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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Democratization and Extremism: The Case of Tunisia

A Thesis Submitted by
Mariam Sherif Abdelaty

to the
**Comparative Middle East Politics and Society
Graduate Program**

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Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Islamism in Tunisia.....	10
Introduction.....	10
Background on the origin of the term “Islamism”	11
Historical background: The initiation of Islamism in Tunisia	12
Political Islam and violence in Tunisia under Ben Ali’s ruling period.....	21
The Arab Spring in Tunisia: Did it lead to extremism?.....	24
Islamists’ violence and terrorism in Tunisia	29
Concluding remarks.....	35
Chapter 2: Democratization and extremism	37
Introduction.....	37
Tunisia as a battle field for Islamists’ violence and compromise	41
Tunisia’s Ennahda Islamist Party versus Ansar al-Sharia	41
Democratization and extremism in the terrorism literature.....	44
A micro-individual level of analysis to explain why individuals join violent groups	48
Macro-state level analysis	57
Chapter 3: Explaining the relationship between democratization, Islamist’ violence and compromise using mechanistic approach.....	63
Meso-level analysis while resorting to the approach of mechanisms.....	63
Conclusion	67
Bibliography	71

Introduction

Terrorism has become a real security threat for nearly every country in the world. Despite of the declaration and adoption of several procedures to fight terrorism and its perpetrators, countries have not yet succeeded to control the huge numbers of recruits being mobilized by terrorist organizations.¹ The literature has covered several factors that make recruits vulnerable and easily mobilized and radicalized by terrorist organizations, among which is the suppression of civil and political rights in non-democratic countries, as well as weak political institutions.² Among the Arab world countries, it has been puzzling to find out that despite of being the sole democratizing Arab country, Tunisia has been found to generate the greatest number of foreign fighters joining jihadist groups.³ At the same time, the country's main Islamist party, Ennahda, decided to back up the new democratic government after the Arab Spring, accept a constitution that contradicts the party's Islamist ideology, and be part of the democratization process in Tunisia.⁴ Not only that, but also, Ennahda party was able to win the elections of the Constituent

¹ Almadan Orozobekova, "The Mobilization and Recruitment of Foreign Fighters: The Case of Islamic State, 2012–2014." *Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes* 15, no. 3 (2016): 83-100, p. 83.

² Geoffrey Macdonald, and Luke Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 1 (2018): 126-140, p. 126.

³ Meirav Mishali-Ram, "Foreign Fighters and Transnational Jihad in Syria." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 3 (2018): 169-190, p. 170.; Ric Neo, "The Jihad post-Arab Spring: Contextualising Islamic radicalism in Egypt and Tunisia." *African Security Review* 28, no. 2 (2019): 95-109, p. 100.

⁴ Fabio Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism: the evolution of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Tunisia." *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 1 (2017): 71–90, p. 81.; Geoffrey

Assembly with a momentous margin, as the party won 89 seats out of a total of 217 seats.⁵ Therefore, Tunisia has been a battle ground for these two competing mechanisms; the issue which poses an empirical puzzle for this thesis. Hence, the main research question of this thesis would be: why has the democratic transition in Tunisia been associated with a high rate of recruits joining terrorist organizations? Whereas an extensive number of scholars argue that democracy deters the emergence of terrorism, others view democracy and the transition to democracy as a risky variable that could result in terrorist attacks and Islamic violence.⁶ The driving force behind this question is to problematize the arguments against democratization which claim that the transition to democracy results in Islamist terrorism, conflict, war, and violence. Hence, this thesis aims to examine whether Islamist terrorism has roots and causes stemming from the democratization process or not.

In order to answer this question, I hypothesize that democratization is not a dangerous form of regime change since in Tunisia, interstate violence that resulted from Islamist groups had already existed prior to the country's transition to democracy. I argue that there is a different and deeper explanation to the phenomenon beyond correlation between Islamist

Macdonald, and Luke Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 29, no. 1 (2018): 126-140, p. 126.

⁵ Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring: A Comparative Study of Popular Uprisings in Indonesia and Tunisia." *Asian Politics & Policy* (Wiley Periodicals, Inc.) 6, no. 2 (2014): 199-215, p. 199.

⁶ Katerina Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism." In *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East*, (2011): 21-39, p. 23. Cambridge University Press.

terrorism and democratization and I will emphasize the multiple and sometimes competing *mechanisms* leading to these outcomes while resorting to Jon Elster's mechanistic explanation.

This thesis aims to address the research puzzle at a multi-level analysis in order to find if there is a casual narrative that explains this phenomenon. Hence, the multi-level synthesis would address the micro-individual level and the macro-state level. Regarding the micro-individual level, and in order to understand the tension in democratizing Tunisia, it is crucial to examine how the previous studies on the factors affecting recruitment impact the high rate of flow of recruits from Tunisia and to examine the motivations that push recruits in Tunisia to join Islamist violent groups as ISIS. Hence, I will be drawing on constructivist tradition from International Relations theory in which the unit of analysis goes beyond state actors and heads into comparative politics and sociology that would help in analyzing how or why people get recruited is. In order to understand the interaction between the political (the state) and Islamist violent groups, constructivist tradition and transformative learning theory would be crucial to understand the change in interests and identity of both state and non-state actors.⁷ In order to tackle the research puzzle at a macro-state level, I will resort to democratization theory based on the insights produced by Mansfield and Snyder, in "Electing to Fight: why emerging democracies go to war", in their attempt to link democracy and religion.⁸ Regarding the research design and the methodology that will be used for the aim of the thesis, I will rely on secondary sources to map the historical background of Islamism in Tunisia, and to understand the relationship between democratization and Islamist violent acts.

⁷ Janani Krishnaswamy, "How Does Terrorism Lend Itself to Constructivist Understanding?" *E-International Relations Students* (2012).

⁸ Edward D. Mansfield, and Jack Snyder, *Electing To Fight: why emerging democracies go to war*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (2005): 1-285.

After analyzing the research puzzle from a micro-individual level and macro-state level perspectives, I will come up with a meso-level of analysis that would explain that democratization is not the crucial variable to the rise of violence in Tunisia. Therefore, in order to understand the stance of Ennahda party versus those who joined violent and terrorist groups amid the Arab Spring revolution and during the democratization process in Tunisia, I will resort to Jon Elster's mechanisms and rely on the secondary sources in this regard to explain the thesis's puzzle. Hence, the micro-individual analysis of the motivations that push individuals in Tunisia to join Islamist violent groups along with the macro-state analysis of the country's institutions and historical background of Islamism in Tunisia would both result in a meso-level analysis of the thesis's research puzzle which will be thoroughly explicated using Jon Elster's mechanistic explanation.

Regarding the case study of this thesis, the main focus will be on Tunisia for its unique aspects among the Arab countries and for being a battle ground for the puzzling issue of being the only democratizing Arab country and the largest generator of violent Islamist individuals. The reason behind using a single case study method is to study the case in-depth and intensively with the aim of understanding a wider range of relatively similar cases.⁹ Using a case study for the aim of this thesis will provide an implicit comparison for other cases as well, which would thus be useful for other research purposes.¹⁰ Since the aim of this thesis is mainly to examine whether there is a casual relationship between Tunisia's democratization and the high rate of

⁹ John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?" *The American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004): 341-354, p. 342.

¹⁰ Ibid., 348.

recruits, therefore, using a case study method will allow for peering into “the box of causality to the intermediate causes lying between some causes” and its asserted effect.¹¹

In this thesis, for the sake of clarity and consistency, I will be using the term ‘Islamists’ violence’ to refer to any acts of violence that have been carried out by those affiliated to any of the jihadist groups or those who claim to fight for their optimal goal of having an Islamic State. Although the use of violence by the government against its citizens could be referred to as terrorism by broadening the definition, in this thesis, the use of the term “terrorism” limitedly and precisely refers to the deployment of violent acts by a group or an organization, and not by the government, in order to spread fear and intimidation and achieve specific goals. I decline from using the broader definition in order to not distract the attention from the thesis’s main focus. Hence, the term “terrorism” in this thesis refers to political act carried out by an organized group that involves the intention of killing, harming, or destroying state’s vital institutions and to spread fear among both civilians, noncombatants, and the regime.¹² Last but not least, for the purpose of this thesis, the use of the term Jihadists refers to radical Islamists.¹³

The thesis is divided into three sections: chapter one, chapter two, and chapter three which is the conclusion. In chapter one, I mainly discuss the historical background of Islamism in Tunisia in an effort to prove that Islamists’ violence existed even before Tunisia’s transition to democracy. Hence, chapter one will be a detailed presentation and analysis of the initiation of Islamism in Tunisia as well as the incidence of violent actions carried out by Islamist groups prior to the Arab Spring and under the Tunisian authoritarian regimes. The aim of this chapter is to examine whether Islamist violence occurred only during the democratization process in

¹¹ Ibid., 348.

¹² Dalacoura. "Introduction: The Book’s Central Question and Rationale.", 13.

¹³ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism", 72.

Tunisia or it existed prior to the democratization process. Chapter two will then examine the Islamists' different reactions to the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia, where the country was regarded as a battle ground for two competing mechanisms. The first of which is the large number of individuals joining Islamist violent actions and groups, and the second one is the decision of the country's main Islamist party, Ennahda, to give up some of its core principles, accept the democratic transition, and be part of the new secular government. The aim of the chapter is to argue that democratization is not a crucial variable for Islamists' violence, and to come up with a meso-level analysis which combines the micro-individual and macro-state analysis. This meso-level analysis of the thesis's puzzle would then be thoroughly explained through Jon Elster's mechanisms in chapter two. Chapter three is the last part of this thesis in which I explain the relationship between democratization, Islamists' violence, and compromise while resorting to the approach of mechanisms.

Chapter 1: Islamism in Tunisia

Introduction

A common narrative among authoritarians associate terrorist attacks carried out by jihadists to the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime and the spread of instability due to the strong relationship between the toppled regime and the country's security apparatus.¹⁴ The rest of authoritarian rulers in the region adopted this narrative to show themselves as the safeguards of their countries from Islamist violence and jihadism.¹⁵ This counter-revolutionary narrative's flaw lies in the absence of historical outlook.¹⁶ This chapter aims at deploying the process-tracing method to trace the historical processes that may have an influence on the breakdown of the regime rather than the revolution. After reviewing the literature, most scholars argue that Islamic violence result from political instability and revolutions. Moreover, as discussed by several scholars, including Mansfield and Snyder's argument in their book "Electing to fight: why emerging democracies go to war" in which they focus on the possibility of the emergence of war and conflict during the transition to democracy, the authors argue that democratic transitions are not necessarily dangerous, and war and conflicts arise during transition to democracy in states that have weak or absent accountable political institutions, lack rule of law, have no competitive political parties, and news media that is unprofessional and biased.¹⁷ However, after resorting to the process-tracing method and going through the history of

¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Jihadism in North Africa: A House of Many Mansions." *Adelphi Series* 55, no. 452 (2015): 97-112, p. 97.

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Edward D. Mansfield, and Jack Snyder, *Electing To Fight: why emerging democracies go to war*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (2005): 1-285, p. 2.

Tunisia, I argue that democratization does not necessarily lead to violence since Islamic violence existed prior to the Arab Spring and democratization process in Tunisia. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to trace the history of Islamists' violence in Tunisia prior to the revolution of 2011, in order to understand whether if revolutions or uprisings lead to Islamic violence, and then to assess the validity of Mansfield and Snyder's argument and understand whether political transition leads to Islamic violence or not, in order to prove that democratization is not the crucial variable to the rise of violence and extremism in Tunisia, and that Islamists' violence existed prior to the Arab Spring and the Tunisian transition to democracy.

Background on the origin of the term "Islamism"

Back in the late 1970s, the term "Islamism" was invented by French political scientists in an effort to comprehend instances of Islamic activism such as the Iranian revolution.¹⁸ Back then, the academic term "Islamist" was not used in reference to Islamist movements like the Tunisian Islamist party, but "Muslim" was used instead. The Western media popularized the term "Islamist", which has been taken by some political actors influenced by Islamic divine ideas such as Ennahda party, which "currently refers to itself as an Islamist party."¹⁹ Islamism entails the ideology that was originated by Jamal El-Din Al-Afghani and Hassan al-Banna back in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁰ Hence, the term "Islamism" identifies political actors that have been influenced by this tradition and ideology such as the Muslim Brotherhood along with its several sister parties across the Muslim and Arab world.²¹

¹⁸ Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia."

Journal of Democracy 26, no. 4 (2015): 110-124, p. 111.

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Ibid.,

Islamism is mainly about perceiving Islam as a political ideology, and not only as a religion, and the idea that the primary Islamic texts should organize and guide all the societal aspects.²² Islamists believe that there is Islamic educational system, Islamic economy, as well as environmental and social policies. Islamists, and mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, adopt the slogan of “Islam is the solution”, which indicates that the solution for any political, societal, or economic issue can be interpreted and solved based on the Islamic teachings, the Quran, and the practices of the caliphs.²³ Accordingly, Islamism is an ideology that aims to transform the society based on a set of preidentified principles.²⁴ Scholars perceive these Islamist parties and movements differently. For instance, neoconservatives and orientalist believe that Islamist movements and parties are undemocratic and incapable of reforming.²⁵ According to Bernard Lewis, “For Islamists, democracy . . . is a one-way road on which there is no return, no rejection of the sovereignty of God, as exercised through His chosen representatives.”²⁶ Therefore, scholars mostly agree that political actors who are influenced by Islamism are undemocratic and incapable of reforming.

Historical background: The initiation of Islamism in Tunisia

The recounting of the history of Islamist violence in Tunisia aims to show that although Tunisia was ruled by authoritarian regimes that repressed and oppressed Islamists’ activities, and marginalized them from the political scene for a long period of time, Tunisia still witnessed Islamist violence and terrorist incidents throughout its history, and not only after its

²² Ibid.,

²³ Ibid.,

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Ibid.,

democratization process after the Arab Spring. Tunisia's Islamic nature and dynamics have been linked to the country's past religious and westernized policies.²⁷ After Tunisia's independence in 1956 from France, President Habib Bourguiba was keen to develop an exclusive "Tunisian Islam" in an effort to harmonize "religion with modernization".²⁸ Hence, Bourguiba carried out a series of reforms with a sense of Westernism, which included the launch of modernized educational system and the issuance of laws enhancing the rights of women under "Tunisia's Personal Status Code".²⁹ In order to fully implement the campaign of modernization to Tunisia, Bourguiba worked on eradicating anything linked with "religious conservatism".³⁰ This act was reflected in the dismantling of Islamic institutions such as Zaytouna University, where education and religious teaching were characterized with backwardness.³¹ Rachid Ghannouchi, co-founder of Ennahda Party, once stated that Bourguiba carried out extensive changes to abolish the Tunisian "Arab-Muslim identity" and enforce the model of the French life.³² Therefore, this period was characterized by the marginalization of Islamists not only at a political level but also at a socio-economic level. As discussed throughout the thesis, such factors can play as push factors encouraging individuals to join terrorist groups in order to achieve their goals and attain their needs, and sometimes revenge from the government.

²⁷ Anne Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'? Religion and politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, no. 4 (2013): 560-573, no. 561.

²⁸ Ibid.,

²⁹ Ibid.,

³⁰ Ibid.,

³¹ Ibid.,

³² Ibid.,

During a decade highlighted by clashes between the conservative and liberal wings, and the political and institutional instability within the regime, the Islamic movement that persists till today came to life in Tunisia during the 1970s as a result of internal and external factors.³³ From 1957 to 1987 under the ruling period of the first Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, some major clashes occurred. These series of crises were initiated in the 1950s by the Youssefist crisis which was the moniker marking the bloody conflict and hostilities between the supporters of the two focal leaders of the Neo-Destur Party; Habib Bourguiba and Saleh Ben Youssef.³⁴ Victims were left out of these clashes in Tunisia, including prosecuting Ben Youssef's supporters.³⁵ The following clash was between the regime of Bourguiba and the far leftists. The regime started forbidding the Communists from participating in the political life in the 1960s. The clash came to an end when the liberals left the government and the ruling party, while leaving grievances behind.³⁶ During a decade highlighted by clashes between the conservative and liberal wings, and the political and institutional instability within the regime, the Islamic movement that persists till today came to life in Tunisia during the 1970s as a result of internal and external factors.³⁷ Internal factors were represented in the bloody confrontations

³³ Ibid.; Ignatius Kobbina Yankey, "The Arab Spring in The Arab World: Is Islamism a Factor? A Case Study of Tunisia." *Journal of Social Science Research* 12, no. 2 (2018): 2819-2827, p. 2822.

³⁴ Alaya Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980-2008.", *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 257-272, p. 259.

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Ibid.,

³⁷ Ibid.; Ignatius Kobbina Yankey, "The Arab Spring in The Arab World: Is Islamism a Factor? A Case Study of Tunisia." *Journal of Social Science Research* 12, no. 2 (2018): 2819-2827, p.

that continued after Bourguiba was announced “President for Life” in 1974 and the absence of democracy in Bourguiba’s government dominated the scene.³⁸ Clashes between the government and the national trade union organization (U.G.T.T.) took place in 1978, leading to casualties and the arrest and prosecution of a number of unionists.³⁹ The Islamic Movement started to take its first steps after these circumstances, with the issuance of Al-Maarifa magazine.⁴⁰ The aim of Al-Maarifa magazine was at first to focus on spreading principles of Islam in mosques, promoting organizations to defend the Qur’an, along with religious and societal issues as education and family topics. At first, Al-Maarifa magazine did not aim to tackle political issues until the bloody conflict took place in 1978 after which Al-Maarifa magazine started shifting its direction and topics to politics, backing the government against the labor union’s leftists, and considering them as the Islamist movement’s enemy.⁴¹

The Islamic movement got promoted via external factors as well during the 1970s.⁴² The fading of the Arab nationalism as well as the Iranian revolution in 1979 fed the Tunisian Islamic movement with organizational, political, and ideological sustenance. The Islamic movement seemed to have supported the revolutionary tendency of Islam represented in the Iranian revolution, and praised the revolution, considering it as a victory for Islam.⁴³ Hence, the Tunisian Islamist Movement flourished in light of the conflict between the rightists and

2822.

³⁸ Alaya Allani, “The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation, 259.

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Ibid.,

⁴¹ Ibid.,

⁴² Ibid.,

⁴³ Ibid.,

leftists.⁴⁴ The principles of the Muslim Brotherhood influenced the goals of the Tunisian Islamist Movement and some of their newspaper articles stressed the Movement's refusal to the views of the West.⁴⁵ During the early 1980s, there was a remarkable change in the Movement's attitude, especially during the immigration period. At first, the Movement's texts criticized the West, considering it as the main reason behind underdevelopment in the Islamic countries.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Islamic Movement criticized the movements of the reformists which took place in the 19th century and called for models of the West, asserting that the Islamic Movement should not be influenced by these Westernized models.⁴⁷

The leadership decided to create a secret congress in 1979 which consisted of 60 members and came up with a name for the Islamic Movement to be "The Islamic Group" or "Jamaa Islamiyya", and agreed on its fundamental rules.⁴⁸ These rules asserted that the congress should witness a new consultant Council every three years, and a novel Executive Bureau headed by the Movement's president, along with a novel official of the Movement regionally.⁴⁹ The Movement kept on carrying on its work in secrecy until it was unveiled by the police in 1980. Afterwards, the Movement decided to officially register as a political party, under the name of "The Islamic Tendency Movement" in 1981.⁵⁰ The second congress of the Movement started to have a tendency towards confrontational against the government as it

⁴⁴ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁴⁷ Ibid.,

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ Ibid.,

⁵⁰ Ibid.,

decided to have a coalition with the opposition parties in an effort to overthrow the Tunisian regime at that time.⁵¹ In 1981, the Tunisian authorities initiated a series of prosecutions, and the Tunisian Islamic Movement started witnessing a hardship period with the Tunisian authorities, which was on the other hand having a crisis with the leftists which put the country into severe problems, which intensified after the parliamentary elections that were falsified by the government to obstruct the opposing party, the Democratic Socialist Movement, from having seats in the parliament.⁵²

The Islamic Movement's political and violent attitude against Bourguiba's government was revealed after the attack on Gafsa took place in 1980.⁵³ Gafsa is a poor town located in south western Tunisia, and famous for its hostility towards Bourguiba.⁵⁴ Tunisian rebels carried out the attack and bombed numerous locations including the barracks of the army. The Islamic Movement held the government accountable for the attack and considered it a result of the social and political unrest.⁵⁵ Hence, the Movement took opportunity of these circumstances and presented itself as the sole available alternative political party. The Movement's student wing started taking a more radical action by announcing their support to those who carried out the Gafsa attack. Since then, the government started considering the Movement of having

⁵¹ Ibid.,

⁵² Ibid., 261.

⁵³ Ibid.; Anne Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 563.

⁵⁴ Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation", 269.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 261.; Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 563.

hypocritical and contradicting attitude.⁵⁶ Hence, this reflects that Islamists violence was present under a regime that was not undergoing political transition, and democratization in specific.

The government started to become more concerned with the attitude and views of the Tunisian Islamic Movement following the Gafsa violent incident and began to justify the prosecution of several members and its efforts to curb the spread of the Movement.⁵⁷ The authorities had two main reasons to confront the Islamic Movement. The first reason was the government's belief that the Movement's goal was to take power by force. The second reason was the authorities' unacceptance of the of the Movement's involvement in mosques and the fear of the government from the Movement's control over the religious institutions.⁵⁸ 107 Islamists got imprisoned for up to 11 years.⁵⁹ Islamist leaders outside prison started to reevaluate the Movement's political and ideological experiences, which resulted in the split of some figures to create an Islamic group focusing specifically on the ideological side more than the organizational one, and gave themselves the name of "The Progressive Islamists in Tunisia"⁶⁰ Moreover, the reevaluation resulted in the emergence of two opposite trends: a modest one claiming not to take a violent trend. The moderate trend was headed by Abdelfattah

⁵⁶ Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation", 261.; Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 563.

⁵⁷ Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation", 261.

⁵⁸ Ibid.,

⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 262.

Mourou, who's the co-founder of Ennahda Party.⁶¹ The second trend is a radical one that preferred revolting against the authorities and was headed by Salah Karkar.⁶²

Tunisia witnessed a period of relief and desire for inclusion and participation of the Islamists from 1984 till 1985.⁶³ The "Bread Uprising of January 1984" broke out 1984, as a violent response to the increase of bread price in the country.⁶⁴ Muhammed Mzali, the Tunisian Prime Minister back then, thought that the Minister of Interior along with members of the trade union initiated the uprising and resulted in the firing of the Minister of Interior and the sentence of Habib Achour, the secretary general of the union.⁶⁵ The Prime Minister's relationships worsened after these actions that he took, and he had to limit the losses. Thus, Mzali worked on having a compromise with the Movement's members who were imprisoned, and started releasing them progressively.⁶⁶ The Movement considered Mzali as their ally after he began to sympathize with their views and managed to protect the Arab and Islamic identity while preaching modernization.⁶⁷ Although Bourguiba was not convinced with giving the Islamists space to participate in the political life, the Prime Minister worked on relieving the tensions between the President and the Movement.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² Ibid.,

⁶³ Ibid.,

⁶⁴ Ibid.,

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ Ibid.,

The Tunisian security and social conditions deteriorated after the fall of the government of Mzali in 1986 which resulted in the spread of riots across the country.⁶⁹ The confrontation between the authorities and the Movement started taking place again, after Ghannouchi's prosecution took place in September 1987, resulting in his life sentence. After Bourguiba ordered Bin Ali to kill the Islamists in prison including Ghannouchi, Ben Ali refused and according to Ghannouchi, "Ben Ali not only saved one person but a whole nation".⁷⁰ This reflects the amount of frustration that the President had towards the Islamists and the repression they suffered from that could explain their violent actions that took place later on. From this point, the period of confrontation came to an end and a new era of participation started.⁷¹ In November 1987, Zin El Abidine Ben Ali came to power "by means of a constitutional coup against Bourguiba", and became the second Tunisian president, which was considered as a relief for the Tunisian Islamists.⁷² In summary, Islamism has been used as a tool of opposition against the authoritarian government throughout the Tunisian history prior to the Arab Spring.⁷³ The roots and history of Islamist extremism and jihadism in North Africa dates back to 1992 when the electoral process in Algeria, which was a chance back then for Islamists to

⁶⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁷⁰ Ibid.,

⁷¹ Ibid., 267.

⁷² Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 203.; Ibid., 263.

⁷³ Ignatius Kobbina Yankey, "The Arab Spring in The Arab World: Is Islamism a Factor? A Case Study of Tunisia." *Journal of Social Science Research* 12, no. 2 (2018): 2819-2827, p. 2823.

be in power, was suspended, leading to a dreadful civil war.⁷⁴ Thus, jihadism in the Islamic Maghreb had its roots in Algeria from where it expanded in the form al-Qaeda, and continued to grow in the form of Ansar al-Sharia after the Tunisian revolution's aftermath.⁷⁵

Political Islam and violence in Tunisia under Ben Ali's ruling period

The aim of this section is to show the existence terrorist activities before the introduction of democracy in Tunisia and under the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali despite explicit repression towards religiously influenced groups, movements and parties and their involvement within political affairs of the country as a result of this marginalization. Political Islam has been deployed by both the state and extremists as a means of altering the status quo, and became instrumental in security bodies, governmental entities, and social groups.⁷⁶ Political Islamism was allowed in Tunisia as a vital means for successful democratic transition.⁷⁷ According to John Turner, the Tunisian Islamic parties took part in the political life after the revolution, reflecting the possibility of democratization.⁷⁸ Tunisia has been characterized by having Political Islam as the main opposition force, and the most critical political challenge that Tunisians have been dealing with since the independence.⁷⁹ Islamists tend to deploy violence

⁷⁴ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Jihadism in North Africa: A House of Many Mansions." *Adelphi Series* 55, no. 452 (2015): 97-112, p. 97.

⁷⁵ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Jihadism in North Africa: A House of Many Mansions.", 98.

⁷⁶ Ignatius Kobbina Yankey, "The Arab Spring in The Arab World: Is Islamism a Factor? A Case Study of Tunisia." *Journal of Social Science Research* 12, no. 2 (2018): 2819-2827, p. 2822.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,

⁷⁸ Ibid.,

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2823.

to enforce change in society. In Tunisia, Islamism is perceived as “a counterbalance to the radical left opposition”.⁸⁰ Ben Ali tried to denounce and bring down the Islamic Movement as he felt threatened by its power.⁸¹ Since the mid-1990s, the Tunisian authorities have been instigating “a war of words with religious elements”, portraying “conservative Muslims as Islamists and terrorists”.⁸² This strategy has succeeded since both terms are used till today in an interchangeable way in Tunisia.⁸³

Once Ben Ali became Tunisia’s president, the Islamist Movement was excited to participate in the political life. Ben Ali’s regime repressed public expression related to political Islam for two decades.⁸⁴ After the Islamists’ success in the elections that took place in 1989, Ben Ali started repressing the Movement, which was renamed during the same year as “Ennahda” in order to comply with the governmental regulation that was issued in 1988 to prohibit having party names that refer to religion.⁸⁵ Since then, many members started taking a more radicalized stance against the authorities.⁸⁶ For instance, during the year 1991, an office

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

⁸¹ Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 203.; Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 562.

⁸² Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 562.

⁸³ Ibid.,

⁸⁴ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Lesson eight: Jihadists could become obsolete." In *The Arab Revolution : Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*. Oxford University Press USA – OSO (2011): 107-119, p. 115.

⁸⁵ Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 203.; Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 564.

⁸⁶ Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 564.

related to the Constitutional Democratic Rally in Tunisia's downtown was burnt by three Islamists which resulted in the death of a guardian.⁸⁷ This violent incident was enough to give the authorities the excuse to repress the Islamists until the fall of Ben Ali's during the Jasmine revolution.⁸⁸ In this regard, violence seemed to dominate the scene in Tunisia while the country was still not witnessing any political transition.

In 2002, al-Qaeda attacked Tunisia, and Ben Ali's regime continued to target Ennahda as a "source of terrorism".⁸⁹ With the repression and imprisonment of many members of Ennahda starting the 1990s, some Islamists took a violent path to express their views by joining radicalized and extremist groups.⁹⁰ Such aggressive path was clear in 2006 when five Tunisian Islamists along with a Mauritanian one had been trained by al-Qaeda and started recruiting members and carried out violent incidents that caused instability within the country. The police were able to arrest two of them, while the other four were able to radically and violently attack vibrant institutions and Tunisian as well as foreign figures.⁹¹ Furthermore, the only four radicalized Islamists were able to create a Jihadi network and recruited around 40 others to join their group.⁹² The degree of repression and suppression that Islamists faced hindered them from

⁸⁷Ibid.,

⁸⁸ Ibid.,

⁸⁹ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Lesson seven: Islamists must choose." In *The Arab Revolution : Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*. Oxford University Press USA – OSO (2011): 91-105, p. 95.

⁹⁰ Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 564.

⁹¹ Ibid., 565.

⁹² Ibid.,

“becoming socialized in the norms of negotiation and compromise”.⁹³ Therefore, as the state tried to maintain internal stability, its use of repression, in all its forms, , ranging from imprisonment, state violence, persecution, and torture towards Islamists, intensified feelings of marginalization and alienation in the hearts of Islamists who resorted to the use of violence and extremism due to their feelings of alienation from their society.⁹⁴

Tunisia witnessed an unprecedented flow of Tunisian jihadists in the 2000s, and a lot of young Tunisians got influenced by the radical extremist ideology.⁹⁵ The government intensified its unjustified arrests to a lot of young Tunisians out of fear from strengthening Islamic jihadism the country.⁹⁶ This shows that although Tunisia was not witnessing a transition to democracy at that time, the country still had some of its conservative Muslims joining radical movements due to their repression, instability, and marginalization.

The Arab Spring in Tunisia: Did it lead to extremism?

This section aims to assess the relation between the drive for democracy through the Arab Spring and the rise in terrorism, arguing that despite the rise of these terrorist activities after the Arab Spring in Tunisia, extremists existed way before the Tunisian revolution during the authoritarian regimes that ruled the country. Therefore, the democratization process that Tunisia has witnessed and the introduction of democracy by way of the revolution was not the catalyst to the introduction of terrorist activities within the state, however, it merely just made them visible.

⁹³ Katerina Dalacoura. "Introduction: The Book's Central Question and Rationale." In *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East*, (2011): 1-20. Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.,

⁹⁵ Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'?", 565.

⁹⁶ Ibid.,

In 2011, Tunisians decided to put an end to the oppressive authoritarian rule of Ben Ali and to bring down his regime. Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor, sparked the upheaval when he set himself on fire publicly in the city of Sidi Bouzaid to demonstrate the haphazard seizure of his business.⁹⁷ The Tunisian uprising that started in 2010 reflected the problematic conditions of youths in most of the Arab states. Tunisians protested against social, economic, and political conditions reflected in high poverty rates, lack of good educational systems, expanding unemployment, growing income gaps, political repression, worsening of public services, and social and political marginalization and neglect.⁹⁸ Tunisians were able to bring down Ben Ali's authoritarian regime in January 2011 after being in power for twenty four years.⁹⁹ After sparking the Arab Spring uprisings, Tunisia was able to have a successful transition to democracy, unlike Syria, Yemen, and Libya that fell into civil wars, and Egypt that regressed to authoritarianism.¹⁰⁰ Tunisians succeeded in having presidential and legislative

⁹⁷ Bassam Tibi, "Islam and Democracy." In *Islamism and Islam*, (2012): 94-133, p. 126, Yale University Press.; Merouan Mekouar, "Police Collapse in Authoritarian Regimes: Lessons from Tunisia." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 10 (2017): 857-869, p. 858.

⁹⁸ Emma C. Murphy, "A Political Economy of Youth Policy in Tunisia." *New Political Economy* 22, no. 6 (2017): 676-691, p. 676.

⁹⁹ Robert Andersen, and Robert Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy: Tunisia in 2015." *Canadian Sociological Association/La Société canadienne de sociologie* 54, no. 4 (2017): 519-529, p. 520.

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Macdonald, and Luke Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 29, no. 1 (2018): 126-140, p. 126.; Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 110-124, p. 110.; Robert Andersen, and Robert Brym,

fair and free elections in 2014, drafted a constitution, and formed a new government.¹⁰¹ The two major political players, secularists and Islamists, approved and supported the new constitution in January 2014, after a transitional period that was characterized by volatility and instability between 2011 and 2013.¹⁰² After fulfilling these achievements, Tunisia has been considered as the sole democratizing Arab country after the Arab Spring took place in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.¹⁰³ Therefore, after the fall of Ben Ali's regime, the Tunisian

"How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy: Tunisia in 2015." *Canadian Sociological Association/La Société 'te' canadienne de sociologie* 54, no. 4 (2017): 519-529, p. 520.

¹⁰¹ Fabio Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism: the evolution of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Tunisia." *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 1 (2017): 71–90, p. 81.; Geoffrey Macdonald, and Luke Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 29, no. 1 (2018): 126-140, p. 126.; Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 110-124, p. 110.; Robert Andersen, and Robert Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy: Tunisia in 2015." *Canadian Sociological Association/La Société 'te' canadienne de sociologie* 54, no. 4 (2017): 519-529, p. 520.

¹⁰² Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism:", 81.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 71.; Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 110-124, p. 110.; Robert Andersen, and Robert Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy: Tunisia in 2015." *Canadian Sociological Association/La Société 'te' canadienne de sociologie* 54, no. 4 (2017): 519-529, p. 519.; Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *ResearchGate: Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2

political secularists and Islamists were able to prove that society, religion, and politics can come together under democratic circumstances.¹⁰⁴

In 2015, Tunisia was hit hard by major terrorist attacks since its transition to democracy.¹⁰⁵ In March 2015, 22 people were killed in the Bardo Museum by Islamist attackers.¹⁰⁶ During June, another 39 people, mainly tourists, were killed as well by a member in ISIS at the Imperial Marhaba Hotel in the Tunisian city of Sousse.¹⁰⁷ The attacks mainly targeted touristic places that had symbolic significance in Tunisia with the aim of disturbing the tourist industry and thus shacking the economic and employment sectors and causing instability within the country.¹⁰⁸ Another terrorist attack took place on November 24th when many presidential bodyguards were killed by a suicide bomber on a bus.¹⁰⁹ Some small-scale terrorist incidents persisted in 2016 when a Tunisian soldier was murdered by Islamist

(2014): 313-331, p. 326.

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations." *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 2 (2012): 89-103, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey Macdonald, and Luke Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 29, no. 1 (2018): 126-140, p. 126.; Robert Andersen, and Robert Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy: Tunisia in 2015." *Canadian Sociological Association/La Société canadienne de sociologie* 54, no. 4 (2017): 519-529, p. 520.

¹⁰⁶ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", 126.; Andersen and Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy, 520.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁸ Andersen and Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy", 520.

¹⁰⁹ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", 126.

extremists in his home. Also, two police officers were wounded by another Islamist extremist in November 2017.¹¹⁰ After these major terrorist attacks, “skepticism about democracy increased significantly.”¹¹¹ In order to assess the impact of terrorism on the Tunisian population, Andersen and Brym carried out a study to analyze whether the terrorist attacks of 2015 encouraged Tunisians toward authoritarianism and pushed them to doubt democratization as a suitable political system.¹¹² The scholars found out that the 2015 terrorist attacks have had a destructive effect on attitudes towards democracy, even those who strongly supported democracy “had their faith in democracy shaken” after the terrorist attacks.¹¹³

The “dual trends” of intensifying democratization and expanding violent extremism since the fall of Ben Ali’s regime create a research puzzle.¹¹⁴ Some scholars argue that as Tunisia has been democratizing, it was expected to witness a decline in extremism and radicalization.¹¹⁵ Many scholars, including Alan Krueger, argue that violent extremists originate from countries that oppress civil, social, and political rights.¹¹⁶ According to Arch Puddington, who’s currently a “Senior Scholar Emeritus at Freedom House”, more than 90 percent of the terrorist attacks that took place in 2013 “occurred in partly or not free countries”.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, after Tunisia received the “Free rating” from the Freedom House

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹¹ Andersen and Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy", 528.

¹¹² Ibid., 521.

¹¹³ Ibid., 522.

¹¹⁴ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", pp. 126, 127.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; n.d. *Freedom House*. Accessed 2020. <https://freedomhouse.org/expert/arch->

in 2015 for the first time, it has been recorded that almost seven thousand Tunisians have joined terrorist groups such as ISIS.¹¹⁸ Compared to the whole Tunisian population that is estimated for eleven million, the anticipated number of Tunisians who joined terrorist groups in 2015 is relatively large and substantial.¹¹⁹

Islamists' violence and terrorism in Tunisia

This section aims to analyze the reasons for terrorist activities within the state of Tunisia. It aims to argue that the democratization process is not the main reason for the rise in terrorism and the high number of recruits joining terrorist organizations rather there are different mechanisms by which individuals choose to participate in terrorist activities. First of all, on a microstate level analysis which focuses on the state itself and the micro level analysis which focuses on the individuals themselves and the circumstances which influences their choices. This analysis shows that depending on the position state is in and the circumstances of that particular individual their choices could differ. Therefore, some could choose to go down the extremism route and some may choose the secular route or neither. Therefore, democratization in itself is not the catalyst, rather a combination of the factors surrounding the state and the circumstances of the person in question.

Among the Arab countries, terrorism has become a real security threat.¹²⁰ Countries that witness transition from authoritarianism to democratization are more likely to be

puddington.

¹¹⁸ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", pp. 126, 127.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.,

¹²⁰ Francesco Tamburini, "Anti-Terrorism Laws in the Maghreb Countries: The Mirror of a Democratic Transition that Never Was." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 8 (2018): 1235-1250, p. 1235.

vulnerable to violence, terrorism, and Islamic Jihadism since they do not have consolidated normative and institutional democratic foundations.¹²¹ Hence, violence and terrorism are considered as serious threat to democratizing countries due to the sense of insecurity, economic instability, and social tensions that result from such attacks.¹²² The Carnegie Middle East Center conducted a study in which it observed that the Arab youth are not properly ready to “compete in a globalized society”.¹²³ Moreover, it has been found out by the Middle East Policy Council that in several Arab states, labor markets do not have the capabilities of providing sufficient job opportunities in order to be able to withstand their mounting youth populations.¹²⁴ The Arab Spring uprisings paved the way for contention and political opportunities for Islamists.¹²⁵ According to the literature, the Tunisian domestic political consequences led to the domination of two novel jihadi actors to the scene. On a transnational level, ISIS became dominant and on a domestic level, Okba Ibn Nefaa became the prominent one.¹²⁶ In this

¹²¹ Jacob Høigilt, and Kjetil Selvik, "Debating terrorism in a political transition: Journalism and democracy in Tunisia." *The International Communication Gazette* (SAGE Publications) 82, no. 7 (2020): 664–681, p. 666.

¹²² Jacob Høigilt, and Kjetil Selvik, "Debating terrorism in a political transition: Journalism and democracy in Tunisia." *The International Communication Gazette* (SAGE Publications) 82, no. 7 (2020): 664–681, p. 666.

¹²³ Jessica Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do about It?" *The Annals of the American Academy* (2016): 102-117, p. 108.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²⁵ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism", 83.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,

section, I will refer and analyze ISIS since it has gained a lot of attention in the literature not only for its global expansion in general and in Tunisia in particular, but also for its use of modern recruitment and mobilization techniques.

Although the development and domination of these violent jihadi groups resulted mainly from internal political events, the regional situation became as of much importance as the internal one due to the emerging importance of proclaiming a “global Islamic Caliphate”.¹²⁷ Hence, Tunisia, as well as other Arab countries, witnessed the emergence of various types of violent Islamist jihadists after the eruption of the Arab uprisings. Jihadism in Tunisia started spreading partially due to the confrontation policy that was adopted by the authorities for many years.¹²⁸ Mourou perceives the Islamist tendency as being against Arab leaders, the West, and democracy, and for having the desire to fight “ its enemies by arms rather than politics”.¹²⁹ Samir Ben Amor, a Tunisian lawyer, once stated in a conversation with an American diplomat back in 2008, that during Ben Ali’s ruling period, especially after 2004, Tunisian has witnessed more of its citizens joining jihadism.¹³⁰

The democratic transition in Tunisia has been threatened by terrorist attacks, economic instability and political divisions.¹³¹ Some scholars argue that the support to jihadism has significantly increased in the Arab countries due to the political and economic instability that resulted from the eruption of the Arab Spring uprisings.¹³² Others argue that Islamic violence

¹²⁷ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism", 83.

¹²⁸ Allani, “The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation”, 267.

¹²⁹ Ibid.,

¹³⁰ Wolf, "An Islamist ‘renaissance’?", 562.

¹³¹ Andersen and Brym, "How Terrorism Affects Attitudes toward Democracy", 519.

¹³² Meirav Mishali-Ram, "Foreign Fighters and Transnational Jihad in Syria." Studies in

and Jihadism does not necessarily spate in countries that are politically unstable or from countries where jihadist movements are spread.¹³³ However, a lot of foreign fighters join terrorist jihadist groups, because of their different perspectives on “the role of Islamism in sociopolitical life and the political authority of the regime”.¹³⁴ Other scholars argue that violent extremism and recruitment in jihadist groups are expected to decline with the democratization process.¹³⁵ However, among the Arab world countries, despite being the sole democratizing country, Tunisia has been found to generate the greatest number of foreign fighters joining jihadist groups.¹³⁶ In July 2015, according to United Nations experts, it has been recorded that around 5,500 Tunisians have joined ISIS and traveled to fight in Syria. By the end of the year 2015, this figure is estimated to have risen to approximately 6,000 extremist and radicalized Tunisians.¹³⁷ Also, according to a study carried out by the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, almost 69 percent of the Tunisian jihadists traveled to Lybia for “military training”.¹³⁸ Hence, from the perspective of terrorist recruitment, and with the huge flow of recruits, Tunisia is considered to be the main Arab country responsible for the survival of ISIS in Syria and Iraq.¹³⁹ According to the literature, the reasons behind Tunisia being the largest

Conflict & Terrorism 41, no. 3 (2018): 169-190, p. 170.

¹³³Ibid.,

¹³⁴Ibid.,

¹³⁵ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", p. 127.

¹³⁶ Mishali-Ram, "Foreign Fighters and Transnational Jihad in Syria.", 170.; Neo, "The Jihad post-Arab Spring", 100.

¹³⁷ *Tunisia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*. Counter Extremism Project, (n.d.), 1-10, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid.,

¹³⁹ Joseph Siegle, "ISIS in Africa: Implications from Syria and Iraq." *Africa Center for*

generator of foreign fighters in jihadist groups mainly lie in the country's weak economy, high levels of unemployment, poverty, as well as the impact of marginalization of youth politically, socially, and economically.¹⁴⁰ However, the literature does not extensively elaborate on the correlation between the democratic transition of Tunisia and its relation with high flow of recruits joining terrorist organizations and violent extremism.

The inability of countries to fulfill the expectations and needs of their people might lead to social and economic grievances.¹⁴¹ The Tunisian case shows that terrorism and violence can hinder the process of peaceful transition to full democracy.¹⁴² The concept of democracy itself is a contested one. It is crucial to understand that procedural democracy occurs when free and fair elections are held, and when the political system respects civil and political rights, as well as freedom of expression. However, the system in itself is not a "true democracy".¹⁴³ This type of democracy, along with material, substantial, or procedural democracy, is crucial, as the ruling system needs to be able to satisfy its citizens' needs, including the minorities, and ensuring equality at all levels. According to Francesco Tamburini, terrorism and violence are fueled with the absence of material democracy.¹⁴⁴

Strategic Studies: 20-23, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Neo, "The Jihad post-Arab Spring", 100.

¹⁴¹ Francesco Tamburini, "Anti-Terrorism Laws in the Maghreb Countries: The Mirror of a Democratic Transition that Never Was." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 8 (2018): 1235-1250, p. 1247.

¹⁴² Ibid.,

¹⁴³ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.,

The Arab States witnessed a number of uprisings in 2011 that led to a period of political instability. In most of the countries that witnessed the Arab Spring uprisings, the situation ended with the continuation of authoritarianism or civil wars.¹⁴⁵ Islamist movements have become, as in the past, the main opposition and challenge to the political systems.¹⁴⁶ From 2011 till 2013, the Arab countries that went through the uprisings and experienced political instability witnessed the rise of novel trend for jihadism as a social and political force.¹⁴⁷ This new trend encourages jihadists to convert into political and social movements. In Tunisia, this trend is demonstrated in ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia.¹⁴⁸ The violent incidents that took place during the post-revolutionary period of volatility and turmoil from 2011 to 2013 were usually linked to jihadist movements.¹⁴⁹ After the fall of Ben Ali's regime, Tunisia witnessed two different entwined paths. The first one is represented in the domination of party politics as per the literature on democratization, while the other path is represented in the social dispute that took place through "street politics".¹⁵⁰ The Islamists were actively present in both directions. The secularist bloc started reacting towards the presence of Islamists in the political life and the radical jihadi movements on streets as there was as a threat that Islamists could take over power and society.¹⁵¹ In order to be part of the political sphere, Ennahda party was pressured to

¹⁴⁵ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism", 71.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.,

support technocratic government and give up their power. In the meanwhile, Ansar al-Sharia and ISIS were declared as terrorist organizations with Ennahda's approval.¹⁵²

Violence has been deployed as a political mean of confronting the state after Ansar al-Sharia (AST) was legally banned.¹⁵³

Concluding remarks

To sum up, the aim of this chapter was to demonstrate that the transition to democracy does not necessarily lead to violence, as it has been argued by some scholars like Mansfield and Snyder. After deploying the process-tracing method to explore the history of Islamists' violence in Tunisia prior to the Arab Spring and the process of transition to democracy, it has been found out that violence has already existed and preceded the democratization process in Tunisia. Also, the rise of Ennahda party during the transitional period to democracy in Tunisia reflects that influence of the history of repression of Islamists during the authoritarian ruling periods of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, as well as the other sociopolitical factors.¹⁵⁴ After reviewing the history of the previous Tunisian regimes in relation to Islamists, some could argue that the deprivation of Islamists from freely expressing their voice and needs and restricting them from joining the political life could be considered as a reason to explain why some of those Islamists were pushed to the use of arms and resorted to the use of violence and joined terrorist groups. However, if this is the case under authoritarian regimes, then why has the number of recruits in terrorist groups increased after the democratization of Tunisia? This shows that the transition to democracy is not the core variable to Islamists' violence or to the insurgence of high rate of

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵⁴ Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 212.

jihadists from Tunisia. However, there could be other explanations for this phenomenon, which will be discussed thoroughly in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Democratization and extremism

Introduction

Despite of the fact that studying the history could be insightful to prove a specific argument, as what has been proved in Chapter 1, that Tunisia witnessed Islamists' violence under its authoritarian regime long before the Arab Spring revolution and the country's transition to democracy, it is still not enough. Although process-tracing and historical analysis is essential to initiate discussion that would be related to the present, it is still crucial to analyze the whole situation from contemporary studies and incidents as well as from theoretical perspectives because there could be some limitations to the sole dependency on historical analysis.¹⁵⁵ First of all, when analyzing the history of a country or specific incidents, there could be a tendency to overstress or assume the continuity over time, and supposing that the present is explained by the past.¹⁵⁶ Second of all, historical analysis might not be able to fully resolve and determine the theoretical matters that might be posed by such history.¹⁵⁷ Also, as argued by John Mahoney in his article *Process Tracing and Historical Explanation*, the use of process tracing method in political science "often lacks systematization of technique and explicitness in execution".¹⁵⁸ Moreover, as further emphasized by James Mahoney, the causality resulting from the process-tracing method to a certain case "might be conceptualized in terms of necessity" in the literature

¹⁵⁵ Fred Halliday, "International Relations Theory and the Middle East." Chapter 1. In *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology, The Contemporary Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2005): 21–40, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Mahoney, James. "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation." *Security Studies* (Security Studies) 24, no. 2 (2015): 200-218, p. 201.

of social science.¹⁵⁹ This means that if “X” is asserted to cause “Y” in a certain case, then this indicates that “X” was a “necessary condition” for the occurrence of “Y” in this certain case.¹⁶⁰ Also, some scholars argue that the use of process tracing may perceive causes as contributing conditions that can result in increasing the “probability of an outcome”.¹⁶¹ Therefore, this chapter discusses the factors that possibly push individuals to join violent acts and groups from a micro-individual level and macro-state level. After carrying out a multi-level analysis, the chapter will conclude with a meso-level of analysis to answer the thesis’s research puzzle while resorting to Jon Elster’s mechanisms.

The Arab Spring uprisings brought about a new phase of Islamic violence revival by forces of globalization which has severely changed social beliefs in the region.¹⁶² This change was mainly characterized by the acceptance of secularism and modernism with all its secular features.¹⁶³ This transformation led to the considerable restriction of accepting the interference of religion in politics and the public sphere.¹⁶⁴ In relevance to International Relations, and according to secularists, religion is in itself separate from the political, economic, and social domains of the state and governance.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, secularism does not entail referring to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,

¹⁶² Sanjeev Kumar H. M., "ISIS and the Sectarian Political Ontology: Radical Islam, Violent Jihadism and the Claims for Revival of the Caliphate." *India Quarterly* (SAGE Publications) 74, no. 2 (2018): 119–137, p. 120.

¹⁶³ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. "The Political Authority of Secularism in International

divine orders or holy books in order to dictate and guide the state system, laws and government.¹⁶⁶ Several authors discuss the position of religion in international politics, while focusing on two prevailing positions. The first of which is that religion is perceived by some political scientists as “an irrational obstacle to the pursuit of progressive politics”. Whereas the second of which perceives religion as a “unique and immutable civilizational ‘glue’ contributing to animosity between civilizations”.¹⁶⁷ However, when these two secularist positions towards religion intermingle, this might cause, as argued by Elizabeth Shakman Hurd in her article *The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations*, a disclosure of political sphere and the “displacement of politics”.¹⁶⁸

Hence, the role of Islam has mostly been minimized in the judicial, textual, and public life.¹⁶⁹ Modernism, as well as secularism framed the role of Islam in giving legal and ethical guidelines for public life issues as well as socio-economic reforms.¹⁷⁰ “This current is in the mainstream of reformist Islam and intervened between two extremes, conservatism and radicalism”.¹⁷¹ Conservative Islamism endorses the values of authority, hierarchy, family, and

Relations." *European Journal of International Relations* (SAGE Publications and ECPR-European Consortium for Political Research) 10, no. 2 (2004): 235-262, p. 235.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 256.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁹Sanjeev Kumar H. M., "ISIS and the Sectarian Political Ontology: Radical Islam, Violent Jihadism and the Claims for Revival of the Caliphate." *India Quarterly* (SAGE Publications) 74, no. 2 (2018): 119–137, p. 120.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁷¹ Ibid.,

property, backed up with the preeminence of religion in its acknowledged form, unlike radical Islamism which aimed to bring down “Infidel Governments” and enforce the Islamic State.¹⁷² Hence, political Islam is both a political and religious phenomenon that arose as a result of development, modernization, and globalization with all their unsettling scopes.¹⁷³

After the Arab Spring uprisings, the political Islam trend tends to have become more regressive, provoked by contentious forces of religious extremism and autocracy.¹⁷⁴ Some of the literature on Islamic radicalization and extremism suggest a lot of causes for the phenomenon ranging from political oppression, vacuum, instability and marginalization, to economic hardships, poverty, and lack of job opportunities.¹⁷⁵ Some scholars argue that the revival of Islamic extremism and radicalization in the region has been due to the political instability that Arab countries have witnessed after the Arab Spring uprisings, as well as the persistence of authoritarian regimes, with the exception of Tunisia as well the emergence of civil wars in some of the Arab countries and the resurrection of transnational terrorism that is provoked by “radical Islamism”.¹⁷⁶ While some Islamists revert to violence and jihadism, others decide to be part of the political system and give up some of their goals. In Tunisia, while some Islamists joined terrorist organizations after the revolution amid the transitional

¹⁷² Ibid.,

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁵ Brynjar Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World after 2011: Expaining its expansion." *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 4 (2016): 74-91, p. 87.

¹⁷⁶ Sanjeev Kumar H. M., "ISIS and the Sectarian Political Ontology: Radical Islam, Violent Jihadism and the Claims for Revival of the Caliphate." *India Quarterly* (SAGE Publications) 74, no. 2 (2018): 119–137, p. 120.

period to democratization, Ennahda party decided to have a coalition with the secularist political actors in order to take part in the political process.¹⁷⁷ Hence, this chapter aims to understand the relationship between democratization and Islamists' violence from a micro-individual level and macro-state level while examining the case of Tunisia amid the Arab Spring. This chapter also aims to analyze the different stance of Islamist actors and understand Tunisia's Ennahda Islamic party and its willingness to join secularists and give up many of its core beliefs in order to be part of the political life and why other individuals decided to join violent groups.

Tunisia as a battle field for Islamists' violence and compromise

Tunisia's Ennahda Islamist Party versus Ansar al-Sharia

After the eruption of the Arab Spring, Tunisia has been a battle field for Islamist's violence and compromise. The aim of this section is to compare between two Tunisian Islamist groups, Ennahda Islamist party and Ansar al-Sharia terrorist group in order to identify the goals of both and understand their different stance towards the democratization of Tunisia and after the Arab Spring. In 2011, and after the Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia, the Tunisian people "elected a National Constituent Assembly (NCA)" that was able to adopt a new constitution in 2014, despite of the security, economic, and political instability.¹⁷⁸ Ennahda party, led by Ghannouchi, was significant to the Tunisian transition to democracy and claims a substantial degree of the composition of the new constitution, which seems to contradict the party's values.¹⁷⁹ The new constitution only mentions Islam as the "state's religion" and in the

¹⁷⁷ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", 126.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew F. March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought*, 1-287 (2019). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 205.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

Preamble which states “our people’s commitment to the teachings of Islam”. Other than that, there is no much substance referring to Islam or sharia in the new constitution that asserts that the state is a “civil state based on citizenship, the will of people, and the supremacy of law”.¹⁸⁰

Certainly, the approval of Ennahda’s party to the new constitution and matters related to Islamist ideology and religion has been widely noticed. The party decided to give up substantial core demands driven by Islamic ideology such as the constitutional reference to sharia as a source of state’s guidance and law, the description of women’s status in the constitution, referring to human rights as “universal”, as well as the acceptance of having presidential-parliamentary system which contradicts the party’s preferred parliamentary system.¹⁸¹ Ennahda party’s stance could be regarded as a compromise or a tactical decision that aims to achieve future realization of the party’s ideology. In his discussions regarding the reason behind the agreement of Ennahda party to give up the sharia clause from the new constitution, Ghannouchi claims that the drafting of the new constitution aimed to gather wide agreement in Tunisia. Thus, the aim of Ennahda was not to have a constitution drafted particularly to satisfy the party’s ideology, but the whole society.¹⁸² According to Ghannouchi, the new constitution shall be adopted based on human values since Ennahda is part of this humanity that refined some principles like human rights and democratic principles. Ghannouchi further emphasized that Ennahda party wants to embrace a civil state that depends on its people, since the legitimacy of a ruler comes through the people and pluralistic, free, and fair elections.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁸¹ Ibid.,

¹⁸² Ibid., 213.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 215.

Hence, Ennahda party has mainly drawn their focus based on the moderation framework, whether implicitly or explicitly, and this could be further explained by their deviation from the Muslim Brotherhood leading principles “towards a liberal democratic agenda.”¹⁸⁴ Ennahda party’s stance after the Arab Spring and during the democratic transition in Tunisia could be regarded as a “learning process” that the party has developed after observing the experiences of other Islamist parties and actors that the region has been through after the uprisings and revolutions and within a multifaceted, uncertain, fragile domestic and regional context.¹⁸⁵ For instance, on several occasions, Ennahda acknowledged that the ouster of Egypt’s Former President Mohamed Morsi along with the severe repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has acted as a “wake-up call” since the Tunisian Islamist party pointed to the weakness of the Islamists’ position in Tunisia and the country’s vulnerable political transition process.¹⁸⁶ Hence, in light of the rising international and domestic terrorism, Ennahda party recognized the urge to distance itself from associating between violence and Islam in order to avoid societal rejection. Certainly, the attacks carried out by terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia increased the fear of “a resurgent Islamist threat which could nullify the gains of a modernist tradition”.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, Ennahda party has been exerting effort to reassure national and international opinion about its adoption to democratic values through the party’s “mainstream official discourse” and by adopting key procedures to

¹⁸⁴ Giulia Cimini, "Learning mechanisms within an Islamist party: Tunisia’s Ennahda

Movement between domestic and regional balances." *Contemporary Politics* 27, no. 2

(2021): 160-179, p. 162.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 161.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 170.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.,

support democratic values.¹⁸⁸ Consequently, Ghannouchi completely realized the Tunisian experience as a pioneering one among the rest of the Arab countries as it is the only democratizing Arab country “based on religious coexistence”.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, Ansar al-Sharia Islamist terrorist group decided to adopt violence and carried out several terrorist attacks. The Tunisian government declared Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization in 2013 as the group had a role in the assassination of eight Tunisian soldiers in the mountains close to the Algerian borders.¹⁹⁰

Democratization and extremism in the terrorism literature

The relationship between democratization and extremism has been widely discussed in the terrorism literature from different perspectives. Some scholars argue that it is less likely for terrorists to emerge from democratic countries and that countries that suppress civil and political rights are more likely to produce extremists.¹⁹¹ Yet, other scholars indicate that political transition and democratization could produce violent extremists and terrorism and therefore result in having conflict and instability due to pluralism and marginalization of minorities.¹⁹² According to many scholars, the democratization process can lead to civil war, internal conflict, and violence.¹⁹³ For instance, as argued by Michel Wieviorka, the armed conflict was deadly in the period following the democratic transition in Spain.¹⁹⁴ According to

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 171.

¹⁹⁰ Ayari, "Ennahda Movement in Power", 140.

¹⁹¹ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", 128.

¹⁹² Ibid., 129.

¹⁹³ Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 29.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 30.

Quan Li, countries that are experiencing regime changes are vulnerable to terrorist incidents more than stable regimes.¹⁹⁵ According to Bernard Lewis, Islam and democracy are paradoxical since the Muslim Arab world lack representative governments, civil society, social pluralism, and individual freedoms.¹⁹⁶ Ernest Gellner also contributed to Lewis's argument as he claims that secularization has been resisted and not adopted in the Arab Islamic countries which hinders their transition to democracy and makes the concept of separation between religion and politics extraneous.¹⁹⁷

On the other hand, Alfred Stepan argues in *Religion, Democracy, and the Twin Tolerations* that it is misleading to attribute Islam to Arab culture, since this indicates that there are no Muslims living under democracies because of the Islamic culture which he proofs to be a wrong assumption as millions of Muslims around the world live under democratic regimes, but not in the Arab countries.¹⁹⁸ According to Stepan's "twin tolerations", Tunisia was able to lead a transition to democracy by adhering to the two tolerations, the first of which is the toleration of religious people towards the state, which requires their acceptance to the "democratically elected officials" regardless of their religious claims.¹⁹⁹ The second toleration

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁶ Jean-Philippe Platteau. "Political Instrumentalization of Islam and the Risk of Obscurantist Deadlock." *World Development* 39, no. 2 (2011): 243-260, p. 244.

¹⁹⁷ Ezzeddine Abdelmoula, "Tunisia's Democratic Transition: Consensus Vs. Competition." *International Journal of Management and Applied Science* 2, no. 6 (2016): 52-56, p. 53.

¹⁹⁸ Alfred C Stepan. "Religion, Democracy, and the "Twin Tolerations"." *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (2000): 37-57, p. 48.

¹⁹⁹ Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations.", 89.

is the state's toleration towards religious citizens, which requires the legal permission of the latter to freely express their voices and views within the society and to freely participate in the political life.²⁰⁰ Hence, as argued by Stepan, successful transition to democracy requires not only the adoption of free, fair, competitive elections, but most importantly, it requires "a clear functional distinction and a mutual respect" between religious citizens and political authority, which means that the transition to democracy is not possible without strong political institutions.²⁰¹

Whereas a considerable number of scholars defends the argument that democracy obstacles the emergence of Islamist terrorism and that it mainly stems from authoritarian and non-democratic structures, a wide body of academic literature, on the other hand, argue that the democratic system could have some characteristics that could lead to and encourage the rise of terrorism.²⁰² For instance, some scholars, like Mansfield and Snyder, argue that the political transition, and democratization in particular, might lead to conflict and violence within the state.²⁰³ As discussed by Mansfield and Snyder in their article "Electing to fight", democratization is considered to be the riskiest type of regime change, as it puts democratizing countries in a more dangerous situation than those witnessing a transition to autocracy, or stable democracies, or even stable autocratic states.²⁰⁴ Mansfield and Snyder discuss the possibility of the emergence of war and conflict during the transition to democracy. The authors argue

²⁰⁰Ibid., 90.

²⁰¹ Abdelmoula, "Tunisia's Democratic Transition", 53.

²⁰² Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 23.

²⁰³ Michael McFaul, "Are New Democracies War-Prone?" *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 2 (2007): 160-167, p. 160.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.,

that war and conflicts arise during transition to democracy in states that have weak or absent accountable political institutions, rule of law, competitive political parties, and news media that is professional and not biased.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, weak states tend to witness interstate conflicts and violence due to the interests of politicians who want to prevail in elections, perceiving their opponents as the nation's enemies, and thus producing extremism and violent tactics from other actors who feel marginalized and excluded.²⁰⁶ Hence, states with weak regimes and weak political institutions are more likely to witness terrorist and violent attacks domestically as well as transnationally.²⁰⁷

Extremism and politics have been addressed by other authors through moderation hypothesis. Schwedler argues that the inclusion of radical Islamist groups into the political system and considering them as legitimate political players may result in transforming such actors into moderate ones.²⁰⁸ Hence, democratic inclusion of radical Islamist groups might limit the possibility of having violent, armed conflicts and terrorist attacks within the country. Furthermore, it has been argued that undemocratic regimes could, in some cases, encourage legitimate political inclusion of Islamists in order to limit the rise of internal opposition.²⁰⁹ Therefore, according to moderation hypothesis, there is a "causal relationship between inclusion and moderation" which implies that democracy or democratic values that might

²⁰⁵ Edward D. Mansfield, and Jack Snyder, *Electing To Fight: why emerging democracies go to war*. Cambridge: MIT Press, (2005): 1-285, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.,

²⁰⁷ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence", 103.

²⁰⁸ Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge; NewYork: Cambridge University Press (2006).

²⁰⁹ Ibid.,

sometimes be adopted even in authoritarian regimes, could decrease the possibility of extremism and radicalization, and result in moderate Islamist political actors.²¹⁰ Most of the literature addressed recruitment in terrorist groups in relation to democratization either from a macro perspective, focusing on the state and its institutions, or from a micro-level sociological and psychological perspective, with a dense focus on the motivations pushing individuals to join terrorist groups. The link between the two levels is however understudied and not clearly outlined in the literature. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to analyze the Islamist's violence from a micro-individual level and a macro-state level, since mobilization and recruitment in violent groups must be tackled from a broad, multi-level perspective.²¹¹ Hence, I mainly problematize the argument that democratization could lead to high risk of conflict within the state, Islamist violence, and terrorism, and I hypothesize that democratization is not a dangerous form of regime change since in Tunisia, interstate violence that resulted from Islamist groups had already existed prior to the country's transition to democracy as indicated in Chapter one.

A micro-individual level of analysis to explain why individuals join violent groups

As discussed by several scholars, individuals who join violent actions or extremist terrorist groups tend to be affected largely by the country's political conditions, weak institutions, societal marginalization, as well as being sidelined from the political sphere. Moreover, it has been argued that people tend to get easily recruited in extremist groups in countries which have high unemployment rates, extreme poverty, and a weak economy. In Tunisia, the reasons

²¹⁰ Ibid.,

²¹¹ Jessica Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do about It?" *The Annals of the American Academy* (2016): 102-117, p. 102.

behind the country being listed as the largest generator of foreign fighters in jihadist groups amid the Arab Spring revolution mainly lie in the country's weak economy, high levels of unemployment, poverty, as well as the impact of marginalization of youth politically, socially, and economically.²¹² Moreover societal uncertainty and dislocation encourage displaced people to be more vulnerable to terrorist groups.²¹³ For instance, In 2012, the economic indicators in Tunisia had worsened. According to the data available from the National Institute of Statistics, the unemployment rate in Tunisia has inclined from "13 per cent in 2010 to 17 percent in 2012".²¹⁴ Moreover, the inflation rate reached almost 10 percent, which caused the standard living conditions to deteriorate, leading to almost 2.5 million out of the Tunisia population of 11 million to live below the poverty line of a \$2 per day.²¹⁵

All these factors negatively affect the individual's values and interests. In order to understand the interaction between the political (the state) and non-state actors (violent Islamist groups), constructivism would be crucial to understand the change in interests and identity of both state and non-state actors.²¹⁶ To address this thesis's research puzzle, constructivism would explain how the behavior of individuals is based on one's experiences, norms, ideas, and identity.²¹⁷ As indicated in Chapter 1 and after carrying out the process-tracing to the

²¹² Neo, "The Jihad post-Arab Spring", 100.

²¹³ Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 34.

²¹⁴ Farida Ayari, "Ennahda Movement in Power: A Long Path to Democracy." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* (SAGE Publications) 2, no. 1&2 (2015): 135-142, p. 140.

²¹⁵ Ibid.,

²¹⁶ Janani Krishnaswamy, "How Does Terrorism Lend Itself to Constructivist Understanding?" *E-International Relations Students* (2012).

²¹⁷ Fred Halliday, "International Relations Theory and the Middle East." Chapter 1. In *The*

history of Islamists' and Islamists' violence in Tunisia, Islamists under President Habib Bourguiba as well as under Ben Ali were subjected to periods of oppression, imprisonment, political marginalization, repression, and denial from participating in the political life. Therefore, these long periods of repression and marginalization could be considered as a crucial variable for the high rates of individuals who joined violent groups and terrorist organizations amid the Arab Spring revolution and the transition to democracy in Tunisia. Therefore, ISIS, for example, targets young people by inducing its strong ideology to those who are unsatisfied with their social, political, economic, and ideological structures.²¹⁸

There has been a great focus on the analysis of terrorists' recruitment, mobilization, and radicalization after the development of ISIS. Although radicalization could be part of recruitment process, the majority of scholars fail to distinguish between both activities.²¹⁹ Whereas Brizka argues that cognitive radicalization is the process that results in the acceptance of an individual to the radical and extremist movement's ideology and beliefs and giving it outward support, but the process does not always result in commitment of the individual to carrying out terrorist act in support of the extremist ideology. On the other hand, Mitts counterargues this argument by perceiving radicalization as the process that takes place over time, in which the individual becomes progressively committed to violent and extreme views and ideologies. Recruitment is considered as a dynamic process by which an individual is

Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology, The Contemporary Middle East. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2005): 21–40, p. 32.

²¹⁸ Francesca Capone, "'Worse' than Child Soldiers? A Critical Analysis of Foreign Children in the Ranks of isil." *international criminal law review* 17, no.1 (2017): 161-185, p. 177.

²¹⁹ Edgar Jones, "The reception of broadcast terrorism: recruitment and radicalisation." *International Review of Psychiatry* 29, no. 4 (2017): 320-326, p. 322.

persuaded and encouraged to join a terrorist group, whether willingly or unwilling.²²⁰ Some scholars argue that cognitive radicalization is the process that results in the acceptance of an individual to the radical and extremist movement's ideology and beliefs and giving it utmost support. However, the process does not always result in commitment of the individual to carry out terrorist violent acts in support of the extremist ideology.²²¹ Other scholars, whom I adopt their perception towards radicalization, define radicalization as the process that takes place over time, in which the individual becomes progressively committed to violent and extreme views and ideologies.²²²

It is crucial to understand not only the structural characteristics of recruitment and radicalization process, but also the individual's cognitive understanding and construction of novel definitions of behavior and self that make them vulnerable for falling preys to jihadism and terrorist groups.²²³ The transformative learning theory is an interdisciplinary approach that provides "a practical framework for understanding how change occurs in individuals".²²⁴ This

²²⁰ Ibid., 322.

²²¹ Nikola Brzica, "Potential Adherents of Radical Islam in Europe: Methods of Recruitment and the Age of Perpetrators in Acts of Terror." *Croatian Political Science Review* 54, no. (2017): 161-184, p. 168.

²²² Tamar Mitts, "From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 173-194, p. 174.

²²³ Alex S. Wilner, and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, "Transformative Radicalization: Applying Learning Theory to Islamist Radicalization." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 5 (2011): 418-438, p. 418.

²²⁴ Alex S. Wilner, and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, "Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalization." *Global Change, Peace*

theory was developed in the 1990s by Jack Mezirow and it combines elements of constructivism and cognitivism, which is crucial to understanding the psychological change that happens to individuals in the case of radicalization and recruitment in violent groups.²²⁵ According to Mezirow theory, learning is the process by which one uses previous interpretations to construct a novel one which guides the person's experience toward future behavior and actions. This approach encompasses five core concepts. The first one is the meaning schemes which refers to the particular feelings, judgments, attitudes, and beliefs that determine the individual's perceptions and meanings, and are observed in one's "behavior and verbal interaction".²²⁶ This approach could easily be reflected in one's feelings of being marginalized, oppressed, poor, socially alienated. The second concept revolves around the perspectives of meaning, which is built on meaning schemes, and exists within the individual, shaping the new experiences and filtering the person's perceptions. In this case, the person might start perceiving the state and society as an enemy due to the negative feelings and personal conditions that is facing him or her. The third concept is about distortions, which refer to the perceptions that are no longer fitting the current reality of an individual. At this stage, the person is expected to be in a phase of quest to personal significance. The fourth concept is critical reflection; which is the capability of reflecting critically on those distortions, and is triggered by crisis that causes disorienting dilemmas such as conflict, personal loss, marginalization, and instability. In the case study of this thesis, the crisis that might have triggered high numbers of individuals to join violent Islamists' groups and actions is the revolution and transitional period to democracy. The last concept is the process of

& *Security* 22, no. 1 (2010): 33-51, p. 45.

²²⁵ Ibid., 45.

²²⁶ Ibid., 45.

transformation which becomes reflected in the personal evolution or change that can be gradual or sudden, and this could explain the final decision to individuals who could transform from normal to extremists and violent citizens or members of terrorist groups.

Consequently, personal change that occurs to an individual is a product of these cognitive and mental concepts and transformation processes. Hence, this helps in shaping our understanding of the change in an individual's behavior depending on the conflict, political instability, economic, and societal circumstances as well as the push and pull factors affecting people's perception towards violent acts.²²⁷ Constructivism, along with the transformative learning theory will then help in explaining the change in behavior, identity, ideas, and beliefs that occur as a result of political and non-political factors. Individuals get influenced and tend to join violent actions against the state for several risk factors which include grievance, which is in most cases caused due to societal injustice.²²⁸

However, not every individual who faces injustice or any kind of difficulties is willing to resort to violent acts. Consequently, the study of political psychology is important in order to analyze the individual traits, which further complicates the study of recruitment and mobilization in Islamists' violent groups.²²⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, I aim to touch upon the factors pushing individuals to join violent actions and groups and not to deeply analyze the issue from a psychological perspective. ISIS, for instance, claims to be fighting for a divine goal which is to create a Caliphate and rule the world using the Islamic teachings according to the group's own wrong interpretations. However, those who join the group usually tend to be mobilized by personal psychological and socio-economic factors such as to earn high salaries,

²²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²²⁸ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence", 105.

²²⁹ Ibid., 105.

or to become a hero.²³⁰ Therefore, this implies that recruiters of violent groups have to be almost psychologists to have the ability and capability of exploiting human needs which are exemplified in the search and need for esteem, achievement and meaning. According to some political psychologists such as Arie Kruglanski, those who join violent or terrorist groups are usually in search for “personal significance” which is therefore triggered by the loss of self-esteem.²³¹ On the other hand, some scholars argue that political, economic, and sociopsychological explanations of Islamist terrorism are insufficient because they do not explicate “why ubiquitous grievances and structural strains” provoke terrorists in some cases and not in others.²³²

Hence, recruiters in violent groups tend to mobilize individuals who are marginalized, whether politically, socially, or economically or have been personally humiliated by the state, and convince them that by joining the group and pursuing its mission, their search for personal significance will be fulfilled.²³³ Therefore, applying Mezirow’s theoretical approach to the micro-individual level analysis would explain why some individuals tend to change their norms, values, and behaviors based on their feelings, experiences and tend to be more vulnerable to violent actions. Referring back to the example of ISIS, it has been observed that most of the individuals who join the terrorist organization are usually oppressed, maltreated and not protected by their governments. Hence, ISIS tend to promise those who feel disgraced and humiliated to restore their honor if they fight against the government. ISIS has further bluntly referred to its followers in the twelfth issue of its online magazine, Dabiq, as “the

²³⁰ Ibid., 107.

²³¹ Ibid., 107.

²³² Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 34.

²³³ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence", 107.

brothers who have refused to live a life of humiliation".²³⁴ Furthermore, ISIS offers high salaries and therefore it attracts individuals with hard economic circumstances.²³⁵

Therefore, several scholars focused not only on the socio-economic and political factors pushing individuals to extremism but also on the psychological factors that motivate young people to join Islamists' violent groups, like ISIS. Some articles published in France 24 and TRT World highlighting the background of a Tunisian terrorist who killed three people in a church in Nice, France. According to the articles published on the terrorist, Brahim Aouissaoui is a 21-year-old Tunisian national and an immigrant, who has been charged with murder of three people in the French city of Nice on 29th of October 2020. Aouissaoui grew up in the city of Sfax in Tunisia after moving there from the governorate of Kairouan in the early 2000s. In September 2020, Aouissaoui moved to Europe from Tunisia first by crossing the Mediterranean to Italy and then to France. Growing up, Aouissaoui was not typically religious, as a matter of fact like a lot of young men his age he smoked marijuana, drank alcohol and partied alongside his friends in his home town. However, in 2019 he quit drinking and smoking and started praying. Despite that, he remained as social as how he used to be and continued to hang out with his friends and going to the gym. Friends and family did not find his behavior as alarming at all, as this was typical for all men his age to start taking the right path. However, Aouissaoui had to drop out of school to support his family, which could somehow explain his tendency and appeal towards joining terrorist groups that offer high salaries and promise better living conditions. He ended up learning motorcycle repairing and also sold contraband fuel for living which was illegal in Tunisia, although authorities choose to turn a blind eye towards these illegal activities as it could lead to social unrest. During his time in Tunisia, he was

²³⁴ Ibid., 108.

²³⁵ Ibid., 107.

making a living profit of \$20 to \$25 a day which is considered a good amount of money in Tunisia. Despite his upbringing, officials have no evidence linking him to extremism while in Tunisia.²³⁶ Therefore, it is speculated that he might have been radicalized during his time in Italy. From the biography of Aouissaoui, it is clear that he was not satisfied with his living conditions, whether the social or the economic ones.

One another case was for a video published in March 2015 by ISIS, in which a Tunisian terrorist called Abu Yahya al-Tounessi, called on Tunisians to join ISIS and he aimed to deliver a threatening message to the government of Tunisia as he recorded: ““We are coming to conquer back Tunisia. I swear you will not be at ease now with the Islamic State a few kilometers from you just across the border.” Relatedly, in April 2015, the “Tripoli Province”, an ISIS-affiliated group, published a video showing a masked gunman who promised to wage attacks to take revenge for Islamists jailed in Tunisia, stating: “The Islamic State is only a few kilometers from you [Tunisia], we are coming.” The video also called on Tunisians to come to Libya to fight with ISIS: “Brothers, come to Libya. Don’t be humiliated by the [Tunisian] dictators. Muslims have their own state now”.²³⁷ Hence, socio-economic factors along with state extensive repression and oppression are often perceived as key factors and explanations for Islamist terrorism and violence. Violent incidents carried out by extremists and terrorist groups are often explained by the factors of alienation and marginalization, as well as the tough

²³⁶ Massinissa Benlakehal. *Digging up the past of the Nice attacker, who killed three French citizens*. (2020). <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/digging-up-the-past-of-the-nice-attacker-who-killed-three-french-citizens-41229>.; *Tunisian charged over fatal French church stabbings*. (2020). <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201207-tunisian-charged-over-fatal-french-church-stabbings>

²³⁷ *Tunisia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*. Counter Extremism Project, (n.d.), 1-10, p. 3.

socio-economic conditions that many Middle Eastern societies suffer from.²³⁸ Although the previous examples can support the many arguments in the literature which claim that the social-economic circumstances as well as the displacement and migration could act as core factors pushing individuals to join terrorist groups, however, it is still not valid to generalize this argument, since not all those living in poverty and hard social circumstances tend to radicalize and join terrorist acts. From the above previous examples, it is obvious that repression, imprisonment, and the state's use of violence and silencing Islamists back under the authoritarian regimes of Ben Ali and Bourguiba could have led to the present situation and the expansion of the base of recruits joining terrorist groups. Nevertheless, this explanation or prediction is inadequate, since other Islamists did not take the same violent extremist path and chose to come together with the secularist government of Tunisia after the Arab Spring and be part of the political sphere.

Macro-state level analysis

After analyzing the reasons that push individuals to join Islamist terrorist organizations and violent groups from a micro-individual level perspective, it is crucial to analyze the issue from a macro-state level perspective in order to examine how the state's institutions and transition to democracy affect the rate of individuals joining violent groups. As discussed by several authors, democratization is not the optimum means of fighting Islamist violence. On the contrary, the rule of the majority can result in more violence, as minorities would still be marginalized.²³⁹ As argued by several scholars in the literature, democracy may not only fail to hinder the rise of terrorist groups or movements, but it can encourage it for a couple of reasons. One of the reasons discussed in the literature is that the open nature of democratic

²³⁸ Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 34.

²³⁹ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence", 108.

countries unintentionally allows for a welcoming environment for terrorism.²⁴⁰ Countries with democratic characteristics allows for freedom of movement, assembly, and information, which might allow for the organization and formation of terrorist movements and extremists and give them the capability of remaining undetectable for long time. Some scholars, like Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, argue that there is a positive relationship between terrorism and democracy, as they explain statistically that terrorist attacks take place in the most stable democracies of the world, and that both perpetrators and victims of such terrorist incidents are citizens who belong to stable democratic states.²⁴¹

Other scholars argue that semi-democratic or semi-authoritarian regimes are subjected to utmost risk of suffering from violent attacks and terrorism.²⁴² Hence, democratic states are sometimes perceived to be more likely to provide safe havens for terrorist groups and extremists to organize and carry out violent attacks and to form support networks.²⁴³ These terrorist groups then could target authoritarian regimes from which they have been ejected or democratic ones with policies they strongly reject.²⁴⁴ As discussed by Paul Wilkinson, terrorists are desperate citizens who represent a significant “excluded minority whose preference have lost out or are no longer seriously considered in the normal democratic struggle over the formation of public policy”.²⁴⁵ This happens because the democratic regime might turn into a “tyranny of the majority”, which thus allows terrorism to emerge under democratic

²⁴⁰ Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 26.

²⁴¹ Ibid.,

²⁴² Ibid.,

²⁴³ Ibid.,

²⁴⁴ Ibid.,

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

systems where the voting of the majority is conceived as a systematic whipping of the minority and their desires.²⁴⁶

Violent extremist groups tend to thrive and mobilize large number of recruits in countries that suffer from poor and weak governance.²⁴⁷ As discussed by many scholars including Mansfield and Snyder, whom I problematize their argument, the transition to democracy might result in war and interstate conflicts and violence which arise in states that have weak or absent accountable political institutions, lack rule of law, have no competitive political parties, and news media that is unprofessional and biased.²⁴⁸ Barbara Geddes also argues that poor economic performance, economic hardships or any other crisis that causes instability within the state could drive normal individuals into violent opposition. Hence, societal and economic changes could affect individuals' behaviors as well and result in strong violent opposition while weakening the elites.²⁴⁹ Relating these arguments to the case of Tunisia, the Arab Spring has barely improved the social and economic circumstances in the marginalized areas of the Tunisian "economically underdeveloped southern border regions" which are perceived as "hotbeds for social unrest".²⁵⁰ The unemployment rates in the country

²⁴⁶ Ibid.,

²⁴⁷ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence", 108.

²⁴⁸ Mansfield and Snyder, "Electing To Fight", 2.

²⁴⁹ Barbara Geddes, "Chapter 2: Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answers You Get." In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, (2003): 27-88, p. 45. United States of America: The University of Michigan Press.; Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What do we know about democratization after twenty years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115-144, p. 119.

²⁵⁰ Cengiz Günay, and Fabian Somavilla.. "Tunisia's democratization at risk." *Mediterranean*

range between 22 and 30 per cent, along with few job opportunities offered to the youth, and scarce private and public investments.²⁵¹

Moreover, in the case of Tunisia, despite of being the sole Arab Spring country that has succeeded in witnessing a transition to democracy after being ruled by autocratic regimes for many decades, the country still recorded the highest number of recruits joining terrorist groups after the Arab Spring. The country still has not achieved a consolidated democracy and has been facing the impending risk of backsliding towards authoritarian inclinations.²⁵² Since then, the Tunisian government's fight against terrorism and extremists has led to the divergence of huge amounts of the country's budget from fighting hunger, poverty, economic instability, and unemployment.²⁵³ The Western partners and donors have supported the Tunisian government's fight against extremism since it has corresponded with their security interests. Moreover, as the refugee crisis dominated the scene in 2015 and the number of Islamist terrorists increased globally, Western partners such as the United States and the European Union increased their technical support and military aid given to Tunisia for better border management and surveillance.²⁵⁴ Hence, as argued by Cengiz Günay and Fabian Somavilla, the fight against terrorism in the young democracy of Tunisia might act as a risk factor for reviving authoritarian patterns with the focus on hard security, and could lead to the deterioration of the social and

Politics (2019): 1-9, p. 7.

²⁵¹ Ibid.,

²⁵² Ibid., 1.

²⁵³ Ibid., 2.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.,

economic situation of marginalized groups and leading Tunisia to a “grey zone” between democracy and authoritarianism”.²⁵⁵

On the other hand, it is crucial to shed light on the relationship between Islamist terrorism and authoritarianism. Some scholars argue that authoritarian regimes are less likely to be subjected to terrorism.²⁵⁶ This argument lies on the belief that authoritarian regimes may seem to be well placed to avoid transnational and domestic terrorist attacks within their borders by arbitrarily suppressing the opposition and controlling armed activities on a domestic level. However, they can still disseminate the problem by sponsoring terrorists abroad, since repression of terrorist groups may lead to their transformation to transnational terrorist organizations, leading to terrorist attacks abroad.²⁵⁷ Equally, within authoritarian regimes, political liberalization can lessen the spillover effect of terrorism as it can permit the deportation of opposition groups abroad and supports the channeling of armed protests and campaigns “against national institutions into peaceful activities”.²⁵⁸

Hence, some scholars support the view that democratic characteristics and systems can encourage terrorism rather than curb its existence. For instance, Katerina Dalacoura argues in her book *“Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East”* that “democracy is not a certain antidote to terrorism”, and hence democracy, in many cases, does not necessarily hinder the emergence and spread of terrorist organizations.²⁵⁹ For example, in the post-World War II

²⁵⁵ Ibid.,

²⁵⁶ Dalacoura, "Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism", 26.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 24.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.,

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

era, Western Europe, where the most mature democracies are established, experienced the rise of a broad variety of terrorist groups and violent movements.²⁶⁰ Some of these terrorist movements, whether ethno-nationalist movements or ideological extreme leftist movements, have plagued the politics of Western Europe ever since. These movements encompass the Italian Red Brigades established around the 1970s, the Greek 17 Group that was founded between 1873 ad 1975, as well as the Baader Meinhof (German Red Army Faction) which commenced its operations during the 1970s.²⁶¹ Moreover, according to the World Terrorism Index that was published by the London-based World Markets Research Center, North Korea has been classified as the country that is “least exposed to international terrorism”.²⁶²

However, although the former examples might indicate that terrorism was widespread in democratic European countries, this does not reflect that there exists a direct casual relationship between democracy and terrorism. Based on statistical data and evidence, and according to the annual report of the US State Department’s ‘Patterns of Global Terrorism’, countries classified by the Freedom House as “free” witnessed 269 major terrorist attacks between the years 2000 and 2003, where as “partly free” countries experienced 119 terrorist incidents, and “not free” countries faced 138 attacks by terrorist movements.²⁶³ Therefore, these statistical evidence implies that there is no clear relationship between the occurrence of terrorist incident in a country and the level of freedom enjoyed by its people.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.,

²⁶¹ Ibid.,

²⁶² Ibid., 26.

²⁶³ Ibid., 25.

Chapter 3: Explaining the relationship between democratization, Islamist' violence and compromise using mechanistic approach

Meso-level analysis while resorting to the approach of mechanisms

As explained earlier, in Tunisia, while some Islamists joined terrorist organizations after the revolution and amid the transitional period to democracy, Ennahda party decided to have a coalition with the secularist political actors in order to take part in the political process.²⁶⁴

Tunisia's leading Islamist party, Ennahda, decided to give up many of its religious platform's planks in order to be part of the political game and joined secularists in a governing coalition that perceived Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization.²⁶⁵ As explained by Kalyvas in "*Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties*", democratization paves the way for opposition and marginalized actors to be part of the political process and to take part in the fair, free, and competitive elections.²⁶⁶ The situation and future of secular parties and liberal institutions are put into question once religious parties become ready to win elections under democratizing states.²⁶⁷ Religious parties tend to either enforce "theocratic authoritarian institutions" or let go of their objectives and adjust themselves to be part of the emerging democratic political system, which reflects what Tunisia's Ennahda party went through after the Arab Spring.²⁶⁸ The outcome is certain in the first case as democratization does not certainly succeed. However, in the second case, uncertainty prevails

²⁶⁴ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", 126.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties." *Comparative Politics* 32, no. 4 (2000): 379-398, p. 379.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.,

²⁶⁸ Ibid.,

as democratization might succeed but it might also fail. In the case of Tunisia, the country is still an emerging democracy.²⁶⁹

In order to understand the different stances of Islamists of Ennahda party versus others who joined violent and terrorist organizations or groups amid the Arab Spring revolution and during the democratization process in Tunisia, I will resort to Jon Elster's mechanistic explanation. According to Elster's definition, mechanisms are regularly occurring patterns that could be recognized easily and are driven by unidentified conditions or undetermined consequences.²⁷⁰ Mechanisms give us the opportunity not to predict or assume "objective, knowledge-independent indeterminacy", but to explain behaviors and consequences that are undefined compared to what we know.²⁷¹ Elster portrays mechanisms in a way that makes them rely on our "epistemic condition" and relate to the "social scientist's worldview" that is relatively ignorant.²⁷² According to Elster, mechanisms tend to be "explanatory in their own right".²⁷³ As explained by Elster, mechanisms can be divided into two general kinds. The first kind of mechanisms are triggered under undetermined consequences, whereas the second kind of mechanisms have uncertain consequences.²⁷⁴ Therefore, the first type of mechanisms is mainly about triggering and it revolves around what takes place "at the beginning of a causal

²⁶⁹ Ibid.,

²⁷⁰ Johannes Persson, "Mechanistic Explanation in Social Contexts: Elster and the Problem of Local Scientific Growth." *Social Epistemology* 26, no. 1 (2012): 105-114, p. 106.

²⁷¹ Ibid.,

²⁷² Ibid.,

²⁷³ Ibid.,

²⁷⁴ Ibid.,

chain”. For instance, as Elster explains, if the predator is detected by the prey, this might lead to the escaping of the predator, but sometimes, the prey disregards the predator.

The second type of mechanisms has to do with the indeterminacy of the overall effects or results, as it is mainly concerned with the “end of the evolving casual pattern”²⁷⁵ For instance, as Elster elaborates, practice probably improve the swimming skill and the confidence in the skill of swimming for all swimmers. The swimmer’s risk exposure might be affected by both skills. Sometimes, the swimmer’s skill might increase the risks, but definitely it does not increase the risk of drowning.²⁷⁶ Hence, two causal chains seem to be activated by the training: on one hand, swimming skill seems to reduce the risk of drowning, while on the other hand, this risk might increase with confidence. In some cases, confidence in the skill of swimming rises faster than the swimming skill itself. Therefore, the overall effect of training on risk is usually indeterminate.²⁷⁷ Hence, according to Elster’s argument, once the triggering condition is identified, the mechanistic explanation is lost and replaced by a law.²⁷⁸

Relating Elster’s mechanistic explanation to the case of Tunisia, Elster’s mechanisms could explain the different stances that Tunisia has witnessed from its Islamists, whether those who resorted to violence and joined terrorist groups or the country’s major Islamist party that decided to compromise many of its principles in order to be part of the political game. After the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia, the process was gravelly. Despite all the crises and instability that the country went through after the revolution, and after the political actors succeeded to reach a point of compromise and have a new constitution on the 26th of January

²⁷⁵ Ibid.,

²⁷⁶ Ibid.,

²⁷⁷ Ibid.,

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 109.

2014, Tunisia was able to pave its way to democratization.²⁷⁹ However, the process of democratization in Tunisia carried in its way two different mechanisms regarding its Islamists: a violent one and a compromising relatively peaceful one. On one hand, amid its transition to democracy, Tunisia has been found to generate the greatest number of foreign fighters joining jihadist groups.²⁸⁰ On the other hand, the large Tunisian Islamist party, Ennahda, has decided to have a coalition with the secularists, and supported the new constitution although it encompassed several principles that were previously opposed by Ennahda.²⁸¹

For instance, the new constitution declares that “Tunisia is a civil state”, which reflects the unacceptance of the interference of religious corpus in the state.²⁸² Also, this constitution that has been backed up, accepted, and supported by the Tunisian Islamist party, Ennahda, does not refer to Islamic law but only to the “teachings of Islam”, which reflects the effective exclusion of any Islamic legal role within the state.²⁸³ Moreover, the newly approved constitution declares the “right to freedom of conscience and belief”, which is a principle that is highly controversial in the Muslim world.²⁸⁴ This principle is highly contested among

²⁷⁹ Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 110-124, p. 110.

²⁸⁰ Meirav Mishali-Ram, "Foreign Fighters and Transnational Jihad in Syria." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 3 (2018): 169-190, p. 170.; Ric Neo, "The Jihad post-Arab Spring: Contextualising Islamic radicalism in Egypt and Tunisia." *African Security Review* 28, no. 2 (2019): 95-109, p. 100.

²⁸¹ Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, "After the Arab Spring, p. 110.

²⁸² Ibid., 110.

²⁸³ Ibid., 110.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 110.

Islamists as it admits that each citizen has the right to freely choose their faith; to change their religious affiliation, or freely abandon any religious belief. In the Muslim world and among most traditional Islamic establishments & Islamist ideologues, the idea of a Muslim abandoning Islam is strictly condemned. Therefore, the new constitution contradicts Ennahda's Islamist principles and ideology.²⁸⁵ However, it has still been accepted by the Islamist party despite its democratic and liberal laws that deviate from Islamic law or Sharia'a. At the same time, the upsurge of Ennahda party and their acceptance to be part of the democratization process and accept it could be explained by the long periods of the party's marginalization and repression under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime.²⁸⁶ Therefore, this indicates that, according to Elster's mechanistic explanation, democratization could lead to two mechanisms: the first of which is conservative Islamists supporting democratic values that they used to oppose back then, and the second of which is that non-conservatives could become violent, join extremist terrorist groups, and have the will to kill noncombatants, although it is prohibited by all divine religions.²⁸⁷ Hence, democratization does not lead to violence and interstate conflict.

Conclusion

The "dual trends" of intensifying democratization and expanding violent extremism since the fall of Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia creates a research puzzle.²⁸⁸ Some scholars argue that as Tunisia has been democratizing, it was expected to witness a declination in extremism and radicalization.²⁸⁹ Others argued that democratization is not the optimum means of fighting

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 111.

²⁸⁶ Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 200.

²⁸⁷ Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence";, 106.

²⁸⁸ Macdonald and Waggoner, "Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia.", pp. 126, 127.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.,

Islamist violence, as the rule of the majority in itself can result in more violence, as minorities would still be marginalized.²⁹⁰ In this thesis, I aimed to hypothesize that democratization does not lead to Islamists' violence, and that there could be other explanations for any violence that might arise after a revolution and during the transition to democracy. After reviewing the literature on democratization, terrorism, and Islamists' violence, I found out that many scholars focused on the analysis of the micro-individual level, which means the factors that push individuals to join violent groups that affiliates itself to Islam. These factors include political instability, poverty and deteriorating economic circumstances, social and political marginalization. After analyzing the literature from a micro-individual level perspective, it has been found out that individuals tend to join violent groups and actions amid a revolution, and not necessarily during a transition to democracy, due to the feelings of marginalization, alienation, grievances, and personal humiliation that they might have accumulated during periods of oppression from their government and society. Also, as argued by Barbara Geddes, economic hardships or any other crisis that cause instability within the state could drive normal individuals into violent opposition. Hence, societal and economic changes could affect individuals' behaviors as well and result in strong violent opposition while weakening the elites.²⁹¹ As discussed in the literature, some individuals are willing to kill non-combatants and participate in violent acts against the state in order to gain money and improve their economic and living conditions. These factors tend to affect the political psychology and ideology of some individuals and push them towards extremism and violent acts.

On the other hand, some scholars focus on the macro-state level analysis in order to understand why some individuals resort to violence and join terrorist groups in democratizing

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 108.

²⁹¹ Geddes, "Chapter 2: Big Questions, Little Answers", 45.

countries. Some scholars argue that violence is more likely to erupt in democratizing countries with weak institutions. Others argue that the process of the transition to democracy itself results in violence and interstate clashes and conflicts. Therefore, after a thorough review to the literature and the secondary data sources on democratization and Islamists' violence while resorting to the process-tracing method to analyze the history of Islamists' in Tunisia, I came up with a meso-level analysis that could help in explaining the research puzzle using Jon Elster's mechanisms. This analysis results in having two main mechanisms related to democratization. The first one is that democratization, or political transition in general, could lead to the rise of violence due to weak and unstable institutions, even more than authoritarian regimes.²⁹² The second one is that democratization could result in having political actors who are influenced by divine principles and ideas supporting the transition to democracy and giving up some of their ideological principles in order to be part of the political sphere. While resorting to the use of a single-case study, Tunisia represents a battle ground for these competing mechanisms and poses an empirical puzzle. Tunisia is considered as the sole Arab country that has been democratizing since the Arab Spring, while at the same time the country has witnessed two different stances from its Islamist actors. The meso-level analysis would then be as follows: democratization could lead to two mechanisms: the first of which is conservative Islamists supporting democratic values that they used to oppose back then, and the second of which is that non-conservatives could become violent and join extremist terrorist groups. The meso-level analysis is an intermediate explanation that combines both the micro-individual analysis and the macro-state level analysis of the thesis's research puzzle. The reason why I deploy Elster's mechanistic approach in this thesis is because mechanisms give us the opportunity not to predict or assume "objective, knowledge-independent indeterminacy", but

²⁹² McFaul, "Are New Democracies War-Prone?", 161.

to explain behaviors and consequences that are undefined compared to what we know.²⁹³ Hence, when there is another autocratic country that is undergoing a transition to democracy, it will be possible to apply Elster's mechanistic approach as exemplified in the case study of Tunisia. Also, we can conclude that not all Islamists' are violent. Although the process-tracing of the history of Islamists' in Tunisia reflects that there were some violent incidents carried out by the Tunisian Islamist Movement, Ennahda party did not resort to violence during the democratization process after the Jasmine revolution, because the goals of the party might be different from those of terrorist groups. Ennahda party does not seem to aim at imposing Islamic Sharia' law or to have a secular state, but it might be aiming to have a secular society instead, unlike Islamist terrorist groups like ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia who fight for creating an Islamic Caliphate guided by the Islamic Sharia' rules and laws, and to completely abandon secularism.²⁹⁴ Therefore, after critically analyzing the case of Tunisia and the literature on democratization, Islamism, and extremism from multi-level analysis perspectives, Therefore, I conclude that democratization is not the crucial variable to violence and interstate conflict.

²⁹³ Persson, "Mechanistic Explanation in Social Contexts", 106.

²⁹⁴ Burhani, "The Reformasi '98 and the Arab Spring", 211.

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