Algerians to fight French colonial and cultural domination. In fact, Islam served as a mobilizing force during the war, the Muslim combatants against France's colonial forces being called *mujahidin* (holy warriors). This background not only had far-reaching impact on the collective psyche of Algerians but made it politically difficult for successive Algerian governments to implement secularization policies in the post-independence era. As a wartime party, the National Liberation Front (FLN) incorporated religious messages into its nationalist discourse in its fight against the colonial rule; thus, its legitimacy was closely tied to the place of Islam in postcolonial politics.

This background explains why unlike Bourguiba, who perceived Islam and modernization as incompatible in Tunisia, both presidents Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumediene incorporated Islam, in its so-called modernistic form, into revolutionary notions in Algeria.[17] Unlike Tunisia, Algeria adopted an embracing position regarding religion and aspired to solidify its Islamic credentials by promoting Arabic education and multiplying the construction of mosques. Yet, the regime underlined Islamic values only insofar as they were a component of the state's ideological system—"Islamic socialism," meaning a combination of Islamic precepts and socialist principles.[18] Claiming that the Muslim world should engage in social revolution, and that socialism was not antithetical to Islamic values,[19] the authorities looked to Islam to enhance national integration and legitimize their specific socialist revolution.[20]

Despite this responsive attitude toward Islam, the Algerian regime's policies toward religion soon elicited organized resistance movements led by Islamist organizations, which employed Islam as an instrument to oppose the regime. Viewing Islam and socialism as incompatible ideologies, the Islamists generally condemned the government's socialist policies, advocated the application of *sharia* (Islamic law), and called for the revival of "authentic Islam." Yet, Algerian Islamists disagreed on the methods to achieve this objective, resulting in a complex Islamist spectrum. Early Islamist organizations included Al Qiyam

al Islamiyya,[21] a group intent on establishing a society based on religious morals; al-Da'wa wa al-Tabligh, a group linked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that advocated gradual change; and Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, founded by Mahfoud Nahnah, a former member of al-Da'wa wa al-Tabligh, which was also close to the Muslim Brotherhood.[22] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, more organizations emerged, the most prominent of which were Djaballah's Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, a group self-representing as "Islamic left" that sought to eradicate the gap between rich and poor,[23] and the Armed Islamic Group, a representative of extreme Islamism, which used brutal methods to fight the regime and the population.

Like Tunisia, Algeria generally used repressive measures in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the growing Islamist movement. Boumediene dissolved Al-Qiyam forcefully in 1970, and arrested several Islamist activists, including Nahnah.[24]

The regime's attitudes toward Islamists changed after Boumediene's successor, Chadli Bendjedid, became president in 1979. To counterbalance the leftist movement, which opposed the new president's dismantlement of Boumediene's policies, Bendjedid tolerated the Islamist movement and made concessions to Islamists when formulating the 1984 Family Code,[25] for instance. Nonetheless, despite the regime's increasing tolerance of Islamists, the Islamist marketplace remained relatively closed before 1989, as no autonomous Islamist organizations gained legal status and no Islamist parties were allowed to form. Nahnah's charitable association was barely tolerated. The year 1989 marked a watershed because Tunisia and Algeria adopted distinctly divergent strategies to manage Islamism.

THE CLOSED ISLAMIST MARKETPLACE IN TUNISIA (1989–2011)

Following the October 1988 bloody riots, the Algerian political system changed tactics by creating relative openness in the Islamist marketplace. In the same period, Ben Ali changed from seeming tolerance of the Islamist movement to harsh oppression; indeed, the Tunisian regime outlawed Ennahda and launched repression against it, closing the Islamist marketplace altogether.

In 1991, the regime not only banned Ennahda and forbade the party's publications, it imprisoned hundreds of its members. In addition to closing the space for Ennahda to operate, Ben Ali portrayed himself as the sole manager of Tunisia's Islamic debate. While the president acknowledged Tunisia's Islamic identity by building the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali Mosque and asking his female family members to wear the hijab in public, he intensified the state's monopoly over the interpretation of Islam. He closely monitored the sermons in the mosques and appointed government-trained imams.[26] He likewise developed the state's religious discourse, or what has been termed the "official frames"[27] of the regime, to marginalize Ennahda's interpretation of Islam.

Specifically, Ben Ali took three measures that made the regime appear simultaneously as "provider and protector of Islam and as the repressor of Islam."[28] First, the authorities claimed repeatedly that Islam helped unify Tunisians,[29] a claim that bolstered the official rhetoric that the country was united through one common national identity.[30] Such discourse allowed the regime to forbid unofficial interpretations of Islam, alleging that these interpretations were sectarian and divided Islam and Mus-

lims. Second, the official discourse emphasized that tolerance is an important value that Islam stands for.[31] Ben Ali insisted that Islamist groups represented by Ennahda contradicted the value of tolerance, for they rejected collaboration with secular parties and allegedly propagated conservative discourses, including the depreciation of women's status in their discourse during Ennahda's electoral campaign of 1989. The authoritarian regime argued that if Ennahda assumed power, Tunisians would likely lose their freedom.

Third, by combining Bourguiba's emphasis on modernization with "scientific evaluation of the sacred texts,"[32] Ben Ali indicated that the anti-imperialist positions of Ennahda amounted to rejection and denial of Western science and impeded Muslims from finding "the authentic religious faith."[33] In general, Ben Ali's official interpretation stressed that Islam was "unifying, a symbol of tolerance, and a force of progress."[34] By establishing the state's religious discourse, his regime sought to depict Islam as a political and national mobilizing factor and to make Islam—a popular belief system—a tool of authoritarian politics.

However, Ennahda benefited from the competition against the state's religious discourse in two ways. First, since the regime excluded all Islamists and marginalized other interpretations of Islam, all Islamists viewed the regime as the main opponent. The shared experience of being prosecuted and competing against the official "religious discourse" helped Ennahda preserve its internal unity, though it was forced to dissolve and its members scattered; indeed, some activists were imprisoned while many others were forced into exile.[35]

Second, citizens' individual pursuit of

meaningful existence in the 1990s created a quest for values.[36] Based on Haugbølle's analysis, we argue that while Ben Ali laid out criteria to differentiate Islam from an alleged "distorted" version—labelling the interpretations that rejected solidarity, tolerance, and science as "fake Islam"—the official interpretation of Islam failed to explain altogether what Islam was all about. In other words, in attempting to monopolize religion, redefine it, and distort it for political purposes, the regime reframed it in a way that lost meaning for Tunisians. Although Ben Ali acknowledged Tunisians' Islamic identity and embraced Islam as a core element of the state, he discouraged the individual pursuit of knowledge about Islam and the personal practice of religion, for fear that the expressions of piety and pursuit of Islamic knowledge would arouse people's interest and curiosity in accessing religious messages sent by non-official religious groups, such as Ennahda, and the media in the Gulf countries, like Al-Jazeera and Al-Majd, which frequently interviewed Ennahda members and Muslim Brotherhood activists. In an interview conducted by the author (Zhang) in November 2015, Jabbar,[37] a lawyer from Tozeur, stated, "I was arrested in 1995 just because of doing salat al-fajr (dawn prayer) in the mosque.… The police assumed those who prayed in a mosque early in the morning to be religious people who might support Ennahda." This problem became noteworthy in October 2006, when the regime implemented the campaign to ban the hijab, a ban which aimed to prohibit public religious practices on the grounds that wearing the hijab constituted regressive.[38]

In addition, since the official media discussed little about Islam, people found it hard to learn about and debate religious

matters. Consequently, discontent grew in society regarding the state's interpretation of the role of Islam, which led many people to "retreat further into religion"[39] Meanwhile, the way that the regime controlled the religious sphere and closed the Islamist caused increasing demands among Tunisians to know what the religious identity really meant to them, leaving a gap for other interpretations of Islam.

Moreover, Ben Ali's hegemony over the Islamic sphere provoked a framing competition between the state and Ennahda's religious discourse. This strengthened the party's credibility when it resurfaced following the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution," for it was both an opponent and victim of Ben Ali's repressive regime. Responding to the Tunisians' hatred of the state's suffocation of religious freedom and its paradoxical action of inhibiting religious practice while recognizing Islam as the state religion, Ennahda started to use the language of democracy to attack the state's discourse. In Ennahda's discourse, Ben Ali's underlying tolerance as an essential Islamic value contradicted his marginalization of the other interpretations of Islam; thus, Ben Ali ran against the very principle of tolerance he himself trumpeted. Consequently, Ennahda argued that the reason why Ben Ali's regime could not represent authentic Islam was its determination to maintain authoritarian control over state and society. For example, in a chapter that he wrote in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*,[40] Ghannouchi stated, "In the Arab Maghreb, it is the state, which is run by a secularist elite in every case, that controls religion and runs its institutions." Elaborating this view in an article in the independent Bahraini newspaper *Al Wasat*,[41] he asserted that Tunisia's problems were caused by "the Western bet on achieving its interests

in the region, not through accommodation with the will of the peoples, i.e., democracy, after that became associated with the quicker road for Islam and Islamist rule, but on…its allies from corrupt dictatorships." In this way, Ennahda gave the impression that by resisting the state's exclusion of political Islam, Islamists were the true proponents of democracy. Hence, the repression that Ennahda activists suffered helped the party gain both legitimacy and empathy.

In sum, Ben Ali's top-down interpretation of and monopoly over religion, and closure of the Islamist marketplace, resulted in a contest between the state and the Islamist parties' discourse, and the growing demand in the society for open debate about Islam's role.[42] Ennahda maintained unrelenting opposition to the regime's discourse, which enabled it to preserve its internal cohesion; assuredly, this challenged Ben Ali's dictatorial rule, especially since the party used the language of democracy. All these aspects prepared Ennahda for its return to the Tunisian political scene and became eventually the largest party in the parliament after Ben Ali fled the country on January 14, 2011; in November 2019, Ghannouchi was elected president of the parliament, which marked the crowning of a decades-long struggle. Although Ennahda has lost support in recent years, it remains the largest party in the parliament and demonstrates stronger mobilization capacity than Tunisia's other political parties.

The Opening of the Islamist Marketplace in Tunisia (2011–Present)

To comprehend Ennahda's performance after it was elected to head the government on October 23, 2011, it is necessary to underline that despite its accomplishments

since 2011, Tunisia is still undergoing transformation from authoritarianism to a democratic polity and is still in the stage of what Farmanfarmaian calls "resilient authoritarianism"[43]—a hybrid system of elite networks of privilege combined with certain public freedoms. Meanwhile, Ennahda is still in the process of adapting to the change in its role from an anti-system party under autocratic rule to a "democratic" force in a free multiparty system. On the one hand, although the Islamist marketplace has been open, one in which fair elections have been held since the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime, the secular elite networks that were formed under the ancien régime have continued to play a role on the political scene; they question and criticize Ennahda for allegedly wanting to erect a theocratic state, although Ghannouchi proclaimed that Ennahda "has left political Islam" to "enter Muslim democracy."[44] On the other hand, as the party shifted from opposition to governing, its internal divisions deepened.

In fact, in the early days of the MTI/Ennahda in the 1980s, internal disagreements had already erupted. Whereas the pragmatic wing represented by Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou intended to participate in mainstream politics and was willing to make concessions to the secular ruling elites, the dogmatic wing led by Salah Karkar and Sadok Chourou insisted on upholding the religious precepts and on adopting a confrontational position toward the regime.[45] This split intensified and became complicated during the two decades when Ennahda had been ostracized in Tunisia's political arena. On the one hand, having "spent two decades in exile observing how democratic systems…actually worked,"[46] some leaders, including Ghannouchi, were convinced

that Ennahda should seek acceptance by and integration within the Tunisian secular elites through making concessions and downplaying religious themes, such as the imposition of sharia law. Several other party activists, including Chourou, on the other hand, remained in Tunisia, suffering from torture under Ben Ali's regime. For them, the implementation of sharia and the establishment of an "Islamic state" became increasingly meaningful, as it seemed that only by achieving the party's original religious ideology would their sufferings pay off. Such dissensions had temporarily been concealed during the years when Ennahda operated underground as a resistance party, for the members remaining in Tunisia lacked the freedom to express opinions, and because the entire membership of Ennahda embraced the same goal of opposing the state's hegemony over the Islamist marketplace.

However, this situation changed dramatically when Ennahda ascended to power. After the common enemy collapsed, Ennahda members' disagreements resurfaced publicly. More important, the frequent criticism from secular elites, media attacks against Ennahda, and the fact that Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party was overthrown and dissolved in 2013, two years after it was elected democratically, created fears among Ennahda members of a repetition of the years of repression. Facing the necessity to survive, Ennahda finally experienced Michels's concept of "iron law of oligarchy"[47]—that is, a party changing from a radical movement to a bureaucratized organization. Indeed, having achieved a legal status and high-ranking positions in the government, Ennahda's chief leaders were reluctant to develop any radical discourse or take any actions that might jeopardize the existence of the party,

even if it meant forfeiting the movement's initial ideological principles.

As different Ennahda members' expectations and understandings of the party's priorities varied, the party underwent fragmentation of discourse once in power. For instance, when debates about the application of the sharia arose, Ennahda's internal dissensions intensified. In an interview in 2011, Houcine Jaziri, Ennahda's spokesman who had lived in exile in France for 20 years, claimed, "It is not appropriate to impose sharia in Tunisia today."[48] Conversely, in an interview with a Tunisian radio station in March 2012, Chourou stated that the Quran, the Sunna, and an ulema council are three fundamental pillars of legislation[49] and should thus be fulfilled.

As a response to the party's dogmatic supporters, Ennahda proposed during the debates over new constitutional provisions in 2012 that the sharia be included as a legislative source, blasphemy be criminalized, and women be defined as complementary to men in the Constituent Assembly. Yet, prioritizing the party's survival, the Ennahda leadership, under pressure from the secular elites, eventually abandoned these proposals. Meanwhile, under Ghannouchi's leadership, Ennahda also promised that it would not amend the 1956 Personal Status Code and rescinded the party's original aim of establishing an Islamic state.[50] This, of course, dissatisfied many Ennahda constituents, who considered such discourse incompatible with Islamist ideology. According to Wolf, around 10 percent of Ennahda members left the party because of the leadership's betrayal of Islamic principles; many of them later joined the salafi currents, including jihadist groups.[51] Moreover, in 2013, a small circle of decision makers, challenging the party internally, caused

further divisions between the top leadership and the rank and file. Such dissensions resulted in mass resignation of the entire political office of Gafsa. They did so to express their utter dissatisfaction with the leadership's arbitrary attitudes.[52]

In sum, although Ennahda's presence as a unified influence and a staunch force of resistance against the old regime made it a popular Islamist party immediately after the downfall of Ben Ali, the party faced the challenge of balancing between "the pragmatic demands of government and ideological pressures from below."[53] Ennahda's internal disputes and fragmented discourse caused its vulnerability and disappointed a large segment of its base. However, as the political system established after the "Tunisian Awakening" was fair and transparent, Ennahda remained part of the democratic system, appearing to be a "safe" party with oligarchical, bureaucratic structures. This differs from the case of Algeria, where the popular movement of February 2019 rejected virtually all the political parties, including the Islamist parties, most of which had been fragmented under Bouteflika's rule[54] and the entire political system.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ISLAMIST MARKETPLACE IN ALGERIA (1989–PRESENT)

Unlike Ben Ali, who insisted on limiting and finally closing the Islamist marketplace, his counterpart in Algeria, Chadli Bendjedid, changed the state's strategy from suppressing Islamist parties to opening the Islamist marketplace in 1989. In an interview with the author (Zoubir) in 1994, a former minister under Ben Ali stressed that such a dramatic shift, especially Bendjedid's legalization of the FIS in an unconstitutional manner, infuriated Ben Ali,

who felt a sense of betrayal, for "Chadli had told him not to recognize Ennahda and then he himself legalized several Islamist parties, including the FIS, HAMAS, and MRI." The different strategies that Tunisia and Algeria adopted in 1989 caused the Islamist parties in both countries to embark on disparate paths. The opening of space in Algeria in 1989–91, as a result of the tragic riots in October 1988, turned out to be a real failure as the regime facilitated the emergence of a strong challenger, the FIS, which threatened not only the regime but the existence of the state itself. However, despite the banning of the party in February 1992, Algeria continued the strategy of "opening up" regardless of the country's instability, avoiding the previous failed attempt. The authorities gradually reopened the Islamist marketplace, without, however, allowing the emergence of a party like the FIS, i.e., one capable of challenging and even overthrowing the regime.

The Failed First Open Space, 1989–92

The emergence of Islamist parties in Algeria resulted from the general crisis of the state in the 1980s and from a severe crisis of legitimacy and participation. All this culminated in bloody riots in October 1988, which were followed by constitutional reforms that allowed for the opening of the political arena, the effect of which was the proliferation of political parties. In allowing the existence of political parties, the FLN single-party, military-backed regime sought not to initiate a genuine process of democratization, but to use a new stratagem to maintain the system, while providing a façade of democracy.

The heterogeneous nature of the Islamist movement gave rise in 1989 to the FIS, a catch-all Islamist political party composed of Islamists ranging from moderates to ex-tremists. Despite its heterogeneous membership and dominant doctrinal orientation, the FIS leadership generally agreed on the establishment of an Islamist order and dismantlement of secular and Western values, including democratic principles. Unlike Tunisia's Ennahda, which supported the compatibility between Islam and democracy and gradually used the democratic discourse to criticize the authoritarian regime, the FIS perceived democracy as "a new religion opposed to Islam."[55] It challenged Algeria's "historic revolutionary legitimacy" by embracing the FLN's revolutionary discourse and clothing it with a religious cloak. The FIS asserted that whereas the regime promised that it would follow the principles of the Algerian revolution of November 1, 1954, against France, which included calls for a democratic and egalitarian society, the post-independence FLN was not an authentic defender of Islam as it allegedly failed in its "irreligious" policies to fulfil a just Islamic society. Describing itself as the "son of the FLN," the FIS claimed that by rigorously following Islamic principles, the FIS was the real heir of the wartime FLN that would realize the goals of the 1954 revolution.[56]

In addition to the FIS, several more moderate Islamist parties also made their entry onto the political scene. However, while two of them—HAMAS (later renamed MSP) and the Movement for Islamic Renewal (MRI)—enjoyed some support from the electorate, their appeal was far less than the FIS's.

The regime was divided on whether to legalize an Islamist party. According to Algeria's 1989 constitution and the new Law on Political Associations, the state prohibited parties with an exclusively confessional, linguistic, or regional basis. The liberal wing of the regime, represented

by Bendjedid, hoped that the FIS would counterbalance the power of their opponents within the FLN. In the eyes of these ruling elites, the FIS, as a party that by no means embraced democracy, would never offer Algerians rights that they aspired to such as freedom of speech. They were, as a result, confident that it could not constitute a threat to the established order and would never outweigh the regime in upcoming elections, despite confidential reports to the contrary from the National Gendarmerie. The conservative wing of the regime opposed the FIS legalization and got the upper hand after the FIS general strike in May 1991, which the security forces ended rigorously.

Interestingly, although Tunisia's Ennahda and Algeria's FIS employed different discourses to mobilize support against their respective regimes, both parties enjoyed intense popularity. What Bendjedid had miscalculated was that many Algerians resented the status quo so vigorously that they supported the FIS only in the hope of toppling the regime, though the FIS was no more democratic than the ruling elites. The FIS won 42 of 48 *wilayat* (prefectures) and 853 of 1,539 municipalities during the local elections in 1990,[57] and garnered 47.3 percent of the valid votes in the 1991 legislative election.[58] The FIS's electoral victory triggered a coup in January 1992, and Algeria was then beset with protracted bloody conflict lasting nearly a decade.

In total, Algeria's first opening of the Islamist marketplace failed primarily because the regime either miscalculated or had no real intention of liberalizing. We contend that the regime had no intention of liberalizing despite the presence of reformers within the state; instead, the regime used liberalization only as a tool for sur-

vival[59] and because it underestimated the real power of the FIS.

The Reconstruction of the Open Space since 1992

In the years after 1992, Algeria resumed the strategy of "opening" the Islamist marketplace. However, given the disastrous experiment with the FIS, it rebuilt the system without the FIS by co-opting, atomizing, manipulating, and thus, perhaps unwittingly, discrediting the moderate Islamist parties, ensuring that no powerful party, especially an Islamist one, could ever emerge, let alone challenge the political system established after Algeria's independence in 1962.

As in Tunisia, Algeria banned the largest Islamist party, the FIS, in 1992 and imprisoned its activists thereafter. One difference between the two regimes is that Algeria seemed opposed only to radical and violent Islamism, rather than Islamism as a whole. The Algerian leadership's strategy was to delegitimize the FIS by asserting that violence is antithetical to Islamic values. Meanwhile, the ruling elites claimed that their intention was not to repress the FIS activists and armed Islamists forever. Instead, from the Rahma (Pardon) Law of 1994 to the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation of 2005, the Algerian leadership demonstrated the regime's tolerance by offering radical Islamists a chance to be pardoned and reintegrated into society on the condition that they abandon violence.

Moreover, unlike Ben Ali, who acted as the hegemonic figure in Tunisia's Islamic sphere by creating official religious discourse and marginalizing all other versions of Islam, the Algerian ruling elites became the organizers of Algeria's pluralist Islamist market by keeping an open mind toward various religious currents. Unlike

Tunisia, Algeria never closed the entire Islamist marketplace—even if sermons in the mosques came from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. While the regime eliminated the FIS and fought armed Islamist insurgents, the moderate Islamist parties, including HAMAS/MSP[60] and MRI, remained legal political actors with followers that bestowed upon them an indisputable degree of legitimacy. To prevent the emergence of another FIS with adequate mobilization capacity to challenge the regime, the authorities now combined the methods of co-optation and division.

On one hand, the regime offered benefits to the tamed Islamist parties, including HAMAS /MSP, by inviting them to join the National Consultative Council, an advisory body of the legislature established in April 1992,[61] and by offering ministerial positions to party members, especially those pro-regime activists.[62] On the other hand, it manipulated dissensions within Islamist parties, especially within the parties that were less pro-regime. The aim was not only to undermine the less pro-regime parties, but to also encourage the proliferation of small Islamist parties composed of smaller numbers of people that could easily be co-opted and controlled. For instance, the MRI had opposed Algeria's banning of FIS and, in January 1995, signed the Italian ecclesiastical Sant'Egidio peace platform that criticized the regime's interruption of the electoral process. Yet, in 1996, the regime encouraged internal strife within the MRI against the party's charismatic leader, Djaballah. Lahbib Adami, a prominent activist in the MRI and brother of the then-minister of justice, Mohamed Adami,[63] openly challenged Djaballah and claimed that the MRI experienced heavy losses owing to Djaballah's anti-regime positions. In concert

with Adami's attack, an intensification of harassment of MRI activists helped Adami evict Djaballah from the party in 1999, leading him to create a new Islamist party, the Movement for National Reform.

After Bouteflika became president in 1999, the regime continued to encourage the splintering of Islamist parties. It also supported the growth of Sufism and nonviolent Salafiyya 'ilmiyya (scholastic current) to intensify the competition within the Islamist camp and threaten the Islamist parties' expansion.[64] In a broad comparison of the tactics of North African regimes to concentrate their power, Joffé contended that one of the approaches that Bouteflika adopted was the revival of Sufism "as an antidote to Islamist extremism."[65] In 2006, to show his support for a symposium organized by the Sufi Tijaniyya order, Bouteflika asked Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem, a member of the FLN known for his close ties to the Islamist movement, to deliver a speech at the gathering. Belkhadem stressed the necessity "to use this meeting and the zawiyat (Sufi lodges) as centers of influence and as platforms from which the precepts of our religion can be propagated."[66] Three years later, Algeria's Ministry of Religious Affairs authorized the Sufi orders to distribute Sufi publications and CDs to schools and mosques. Meanwhile, Bouteflika also backed Salafiyya 'ilmiyya, a branch of Salafism inspired by Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia. Unlike some other Salafist tendencies that advocated violent activities or political engagement, Salafiyya 'ilmiyya is characterized by political quietism and deference to the government.[67] Because this school not only diverted people's interest away from politics, but also challenged violent tendencies, Bouteflika encouraged its expansion to further divide religious groups and allowed

imams of Salafiyya 'ilmiyya to preach in mosques or in Qur'anic schools.[68]

An outcome of Algeria's approach to the management of the Islamist marketplace was the multiplicity of Islamist parties and fragmentation of the Islamist movement. Drastic competition between Islamist parties over discourse framing hence arose. Such competition was manifest in the Islamists' debate over Bouteflika's amendment of the 1984 Family Code in 2004. Bouteflika's initiative was to amend the code by removing two key clauses, the marriage-tutor regulation and the second-marriage regulation. The tutor regulation referred to a marriage contract that could only be signed in the presence of the bride's male guardian, who must be either her father or brother. The second-marriage regulation authorized men to marry an additional wife as they wished.[69] The amendment draft faced vigorous criticism from Djaballah's MRN when it was first announced. During a party meeting held in Boudouaou (east of Algiers) in September 2004, Djaballah claimed, "The Family Code is the last citadel of sharia in Algeria and must be preserved"; he added that he considered those intending to amend the Family Code to be Westernized and enemies of Islam.[70] To show his party's tolerance of modernized values and readiness to compromise with the regime, MRI's Lahbib Adami expressed flexibility with Bouteflika's amendment, claiming that the amendment "was by no means inspired by the West."[71] Competing with the other Islamist parties, the MSP—the largest legal Islamist party in today's Algeria—had to demonstrate that it was no less religious than the MRN, and no less modernized than the MRI. Thus, despite its leader Aboudjerra Soltani's initial opposition to the amendment,[72] he soon changed his tune

and claimed that the MSP espoused the amendment in general and only disagreed with some clauses, such as the required presence of a male guardian at the signature of a marriage. Hence, the debate over religious topics involved mainly Islamist parties rather than a debate between the Islamists and the regime or between the population and the regime, as was the case in Ben Ali's Tunisia. Such fragmentation of the Islamist movement and competition within the Islamist camp in Algeria undermined all Islamist parties, thereby preventing the formation of a strong Islamist opposition and allowing the regime to smoothly implement any proposal without conceding much to the Islamists.

In addition, the regime's combination of co-opting and dividing the Islamist parties accelerated the latter's propensity to replicate the hierarchical structures, reflecting Michels's "iron law of oligarchy." Lured and nervous about the regime's carrot-and-stick strategies, some Islamist leaders were keen to formulate discourses that pleased the regime, albeit subverting their parties' initial goals, in exchange for their parties' engagement in the hoped-for decision-making process and their personal gains. Such a scenario took place clearly within the MSP. Despite the objections of many party members, Soltani bound the MSP's platform to Bouteflika's and insisted that the MSP join the "Presidential Alliance" to back Bouteflika's first re-election in 2004.[73] In return, Bouteflika supported Soltani's domination over his own rivals in the MSP and invited him as an important figure to attend national religious events, like the Eid al-Adha's prayer, and to increase his influence both inside and outside the MSP.[74] One outcome of the entanglement of certain Islamist leaders with the ruling authority was the disappointment of

many party activists over their parties' deviations from the goals that they originally set out to achieve, which further intensified the atomization of Algeria's Islamist bloc. For instance, Abdelmadjid Menasra, a senior leader of the MSP second only to Soltani, disagreed with Soltani's major concessions to the government and created a new party, the Movement for Preaching and Change/Front of Change (FC). A more paradoxical consequence was that by openly allying with or supporting the ruling elites, many Islamist parties, such as the MSP, entrapped themselves: they became tools of the regime that they once claimed to have opposed. In this way, these Islamist parties not only failed to maintain the consistency of their goals but discredited themselves as appendages of the regime. Consequently, the reputation of Islamism as a brand was tarnished; and in the opinion of most Algerians, the Islamist parties had become untrustworthy opportunists no better and no less corrupt than the ruling elites.

Finally, like his Tunisian counterpart Ben Ali, Bouteflika also underlined the Islamic identity by constructing several new mosques across the country. That included the Grand Mosque of Algiers, the third largest in the world, which cost $2 billion to build[75] and was inaugurated in late October 2020. Yet, unlike Ben Ali, who discouraged people from praying and wearing the hijab, the Algerian president encouraged people's piety and presented himself as an interested party in the Islamic debate. By including as many peaceful Islamist currents as possible, and by offering freedom of speech, albeit superficially,[76] to domesticated nonviolent Islamist parties and organizations, Algerian worshippers were presented with a "consumer market" of religious ideas and interpretations. Thus,

little space was left between the supply and demand for the Islamic debate. Meanwhile, the multiplication of Islamic choices in Algeria resulted in the failure for any single Islamist party to distinguish itself and gain strong mobilization capacity through "the simple merit of their Islamic identity."[77]

In short, the Algerian regime's management of the Islamist pluralist marketplace—through the methods of co-opting and dividing—successfully weakened, split, and discredited Islamist parties. This explains the minimal share of the votes obtained by Islamist parties in the two recent legislative elections. The largest Islamist coalition in the two elections, the Green Algeria Alliance in 2012 and the MSP-FC in 2017, garnered 6.2 percent and 6.1 percent of the votes,[78] respectively. Moreover, by involving domesticated Islamist parties in the façade of democratic institutions, Algeria not only defamed the Islamist parties, it unwittingly discredited the whole political system.[79] This explains why, during the weekly marches, the protesters of the Hirak had not been content with the mere removal of Bouteflika from office in April 2019. What they continue to call for now, through the social networks and independent radio stations, is the dismantlement of the whole system, including the moderate Islamist parties which were part of it.[80]

CONCLUSION

The fact that most Tunisians have not strayed from religion despite the seeming secularization policies undertaken by Bourguiba and Ben Ali indicates that Islam remains one of the core elements of identity, no matter the secularization process in Muslim societies. Hence, both policy makers and academics should abandon the quest for un-Islamizing an Islamic society and focus on various approaches to

manage the Islamist question in a society dominated by Muslims and how Islamist parties can be integrated in a democratic polity. Whereas the Tunisian regime under Ben Ali closed the system completely and sought to dominate the Islamic sphere by imposing an unchallengeable official interpretation of Islam and totally excluding Islamism from the political space, the Algerian regime adopted a different approach to managing the Islamist question by opening the marketplace and introducing "liberalization" measures to thwart the power of radical Islamists as challengers to the system.

When the Algerian regime first opened the system and instituted "illiberal democracy" in 1989, it miscalculated the situation by including, against the Constitution, the FIS, a radical Islamist front that had no intention of erecting a democratic system and only aimed to break the status quo. The Algerian regime's policy backfired because the FIS eventually garnered mass support among elements of the population who hoped to replace the regime with an alternative, even though that alternative was no less authoritarian than the autocratic regime. After the cancellation of the electoral process in 1992 and the armed Islamist insurrection that ensued, the regime gradually reopened and reconstructed the Islamist marketplace. This time, it managed the Islamist market more shrewdly. Rather than alienating the entire Islamist community, it only excluded violent Islamists. While it delegitimized the FIS by using religious discourse to criticize its violent actions, the authorities pardoned Islamists who repented. Meanwhile, the regime divided, co-opted, and controlled a great number of Islamist currents, so as to thwart the emergence of a unified Islamist camp and prevent the rise of well-

structured and mass-supported political rivals, like the FIS, that could dispute the regime's hegemony.

The two methods pursued by Tunisia and Algeria to manage the Islamist marketplace have yielded completely different results. In Tunisia, the ruling elites provoked a framing contest between themselves and the Islamists, confronted repeated Islamist challenges to their political authority, and aroused a growing demand in society for alternative interpretations of Islam. The Ennahda activists were united under the common goal of resisting the regime and maintained its clandestine structures during the two decades when the party was banned, from 1991–2010. After Ben Ali's ouster in 2011, Ennahda entered the newly established democratic system using the resistance capital it had earned facing state repression. However, after Ennahda transformed from being an opposition party to a governing party and was confronted with constant criticism from secular elites, it finally took the pathway of adaptation and deradicalization, disappointing supporters of the party, including some radical members who eventually joined jihadist groups.

As Tunisia's legislative electoral outcomes in October 2019 demonstrate, despite being the largest party in the parliament, it is not certain whether the party can maintain this success in view of the seeming decline in the popularity of Islamism. Although today Ennahda's support is fluctuating, as Tunisians are willing to play by democratic and pluralistic rules, Ennahda is likely to survive as a benign, bureaucratized party like any other that plays a relatively important role in the political scene. Thus, there is no reason why Islamist parties in the MENA cannot play a role similar to that played by Christian democratic parties in the West. Of course,

this presupposes democratization, or at least an opening, of the political systems in the MENA and acceptance of the democratic rules by all the parties, secular and religious alike.

In Algeria, although the first attempt to open the Islamist marketplace failed and led to the rapid rise of the FIS, the reopening and reconstruction of the system after 1992 avoided the recurrence of the same scenario. The ruling elites not only divided the Islamist movement into fragmented clusters and encouraged fierce competition among them over discourse framing, they also strengthened the "liberalized" autocratic system by creating the pretense of religious freedom. Algerian Islamist parties, including the MSP and the MRI, progressively lost their standing due to their participation in the authoritarian marketplace. This precluded them from playing an effective role in what Volpi and Stein call "consensus building in national politics,"[81] while their association and compromises with an already discredited political system cut them off from the grassroots. Moreover, the Algerian regime's opening of the marketplace weakened the political parties, the Islamist parties in particular, and in the longer run discredited multiparty politics[82] because, as the Hirak protests demonstrated, Algerians are demanding the transformation of the entire system.

In our view, the scenario of an Islamist party's revival in post-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt is unlikely to repeat itself in Algeria. Neither the repressed FIS nor the more moderate parties, including the MSP, the largest and best organized among them, would play the role of Tunisia's Ennahda.

In retrospect, the FIS appeared as authoritarian as the regime itself; the radicalism that the people supported when the FIS fought the regime has today become unacceptable due to the civil strife experienced in the 1990s. As for the MSP, because it coexisted with the Algerian regime, its determination to rebuild itself as a genuine opposition party under the new leadership of Abderrazak Makri and its joining in 2014 the anti-regime rally, the National Coordination for Liberties and Democratic Transition, amounted to naught; indeed, the protesters who chased Soltani in April 2019 in Paris[83] showed that the MSP's long-term intimacy with the ruling elites over the past two decades meant that the party could only survive as part of the authoritarian regime's plan to institute an "illiberal democratic" model. Ironically, the protesters' exclusion of Islamists during and after the Hirak is likely to prevent the formation of a uniting force.

In the case of Tunisia, this eventually brought an end to the decade-long status quo. Algeria today is undergoing yet another transition. While it is too early to predict future developments, what is certain is that the political system must change; if the current authorities are willing to negotiate a transition pact that includes moderate Islamists, organized in reconstituted political parties, the transformation of the political system might run smoothly. Of course, all "opposition political parties" that associated with and operated under the previous regime must undergo genuine transformation if they wish to gain legitimacy and participate in the construction of what the current regime has dubbed Algeria's "second republic.

[1] See Arthur Goldsmith, "Muslim Exceptionalism? Measuring the 'Democracy Gap'," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (2007): 86-96; Larry Diamond, "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?" *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 93-104.

[2] We follow Nikki Keddie's distinction between Islamic and Islamist. She distinguished belief (Islamic) from "movements to increase Islam's role in society and politics, usually with the goal of an Islamic state. See Nikki Keddie, "The Islamist Movement in Tunisia," *The Maghreb Review*, no. 11 (1986): 26.

[3] Although the Bouteflika clan and its clients have fallen, the regime has remained intact, which explains why protestors have continued their movement for more than a year now demanding the dismantlement of the political system in place since the country's independence in 1962 and the institution of a second republic based on genuine democratic governance. See, Yahia Zoubir, "Introduction: The Making of a New Republic?" in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations,* ed. Yahia Zoubir (London & New York: Routledge, 2020).

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[13] Marion Boubly, "The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia since Independence," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988): 612.

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[15] Yahia Zoubir, "Civil Strife, Politics, and Religion in Algeria," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, 2019, 2-3.

[16] Ibid, 3.

[17] Yahia H. Zoubir, "Algerian Islamists' Conception of Democracy," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1996): 66.

[18] Zoubir, "Civil Strife, Politics, and Religion in Algeria," 4.

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[20] Zoubir, "Algerian Islamists' Conception of Democracy," 66-67.

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