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Social classes and political Islam: a comparative ecological approach of post-Arab Spring elections in Northern Africa (2011- 2014)

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the debate on the sociology of political Islam, opposing interpretations centred on identity and on specific class alliances, the paper proposes a comparative analysis of the socio-geographies of mainstream Islamist parties in the post-Arab spring period in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. The paper shows that socio-geographies of political Islam are very pronounced, making unlikely an interpretation of Islamist parties as having a purely non class-based identity. These results challenge the conception of political Islam as a hegemonic ideology among Arab populations, as such an ideology would be built on their cultural heritage, repressed both by colonialism and by post-colonial elites. This conception denies the complexity of modern Arab societies, the importance of minorities, the diversity of social trajectories and the capacity of other movements to penetrate into some deprived rural or urban areas. This analysis neither validates conclusions that political Islam is an alliance between the deprived urban classes and the traditional bourgeoisie politically excluded from the ruling post-colonial classes. Rather, one finding is that the social grounds of Islamists are very dependent on the national contexts.


Introduction

The analysis of political Islam has been the subject of an abundant literature both in the French and English-speaking academic fields, giving rise to various debates, including on the very definition of this political current. Let us first specify that we will retain the definition of political Islam proposed by H. Seniguer (2021),¹ according to whom, 'in scholarly terms, political Islam is synonymous with Islamism,² in other words, the

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¹Seniguer H. (2021), L'islam politique: définition et enjeux d'un mouvement pluriel, <https://www.aren24.news/2021/10/28/lislam-politique-definition-et-enjeux-dun-mouvement-pluriel/>; see also Seniguer H. (2017), Les islamistes ont-ils évolué ? Retours critiques sur une idéologie résiliente, *Confluences Méditerranée*, 2017/1 N° 100, 159–175. Gana A. & Ait-Aoudia M., (eds), Les partis islamistes ont-ils vraiment changé ?, *Année du Maghreb*, 22/20, 021-1.

²We do not subscribe to a definition of political Islam, which derives this political current from the reformist tradition within Islam and understands it as a form of governmentality associated with the construction of nation-states in countries with a Muslim majority, and which, based on this broad definition, distinguishes political Islam from Islamism (see Cesari J. (2021), « Political Islam: more than Islamism » *Religions* 12: 299.

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ideologization of Islam underpinned by a political project, a society and a State alternative to the Western model'. Although Islamic movements share a common ideological base, it is nevertheless necessary to stress that they cover a relative diversity—namely with regard to their relationship to violence and the institutionalized political game and also depending on whether they are in power or in the opposition.

Academic debates on political Islam have focused in particular on the underlying causes of this movement and have proposed various interpretations for its expansion, especially in the Arab world. It constitutes a reaction to the failure of the modern state project and to authoritarianism that typifies political systems in the countries of the region,³ a (re)affirmation of identity in the face of Western imperialism and cultural domination,⁴ a revival of religious faith⁵ or a particular expression of social protest against economic and social marginalization^{6,7}. The debate over political Islam has been reactivated after the 2011 Arab uprisings, raising questions about the factors that led to the ascendance of Islamist parties and their effective commitment to democracy. In particular, the electoral victories of the Islamist parties in countries directly or indirectly affected by the popular revolts of 2011 have challenged researchers and analysts regarding their profound significance. Some authors point out socio-historical factors, such as the strong organization of Islamist movements, as well as their important social anchoring built over several decades, in particular through a system of aid to the poor^{8,9}. The mobilization capacity of Islamist parties would be linked to their proximity to the people, the attractiveness of their moral and identity discourse and their ability to capitalize on popular discontent with corrupt regimes.^{10,11}

Besides general analyses on the political rise of Islamist parties, little work has focused on the sociological profiles of Islamist voters. While some studies associate the Islamist vote with the poorly educated popular classes,¹² others link it rather to the middle classes with higher education whose social upward mobility would have been hindered by authoritarian regimes.^{13,14} The contradictory results reached by the authors interested in the Islamist vote underline the need, on the one hand, to better take into account the socio-historical and political trajectories of the various countries under study and, on the other hand, to base the analysis of electoral behaviour on fine and reliable empirical data, whenever these are available. In addition, as

³Fuller G (2004), *The Future of Political Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴Burgat F. (2004), Les courants islamistes contemporains: entre 'dénominateur commun identitaire' et internationalisation de la résistance à un ordre mondialisé. *Mouvements: des idées et des luttes*, La Découverte, 2004, pp.77–87.

⁵Burgat F. (2002), *L'islamisme en face*, Paris: La découverte.

⁶Ayubi, Nazih N. (1991), *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab world* / Nazih N. Ayubi. Routledge, London.

⁷Kepel G., 2000, *Jihad. Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*, Paris, Gallimard.

⁸Seniguer H. (2012), « Les islamistes à l'épreuve du printemps arabe et des urnes: une perspective critique », *L'Année du Maghreb*, VIII, 6786.

⁹Vannetzel M. (2017), « The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Virtuous society' and State Developmentalism in Egypt: the Politics of 'Goodness' », *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement*, 8, 220–245.

¹⁰Seniguer, op. cit.

¹¹Pellicer M., Wegner E. (2015), The Justice and Development Party in Moroccan Local Politics, *Middle East Journal*, 69, 1, 32–50.

¹²Fuller, op. cit.

¹³Pellicer, Wegner, Op. cit.

¹⁴Merone F. (2015), 'Enduring Class Struggle in Tunisia: The Fight for Identity beyond Political Islam', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42:1, 74–87.

Garrigou¹⁵ points out, the analysis of electoral behaviour must be attentive to the effects of political conjunctures and stakes, especially when the latter modify previous political cleavages and balances.

Drawing on research work that the authors have initiated relative to post-2011 elections cycles in North Africa, this article proposes to identify the social and territorial bases of Islamist parties by mobilizing the tools of electoral geography as well as a comparative approach of three countries (Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt). After reviewing the scholarly debates on the sociology of political Islam and presenting the political context of the countries under study, an analysis of the socio-geography of Islamist parties at various scales is carried-out. A discussion whether secular¹⁶ and Islamist parties rely on different social backgrounds, is the core of our paper. It is shown here that this opposition (secular vs. religious/Islamist) fulfils important conditions and can be conceptualized as a political cleavage.

A secular vs. Islamist cleavage in Northern Africa?

The concept of cleavage developed by Lipset and Rokkan¹⁷ to understand the diversity of party systems in Western Europe has been denied any relevance for the understanding of the political and party system outside Western Europe. In fact, as political cleavages have emerged in the long term history of Europe and have been frozen in the party system since the beginning of the twentieth century and at least until the 1970's, how helpful is this concept to understand party systems in Northern Africa today (or indeed anywhere else)?

Cleavages may be defined as oppositions in the society that are strong enough to crystallize in the party system and may become partially autonomous from the social forces from which they emerge. To explain this we can refer to Bourdieu's¹⁸ concept of 'hysteresis', which describes social phenomena that persist after their causes disappear, such as political attitudes related to socio-economic conditions, which last long after these conditions have vanished.¹⁹ Starting from this conceptualization, it is important to raise the question of whether similar processes have taken place in the Arab world and whether they have given rise to such strong oppositions in society that might be considered as political cleavages.

One can trace back the origins of the conflicts that would later form the basis of an opposition between secular and religious groups to the nineteenth century, with the rise of Muslim reformism. Represented by religious figures such as Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghâni (1838–1898), Mohammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawâkibi (1855–1902), the 'Nahdha' current of thought was constructed as a critique of both a dogmatic conception of Islam and the despotic political system and went so far as to advocate, as

¹⁵Garrigou, A. (1989), « Conjoncture Politique et Vote », In Daniel Gaxie (ed), *Explication du Vote: Un Bilan des Etudes Electorales en France*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 357–384.

¹⁶We regard as secular the parties whose political and governmental projects do not include religious norms as a source of law and regulation of social relations and for which the State should not have a religious character.

¹⁷Lipset, S.M., Rokkan, S., (1967), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives*. Free Press, New York.

¹⁸Bourdieu P. (2002), *Le bal des célibataires*, Paris: Editions du Seuil.

¹⁹Van Hamme, G., Medina Lockhart, P., Vandermortten, C. (2017), 'The Electoral Geography of the Left in Western Europe Since 1945: Permanencies and Changes', *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 109; 2: 274–294.

did al-Kawakibi, the separation of political and religious powers^{20, 21} The debate over the conception of Islam and the political dimensions it takes on will give rise to broader confrontations in the 20th century, in particular with the current of political Islam, which appeared at the end of the 1920s with the creation, by Hassan al-Bannâ (1906–1949) of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In fact, the latter attacked the project of reformist Islam and advocated a state model inspired by the first caliphate where the law would be exclusively based on a religious source (*Sharia*). The debate around the reform of Islam will find further expression through the colonial period, also in relation to the issue of national liberation.²² It tends to run out of steam on the eve of national independence, which saw the emergence of charismatic leaders and political movements inspired by modernist thought.²³

The conflict between the modernizing current of Islam and political Islam was later reactivated in the post-2011 context and generated major debates in the political sphere, as illustrated by the confrontations that took place in recent years around constitutional issues in Tunisia or Egypt,^{24, 25} In these two countries, one observes that with the opening of the political field, parties tend to explicitly position themselves at both poles of the opposition between the religious and the secular.

In Egypt, the presence of political Islam was reinforced in 2005 with the entry of a significant number of Muslim Brotherhood deputies (88) into the Egyptian parliament. After the fall of Mubarak in 2011, the landscape of political Islam became more diverse with the rise of the Salafist movement, which contributed to deepening the ideological conflict between religious movements and secular political formations. As Stéphane Lacroix²⁶ points out, 'The entry of the Salafists had a major effect: that of reopening the battle of identity by moving the cursor to the right'. Nathalie Bernard-Maugiron²⁷ also emphasizes that the debate around constitutional issues revealed the 'political struggle between liberals, supporters of a secular ("civil") state, and supporters of a re-islamization of law and institutions'.

In Tunisia, the relationship between the state and Islam has been a subject of political debate since Tunisia's independence. Also, the question of the state control on the religious sphere has kept its importance until the Tunisian spring.²⁸ However, it has only been since 2011 that the ideological conflict over the relationship between the

²⁰Haddad M. (2010), *Islam et progrès*, Introduction, [http://openaccess.uoc.edu/webapps/o2/bitstream/10609/53965/1/ Islam%20et%20progr%C3%A8s_Portada.pdf](http://openaccess.uoc.edu/webapps/o2/bitstream/10609/53965/1/Islam%20et%20progr%C3%A8s_Portada.pdf)

²¹Charif M. (2006), « 27: Réformisme musulman et islam politique: continuité ou rupture ? », in Pierre-Jean Luizard (ed.), *Le choc colonial et l'islam*. Paris, La Découverte, « TAP/HIST Contemporaine », pp. 517–532.

²²Particularly through the writings of thinkers and intellectuals, such as Sheikh Thaalbi, Tahar Haddad in Tunisia, etc.

²³Haddad, op. cit.

²⁴Perez D. (2016), 'Mythes fondateurs et fabrique du politique dans l'hémicycle: le débat identitaire à l'Assemblée nationale constituante tunisienne', in Van Hamme, G., Gana, A. *Elections et Territoires en Tunisie: Enseignements des scrutins post-révolution* (2011–2014), Paris, Karthala.

²⁵Bernard-Maugiron N. (2011), « Egypte: Les enjeux constitutionnels », *Afkar/Idees*, Estudios de Política Exterior/Instituto Europeo del Mediterraneo.

²⁶Lacroix, S. (2012). *L'Égypte en révolutions*, PUF, Paris.

²⁷Bernard-Maugiron, op. cit.

²⁸McCarthy R. (2014), 'Re-thinking Secularism in Post-independence Tunisia', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19:5, 733–750.

state and religion became a cleavage in the full sense of the word^{29, 30, 31} It will be reflected in the emergence of a party system opposing the Islamist party of Ennahdha to several 'secular' parties. Such ideological opposition between both poles has been apparent in the discussions about the New Constitution³²—finally adopted in 2014—, particularly about Article 1 of the 1956 constitution stating that « Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is Republican » or about the education system (the role of the private education system, meaning in practice, religious schools). Whatever it is called (Modernists vs. Conservative, religious vs. Secular), such opposition corresponds to the concept of cleavage.³³

However, a cleavage also implies deep divisions in the society, meaning that both poles may rely on different groups, categories or classes within the society. This is precisely the aim of this paper to shed some light on the sociology(ies) of Islamism in modern Arab societies. After synthesizing different theories about the distinctive sociology of Islamist movements in [section 2](#), this question will be explored through examining the electoral geographies of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco in a comparative perspective.

Debates about the sociology of political Islam

The debate about the social support of Islamism has opposed two major theses in French-speaking literature—partly echoed in English literature.³⁴

The most famous one, defended by Gilles Kepel,^{35, 36} interprets political Islam in the 1970s to the 1990s as an alliance between the devout bourgeoisie (« bourgeoisie pieuse ») and urban working classes.³⁷ His analysis focuses in particular on the Iranian revolution of the seventies and the political struggles in Algeria during the late eighties and nineties. In the latter case, he interprets the rise of the ISF (Islamic Salvation Front) as the result of an alliance between, on the one hand, the middle class were excluded from the political power stemming from the Algerian independence war (1954–1962) (the old middle classes such as merchants and the new, such as social-climbing professionals) and, on the other hand, the new urban working classes, largely marginalized in the course of the modernization process initiated by the Algerian state since independence. However, he also sees this alliance as precarious: after the army stopped the electoral process in 1991,

²⁹Ferjani M. C. (2012), 'Révolution, élections et évolution du champ politique tunisien', *Confluences Méditerranée*, 82: 107–116.

³⁰Boubekeur A. (2016), 'Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition', *Mediterranean Politics*, 21:1, 107–127.

³¹Wolf A. (2013), « An Islamist 'Renaissance'? Religion and Politics in Post-revolutionary Tunisia », *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18: 4, 560–573.

³²Perez, op. Cit.

³³Gana, A., Van Hamme, G. (2016). *Elections et Territoires en Tunisie: Enseignements des scrutins post-révolution (2011–2014)*. Tunis-Paris: IRMC-Karthala.

³⁴Turner B. (2003), 'Class, Generation and Islamism: Towards a Global Sociology of Political Islam', *British Journal of Sociology*, 54 (1), 139–14

³⁵Kepel G. (1991), *La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, Paris, Seuil, « l'épreuve des faits ».

³⁶Kepel (2000), op. cit.

³⁷Turner, op. cit.

the most radical factions—mostly coming from urban working classes—took up arms against the regime, while moderate factions of the middle class have been integrated within the State institutions.

These readings are also prevalent in Egypt during the eighties,^{38,39} For example, according to Saad Eddine Ibrahim,

'it seems that all four Islamic movements⁴⁰ have grown primarily out of the middle and lower sectors of the new middle class; they are of recent rural background, experiencing for the first time life in huge metropolitan areas where foreign influence is most apparent and where impersonal forces are at maximum strength' (p. 446). Hence, *'The class factor in all cases has to do with collective status incongruity (i.e, strong achievement motivation, with justified aspiration, yet little economic and political opportunity)'* (p.447). Trying to understand how 'Islamist activism has moved from the university to the neighbourhood', Salwa Ismail⁴¹ (2000) concludes that it is largely the result of a deliberate strategy to target informal neighbourhoods where state services and jobs are rare: *'The informal housing communities, therefore, served not only as places of residence and hiding, but also as areas of militant concentration and activity'*.

To a certain extent, social readings of political Islam in recent years has relied on a similar interpretative framework, for example in Turkey,^{42,43} or in Tunisia,^{44,45} in the sense that they focus on the socio-economic exclusion or forms of relative deprivation, notably marked by exclusion from state institutions. According to Merone,⁴⁶ the Islamist vs. Modernist cleavage opposes two factions of the Tunisian Middle class: while modernists have been integrated into the Tunisian State, conservative middle classes were excluded. As a result, their integration into the state structure after 2011 resulted in the ignoring of the social and economic claims of deprived classes. This would explain the radicalization of a faction of these classes, especially through Salafist movements such as *Ansar al-Sharia*. Such an interpretative scheme bears some similarities with Kepel's ideas, as they focus on the fragile alliance between politically excluded middle classes and economically 'excluded' urban working classes. In the Egyptian case, no such theory has emerged after 2011. In fact, being a mass political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt seems to have an inter-class base, recruiting both from the underprivileged strata of the population and also from educated executives (civil servants, professionals, merchants and businessmen)^{47,48} However, studies based on aggregate data have underlined the correlation between electoral results of the Liberty and Justice Party (JLP)—the

³⁸Saad Eddine I. (1980), 'Anatomy of Egypt' Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12, 423–453.

³⁹Ansari H.N (1984), 'The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1: 123–44.

⁴⁰Islamic Liberation (MA—Military Academy group), Repentance and Holy Flight (RHF), Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Mujahideen.

⁴¹Salwa I. (2000), 'The Popular Movement Dimensions of Contemporary Militant Islamism: Socio-Spatial Determinants in the Cairo Urban Setting', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42: 2, pp. 363–393.

⁴²Seda Demiralp (2012), 'White Turks, Black Turks? Faultlines beyond Islamism versus secularism', *Third World Quarterly*, 33:3, 511–524.

⁴³Gumuscu S. (2010), 'Class, Status and Party: The Changing face of Political Islam in Turkey and Egypt', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43 (7), 835–861.

⁴⁴Merone, op. cit.

⁴⁵Boubekeur, op. cit.

⁴⁶Merone, op. cit.

⁴⁷Aclimandos, T. (2010), « L'islam politique égyptien », *Confluences Méditerranée*, 75: 4, pp. 167–179.

⁴⁸Vannetzel M. (2007), « Ils nous ont déjà essayés ! Clientélisme et mobilization électorale frériste en Égypte », *Politique africaine* » 108: 4, 47–66.

political branch of the Muslim Brothers—and deprivation at the provincial level,^{49, 50} while no such straightforward relationship has been found at the neighbourhood level in the Cairo urban area. In Morocco, studies have mainly underlined the urban character of Islamist voting.⁵¹

This interpretation of the sociology of Islamism raises a number of important issues. First, it relies on little empirical data and in most cases on no systematic quantitative assessment of the support of Islamist parties or movements. Researchers cannot be blamed for this since such data simply does not exist in most contexts. Hence, these theories are generally based on more or less careful generalization based on qualitative assessment. Second, when such assessment is made, it focuses on very different subjects namely Islamist political elites, more or less radical militants, *Jihadists* and voters. Yet, obviously, one cannot expect these different circles of Islamist supporters to be recruited in similar segments of societies. Third, many papers produce very vague social categories. For example, Merone proposes no rigorous conceptualization of the middle classes excluded from the nation-state apparatus. The question of why deprived classes from the country's interior regions, the ones initiating the revolutionary process at the end of 2010, barely support Islamist parties, while Ennahdha finds strong support in some deprived areas of large cities,⁵² remains also unanswered. Finally, Islamist movements seem to find different support in different time and space contexts. The strong support of peripheral Anatolia for the AKP in Turkey is well documented⁵³ but quite different from the case observed in Morocco, where the JDP mainly relies on urban militancy and voters.⁵⁴ To understand such difference, one must take into account the party system and the differentiated national histories of political Islam, including the intensity of repression they have faced over time.

In contrast to Kepel, Burgat⁵⁵ explicitly rejects this class reading of political Islam. Taking examples in diverse contexts in time and space, he rejects the idea that political Islam finds more support in some segments of the society. For Burgat, to understand this political phenomenon, one must listen to the messages they deliver, hence its methodology mainly relies on interviews with Islamist leaders. Based on this empirical material, he concludes that Islamism is mainly a question of identity. The devaluation of the local culture in the Arab-Islamic world during the colonization period is supposed to be

⁴⁹Bayoumi H., Rougier B., (2015) « Sociologie électorale de la séquence 2011–2013 », in Rougier, Lacroix (eds), *L'Égypte en révolutions*, Presses Universitaires de France, Proche-Orient, pp. 165–190.

⁵⁰Elsayyad, M., Hanafi S. (2014), Voting Islamist or Voting Secular? An Empirical Analysis of Voting Outcomes in Egypt's 'Arab Spring', *Public Choice*, 160, 1–2, 109–130.

⁵¹Goeury D. (2014), « Le pouvoir est-il enfin dans les mains des villes ? », *EspacesTemps.net* [En ligne], Travaux, 2014 | Mis en ligne le 12 mai 2014, consulté le 12.05.2014. URL: <https://www.espacestemp.net/articles/le-pouvoir-est-il-enfin-dans-les-mains-des-villes/>

⁵²Gana A., Van Hamme G. & Ben Rebah M. (2012), « Géographie électorale et disparités socio-territoriales: les enseignements des élections pour l'assemblée constituante en Tunisie », *L'Espace Politique* [En ligne], 18 | 2012–3, mis en ligne le 21 décembre 2012. URL: <http://espacepolitique.revues.org/2486>; DOI: 10.4000/espacepolitique.2486.

⁵³Demiralp, op. cit.

⁵⁴Goeury, op. cit.

⁵⁵Burgat (2002), op. cit.

perpetuated by the new elites that emerged from the independence movements. Their modernization project mainly relies on Western values and in particular secularism⁵⁶ and the supposed devaluation of Islam.

In our view, this debate opposing views of political Islam either as a result of social dynamics or as an identity issue—is largely reductionist. With no doubt, the successes of political interpretations of Islam cannot be understood without taking account of issues related to identity. However, does this mean that Islamism is hegemonic in Arab societies, to the exception of the ‘alienated’ elite, as Burgat’s supposition would suggest? Certainly not. It is true that Islamist parties won most of the fair elections in the Arab world (Algeria 1991, Tunisia in 2011, Egypt 2011–2012, Morocco since 2011, . . .), but in most cases they represent only a relative majority. Indeed, the opposition to Islamism can in no case be reduced to the more or less narrow « modernist » elite: it also includes large segments of the rural world, deprived regions in Tunisia and workers. Also, by reducing identity to Islam, it has provoked hostility within large minorities, such as the diverse Berber groups in the Maghreb.

This is why the authors believe that support for Islamism is neither hegemonic nor random. Of course, one cannot expect from parties that rely on some interpretations of religion and identity to be easily delineated in social space. Furthermore the discredit and failure of the other opposition forces—notably leftist ones—has made the Islamist movements the only strong and organized opposition to authoritarian regimes,⁵⁷ hence able to gain support far beyond conservative/devout populations. Also, it seems evident that support to Islamism is not stable in space and time. As a case in point, one saw in the few months (between the parliamentary elections at the end of 2011 and the presidential elections in June 2012), the electoral support for the *LJP* in Egypt dramatically fall from more than 40% to less than 25% of the valid votes. This erosion of the Islamist vote was also observed in Tunisia where the *Ennahda* party, majority winner of the 2011 constitutional ballot with nearly 38% of the voices, only obtained 27% of the votes in the legislative elections of 2014. However, interrogating the social support for Islamism is still a relevant question in order to appreciate the power relationship between secular and Islamist political forces. It also helps to understand their discourses and programs, which are never separated from the social forces on which they rely.

In this paper, the authors aim to go beyond the academic debate between Kepel’s and Burgat’s hypotheses. On the one hand, political Islam cannot be exclusively associated with the complex issue of identity in the Arab world, since large segments of these societies, well beyond the reigning elites, do not support Islamist parties or

⁵⁶If the principle of secularism is the separation of religious matters from the state, the forms of secularism vary according to the socio-historical processes that shape the political systems in place in the different countries. The literature distinguishes between moderate and authoritarian secularism. While the moderate secularism model allows for the expression of religious values in the public sphere, authoritarian secularism establishes state control over religion and limits its expression in the public sphere, as well as the political role of religious institutions (see Mahmood S. (2006), *Secularism, hermeneutics, and empire: the politics of islamic reformation. Public Culture* 18(2); Stephan A. (2011), *The multiple secularisms of modern democratic and non-democratic regimes. In Rethinking secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, New York: Oxford University Press; Oztig, L.I. (2018) *A governmentality approach on the transformative role of authoritarian secularism. Z Religion Ges Polit* 2, 81–99 (2018).

⁵⁷Saad Eddine, op. cit.

ideology(ies). On the other hand, it is necessary to go beyond the impressionist reading of the sociology of Islamism which has dominated until now. By focusing on a specific period, between 2011 and 2014 and using a comparative method between Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, a systematic comparison of the electoral basis of Islamist parties will be proposed. Through this approach, it is shown that Islamist parties rely on specific socio-territorial bases, hence do not equally penetrate all segments of the societies under scrutiny.

Context(s) and patterns of socio-geographical implantation of Islamist parties

The context in which the support for major Islamist parties or candidates is analysed is a very specific one, but also the only one where open electoral processes have allowed a realistic measure of the popular support for political Islam. The study focuses on the 2011–2014 period because of the opening of the electoral process, allowing for the electoral victories of Islamist parties. After that, a new period begins, characterized by successive political defeats of political Islam: the Sissi's coup d'état in Egypt in 2013, the electoral decline in Tunisia and finally their exclusion from government in the 2021 summer, their historical defeat in the 2021 parliamentary elections in Morocco. It is not claimed that this study shows the 'true sociology' of political Islam, especially since the importance of the context in explaining their social base is highlighted. However, this period presents an opportunity to study the support this political movement beyond active minorities.

Indeed, a large social movement—often named the Arab Spring—started at the very end of 2010, and rapidly spread nearly throughout the Arab world. While Ben Ali, the Tunisian president, had to flee the country on 14 January 2011, massive protests started in Egypt as early as the 25th of January, leading to the same result, the fall of President Mubarak. In Morocco, protests started on February 20, resulting in the adoption of a more liberal Constitution through a referendum in July 2011. However, in Morocco, the nature of the regime did not change^{58 59},

Table 1. Electoral scores of Islamist parties, 2011–2016.

		Main Islamist party(ies)	Share of valid votes (%)
Egypt	Parliamentary 2011	LJP (Muslim brothers); Nour (Salafist)	44.6%; 22.5%
	Presidential 2012	Morsi (Muslim brothers); Abou El Fotouh (Independent)	24.8%; 17.5%
Morocco	Parliamentary 2011	JDP	27.1%
	Parliamentary 2016	JDP	27.9%
Tunisia	National Constituent Assembly 2011	Ennahdha	37.0%
	Parliamentary 2014	Ennahda	27.8%

Sources:

Morocco: Ministère de l'Intérieur; Tafr

Egypt: National Election Authority

Tunisia: ISIE.

⁵⁸Germain V. (2013), « Le printemps arabe au Maroc », *Les clés du Moyen Orient*, 08/07/2013.

⁵⁹Bennafla K., Seniguer H. (2011), « Le Maroc à l'épreuve du Printemps arabe: une contestation désamorcée ? » *Outre-terre*, 29: 143–158.

In the three cases, the massive protests opened a process of liberalization and free elections, although this was already the case in Morocco. The three countries went through a fair electoral process in 2011, which resulted in a (more or less) massive victory of the Islamist parties (Table 1) and their access to power. Yet, with the exception of the Egyptian elections in late 2011, where the Islamist forces as a whole collected around 70% of valid votes, Islamist parties were 'only' able to secure a large minority (or a relative majority). Thus, a few months after the Egyptian parliamentary elections, the official candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood obtained 25% of the votes, 20 points less than the LJP score a few months earlier.

It is not the proper place here to discuss in detail the complex processes that unfolded at the time, and especially the diverse pathways that each country followed. The aim of the paper is simply to point out and discuss certain elements that are of high relevance for an understanding of the sociology of political Islam.

How is the electoral success of the Islamist parties to be interpreted? Though there may be specific reasons in specific contexts, some common factors can be highlighted in these three countries. On the one hand, although they did not play a major role in the initial revolutionary process,⁶⁰ Islamists are the most organized force and cover through large networks of associations the entire territory, and are thus capable of campaigning throughout the country,⁶¹ while other political forces appear to be weak and divided. This is particularly true in Egypt, yet also in Tunisia, where Islamist networks have been able to pursue their activities even in times of repression and clandestine activity. It should also be recalled that the expansion of a political Islam movement in several Arab countries has also to do, as documented by several authors, with the relationships they maintained with authoritarian regimes. Indeed, contrary to a widespread idea in the literature on political Islam, the history of this movement in several countries, has not only been marked by violent confrontation with the ruling powers, but also by accommodating arrangements, compromises and 'collusive' transactions,⁶² be it in Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco^{63, 64, 65} The relationships between the ruling powers and the Islamist groups (notably in Egypt and Tunisia) have in fact been marked, from the 70's onwards, by periods of tolerance and even encouragement to the expansion of their preaching and religious education activities. This was done to counter the left-wing opposition that allowed for the continuation of Islamist activism over a very long period of time.

However, having been major opponents to authoritarian regimes and victims of a harsh repression, Islamist forces appeared in 2011 as a credible force to ensure the break with the authoritarian regime as well as a credible counter-weight to the Makhzen in Morocco. These factors should also be understood in the framework of Islamism's

⁶⁰Gana A., Sigillo E., Blanc T. (2021), 'Beyond Moderation: Strategic Pluralization in Tunisian Islamist Politics', *Middle East Law and Governance*, (Forthcoming).

⁶¹Seniguer, op. cit.

⁶²Geisser V., Gobe E. (2008), « Un si long règne ... Le régime de Ben Ali vingt ans après ». *L'Année du Maghreb*, CNRS Éditions, p. 347–375.

⁶³Allani A. (2009), 'The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation: 1980–2008', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 14:2, 257–272.

⁶⁴Allal, A. & Vannetzel, M. (2017). « Des lendemains qui déchantent ? Pour une sociologie des moments de restauration », *Politique africaine*, 146, 5–28.

⁶⁵Gana, Sigillo, Blanc, op. cit.

history in general: it has become a major political force in the Muslim world since the seventies onwards, with increasing intensity as the Arab nationalist regimes failed to achieve their promises of modernity for all.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, their electoral successes, in this most favourable post-2011 context, are relative. Indeed, Islamist parties and candidates never reached a hegemonic position, except during the late 2011 parliamentary elections in Egypt. Islamism has faced major opposition, including in the street in Tunisia and Egypt, which cannot be reduced to the 'modernized/westernized' elites and/or social groups associated with the old regimes. It also comprises very diverse social groups in the three countries, both in rural and urban areas. In addition, it must be noted that in Egypt and Tunisia support for the main Islamist party has rapidly declined (see Table 1), in contrast to the very specific and favourable 2011 electoral context.

Data and method

Our method is based on the ecological approach of electoral geography, that is the use of electoral and socio-economic data at aggregated level and the assessment of the relationship between the characteristics of the population and their voting behaviour at different scales. In order to grasp the socio-geographical bases of the Islamist parties' electorate and their evolution, this paper's methodological approach included the following components.

For the three countries, electoral data were collected on different scales for most elections between 2011 and 2014, referendums excluded. Socio-demographic data were gathered on the same scale (Table 2). Different steps and methods were followed to analyse the data. First, a systematic mapping of the electoral results have been produced, allowing for the description of the geographies of the Islamist parties, that is the spatial distribution of their votes. It also shows how stable these geographies were between 2011 and 2014. Second, principal component analysis (PCA) has been applied to electoral data. Such method allows for a large amount of information to be reduced into several relevant axes, grouping together parties with similar geographies. Using this technique, major geographical divides within the national political space have been identified. Third, electoral and socio-demographic data were associated at all possible scales, to explore the link between the spatial distribution of the different social categories and voting.

Table 2. Sources and scales of the data in the three countries.

	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Electoral data	Ministère de l'Intérieur, Tafra	ISIE, available at the poll station	National Election Authority CAPMAS
Socio-economic data	INSEA	INS. Complete set of data for the 2004 and 2014 census	
Macro-scale	Province	Governorate	Governorate
Intra-urban data	Municipalities of the Great Casablanca	Delegations of the Great Tunis	Qism of the Great Cairo

⁶⁶Ayoobi, M. (2004), 'Political Islam: Image and Reality', *World Policy Journal*, Fall, 2004, 21, 3, pp. 1–14.

Two different analytical scales were used: that of provinces throughout the country and that of the districts within cities. The first scale identifies major geographical divides within the political space of each country, and assesses whether they are related to differences of « development » or between the « urban vs. rural » distinction. At a very local level, similar approach is used in order to disentangle the relationship between the social space and the electoral space within cities.⁶⁷ At such refined scale, the hypothesis is made that geographies of voting within cities is a good proxy for the sociology of voting,^{68,69} (Bussi, 1998; Rivière, 2017). Of course, there is no way to be sure that one is not falling into the ecological fallacy: even though detailed scales may limit such risks, there is no certainty unless enquiries in the same city are produced. In contrast, large national enquiries, which are supposed to be the best instrument to assess the sociology of voting, suffer from a symmetrical bias: by extracting voters from their context, the process by which political attitudes are shaped by the social networks in which individuals are embedded can be overlooked,^{70, 71, 72} This approach thus neglects the 'neighborhood effect',⁷³ i.e. the tendency for political homogeneity at the local level. As a result, when voters from different contexts are lumped together, the sociology of voting becomes blurred: while there may be a very clear sociology in one single city, it may be different in other cities or in rural areas, resulting in a very complex sociology of voting at national level.

The socio-geography of Islamist parties (2011-2014): main results

The « Provincial » scale: huge geographical contrasts of support for the Islamist forces

Results 1. The scale of provinces

Several lessons can be drawn from Figure 1. First, it may seem trivial, but in all cases, there is a geography of the Islamist parties, meaning that there are significant geographical differences in the support for Islamist forces. In Tunisia, in 2011, *Ennahdha* reached between 15.6% (Sidi Bouzid province) and 59.4% (Tataouine province) of valid votes; that same year, the *JDP* in Morocco obtained 4.6% of the votes in the Driouch province and 47.0% in Tanger; in Egypt, for the presidential elections of June 2012, Morsi got only 15.3% of votes in Alexandria and Port Saïd, and up to 46.9% in Fayum province. Such huge gaps in the geographical support for major (and legalist) Islamist forces must be linked to different historical and socio-economic paths, hence making very unlikely Burgat's claim that Islamists are to be found

⁶⁷In Cairo, it was impossible to systematically map and analyse electoral and socio-demographic data at local level, because of the lack of data.

⁶⁸Bussi M. (1998), *Éléments de géographie électorale. A travers l'exemple de la France de l'ouest*, Publications de l'université de Rouen.

⁶⁹Rivière J., « L'espace électoral des grandes villes françaises. Votes et structures sociales intra-urbaines lors du scrutin présidentiel de 2017 », *Revue française de science politique*, 67:6, 1041–1065.

⁷⁰Braconnier C. (2010), *Une autre sociologie du vote: les électeurs dans leurs contextes*, Paris, Lextenso.

⁷¹Van der Wusten H., Mamadouh V. (2014), « 'It is the Context, Stupid!'. Or is It? British-American Contributions to Electoral Geography since the 1960s », *L'Espace Politique* [En ligne], 23 | 2014–2, mis en ligne le 02 juillet 2014, consulté le 23 décembre 2019.

⁷²Van Hamme, G. (2012), 'Social Classes and Political Behaviours: Directions for a Geographical Analysis', *Geoforum*, 43(4).

⁷³Van Hamme, G., David, Q. (2011). 'Pillars and Electoral Behavior in Belgium: the Neighborhood Effect Revisited'. *Political Geography*, 30(5), 250–262.

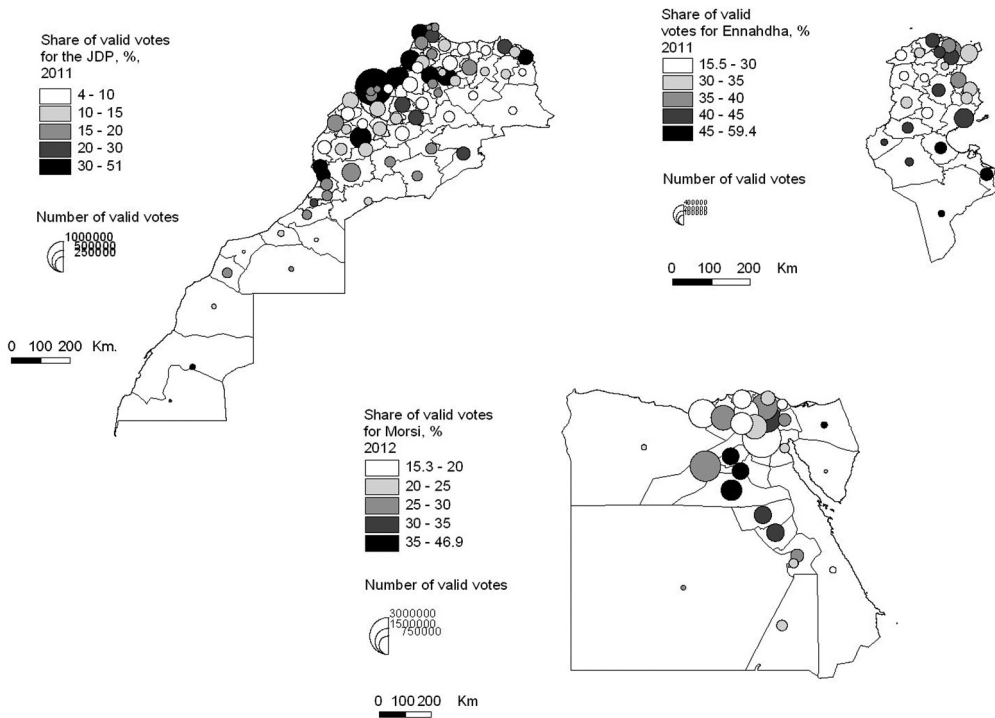


Figure 1. Geographies of the main Islamist party or candidates in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, 2011–2012. Sources: *Morocco: Ministry of Interior, Tafra*; *Tunisia: ISIE*; *Egypt: National Election Authority*

(equally) in every stratum of society. Second, clear oppositions can be observed in these geographies: urban/metropolitan areas vs. rural/peripheral areas, on the one hand, large regional contrasts, on the other hand. One must note that Islamist parties tend to be either specifically urban (Morocco) or rural (Egypt). Large regional contrasts are visible in Tunisia, between the South, where the support for *Ennahdha* is generally high, and the North. In Egypt, similar contrasts are to be found between Middle Egypt—the bastion of the *LJP*—and Lower Egypt, at least in its central part, where the support for Islamist forces is weak.

Such geographical contrasts are well illustrated through principal component analysis (Figure 2). This statistical method will tend to regroup political forces with similar geographies and, in contrast, opposes those showing dissimilar geographies. In the three countries, the position of Islamist parties (or candidates) is opposite to the other political forces, mainly the ‘modernist’ parties in Tunisia and Egypt, and to all other parties in Morocco. Hence, the important result is that statistical analysis clearly highlights the specific geographies of Islamist forces and the geographical contrast with ‘modernist’ parties.

Keeping this descriptive line, a third level of analysis is proposed by crossing the electoral results of Islamist parties/candidates with socio-economic features, using multiple regression analysis. However, since many socioeconomic indicators are



Figure 2. PCA on electoral results in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, 2011–2012. Sources of the data: *ibidem*; own calculations

correlated with each other (economic structure, qualification, urbanity, incomes, etc), a synthetic indicator of territorial development has been produced (methodological details in Annexe 1).

Results of the regression are detailed in Annexe 2 but they can be easily synthesized. At this governorate scale, a strong relationship was found between the level of development and the electoral scores of the Islamist forces, as illustrated in Figure 3. However, this relationship is not going the same direction for the three countries: in Egypt, the more developed the governorate, the less votes for Morsi; in Morocco, the more developed, the higher the score for the JDP; in Tunisia, the relationship is not

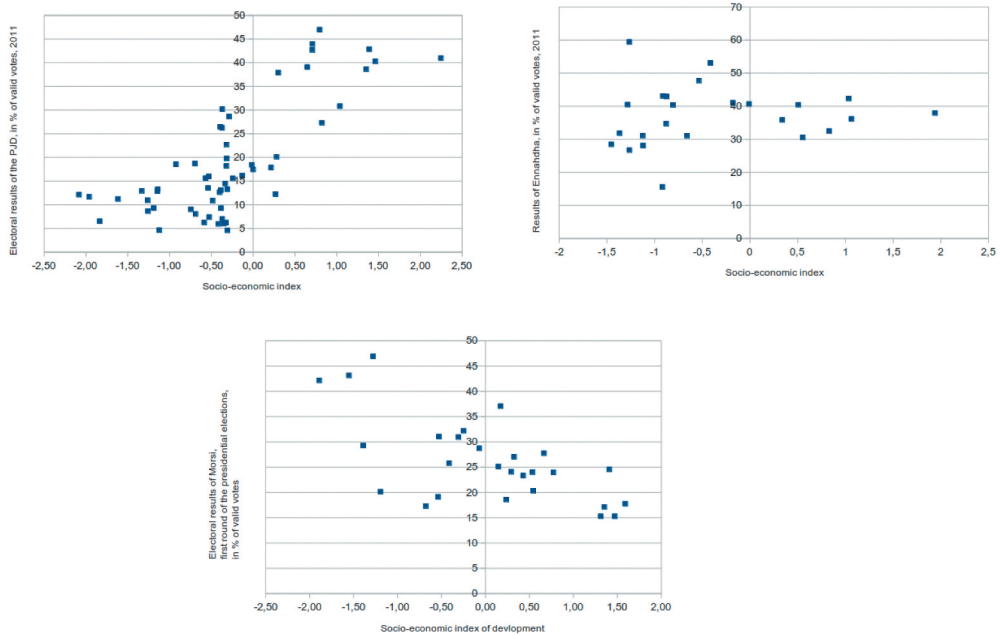


Figure 3. Socio-economic development and the electoral scores of the Islamist forces in Morocco (Left), Tunisia (Right) and Egypt (below), around 2011. Sources: *Morocco: Ministry of Interior, Tafra; INSEATunisia: ISIE; INSEgypt: National Election Authority; CAPMAS*

significant. In other words, while the LJP is specifically rural, it is the other way around in Morocco, while the model is more complex and/or lies in between in the Tunisian case.

The main issue is that Islamist parties show in some way opposite geographies, either positively correlated with wealth and urbanity (Morocco) or negatively (Egypt), while Tunisia is lying somewhere in between.

To synthesize, three important results were found at this scale, that needs to be interpreted in the light of what is known about political Islam in the three countries: First, there are huge geographical contrasts of support for the Islamist forces; second, these geographical contrasts in the support for the Islamists are strongly related to the level of development in both Morocco and Egypt, but not in Tunisia; third, this relationship has opposite directions in Morocco, where Islamists got their best scores in the most developed areas of the country, and Egypt, where the reverse is true.

Intra-urban analysis

In many cases, the electoral geography has a complex relationship with the spatial distribution of poverty and wealth, which may be very different at regional or at the neighbourhood scale within cities.⁷⁴ This difference has also been observed in Tunisia in electoral processes after 2011.⁷⁵

In this section of the paper, this relationship is explored within the largest city in Morocco and Tunisia, while data could not be collected systematically for Cairo.

Figure 1 shows the score of the main Islamist party/or candidate for Tunis and Casablanca. Each city is divided into large neighbourhoods: delegation in Tunis and district in Casablanca. In each case a large delimitation of the city is used rather than the administrative one. A socio-economic index was built to test the relationship with Islamist voting; the construction of this index is described in annexe 1b. Building on this, we then propose through regression analysis to test the relationship between socio-economic divisions in the city and voting pattern. However, the socio-economic data and electoral results at the Qism level for Cairo have not been compared, given the difficulties to access small scale data. Results for Tunis and Casablanca are shown in Annexe 3.

It is clear from Figure 4 that Islamist parties have very unequal support within cities. In Tunis, in 2011, *Ennahdha* obtains 12.5% of the valid votes in El Menzah, a wealthy district in the North of Tunis, and up to 60% in Sijoumi, a poor and dense neighbourhood just west of the Medina. The Islamist party also obtains more than 50% of the votes in some more peripheral districts, such as Ettadhamen or Mohamedia. Similar geographical contrasts are to be found in 2014. In Tunis, contrasts are so huge that there are among the highest and lowest scores found for the whole country. Similar contrasts can be found in Casablanca, from less than 5% up to 50% of the valid votes. However, this geography can easily be synthesized as 'Core'—where PJD reaches high scores—vs. 'Periphery'. Within the city of Casablanca, contrasts exist but are much less pronounced, from around

⁷⁴Bussi, op. cit.

⁷⁵Van Hamme, G., Gana, A., Ben Rebbah, M. (2014), 'Social and Socio-territorial Electoral Base of Political Parties in Post-revolutionary Tunisia'. *Journal of North African Studies*, 19(5), 751–769.

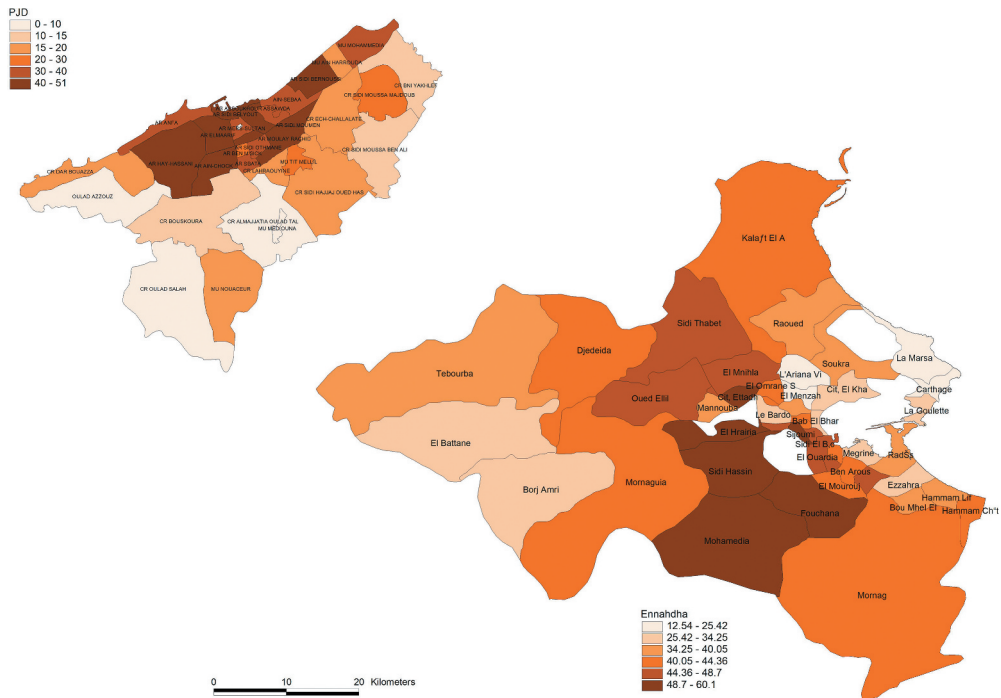


Figure 4. Electoral results at Neighbourhood level for Tunisia and Casablanca.

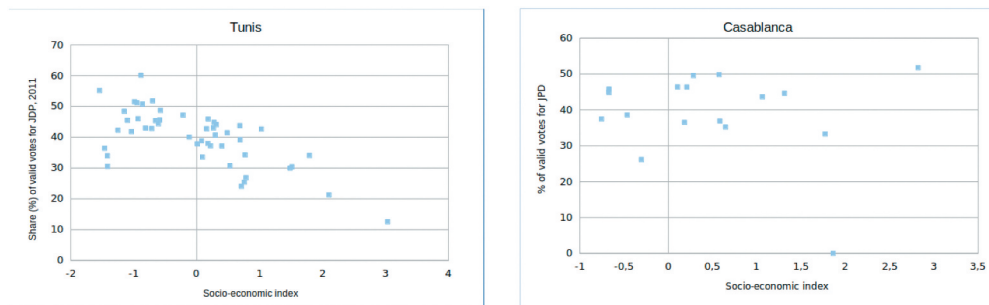


Figure 5. Socio-economic data and electoral scores for the main Islamist force, by neighbourhood in Tunisia and Casablanca, 2011. Note: only central urbanized districts are shown for Casablanca. Sources: Morocco: Ministry of the Interior, Tafra; INSEATunisia: ISIE; INS

a quarter (Ben M’Sick) up to half of the votes (El Maarif). In the city of Cairo, despite a less refined scale, similar contrasts are found, from 5% of the votes for Morsi in Qasr al Nil, a very central district near Tahrir, up to 35% in Al-tbīn. In sum, it appears very clearly that the main Islamist force in each country has a very unequal capacity to gain votes within cities, making it very unlikely that they equally penetrate all social classes.

What are the drivers of these contrasted geographies?

In Tunisia, a clear relationship is found between the socio-economic level of the neighbourhoods and the support for Ennahdha: the wealthier the neighbourhood, the lower the support for Ennahdha. Figure 5 perfectly illustrates this relationship. The only

exceptions are very peripheral neighbourhoods, nearly rural, where, despite a low socio-economic index, the support for Ennahdha is limited, ranging from 30 to 40%. In Tunisian major cities, the conservative vs. modernist cleavage is largely overlapping with the cities' socio-spatial divisions. Surveys conducted in Tunis and Sfax confirm Ennahdha's support among the lower classes, in contrast to the high scores obtained by secular parties among the middle and upper classes.⁷⁶ There seems to be a clear sociology of the conservative vs. modernist cleavage. This clear relationship, it should be recalled, is not visible at the national level where voters in the deprived interior regions provide very little support for Ennahdha. We have some indications that outside the large cities, Ennahdha's sociology may be very different, finding support from various segments of the social spectrum.

This kind of relationship is not found in Casablanca. The main divide is between core and peripheral urban areas: the more peripheral they are, the less support for the PJD. Indeed, further from the city centre, processes similar to rural areas are identified, where the PJD has few local networks and relays. Within the city centre, there is no significant difference in the support for the PJD between wealthy and poor districts of the city.

Here again, contrasting results appear between cities. In Tunis, Ennahdha obtains much better scores in deprived neighbourhoods. On the contrary in Casablanca such a relationship is not to be found.

Considering socio-spatial differences in support of mainstream Islamist parties

Even in the very favourable post-2011 context, Islamist parties never reached a hegemonic position, because more or less large segments of North African societies did not support them. These segments are unequally distributed geographically: in Morocco, the JDP got low electoral scores in most rural areas; in Tunisia, Ennahdha is relatively weak in economically marginalized areas of the inner country, as well as among the middle and upper urban classes; in Egypt, LJP is weak in the central delta area, as well as in many urban neighbourhoods. It is clear from these results that not voting for Islamist parties is by no means limited to wealthy, westernized urban populations, even though this social group may be the most visible opposition to Islamism.

However, the areas of support and opposition to Islamist parties correspond to different patterns. These are the result of the diverse political trajectories of the three countries and more precisely of the different positions occupied by political Islam in their respective national political spaces.

Two main observations can be drawn from analyses above. First, Islamists have a different capacity to penetrate rural areas. Second, Islamist parties have contrasting results within cities, showing different levels of support from wealthy districts. Here we propose a discussion of the drivers of these contrasting geographical differences.

The first issue relates to contrasting results in rural areas of Morocco and Egypt. Indeed, the contrast lies in rural rather than urban areas. Islamist parties in the three countries have their origins in urban areas and all have an important audience in cities. The urban

⁷⁶Van Hamme, G., Gana, A. (2016). "Ebauche de sociologie électorale des élections d'octobre 2011 ». In Gana, Van Hamme (Eds.), *Elections et territoires en Tunisie*. Tunis-Paris: IRMC-Karthala. pp. 87–115.

character of the Islamist movement is well documented.⁷⁷ In this perspective, the contrast lies in the capacity of the main Islamist parties to penetrate rural areas: high in Egypt, low in Morocco and in between in Tunisia.

In Egypt, despite harsh repressive episodes against Islamist movements (1960s, 1990s, July 2013 onwards), there have been long periods of appeasement, for example in the 2000s. These periods have been marked by a kind of implicit contract between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood: as long as the latter remains out of politics, they can occupy the social ground, ensuring social peace through their charity networks^{78, 79} This process has allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to penetrate deeply into society in some rural areas, in particular in Middle Egypt, including El Fayum. Yet, this strong penetration should not be interpreted as the Muslims being a rural political force. Rather, it seems more correct to say that it is mainly an urban movement—that is, educated urban classes penetrating newly urbanized areas inhabited by displaced rural people^{80, 81}—which has succeeded to penetrate some rural areas.

In Morocco, the process is somewhat different. There is no doubt about the urban roots of the JDP, but the movement has not been able to gain influence in rural areas. On the one hand, repression has been constant and intensified after terrorist attacks in the 1990s, leaving no space for the more legalist segments to penetrate the deeper Moroccan society. On the other hand, the notability relations associated with the Makhzen system have remained very powerful in the Moroccan countryside. And although Islamic associations have been able to expand in rural areas politically, parties linked to the Makhzen system have continued to occupy a dominant position in the countryside. In Tunisia, the situation lies somewhere in between: although Islamist forces have faced episodes of harsh repression and in spite of the close control to which the rural areas were submitted by the state-party structures, they were able to reach the countryside through their charitable networks and support to the families who are victims of the former repressive regime.

In addition, Islamists reach very low electoral scores in Amazigh areas. This is a clear example of the low influence of Islamist party among minorities, which can be observed in Algerian Kabylie

or in the Amazigh rural areas of Morocco, such as reported in Tilmatine & Desrues.⁸² One of the reasons is the exclusive focus on religious identity promoted in the Islamist reading of societies, denying explicitly or implicitly the multiple dimensions that characterized (ethnic or religious) identities in Northern Africa.

The second issue relates to the contrasting geographies within large cities: in Tunis, the less the district is wealthy, the higher the number of votes for Ennahdha, while in Casablanca, very contrasting scores exist related to the JDP among deprived neighbourhoods and relatively high and homogeneous results among middle and upper class

⁷⁷Saad Eddine, op. cit.

⁷⁸Aclimandos, op. cit.

⁷⁹Vannetzel 2007, op.cit.

⁸⁰Ansari, op. cit.

⁸¹Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot (1984), 'Religion or Opposition? Urban Protest Movements in Egypt,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16: 541–52.

⁸²Tilmatine M. & Desrues T. (eds), 2017, *Les revendications amazighes dans la tourmente des « printemps arabes »*. Trajectoires historiques et évolutions récentes des mouvements identitaires en Afrique du Nord, Centre Jacques Berque Editions, Rabat.

neighbourhoods; in Cairo, complex relations between the socio-economic level and the LJP scores at district level are also observed. It is clear that the sociology of voting cannot be definitively derived from these results. Yet, in Tunis, both enquiries and analyses at the polling stations confirm that Ennahdha's support in Tunis relies on lower classes and decreases with the social status.⁸³ No such evidence exists in Morocco or in Egypt.

How can this contrast be explained between Tunis and Casablanca? Various socio-political processes are involved.

In Tunisia, the modernization process, in particular the secularization of the State and politics, which has gained the support of a large part of the population, has been very prevalent since the Bourguiba regime⁸⁴ and has resulted in large segments of the middle class massively opposing any role of religion in politics. According to the Arab barometer,⁸⁵ Tunisia has among the Arab countries (Lebanon excluded) the highest share of people claiming not to be religious, the highest rate of disagreement with the statement that 'the government and parliament should enact laws in accordance with Islamic law' and the lowest attendance to Mosques. On the contrary, thanks to solidarity networks with the victims of repression and to charity action that mobilizes a religious discourse, Islamists have been able to penetrate deprived neighbourhoods in large cities⁸⁶⁸⁷ While it should be acknowledged that there has been a revival of religiosity and religious practice, especially since the Ben Ali era, this does not imply, far from it, an adherence to the Islamist party. And if the latter was able, in 2011, to capitalize on the popular demands around the moralization of political life and the break with the old regime, the failure of the Islamist party, and of the political class in power in general, to respond to the demands for social and territorial justice, has contributed to its growing discredit, especially among youth.

In Morocco, the relationship between state and religion is quite different, the country being defined by the constitution as an Islamic monarchy and the king as the Commander of the Believers. Conferring religious legitimacy for the king's power, this political system also implies a control of religious institutions and Ulemas whose role will be to give legitimacy to state policy.⁸⁸ State policies are criticized as not conforming to the religious precepts that political Islam has developed in Morocco. Its implementation throughout the country by means of various religious preaching and charity associations has grown steadily in a context marked by both compromises and confrontations with the political authorities.

Thus, in Moroccan urban areas, the Islamist organizations' networks have developed in parallel with the Makhzen networks, both in deprived areas⁸⁹ and among middle and upper classes neighbourhoods. This means that the Moroccan educated and modernized elites seem much less penetrated by anti-Islamic sentiments. This may be among the

⁸³Gana et al 2014, op. cit.

⁸⁴Mokhefi M. (2015), « Tunisie: sécularisation, islam et islamisme », *Histoire, Monde & Cultures religieuses*, 34, juin 2015.

⁸⁵<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2019/12/arabs-are-losing-faith-in-religious-parties-and-leaders/>

⁸⁶Merone, op. cit.

⁸⁷Carpentier I. (2016), « L'observatoire localisé de Gabes: les ressorts d'une victoire éclatante du parti Ennahdha », in Gana, Van Hamme. *Elections et Territoires en Tunisie: Enseignements des scrutins post-révolution (2011–2014)*, pp.153–171.

⁸⁸Dialmy A. (2000), « L'islamisme marocain: entre révolution et intégration », *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 110, p. 5–27.

⁸⁹Zaki L. (dir) (2009), *Terrains de Campagne au Maroc. Les Elections Législatives de 2007*, IRMC-Karthala, Paris-Tunis, 2009, 332 pages.

causes of the absence of a large liberal party. However, the most important thing is that the JDP may be considered a counterweight by segments of the middle and higher class, the only political force able to counterbalance the monarchy.

The hypothesis that the authors want to defend here relates to the different nature of the religious/secular divide in the Moroccan partisan field compared to the Tunisian. As a result, the PJD does not have (or no longer has) the image of a radical party that would bring about a major break. The party therefore seems to enjoy the support of factions of the middle and wealthy classes, for whom it can represent a political force necessary for the balance of power. Consequently, the Moroccan Islamist party is not limited to working-class urban districts where it deploys its social and associative networks

Conclusion

This paper intended to shed some light on the debate over the sociology of political Islam. By using a comparative perspective and solid data, the shortcomings of studies that deny the social grounds on which political Islam can grow were identified. Data and analysis from this research have provided support for the idea that political Islam is neither hegemonic in North African societies, even in the more favourable context following the 'Arab spring', nor is it equally distributed among social classes and territories. Social settings where political Islam does not develop or indeed faces opposition have been clearly identified. Moreover, the lack of support for Islamist parties is not limited to the tiny wealthy and/or westernized segments of urban societies: in inner peripheral areas of Tunisia, in rural areas of Morocco, or even in some popular districts of Cairo, Islamist parties fail to achieve good electoral scores. These basic facts are sufficient to challenge Burgat's conception of a hegemonic ideology among Arab populations, as such an ideology would be built on their cultural heritage, repressed both by colonialism and by the local elites that succeeded it. This kind of conception is misleading because it denies the complexity of modern Arab societies, the importance of minorities, the diversity of social trajectories and interests and the capacity of other movements to penetrate deeply into some deprived rural or urban areas.

On the other hand, this study's analysis does not fully validate conclusions that Islamism is an alliance between the deprived urban classes and the traditional segments of the bourgeoisie politically excluded from the ruling post-colonial classes. Rather, one finding of this study is that the social grounds of Islamists are very dependent on the national contexts in which they are embedded. From this perspective, the Moroccan JDP is a case in point. It is relatively unable to penetrate rural societies, where Makhzen-related prominence remains a strong reality or, in contrast, by its capacity to find support among the urban middle classes or even the wealthy classes, who may see it as necessary force to balance the power of the Makhzen. In Tunisia, clear support for the Islamist party is evident in deprived urban areas—though not necessarily in the most disadvantaged and peripheral ones—but there is hostility to the Islamist party in the middle and wealthy neighbourhoods. However, neither the deprived population of small towns in inland Tunisia—whose protests were at the origins of the 'Tunisian Spring'—show the same support for Islamism, nor is Ennahdha hegemonic in poor metropolitan districts. Also, the strong support for Ennahdha in Southern Tunisia derives rather from a specific identity, linked to the region's historically conflictual relationship with the country's central power

structure based in the north. Similar conclusions can be drawn for Egypt, where Islamist parties can be hegemonic in some areas (El Fayum), while they are quite weak in others (Central Delta). The same observations could be made in the deprived areas of Cairo.

In some ways, this diversity is not surprising for a religious-based party in Muslim societies. 'Pan classist' support could also be observed in the Christian democrat parties of Western Europe, for example. However, it seems that in the post-revolutionary period, Islamist parties did find strong support among certain contentious segments of societies, typically the urban underclass. However, on the one hand, Islamism also has other drivers such as, for example, issues related to local identities in Southern Tunisia. On the other hand, Islamists are not hegemonic among the protesters, as illustrated by their weakness in the Amazigh areas of Morocco, in interior regions of Tunisia and in large segments of the protest urban middle classes.

This conclusion calls for greater rigour in the class analysis of Islamist support and a contextual reading of their sociologies, influenced by the diversity of Islamist parties, as well as their specific anchoring in national or even regional political fields.

This study also sheds some light on the defeats of political Islam in the next period. As a protest movement legitimated by its opposition against the 'old regime', Islamist parties were able to gain electoral support in large segments of the North African societies. As soon as they access to power position, this support erodes, especially in deprived urban neighbourhoods: in Tunisia, Ennahdha maintains or even reinforces its electoral base in peripheral southern conservative parts of the country, while support among popular classes in deprived urban neighbourhoods or in peripheral areas where its implantation was weaker has faded.⁹⁰ It seems that political Islam resists where its networks are strong, nearly hegemonic, while it collapses everywhere else.

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