

المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES  
(Doha Institute)



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## **Case Analysis**

# **A Reading into the Meaning and Significance of Tunisia's Election Results**

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*Doha, February - 2012*

## *Series (Case Analysis)*

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## Introduction

The election of Tunisia's first constitutional assembly on March 25, 1956, only five days after independence, was a major shift in the history of independent Tunisia. The council took three years to release a version of the country's first constitution in 1959. Legislation was written for the creation of the state and crafting of its legal, political, cultural, and societal identity. Despite the fact that Tunisian society was fragile at that time, marred with high levels of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, and deteriorating living conditions, the election of the country's first constitutional assembly was a foundation via which Tunisia mended its national fabric and took flight to a better socio-economic future. Yet after more than sixty years, the course of events brought Tunisia back to the starting point on October 23, 2011, with another newly elected constitutional assembly that may signal, like its original predecessor, a break from the age of political despotism and socioeconomic deterioration, an age which culminated at the end of 2010 and brought to life the revolution of January 14, 2011.

Tunisia's political and intellectual arena after the revolution has seen a great debate on the leadership of political and social change, the materialization of the ideal model of leadership, and the proper way to manage affairs of the state and society. Though the early months of the revolution featured mixed choices and confusion on the adoption of the broad lines of the state's socio-political future, a consensus was achieved on going back to square one and starting a fresh phase with a newly elected constitutional assembly to shape the future and draft appropriate legislation.

Assuming that the Tunisian Revolution of January 2011 marked a rejection by segments of society of political despotism, social injustice, and mismanagement of the state's affairs which culminated on the last days of the former regime, can we say the results of the national Constitutional Assembly (CA) bear signs of different segments of society, within Tunisia and abroad, breaking from the essence of the sociological structure and the main, complex composition of Tunisian character? If we assume that the elections are not only emotional, but also rational, where are the boundaries of the effect of sentiments on the CA results? Where does reasonable, matured, and well-organized conduct start on the map of vote distribution across the different blocs, parties, and individuals?

We will attempt to utilize such questions to understand the sociology of why Tunisians voted on October 23, 2011, and what they have achieved from this election. Perhaps the violent social tension that hit the iconic Governorate of Sidi Bou Zeid after the nullification of the winning lists of the Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice, and Development party (PPFJD) in the October 28 elections, could be a key indicator of the complexity behind the explanation of results. Such social tension pushes for an objective analysis of the results of elections, a reading of its meanings, and an attempt to infer the significance of such elections. Besides, this tension refutes the simplified explanation of results and their connection with other factors.

## I. Tunisia's Elections and Implications

After the revolution of January 2011, a long tug of war ensued between political blocs and parties and the authorities. Following a decision to form a constitutional assembly to appoint a legitimate government and draft a new constitution, elections for the Constitutional Assembly (CA) were scheduled for October 23, 2011, and an authority was elected independent of the government and parties to oversee the CA elections. This was originally a demand raised by protesters in Kasbah during weeks of sit-in protests after the downfall of the head of the Tunisian regime and the takeover of power by the Speaker of the Parliament as per the constitution.

**Shortly before the first deadline for Tunisians to register for the CA elections, the head of the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) said turnout was low and short of expectations. In an official statement, he** said the citizens who registered their names in more than 400 offices across the country were no more than 16 percent of the total population with national IDs. Women's turnout was no more than 13 percent, while men were at 20 percent. Those registered to vote reached 2,276,000, out of 7.9 million eligible citizens. **Talk was rife about a big abstention of Tunisians from political participation, while the need for successful revolution required all Tunisians to show enthusiasm and positive interaction with developments in the national political arena.**

**The developments were interpreted in different ways. Some attributed the low turnout to a set of factors including** the fact that Tunisians are unaccustomed to the culture of democracy and political participation, and that they have never trusted elections and consequently doubted the results in advance. Some laid blame on the ambiguity surrounding the role and tasks of the Constitutional Assembly in the minds of citizens.<sup>1</sup>

No matter how many reasons are given for Tunisians' wariness of elections in the early stage of democratic change, the best justification, in my view, lies in the citizen's absolute sceptability of all things coming from the government. This condition in the Tunisian collective conscience has grown over time. In the most recent presidential elections of 2009, the condition worsened. Most opinion polls conducted after the revolution showed the depth of the confidence crisis with all of the state's figures and bodies (besides the army), and particularly with security agencies.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the deep melancholic political history of elections as remembered by the citizens and society, the wave of absolute chaos (sit-ins, strikes, road blocking, factory shutdowns, and security problems) deepened the crisis of confidence, citizens' introversion, recourse to social reference-institutions (i.e. the family, throne, tribe, and district), and led to a distancing from the state, its institutions, and representatives. This phase was a true embodiment of *social anomie*, defined by French sociologist Emile Durkheim as a state of widespread deviation in the

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<sup>1</sup>“Tunisian Turnout to Check in Voter Registers Still Decent”, Elaph, Thursday, August 4, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> An opinion poll on Tunisians' confidence showed that 81.7% of Tunisians did not trust anyone except for the national army. See: Tunisian Confidence Assessment, Social Science Forum in Tunisia, *Al-Shourouk Newspaper* on April 26, 2011.

transitional context in which a society moves from having absolute control and an excessive presence of the state to the absence and disappearance of the state and a loss of its "prestige."<sup>3</sup>

Such cautious interest in signing up to voting lists, despite several deadline extensions, reflected society's mounting sociopolitical disappointment at the state, its bodies, platforms, and icons. With the sudden unveiling of hidden facts with the downfall of the head of the regime, the astonishing volume of corruption uncovered, and the horrible stories on the immense fortunes of the president's family and close friends, many citizens neglected to register to vote.

The wound of such sociopolitical disappointment was troubling. The attempts after the revolution by the authorities, the interim government, and political parties to heal the wound, restore confidence, and adjust the barometer of confidence in the state and its platforms failed. The past seemed to have inflicted punishment on the present in an ailing, tense political field. The political scene for over 50 years before the revolution featured only a single leading party and a few other parties in the background. The average citizen's abstention from voting in the past prevailed, even after 116 new political parties were founded.

It is important to remember that any pre-revolution election over the political history of independent Tunisia was never a run up to power. They never bore a prior notice of a potential, sudden change to the results in the political life, nor of any unexpected amendment to the map of connections between existing political powers.<sup>4</sup> Rather, elections were theatrical shows with organizers so keen on a thrilling performance for which they picked up the cast, distributed roles, and magically decorated the stage. The single- and multi-party elections never bound the two presidents who had ruled independent Tunisia to do anything specific or clear. The elections however were not devoid of significance or meaning that change according to the context and goals of the ruling authority. Sometimes elections may have aimed at punishing the opposition that deviated from the "right path" charted out by the authority. They also offered an opportunity to materially and symbolically award compliant opposition members by enabling them to run neck-to-neck for presidency. In the last 20 years, elections tended to bear more implicit messages to international powers on how far the regime was keen on, and willing to struggle for, learning the democratic lesson.

With the approach of the first election on the democratic transitional path, confidence was partially revived particularly after Tunisians received several reassurances that the interim government was keen on holding elections on the second date (the first was on July 24, 2011)<sup>5</sup> in a fair and transparent setting away from government intervention.

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<sup>3</sup> The talk about a state's "prestige" and the need to protect it and maintain its image was one of the most important issues raised during this stage before the second interim government, which believed that restoring confidence in state institutions and prestige of the state is an important condition for Tunisia to overcome this critical situation, a situation that saw the disruption of society and state interests, an increase in unemployment, a decrease in growth levels, a remarkable decline in investment volume, and the escape of foreign investors as sit-ins escalated and production stopped.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Gobe and Larbi Chouikha, "Tunisie des Elections Pour Quoi Faire?", February 2010. <http://www.ceri-sciences.po.org>

<sup>5</sup> The announcement of postponement of the election from the first date has been associated with anger and different protests by several parties, social segments, and some civil society organizations, which considered that this

Duty of citizenship drove several Tunisians to register their names on the last day. Although public interest remained unsatisfactory compared to the sacrifices of the society in the revolution, there was a remarkable increase compared to the early days of the registration process. ISIE statements said the total number of voters approved for elections was 7,569,824. Those voluntarily registered were a meager 4,123,602 people, or 54.47 percent of total registered voters. No more than 3,702,627 voters actually took part, including 3,205,845 of those who voluntarily registered beforehand.<sup>6</sup>

The fragile, unstable pillars of confidence among different segments of society, the culture of abstention from political work, and the absolute acknowledgment of its absurdity were not only indicated by the low interest in self-registering to vote. Another indicator was the caution and fear of nominees submitting their names. The number of candidates had been low even until the last day of acceptance of nominee applications. On the last day itself, 50 percent of party candidates and independents were registered. Those running for election numbered 1,519 divided over 27 constituencies. Lists were as follows: 655 for independents, 830 for parties, and 34 for coalitions.<sup>7</sup> Independent representation was highest in the northwest constituency of Jendouba with 58 percent, whereas parties were best represented in Beja (also in the northwest) with 68 percent.

The percentage of women candidates on top of lists remained low at seven percent, despite all preceding mobilization and provisions stressing the importance of having women participate, including the "half-man-half-woman law" for lists. Men dominated the scene at 93 percent. Constituency No. 1 in the capital city Tunis had women leading 20 percent of lists, the highest presence of any constituency. However, their percentage remained lower on top of independent lists (at three percent). Indicators showed that 50 percent of the leaders of lists were over 46 years old. The youngest leader was 23 years old, and the oldest 81.

The statistics available so far do not provide much accurate data or details about the candidates and their gender/age distribution across the different constituencies. However, in spite of the results of elections, it can be said that the available data shows a set of differences on the variation of political awareness, the ability to deal with democratic change, and political participation across the variables of gender, age, and regional affiliation. The low representation of women and youth on top of lists may have more profound significance if we can get adequate data on the levels of participation in such internal, marginalized areas. This may be true, though the number of CA seats won by women is relatively acceptable. Women won 49 seats out of 217, including 42 for the Al-Nahda party's women.

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postponement was a "circumvention of the revolutionary goals," a preface to legitimization of the electoral fraud, and neglect of the people's will. Although the interim government tried to keep the date from changing, it ultimately yielded to the postponement request believed by the ISIE to be more suitable for having all preparations in place and holding elections in an appropriate environment.

<sup>6</sup>According to the ISIE president in a press conference on Thursday, October 27, 2011.

<sup>7</sup>The ISEI official website: <http://www.isie.tn>

## II. National Elections: The Political Scene and the Politics of Meaning

The studies of the sociology of electoral action insist on considering it as a practice with profound social significance correlated to the conditions behind their social production. Such action is surrounded by a hot debate and a struggle, through which the competing political parties each in their own way aim to frame the conception of electoral democracy and present themselves to the public within the election contest. Within this competition, the voting action implies a moment of profound and significant symbolic assessment that reduces a set of ritual protocols, protocols whose dynamics are determined by the nature and size of the political bets in question.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, it is important to identify some factors of the symbolic investment employed in the CA elections. Before analyzing election results as intuitive conclusions of the controversial connection between the electoral action and the differing attitudes of public opinion, it is useful to attempt to get through to the areas of symbolic investment, study the context of the electoral process, and portray some of its actions and rituals. That could help us understand such factors and their effect on election results.

The anthropologic approaches to the study of the political scene are relatively new. Clifford Geertz was one of the most prominent intellectuals who referred to the importance of what he termed “the politics of meaning” in his invitation for exploring the cultural meaning within the political action and life. He believed it was difficult to find a compromise between the course of events comprising political life and the network of beliefs, and that everything turns out to be a forest of scattered plans and surprises. In his view, things look like a broad geometrical picture of well-established judgments. Geertz says, "The link between the disorder of events and the system of emotions is very obscure; and the formula of that link is more obscure. Above all, the attempt to link politics and heritage requires a look less impressed at the former, and a look less interested in aesthetics on the latter."<sup>9</sup>

In analyzing the CA elections, this anthropological approach draws my attention to the set of symbols, metaphors and slogans of different significance that were employed by political parties, independent candidates, and their supporters. They each in their own way sought to impose meaning and their own notions about the competition, and seize the opportunity to transmit their own perceptions of Tunisia's political future through the use of symbols and metaphors.

The ISIE choice to employ the list iconization system stirred mixed reactions in the beginning, with questions on the benefit of this process in a society that boasts a remarkably higher level of literacy, and how this iconization indicates an increase in numbers of illiterate voters. No matter what objective reasons were behind the ISIE choice, the specific icons are new to the Tunisian electoral scene and add a novelty that suggests a change in methods and significance. It is new

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<sup>8</sup> Yve Déloye, “Rituel et Symbolisme Electoraux: Réflexions sur L'expérience Française”, In: Romali R. (dir), *How Did They Become Voters? The History of Franchise in Modern European Representation*, (La Haye: Kluwer Law International, 1998), p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, translated by Mohammed Badawi, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation, 2009), p. 595.



not because pre-revolution electoral contests were held in a coherent scene revolving around the same meaning embodied in the ruling party, even if it had mock rivals, but because the symbolism in the earlier elections was limited to different colors, not shapes.

The color red is significant in the Tunisian mind,<sup>10</sup> as the blood of martyrs who freed the country from French colonization, the national flag's color, and a symbol of loyalty. The color was prevalent in the political scene. It served as a sign of the ruling regime's influence on the scene and the absolute control of its different settings.

The color violet was used after the political change in November of 1987 to tone down and mitigate the red of the ruling party. Violet was a symbol of the previous regime and of Tunisia's respect for human rights.

Undoubtedly, this symbolism was absolutely meaningless without an arbitrary interpretation. Before the 2011 revolution, the red-violet combination dominated Tunisia's streets and squares, regime meetings, and all occasions signaling a celebration. It is not surprising that the new political parties sprung from the dissolved Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) are named "violet" parties.

Despite the reactions to list iconization, the process was rapidly carried out, turning the political struggle and electoral competition ultimately into a race for icons and a struggle for meanings. The candidates and parties, even those dubbed as the educated and upper class, engaged in campaigns to introduce and promote their icons on a large scale to convey significance to voters. The situation called for collecting all direct or indirect references to the background of the icon owners, their political beliefs, ideologies, ambitions, and dreams for Tunisia's future. The candidates raced in search of an exclusively referential icon and genius innovation of a suitable slogan most capable of communicating their goals to voters, to play on the society's most sensitive strings and attract the highest number of voters.

The utilization of icons ranged from animals such as the camel and pigeon (used by candidates of some national, Islamic, and Arabist parties) to plants of widely-recognized significance such as ear, olive and palm (used by several independent candidates) to the use of stars as icons by some parties dubbed as modernist and progressive. The crescent, sun, and icons such as the sickle and hammer (left-wing), mirror, a stretched hand, and flowers were other symbols used. Even glasses and road signs were utilized as icons, symbolizing the sensible path and farsightedness to the future.

Spectacularly, icons varied among candidates, parties, and sensitivities in the election. The iconic references varied as per the diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, and political actors' conceptions of the historic moment, the electoral process, and their role in the future of Tunisia's political scene.

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<sup>10</sup>Sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba explained in detail color symbolism and its relation to the culture of a society, and the peculiarity of the cultural implication of its meanings and significance. He also spoke about the different cultural uses of the color red in Tunisia and the Arab Muslim World, a color that can hardly be found missing in flags of Arab Muslim countries. See: Abdelwaheb Bouhdiba, "Les Arabes et la Couleur", Culture et Société, Publication de l'Université de Tunis, Tunis 1978, p. 78.

The election campaigns spanned 21 days until October 21, 2011. The campaigns were weak in the beginning, as the scene was seemingly decent and modest. It seemed as if the above reasons for the low registration of voters (remnants of the political past, the culture of fear, suspected electoral fraud, and lack of confidence in the state and its bodies) materialized in the early days of campaigning. However, the campaigns got heated near the end. Not lacking was the attempt of candidates, lists, and parties to exploit material and symbolic job opportunities in propaganda, wooing voters and presenting platforms and future perceptions. The scene varied from posting pictures of list leaders in public roads and special areas, to car parades down the streets of big cities, public meetings, and knocking on the doors of voters to deliver fliers containing political platforms and to introduce candidates.

The space represented in some internal geographic areas and public spaces has not anthropologically and symbolically gone unnoticed in political parties' campaigns in a context of accurate morphological use of the significance and symbolic implications of the utilized space. Neither the iconic city of Sidi Bou Zeid nor the cradle of the uprisings and protests in the governorates of the midwest missed the expressive presence of revolution, since they were selected by some parties as a location for electoral campaign launching and ending or simply as a necessary stop place. The parties wanted to court marginalized residents, those deprived of the fruits of all forms of development in Tunisia since independence. Parties wanted to assure that it is impossible to exclude such people in the future from development choices. Those parties emphasized how grateful they were to those residents as producers of the change, which would not have happened without them rising up against injustice and oppression.

Public spaces such as sports fields, conference rooms, hotels, and ancient theaters were not away from political parties' attempts to create meaning and take away symbolic inspiration from the value and position of the space, utilizing its proximity to some people and its distance from others. Some parties chose to convey a message of intimacy with the "honorable people" and integration into its various segments, especially the less fortunate who live in crowded communities in suburbs, city outskirts, the countryside, and the desert. Other parties believed in the need to select a target audience, and use luxurious rooms as venues for discourse with quality catering for the panache of elites. Such parties courted these groups via "modernist progressive", "non-populist" platforms. This variation in discourse and audience, and in how the discourse fits into the propaganda and its spatial, humanistic and symbolic surroundings may provide an explanation for some results, as we will see below. This variation might provide some clues to the unexpected success of some parties and candidates, and it might also help us decipher the mysterious results of the CA elections, dubbed as "surprising".

The symbol perfect use in party campaigns proved the presence of a hidden significant power that revealed a bigger significant investment and more important financing. However, they sorted and classified parties in a hierarchy as per size and weight. Some parties and independent candidates showed financial and moral power. Some proved to be financially powerful, yet morally poor. Some showed average financial and moral power. Some turned weak showing limited impact and influence. This hierarchy evidently shows how helpless the independent personalities and some of their lists were. Being poor, the members had to wait for the late government grant, and some of them failed to receive it. This significant fact may be somewhat responsible for a part of the political bankruptcy which has dragged most of the independent

candidates and several patriotic personalities respected for their scientific status, efficiency and honesty down in the final results of the CA elections.

Despite this fact, an objective analysis renders us to say that “political money” was not a key factor affecting results. Newly established after the revolution, the case of the Free Patriotic Union party, which spent lavishly on its campaign and earned only a single seat, refutes the often-exaggerated effect of money on politics. The issue of party finances, propaganda, and the use of political money sparked a crucial community debate that stressed maturity in dealing with such new phenomena. The debate focused on the importance of respecting the rules of democratic games and abstention from using banned methods in competition.

This societal debate did not miss the keenness of various political actors on confronting the dissenters and the call for keeping some spaces such as places of education, public administration, and worship away from the fuss and flame of campaigns. Without a doubt many violations did occur. It is however a healthy sign that political parties and the public increasingly lived up to the historic moment, as it indicates their perceptions of citizenship. It also reflects the development of supervision by society on the democratic path and the grave concern for maintaining its foundations. The call for keeping mosques and other houses of worship out of campaigns did not conceal the phobia some held of Islamists and their likely benefit of sympathy from mosque-goers. This touches back on the both old and new debate over contact and borders between religion and politics. This debate though cannot be considered an exception to the healthy sign mentioned above.

On the dramatic use of different spaces during the election campaigns, we should point out the importance of virtual space in promoting party platforms and news, and in online confrontation and resistance of the rivals through circulation of supporting news, political movement, rumors, and counter-rumors. A critical number of political parties quickly mobilized social networks, especially with pages on Facebook, and employed them in various ways for their campaigns. They exploited the remarkable achievements of this social network in stirring the revolution and in feeding the spirit of insurgency since December 17<sup>th</sup> of 2010 when the Tunisian revolution broke out.

The exploitation of the virtual space by politicians was done in varying patterns and styles, which articulates differences in general purpose, objectives, and user behavior. Such employment of social networking seemed to be well-planned by some parties, as they sent smart messages pushing to confront all attempts at creating moral confusion, and messages supporting the goal of sweeping the arena with logic courting the minds once and souls many times. These messages served party campaigns and reflected near-perfect organization and a well-arranged distribution of roles among politicians and their supporters in the real and virtual domains. However, some other campaigns in using social networks seemed to be aimless, sporadic, and open to individual and momental discretion of advocates and supporters.

In conclusion, we can say the dramatization of the CA elections with participation of different parties was very important in leading to a special scene which stressed the enthusiasm of various members of the society for different roles with regard to holding successful elections and ensuring the merits of the democratic event. Despite the lack of experience and the grim

sociopolitical past, the election was held in unprecedented integration among the different components and circles. This might emphasize the fact that the preparation had been exaggerated and the event overestimated beyond its political purposes and the bets that suggested it was an action of picking individuals for drafting the constitution. If that were partly true, it can be said the symbolic, indicative dimension of the drafting of the new constitution, including the denotation of laying the foundation for a fresh political, cultural, economic, and social future more than 50 years away from independence from French colonization as if back to the starting point for a new take-off, gave the electoral process a material, moral weight. That may be the major factor in the results that saw voters advocating a side and excluding another, thereby representing ambitions in the provisions of the forthcoming constitution.

### **III. Electoral Map and Results: Believers and Converts**

After a tug of war and the ISIE nullification of the PPFJD lists on the initial announcement of the election results and the later comeback with a decision of the Tunisian Administrative Court, the first free elections in the history of Tunisia produced the following results: the Al-Nahda movement won 89 seats, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) won 29 seats, and the PPFJD won 26 seats. The Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL) succeeded in getting twenty seats, the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) won sixteen seats, the Initiative party and the Democratic Modernist Pole (PDM) each won five seats, Afek Tounes won four seats, the Alternative list of the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (PCOT) won three seats, and the Movement of Socialist Democrats and the People party each won two seats. Sixteen more lists won one seat each.

Given these results, it can be said that the CA elections resulted in a remarkable rise of the Al-Nahda Movement, far and significantly ahead of other parties. The elections give the other parties about 10 variant opportunities to be represented along with the independent PPFJD movement and some other independents.

Given the diversity of the ideological background of parties that came to the CA in light of their history of struggle, the results ensured the formation of the first bloc from the three biggest winners: Al-Nahda, CPR, and FDTL. The second bloc comprised the rest of the parties that won between one and five seats, and the PDP that won sixteen seats. This second bloc contained some newly established parties with no political history such as Afek Tounes and the Initiative party. Those parties won several seats, outperforming parties recognized for struggle such as the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (PCOT), some nationalist parties, and others with Islamist backgrounds established after the revolution. The PPFJD, ranking third before the FDTL, remained out of bloc classification as an independent current, which had appeared just before the elections and surprised all with its platform and discourse, and sparked ceaseless debate.

So how can we theoretically explain the general tendencies affecting voter attitudes that led to these results and led the electorate to make certain choices? There are three theoretical models usually adopted in explaining voting behavior in the literature of election sociology. The first is sociological in nature, and is a priority based on the impact of socioeconomic variables such as sex, age, and social class, the impact of voting results, and the impact of voter choices. This

model is linked to field surveys conducted by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld in a study of the presidential election in the USA in 1940. Lazarsfeld was shocked that the electoral campaign did not affect voter choices. Political tendencies of voters remained the same, consistent with their social, cultural, and family environments. Lazarsfeld adopts the principle of *social inevitability* in explaining vote results. He said, "A person thinks politically, as he is socially. Social characteristics determine political preference."<sup>11</sup> He drew a major conclusion that the media, campaigns, and other external powers cannot impact voting attitude. He accepted the idea of the enlightened citizen that knows the background of circulating discourse and the political bets on display.

The second model has a psycho-political background. It says that a voter chooses candidates out of an emotional and sentimental relationship guiding choice. This model directs criticism to the principle of *social inevitability* on the impact on the voting attitude. This psycho-political model considers the voting attitude a directed action through voter perception of the common political issues. It is a reflection of the sentimental and permanent relationship of the voter with one of the competing parties or major currents in the political arena in the West.<sup>12</sup> The voting choice is the comprehensible outcome of a certain view of the world held by a voter. The stronger the sentimental relationship with the party is, the more positive towards its candidates a voter will be. This concept focuses on the fact that most voters have no specific political or ideological backgrounds and know nothing about the secrets of political conflicts. However, a voter's decision is inspired from their reference and he views it through a sentimental eye.<sup>13</sup> Such references are created beginning at a young age and boosted by the social and professional upbringing one has. The references create solid and well-established rules for voters to follow in making electoral choices.

The third model is economic, assuming that a voter is rational in drawing his or her own political choices given interests and degrees of benefit. This model criticizes the idea of a "passive voter" who is confined to psychological and social parameters. It confirms that the voter is perfectly able to judge the candidates negatively or positively. This economic model proves the bankruptcy and crisis of "emotional identities", as independent voters not belonging to any party constitute the majority, especially in the USA.<sup>14</sup> Voting, in their opinion, is no more than "voting on bets", with voters selecting the candidates who share the same bets with them. In other words, the "rational voter" for this model is of the same concept as *homo economicus*. The political actors are "rational", seeking conformity of the means. The voter makes his choice in the "electoral market", just as a consumer chooses only one product over others. According to the advocates of this theoretical model, voters cast votes for the party or the person believed to be better able to enhance their profit and be of more benefit than other candidates.

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Lazarsfeld, B.B Berelson, *The People's Choice*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1944, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Michel Offerlé, "Eclats de Voix: Les Elections Comme Objet de Science Politique", *Regards Sociologiques*, Issue 7, 1994, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup>Nonna Mayer and Daniel Bory, "Les Variables Lourdes en Sociologie Electorale", *Enquête*, Issue 5, Débats et Controverses, 1997, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p. 111.

Of these theoretical concepts, we can question the “rationality” in Tunisians' voting attitude, their “emotional sympathy” with competing parties, and the role of both their rationality and sympathy in the parties' victories and failures.

The ten months post revolution saw considerable debate with several ideas and concepts, which can be summarized in two potential societal projects for Tunisia's political and cultural future: one which believes that laying the foundation for the future can be through a break up with the political past, yet maintaining the constants of association and identity; and another one that believes in the need for a radical break with the past, while founding a “modern” society that depends on different opinions, principles of "modernism", respect for “personal freedom and an unlimited freedom of creation,” and liberation from the “complex” of holiness and beliefs.<sup>15</sup> The box word as seen by many was more of a victory for identity, a helping hand for maintaining it, and a savior of the first chapter of the current constitution than a victory for Al-Nahda as a party or a platform. The first chapter of the current constitution maintains that: "Tunisia is an Arab Muslim country. Its religion is Islam. Its language is Arabic." Several analyses<sup>16</sup> adopted this explanation and deemed that Al-Nahda derived direct benefit from turning the elections, assumed to be for drafting the constitution, into a conflict over identity between two sides: one that introduces itself as an advocate of identity, while the other is willing to obliterate it.

According to some observers, the Al-Nahda movement emerged victorious in an unequal game inspired by a hidden power of “identity” in the sub-conscious and collective conscience of the society; a society that may seem Westernized or liberal, though in depth it is conservative and centered around constants. Other opinions tend to emphasize that Al-Nahda impressed people with its moderate discourse and messages on its intent to maintain the modernist achievements of the society, especially those related to the “Law of Personal Status” and to women’s rights from a moderate Islamist viewpoint. Al-Nahda courted moderation and won votes. In this context, someone wrote:

"The people's existing awareness is still unsettled and seeking answers for the issues of politics, identity, and society. The middle class represents the focus of this popular awareness, an awareness that wants ‘moderation’ and seeks to bring ‘progress’ and

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<sup>15</sup> In the post-revolution phase were several events that directly and publicly summarized the crash of both projects, bringing to public this hidden discussion between both ideas. Among these are events associated with the display of the film by Director Nadia Al Fani "Neither my God nor my Lord". The film was an attempt to pass the idea of "normalization" with the freedom of creation even if it goes beyond limits. The response was immediate and the Tunisian society saw a genuine debate and broad protests against the issue. We can also recall the marches across the country associated with the display of the Iranian film Persepolis portraying the divine in Tunisian local tongue on the private Nessma channel. There was a call for boycotting the channel and filing a complaint against its owner for infringement of the Tunisian society’s holy beliefs. It was followed by counter marches in form and essence, calling for liberation from the "Permissible-Forbidden Complex" represented in a demonstration dubbed "Liberate Me" in the Tunisian local dialect, meaning “put your hands off me” or “leave me alone”. The political parties were divided shortly before the elections between advocates and the resistance to this latest movement. Some parties believe that their loss of several CA seats was the price for their public support for the Nessma channel and the display of the film. The PDM-PDP coalition was among the staunchest supporters of "Liberate Me" marches.

<sup>16</sup>No in-depth scientific studies analyzing the Tunisian election results are yet available. The existing studies are limited to several essays and writings scattered on some websites. We refer here to some articles published in the Civilized Dialogue, Bawabty, and Elaph websites, and to other analyses in some Tunisian and Arab newspapers and news websites.

‘tradition’ together. It does not want to waste the first for the second, nor stick to the second at the expense of the first.’<sup>17</sup>

In the same context, some other analyses tended to emphasize that Al-Nahda’s victory "portrayed a super capability in understanding the nature of Tunisian society and its basic character, tied to emotion, separate from political calculations, with high political professionalism and real discourse. Al-Nahda leaders addressed voters in the language they understand and appreciate. The party managed to revive the idle anthropological cells that are the cultural springs of the Tunisian people, which the state of independence had strived to dry out." This opinion believes Al-Nahda's victory is a portrayal of the majority’s thirst for religion and for abandoning an environment of exclusion, and that the movement managed to employ good, simple words to capture the hearts of most voters.<sup>18</sup>

Summarizing a host of such opinions, we can say they logically link Tunisians who voted for Al-Nahda to the "religious revival" phenomenon of bringing religion to the street and society. These opinions stress the importance of the impact of this factor through emotional sympathy on voters' choices.

However, what can be stressed is that even though the action of voting for Al-Nahda was partly a victory for Tunisian zeal for identity with its remarkable components of religion and language, and that the voting was partly emotional in the sense mentioned by the supporters of the explanatory models for election attitude with a political background, we can by no means reduce a win of half the votes to that factor only. Undoubtedly, to reduce the explanation to this one-dimensional interpretation is a methodological error and an ethical violation of voters' rights and electoral practice. It would also be a violation of the winners' rights and a confiscation of the social legitimacy of the victory.

If we acknowledge the importance of sociological parameters such as religious commitment, class and regional affiliation, and gender in setting the direction for voters, rendering electoral difference, and rewarding some parties with victory, it may be assumed that those who gave Al-Nahda their votes are the religiously committed<sup>19</sup> from ordinary men and women mostly belonging to victims of poor districts and marginalized areas. According to some analysts, these individuals are most likely to stick to religious beliefs due to their low social class.<sup>20</sup>

The Al-Nahda movement absorbed different constituencies representing all social segments and environments, from the countryside to the city, from north to south, and even the constituencies

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<sup>17</sup>Al Samawal Raji, “A Reading into the Tunisian Election Results”, Website: Civilized Dialogue, November 5, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Saleh Al Mazeqi, "A Sociological Reading into the Tunisian Election Results", Website: Bawabty, November 5, 2011

<sup>19</sup>This issue needs to be carefully examined through study and research, as it is refuted by some facts and evidence. There is no accurate information on whether a considerable number of religious hard-liners participated in the elections or not, though some of them did declare a boycott and others remained silent. Also, there is no accurate information on whether Tahrir Party supporters have participated in the national CA elections. Tahrir is a religious party that has not been granted approval to participate in elections.

<sup>20</sup>This concept prevails in a set of sociological studies by Tunisian researchers and scholars and is repeated in several research studies and theses linking the religious revival phenomena to the popular and poor districts.

overseas. An objective reading into the morphology of vote distribution among parties along the social and geographic map may not disprove the importance of the sociological parameters in the electoral sympathy of some segments with the movement in addition to some of those who adapted themselves to its religious discourse. However, it may at the same time make that explanation seem to be so reduced and disconnected that it may only explain solely a small part of the truth of the national assembly elections. If the logic of the sociological parameter's impact were able to provide researchers with a perfect explanation of voter choices and the direct impact on them, it would have been true that the choices of the middle class (over 80 percent of Tunisians according to official statistics),<sup>21</sup> the working class (over 70 percent of the workforce),<sup>22</sup> and the unemployed (over 200,000 according to post-revolution figures) would be directed to labor and workers' parties, some of which formed after the revolution but were unsuccessful at obtaining any strong support, and to the PCOT, that despite having a well-known history of struggle won only three seats. Moreover, the assumption that Al-Nahda's win has to do with 'identity voting' may lead researchers to wonder why a large number of other parties that voiced support for an Arab, Islamic identity did not win, including nationalist parties and several new parties of Islamic background such as the National Alliance for Peace and Development (ANPP).

The assumption of limited political and psychological interpretations of the problem of emotional sympathy with the winning parties or of sociological parameters to explain voter attitudes during the national CA elections, may justify the adoption of the concept of a prominent presence for the rational dimension of voter attitude. It is possible that the voting movement may take "rational" attitudes that embodied the idea of the "rational voter" who frequented a "political market" and bought suitable items for his or her present and future interests and benefits. This is an analytical view strongly supported by the facts of the parties' preparation for running for the election. Few parties were running for elections with a clear economic and social platform, while many ran empty-handed. Of course, most parties, especially those who found the doors of audiovisual media open, presented future views in socioeconomic issues. Some elaborated on their positions, but a few competing parties, especially those with political and historic weight, practically ran without having a written and precise platform. Some parties explicitly believed that the national CA elections and the goal of drafting the constitution did not require economic, social, and political platforms.

The Al-Nahda movement was among those who presented an economic and social platform. It gave a perception indicating several viewpoints on political, economic, social, and cultural issues, even the most sensitive issues exploited by opponents. Despite the objective attitudes towards the content and levels of reality in its platform, the most important thing was the election itself and its signs, which played a part in Al-Nahda's win of a majority of seats. Despite that, Al-Nahda realized that the October 23 election was not a competition for platforms or perceptions but a battle on the form of the constitution and its general orientation. The movement armed itself with a proactive platform via which it won. The win was due to another set of elements beyond the expectations of observers, analysts, and Al-Nahda figures themselves. This proves the assumption that the Tunisian electoral attitude in these elections are partly emotional.

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<sup>21</sup> Tunisian Agency for External Communication, Tunisia, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Change, p.150.

<sup>22</sup>National Institution for Statistics, National Employment Survey, Tunisia, 2008, p. 26.



However, it was largely a rational choice with a realistic attitude, betting on the simplified economic, social, and political projects that seemed more clear and easy to understand.

This case applies in one way or another to the analysis of the “CA surprise” and the “PP phenomenon”. The PP is a new independent political current declared on March 3, 2011, which nominated candidates in many constituencies. It ran for the elections without a political or struggle-related past but it did have its own economic social platform.<sup>23</sup> No matter how far our criticism of the practicality of the platform goes (underestimated by many observers and analysts and given every irrational name), it is an effort to raise possible solutions for problems and difficulties in life experienced by a significant class of residents in the internal and rural regions and the poor and marginalized neighborhoods. The emotional part and sympathy represented in regional affiliation, the kinship factor, and support for brother and cousin were present and constituted a part of the victory scored by the PP lists in Sidi Bou Zeid region, the square of the PP president's tribal affiliation. However, these factors cannot explain the success of their candidates outside this square, and in constituencies spanning the state's north, center to south, and even abroad in the constituency of Paris, France. It is important in this context not to ignore the impact of the media and the PP's employment of a satellite channel owned by the PP president to promote and bring the party's platform to the voter minds. In spite of the tendency not to overestimate that role in the automatic routing of the voter options, the role cannot also be underestimated, as the PP president was not present in Tunisia. He ran his campaign from London, through his channel in a very peculiar way, raising a lot of questions about the different forms of communication and the course of coordination between the supporters of this current that emerged overnight and all other processes of list review, candidate selection, campaign management and financing, and other procedural details which the daily media presence of the current party president from London helped to control on the air.

The RCD ghost, present yet absent in the CA election scene, was an important factor, stressed by some readings in different ways. One hypothesis suggests that the two million members of this former party, before its dissolution after the revolution, had voted for the PP movement to support it. Others suggest that RCD supporters voted for the Al-Nahda movement as retaliation on the Tunisian society for throwing Ben Ali out and dissolving the RCD.<sup>24</sup>

The assumption of retaliatory or protest votes is still probable in some individual dimensions. In my view, however, it is still improbable on a collective level for a simple reason: the dissolved RCD has no strong integration between its members, and structurally lacks a solid connection with the quality of struggle that could have remained intact after the revolution, or could have pushed it to secret political work. There were no symbolic investment possibilities that might have rescued the party's image. Its unity collapsed immediately after the fall of the head of the

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<sup>23</sup>The platform called for drafting a democratic constitution respecting human rights and Tunisia Arab Islamic identity, adopting the principle of free health care for all, paying between 200,000 and 500,000 TND in unemployment benefits, as well as enabling the elderly to travel by public transportation for free and establishing an Office of the Ombudsman and a special ministry for Tunisian workers abroad.

<sup>24</sup>These readings adopt some writings that consider that this bloc promised a retaliatory vote for Al Nahda since the bloc sit-in in The Dome Building in the context of dispersing the Kasbah sit-in. It is the bloc dubbed by former Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi while stepping down as "the silent majority". See: Al Samawal Raji, “A Reading into the Tunisian Election Results”, Website: Civilized Dialogue, November 5, 2011.

regime and the successive fall of its head figures. The party's struggle and past ceased to exist, especially after a decision by an important group of Bourguibans involved in the RCD to keep separate from it after the revolution and establish parties with mainly a Bourguiban legacy.

Had the party links been effective, at least emotionally, among the RCD previous members, their votes should logically turn to a significant number of the newly established parties that sprang from the dissolved RCD following the revolution. A number of such parties had already bet on this bloc. However, the results did not reflect a clear impact on the continuity of the RCD's political sense at the hearts of some voter groups. Rather, election results assert that the message of collective punishment the people wanted to convey to parties with RCD background and the elimination of such parties from most constituencies was an unexpectedly clear and eloquent message on October 23. Some believed that the Tunisian voter did not even show mercy to these parties with alleged histories of struggle (such as the PDP), only because they showed rapprochement with the RCD remnants. The PDP opened its lists to include some RCD previous members and made a considerable effort to reject exclusion of the RCD members from running for the CA elections in the drafting stage of the current election law in the context of discussion of "Chapter 15", which bans all those with political responsibility in the dissolved RCD from running in the elections. As a result, those parties failed to lead in the CA elections, though several opinion polls held before the revolution confirmed that they would take critical positions.

It is useful to indicate that the CA season unexpectedly bore little fruit for independent candidates. Their results were far below expectations compared to their quantitative weight (655 out of 1,519 running) and qualitative weight as some lists involved significant figures of patriotic struggle known for integrity, honesty, and efficiency in different professions such as justice, higher education, and law. Those figures chose to run independently for the elections, firmly believing in their social weight and position in the society and the minds of the public. The CA results proved otherwise. Objective explanations could be provided for the absence of the independent patriotic efficiencies from the CA seats while there is a quiet presence for patriotically unknown figures of different educational levels and struggling backgrounds. Such explanations are socio-politically linked with the context of elections and some are related to each candidate's personality, type of discourse, and ways of interacting with voters.

Without a doubt, the exclusion of independent personalities from the CA seats lacks, in every form, a sense of underestimation of the special positions held by status some of them have in the hearts of people or a lack of respect for their social status and past of struggle. It simply proves that the general parameters of selection, the political speculation, and the codes of the game in these elections were different. A critical number of voters may realize that some independent personalities with legal and academic backgrounds and a patriotic past could have been more capable of contributing to the new constitution than the current body<sup>25</sup> brought about. Some members of the body are unknown on the national level. However, the bet was on party blocs, not individuals, regardless of their material and moral weight. Voters went to ballot boxes in all

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<sup>25</sup>This group involved 78 seats for educational figures from different types and ranks (including 26 from higher education), 32 lawyers, and 16 doctors and pharmacists. The remaining seats were distributed among engineers, banking staff, several administrative employees, owners of private companies, businessmen, and other investors. The group included some sportsmen, a chairman of a sporting association, and a female movie director. It included six seats for the unemployed and nine others for retirees from education professions and former administrative staff.

constituencies to support a party, not a group of individuals. In most cases, they did not know the names of such candidates. This is no surprise given that the ballot paper only included top figures on the lists, numbers, and party names. It was a battle of party powers and blocs, and was not a battle of individuals, social status, or individualistic moral accounts. As a result, independent personalities found no foothold in this conflict. While the competing party blocs grew stronger with larger electoral grass roots in all contest areas and arenas, the independent personalities suffered difficulties, as their lists withdrew and their chances of entering the CA were slim to none.

An objective analysis in this regard may raise a set of other objective factors, which may partly justify the exclusion of independent figures from the CA seats, which remains unprompted. Such factors include campaign funds, ways to get access to high-weight voters, the independent material, organizational and logistic ability compared to the partisan machine. Parties seem to have been better prepared for the insuperable obstacle, and more able to mobilize voters and forces utilizing ideas, money, and human resources. They also include the discourse and target audience, which often involved only elites, at conference rooms, seminars, and discerning meetings. Important questions may be raised about the role of the current election law in vote allotment that led to unexpected results.<sup>26</sup> However, it is important in justifying part of this natural exclusion of independent figures. Such objective factors remain insignificant when it comes to clarification of the real causes of that silent retreat from the scene.

It is noteworthy that this withdrawal did not spare some well-known union figures of whom some fought the battle through independent candidacies or with new workers' parties that sprung from the labor organization General Union of Tunisian Workers (GUTW). However, the CA results have little presence of workers, either as independents or from workers' parties. The CA did not reflect the weight of the GUTW, which had never been absent from the political scene before and after the revolution. The GUTW and its grass roots are the side mainly accredited for stirring up revolt in the state's internal areas since the early events of December 17, 2010. It was also credited for playing effective roles in directing the scene and the general movements during the first months after the revolution. The GUTW was a prominent power in landscaping the political scene of independent Tunisia via a high-profile presence as a pivotal bloc in the first CA election of 1956. Does this absence today foretell of an exciting retreat of the labor role and union central position in influencing the Tunisian political scene, given the developments after the 2011 revolution? This scene is characterized by the emergence of new actors in the political field because of the union and party pluralism which turned out to be an important source for and necessary pillar of the democratic change in progress.

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<sup>26</sup>The election law applied in the 2011 elections, based on the largest remainder method, was not spared from criticism. Some parties and independent figures that did not win seats blamed the law for their failure, given the fact that it left the door wide-open for candidacy with greater expectations for winning. Unexpectedly, this was not true. They blamed the law for the large number of candidates that believed that the law can do justice to the lists and parties with lightweights and that it is possible to join the CA. All these factors contributed to wide fragmentation of votes. Several law experts believe the election law caused Al Nahda to suffer injustice, blocking it from a significant number of votes and seats. This fairly explains the only target of the largest remainder method, the legal proscription of monopoly of the CA seats by a dominating representative power to obtain the majority of votes.

#### IV. Constitutional Assembly Elections: Test of Democracy and Lessons of Citizenship

Despite the unexpected surprises of the results of the national CA elections and how far they were from prior expectations, and despite the time consumed in the controversy with protests and sit-ins, these results are full of lessons. It is important to say that since the time the election was first scheduled for July 24, 2011, and then postponed to another date, Tunisians had serious doubts about the success of the course of democracy. Political disappointment dominated the public conscience and feelings. There was a common belief before the elections that they were doomed to failure, either due to bad organization, electoral fraud, or suspension through violence by anonymous people, always named “enemies of the revolution.”

The impacts of the previous political disappointment controlled citizens and escalated their concerns and expectations of election failure. Irrational fear for the newborn revolution overwhelmingly dominated the social and virtual arenas. Social networks were spreading news at their known speed along with exceptional ability to spread rumors, leaks and confusing statements on conspiracies made to shift the course of revolution and stop the democratic transition in its tracks. The interim prime minister's assurances did not persuade citizens or parties. Both threatened to intervene in their own way if unexpected events occurred leading to the postponement of the elections date. Until the day of voting, concern and anxiety dominated the social and political atmosphere for fear of the unknown for which the interim government prepared itself with quite unprecedented security and military enhancement. However, Tunisia was engulfed early on October 23 with long lines of citizens before all ballot offices, materializing an unexpected turnout of 54.1 percent at home<sup>27</sup> and 52 percent abroad.

In response to a question about what impressed him in voting on October 23, 2011, Parliamentarian Andreas Gross, who headed a team of observers from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), said:<sup>28</sup>

First of all, people are standing with dignity and a sense of pride. They are willing to wait for two or three hours at school grounds before approaching the ballot box to cast their votes. The process passed in an atmosphere in which tranquility, dignity, and a sense of responsibility were unbelievably common. We felt that citizens, whose participation exceeded 90 percent even in the rural villages located hundreds of kilometers from Tunisia, are so proud and ready to seize this historic moment. For the first time in 100 years, Tunisians enjoy their right to choose a ruling authority and to grant it legitimacy. They did so in an almost unique way compared to the history of democracy worldwide since the French revolution. Democracy was always a multi-phase process, but, today in Tunisia, democracy is achieved in one phase to bring forth prosperity to this country.

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<sup>27</sup>According to statistics of the ISIE, the highest electoral percentage among all constituencies was 66 percent in the Qibli constituency in southwestern Tunisia, and the lowest was 48 percent in the Siliana constituency in the midwest. Participation in four out of 27 constituencies inside Tunisia exceeded 60 percent.

<sup>28</sup>Al Latif, Kamal. "Andreas Gross: Tunisians Set an Example to be Followed", Swiss Info website on October 25, 2011.

All citizens, at all educational levels, social strata, and of all ages - youth and elderly from both sexes - stood in lines, with everyone calmly waiting for their turn without infringing priority.<sup>29</sup> In a historic moment, Tunisian men and women reunited with their citizenship after having been deprived from it for long decades. This happened when they immersed their fingers in containers of election ink as every voter should do. This was the case for every citizen that voluntarily chose to head for the ballot offices, and earlier to voluntarily record his or her name in the voter registers. There were those who said that this process was of no value, but their duty of citizenship stirred them on that day to seize the opportunity, look for their names, and cast their votes.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to the ISIE fear that there might be reactions to it as a retrogressive action that can be interpreted in many ways, immersion of the left index finger in ink turned into a sign of pride among citizens of all social levels and strata. The ink-colored finger became a symbol for the distinguished and landmark moment dividing those who responded to the call of citizenship from those who declined and dreaded the test. It also became a divider between two eras: one of disregarding citizens falsifying their will with false ballot boxes and enlisting votes of the dead, and a new era that establishes a different relationship with ballot boxes in which ink guarantees that only living people, not the dead, cast their votes.

The rush of Tunisians to immerse their fingers in ink is generally similar to the rush into the protest movement in reply to the call for revolution and a response to the outcry of Bu Azizi, who set himself ablaze on December 17, 2010. This is not also different from rush of Tunisians into Habib Bourguiba Street on January 14, 2011 to denounce Bin Ali with their iconic message "Dégage" ("Go"). Yet the first rush was a call for dignity, whereas the second a practice of it. The first was made for a dream that may come true whereas the second for a well-established fact. The two occasions were very distinguished moments in establishing the "*homogenous national era* that grants the whole country a powerful sense of belonging to a massive popular movement in which all citizens rose above narrow interests. It was a time when large yards were full of citizens, when all people got into politics, and every individual felt responsible as a citizen. It is a time of citizenship in Tunisia."<sup>31</sup>

The CA elections were another unique moment full of lessons after the revolution, clearing away all the impacts of wrong deeds, removing the bitterness from politics with the former regime, and burying all signs of any belittling of Tunisian citizenship. In the meantime, this dispelled western assumptions that our communities are not ready to practice democracy and proposals to give

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<sup>29</sup>Pictures of current ministers and high-ranking officers in the current government, standing in lines waiting for their turns like other people, were published on Facebook. This phenomenon did not exist before. In the past, there was extreme respect for politicians at all levels without paying any attention to the esteem of the ordinary people. There are also videos of protest against a candidate on top of a list asking her to stand in line like all people do. Electoral law grants candidates on top of lists the right to pass the line and cast their votes without waiting.

<sup>30</sup>The ISIE has left the door open for people who failed to register their names in the electoral records to cast their votes in specific offices.

<sup>31</sup>Bishara, Azmi. "Tunisia in the time of revolution and the speed of light ", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, January 30, 2011

<http://english.dohainstitute.org/Home/Details?entityID=5ea4b31b-155d-4a9f-8f4d-a5b428135cd5&resourceId=e94038b6-33dc-43bf-849a-3b2ad917d1b0>

them democracy in doses.<sup>32</sup> Although this election was considered a "preamble" to the book of democracy, Tunisia perfectly understood and applied it at once. Ballot boxes did not only give Tunisian citizens of all different economic, social, cultural, and political strata for the first time a free opportunity to choose candidates for drafting the constitution, but it also provided an opportunity for modifying, changing, and controlling national affairs, an opportunity they were previously denied. Ballot boxes were generous enough to grant long-oppressed citizens a chance to release their long-withheld emotions, as they provide them with the opportunity to express their feelings of punishment, revenge, and bliss.

With the first real vote throughout the history of the nation, forms of expression that previously ranged from violence and fraud to favoritism, changed to become a democratic step institutionalizing the civilized form of expression of disapproval, rejection as well as acceptance and satisfaction. Immediately after declaring results, all attendants congratulated each other and the "losers" congratulated the winners. Hence, this very moment revealed a new tradition generated by the test of democracy and expressed an early understanding of the lessons of democracy: the need to show respect for and abide by the results of the ballot box, adopt the morals of coexistence, accept the other, and culturally compete for effectively contributing to realize the future.

Surely all parties, lists, and individuals are winners, whether dubbing themselves as winners or losers and whether winning seats or not. Tunisia is the greatest winner. The will of its people who ousted the regime achieved this victory. Tunisia and its people passed the first test of democracy displaying "excellence with honor".

## Conclusion

The national CA election was a historic event for a multi-dimensional movement of reconciliation. Not only was it an election for selecting deputies to draft the constitution, but it also has much more significance than that. It was a chance for rediscovering identities after a period of confusion and uncertainty. It was also a chance to restore public confidence in a political scene tarnished by the underestimation of citizens and their explicit exclusion from consultation as well as decision-making processes. It was an experiment for Tunisians to reconcile with themselves and each other, and with their political and social past and present.

While confessing the temporal importance of the lessons learned from the periods before and after the elections, and the positive impact they had, it is worth mentioning that these elections delivered a positive message to all political parties and players: the disregard of citizens is no longer tolerated. Tunisia tasted democracy and will never renounce it regardless of the cost of ink or ballots.

Ballot boxes were the first fruit down a path in which the earlier regime disregarded the people and failed to take responsibility, leading to a popular abandonment after long suffering. Looking forward, the ballot box will be a trustworthy demonstration of public opinion on the most worthy political party. Anyone short of that great honor will always be excluded from the ballot box, and so will the treacherous.

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<sup>32</sup>French President Jacques Chirac clearly expressed such ideas in a speech on the means of establishing democracy in countries of the Arab Maghreb.