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TOWARD A NEW ERA IN TUNISIAN POLITICS: 2014 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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This fall Tunisians will go to the polls for parliamentary and presidential elections which will end the three-year transition period. Tunisia will take an important step forward in the democratization process with these elections. This study covers observations and analysis on the new political map in Tunisia which will emerge after parliamentary elections. In this context, firstly the electoral system and procedures adopted for the 2014 parliamentary elections will be explained. Then, parties and coalitions which are expected to achieve considerable success as well as experience a large loss compared to the previous election will be examined. Finally, expectations and assessments will be discussed.

Since 2011, Tunisia is undergoing a transformation process, which was triggered by the street demonstrations. The second parliamentary elections that will take place since Ben Ali's removal, namely the 2014 Parliamentary Elections in Tunisia represents an important political threshold in terms of consolidation of democratic procedures as political norms. Elections in 2011 launched the transitional period to ensure the new political order in the country. 2014 parliamentary elections will end this transitional period and an important step towards the normalization of the new system will be taken. Also Tunisia will take a vital step forward in the democratization process by performing these elections. The new parliament, government and president will encounter many challenges on the way of democratization. The most important challenge is to resolve economic, social and political conflicts without falling in the trap of political polarization in order to secure Tunisians commitment to democratization. Furthermore, Tunisian politicians have to implement deep

structural reforms in the economy and state institutions in the coming period.

Electoral System and Regulations

In Tunisia, approval of the draft constitution on 27 January 2014 by National Constituent Assembly (NCA) paved the way for parliamentary elections agreed to be held within 2014. NCA approved the new electoral law by a vote of 132 to 11 on 29 April 2014.¹ On 23 June 2014, National Constitutional Assembly decided to hold presidential elections on 23 November 2014 and parliamentary elections on 26 October 2014.²



The electoral law stipulates the system and regulations of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in the country. The electoral law adopted a party-list proportional representation for parliamentary elections to be held on 26 October 2014.³ This system and regulations to be followed in this election to elect 214-member parliament is very closely similar to the system used to elect NCA members in 2011.⁴ Voting process will take place in one round, and each voter will chose a single list. The campaign period for parliamentary elections officially began on 4 October 2014 and this period will end on 24 October 2014. Voting process within the country will be taking place on 26 October and abroad on 24-26 October 2014. ISIE, Tunisian electoral commission is obligated to announce preliminary results until 30 October 2014 and official results until 24 November 2014.⁵

Voting process will take place in 33 electoral districts-27 in Tunisia and 6 for Tunisians living abroad- in total.⁶ Tunisians will elect 199 deputies

from 27 electoral districts in Tunisia and 18 deputies from 6 electoral districts abroad. 21 governorates will serve as one district while the rest, namely Nabeul, Sfax, and Tunis, divided into two electoral districts. The electoral districts in abroad consists of France (2), Germany, Italy, North America and rest of the Europe, and Arab world.

As in the 2011 parliamentary elections, Hare Quota (Simple quota) system will be implemented again.⁷ “The highest remaining (largest remainder) method” will be applied for fractional remainders. Hare Quota System with largest remainder prevents well-performed party from gaining extra seats, though sustains advantages to small parties and independent candidates; and increases the numbers of different parties, coalitions and independents in the parliament. This system paved the way for the representation of several small parties in the 2011 elections, but also prevented Nahda, which collected the highest percentage of votes, to form a government alone.

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In the parliamentary elections, a total of 15,652 candidates will compete for 217 seats across the country.⁸ The electoral lists of nation-wide parties, local-scale parties, coalition of smaller parties and independent candidates has reached 1,218.⁹ However, a significant portion of the electoral lists belongs to small and / or local scale parties and independent candidates. Especially, it is noteworthy that the number of independents increases in economically less developed provinces of southern and central Tunisia, where the 2011 uprisings emerged.¹⁰ 349 lists of independent candidates, 729 party lists and 140 coalition lists will participate to the par-

liamentary elections across the country.¹¹

Outstanding Parties and Coalitions

Before examining the predictions on October 2014 Parliamentary Elections, this part evaluates the political parties and coalitions that might have relative success or rapid failures by considering their political histories, advantages/disadvantages and electoral lists.

Nahda - Renaissance Party

In the new political era, beginning with the end of Ben Ali's rule, Nahda, which has been

the most widely spoken and discussed political actor, is the most organized party with its expanded and well-structured party organization. The party originated from the Quranic Preservation Society which aimed to adopt the Arab and Tunisian identity and financed by the state in 1970s.¹² The party's founder Rashid Ghannouchi and Abdulfattah Mouru began their political carriers in Quranic Preservation Society, which provided them with the ability to appeal to a wide audience and thus an important social base in a very short time. In 1978, Quranic Preservation Society was transformed into the Islamic Tendency Movement.¹³ With the short-term relative liberalization following the removal of Bourguiba by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali with a "bloodless coup" in 1978; the Islamic Tendency Movement formed Nahda Party, but could not be accepted legally by the Tunisian authorities until 2011. The Islamic Tendency Movement, which participated in the elections with independent candidates, received %30 of votes in Tunis, Gabes and Souse as well as %14.6 of general votes

in 1989 elections.¹⁴ This electoral success made Nahda party the largest opposition bloc. However, numerous members of Nahda were arrested and its leader Rashid Ghannouchi went to exile following the electoral success.¹⁵ Ghannouchi continued political activities in London and returned to Tunisia on 30 January 2011. Although Nahda Party emerged to spread an Islamic way of life at the beginning, today it stands on "Western-style conservative party" line.

In 2011 elections, Nahda won 89 seats in NCA by taking 54.3% of the total votes across the country.¹⁶ Despite the fact that Nahda was the winner of the election, the party could not reached the quorum to form a government alone, so Nahda formed a coalition with the center-left party ,Republican Congress Party (CPR) and left party Ettakatol. The troika coalition formed two coalition governments, one headed by former Prime Ministers Hamadi Jebali and one by Ali Laarayedh between December 2011 and January 2014. These coalition governments had

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confronted a set of challenges from security to political crisis and transferred powers to the government of technocrats in accordance with the road map on January 2014.

Nahda, standing on the focus of the praise and criticism during the last three years, will run each of electoral districts. Nahda is one of the rare parties in Tunisia which has the ability to organize across the country with its institutional capacity.

It can operate in all electoral districts. Unlike many other parties in Tunisia, Nahda is not suffering from intra-party rivalries, conflicts and fragmentation.

Electoral lists of Nahda in 13 electoral districts are headed by former deputies. All electoral lists contain 10 former ministers, 6 businessmen, 11 lawyers and 6 physicists. In addition, Nahda became the party which gave the most seats in

electoral lists in Tunisia. Including well-known figures in electoral lists is Nahda's one of the most important advantages in this election. Nominating businessmen in economically less developed southern and central provinces supports party's economic objectives and policies discoursed in its electoral propaganda.¹⁷

On the other hand, Nahda announced that it will not nominate a candidate in November 2014 presidential election. Hence, Nahda gives a clear message that it does not want to occupy all the political posts and is open to negotiation. In this context, Nahda pays all its attention on parliamentary elections by withdrawing from the presidential race.

Nahda has fallen behind Nidaa Tounes in opinion polls. According to polls conducted by IRI, Nahda's potential vote rate is around 13%, while Conceil Sigma's polling shows that it is around 24%.¹⁸ However, considering high rates of undecided voters in Tunisia, there are high expectations that final electoral results would exceed the polling results.¹⁹

Nidaa Tounes- Call of Tunisia

Nidaa Tounes is a secular nationalist party which was established following the 2011 elections, and legally recognized on July 2012.²⁰ The party is expected to win a significant share of votes in 2014 parliamentary elections. It was established by Beji Caid Essebsi, former interim Prime Minister in 2011 and a significant political figure who had served both during Bourgiba and Ben Ali eras in order to counterweight to the political force of Nahda. Nidaa Tounes brought together several political figures from different political positions.

Following the legal recognition on July 2012, the party gained its first deputy in NCA via transferring a deputy from Aridha Chaabia.²¹ Until the fall of 2012, several deputies from leftist parties in NCA, including troika partners CPR and Ettakatol, joined to Nidaa Tounes. Nidaa Tounes's deputy numbers reached 11 on November 2012.²² On December 2012, the party got involved in constitution writing process and NCA by joining Modern Democratic

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Bloc. However, deputy number of the party dropped 6 due to disagreements within the party in the summer of 2014.²³

The most prominent and criticized component of the party is the political figures from former ruling party RCD. On 2011, members of RCD were banned to run in elections for 10 years and were prevented from attending in 2011 elections. However, this political ban was criticized in NCA and was accused of aiming a witch hunt. Due to the deepening political crisis, troika government loosened the political ban in 2013 and paved the way for members of RCD to return to Tunisian political life.²⁴ RCD, rooted from the founding party neo-Destor, was one of the most organized and experienced in-

stitution which was structured parallel to the state apparatus. Thus, the return of RCD members to Tunisian political life under the umbrella of Nidaa Tounes provides advantages in terms of institutional capacity. However, Nidaa Tounes has been criticized to revive former regime by introducing RCD members to Tunisian political life again.

Another component of the party is the inclusion of important and well-known figures and movements from left-wing politics. Mohsen Marzouq and Bujima Remili, leading figures from left-wing politics, were among the founding members of the party. Also, Nidaa Tounes consists of prominent names from UGTT, one of the country's most rooted move-

ments in Tunisian history. In addition to UGTT, the party brought together significant figures from several civil society organizations and youth movements under its roof. The party also aims to gain support of the private sector in Tunisia by including head of Center of Young Business Leaders of Tunisia (CJD). The party currently has received the top rank in opinion polls by polling ahead of Nahda. According to polls conducted by IRI, vote rate of Nidaa Tounes is 24%; and according to Sigma Conceil, it is around 41.3%.

Popular Front

Popular Front was established in August 2012 along with small leftist parties with the leadership of Hamma Hammami, the leader of the Tunisia Communist Workers Party (PCOT), as a third block against Nahda and Nidaa Tounes.²⁵ Some of the founding parties in this alliance can be listed as; PCOT, The Movement of Socialist Democrats (MDS), Baathist Movement, Tunisia Green Party and Progressive Struggle Party.²⁶ The founding

parties of the alliance are the left-wing parties that achieved to gain membership in the parliament in 2011 elections. The numbers of the deputies are 3 from PCOT, 2 from MDS, 1 from Progressive Struggle Movement.²⁷ Chokri Belayid and Mohammed Brahmi, the victims of political assassinations that triggered a set of political crisis, were the members of the Popular Front. Popular Front had played a distinctive role in the national reconciliation negotiations for the road map.²⁸ In this process, they were persistent with their demands and thus they gained popularity among the Tunisians due to their appearance in Tunisian media.

Popular Front participates in the elections with the electoral lists of the member parties. The candidate of the Alliance in Sidi Bouzid, the hometown of 2011 uprisings, is Mbarka Belayid, the widow of Chokri Belayid.²⁹ In other provinces, the leaders of the member parties of the alliance are at the top of the electoral lists. The most prominent issue in the election campaign of the Popular Front

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The total vote rate of the alliance parties is about 1% in 2011 elections. However, in 2014 elections this rate is likely to increase. According to the poll conducted by IRI, the probable vote rate of the alliance is around 4-5%. Thus, the alliance seems to be the third party after the Nidaa Tounes and Nahda.

Ettakatol- Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties

Mustapha Ben Jafar, the founder and Secretary-general of Ettakatol, is a prominent human rights activist. He was involved in the political life in MDS in 1978 and on 9 April

1994, splitted from the MDS and established the Ettakatol.³⁰ The party was legally recognized in 2002. Ettakatol constituted the legal opposition in Bin Ali era along with the Progressive Democratic Party.

Ettakatol succeeded to gain 20 seats in parliament in 2011 election with the 9% of the votes. The Party is one of the coalition members of the troika governments. Additionally, Mustapha Ben Jafar served as the Speaker of the Assembly. The Party was criticized hardly since its participation in the coalition government with Nahda. Due to the criticisms both from inside and outside of the party, many figures resigned from the party. In November 2012, some deputies resigned from Ettakatol and joined to Nidaa Tounes.³¹ Till to the

2014, 10 deputies resigned from the party.³²

Ettakatol will join the elections in all the electoral districts. In important districts, ministers who served in troika government and senior executives are at the top of the lists. The public polls indicate that all member parties of troika government counter a decrease in their vote rates compared to the 2011 election. The probable vote rate of Ettakatol is declined to 3-4% according to the IRI.

Congress for the Republic (CPR)

Congress for the Republic (CPR) was founded in 2001 by Moncef Marzouki who is a prominent opposition figure during Ben Ali era. Party held its first party congress on 24-26 June 2011 in Kairouan and was legally recognized. CPR is a center-left party who defines Arab and Muslim values as components of Tunisian identity and promotes a liberal economic system.

In 2011 parliamentary elections, the party gained 29 dep-

uties with the rate of 12.3% and became the second party.³³ CPR is one of the members of the troika governments. The party was subject to many criticisms both from inside and outside the party as Ettakatol.³⁴ Since 2011 elections, 17 member deputies resigned from the party.³⁵ CPR is the coalition member which suffers from the fragmentation at the highest level. Marzouki's resignation after being elected as the president caused a deep leadership crisis in the party and the issue is still on the table.³⁶ Since the leadership issue has not been resolved, CPR is campaigned under the auspices of Marzouki's personal charisma for parliamentary election. CPR uses the same slogans and symbols which were used in 2011 election. However, a significant decrease is observed in the popularity of the RCD. According to the public opinion polls conducted by IRI, the probable vote rate will fall to the 1-2%.

Assessing Tunisian Parliamentary Election

2014 parliamentary elections will set up the new political

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map of Tunisia. By considering the pre-election political situation, the public polls and political dynamics; it is possible to make the following assessments about the election:

- The main struggle in the election is most likely to happen between two opposing poles, namely Nahda and Nidaa Tounes. Although escalating political polarization was resolved by consensus, the danger of polarization has not yet been eliminated totally. This situation may push voter to concentrate on these two parties. Indeed, public opinion polls-despite their reliabilities under question due to great differences among them- indicates intense concentration on these two parties
- Despite the possible concentration on the two main parties, the electoral system that adopted Hare quota system will ensure several parties' representation in the parliament, as happened in 2011 election. Thus, small parties and independent candidates will not be

eliminated due to this political polarization. In addition, due to the electoral system, it seems to be difficult for a single party to take majority of parliament and form the government alone. Therefore, the smaller parties and independent candidates will likely to continue playing a key role in post-election negotiations to form coalition.

- 2014 Parliamentary Election has been shaded by November 2014. Except Nahda and other small scale parties, all parties and coalitions pay their attention to Presidential Elections. Nahda decided not to run candidate in presidency, thus, puts all its efforts on parliamentary elections. This situation provides initial advantages for Nahda.
- Despite the increase in the vote rates of Nahda in public polls, there is a high potential for Nahda to exceed this polling results due to its policies on consensus, its organizational capacity, party cohesion, and well-known candidates in electoral lists.

- Nidaa Tounes, which brought several diverse political parties and figures under its roof, might get success in the parliamentary elections. Inclusion of former regime party, RCD, members increases its organizational capacity. At the same time, this inclusion incites criticism of reviving former regime toward the party. However, during democratic transition periods, people may choose to vote for former regime parties in line with the basic equation of these parties to stability. Hence, Tunisians, who have been under pressure of political and economic instability triggered by political assassinations and terrorist attacks, might likely to lead Nidaa Tounes.
- The diversity of Nidaa Tounes might likely to trigger crisis which will threaten party cohesion. This crisis potential might also have an impact on voter behavior

as well as create disappointment among Tunisians who would vote for Nidaa Tounes with expectations of stability.

- There are significant gaps between data provided by public polls on presidential elections. This gap decreases the liability of polls as well as indicates high rates of undecided voters among Tunisians and uncertain voter behavior. Eventually, the results of parliamentary election might be beyond the expectations.
- The most significant impact of presidential election on Tunisian political life will be the return of political figures from former regime party, RCD, to Tunisian political life. This situation might either increase and deepen political polarization or contribute to the normalization of political life in Tunisia. However, former option is more likely to happen for now.

The most significant impact of presidential election on Tunisian political life will be the return of political figures from former regime party, RCD, to Tunisian political life.

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