The purpose of this article is to predict the support the Islamist Ennahda Movement will enjoy in the Tunisian parliamentary elections on October 23. In order to this, a literature review has been conducted that establishes the context of the Ben Ali regime and its dealings with Ennahda before the revolution; the motivation behind the Jasmine Revolution (and the role played by Ennahda); and Ennahda’s present roles and activities in Tunisia. It will be shown that despite heavy-handed repression of Ennahda by the Ben Ali regime that resulted in the liquidation of the Ennahda movement within Tunisia, and the decidedly un-Islamic nature of the popular uprisings, Ennahda has returned to Tunisia one of the strongest contenders for the October parliamentary elections. These findings suggest that although there is widespread fear and distrust of the Islamic movement within Tunisia, the party’s brand of “soft Islamism” and apparent commitment to the ideals that motivated the revolution, Ennahda are likely to remain key contenders for the October elections, and will continue to influence and interact with Tunisia’s post-revolution political landscape.

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EDITORIAL NOTE:

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Crossroads was unable to publish this article prior to the Tunisian election held on October 23rd 2011, as planned. However the article was received and passed all review processes well before this date. The Editorial Board of Crossroads has ensured that there has been no academic compromise as a result of this unforeseen situation.
THE FUTURE OF TUNISIAN ISLAMISM: THE CASE OF ENNAHDA

This article’s analytical agenda is to assess what role and to what extent the Ennahda Movement will influence the political arena in Tunisia following the Jasmine Revolution. Ennahda gradually emerged in Tunisia throughout the 1970s, originally as The Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI, Movement de Tendance Islamique), and it is important to understand the context surrounding their involvement in society, and their relationship to both President Bourguiba, and later President Ben Ali, if their current role as post-revolution Tunisia are to be fully understood. Ennahda’s leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, who was one of the founders of the movement, and whose belief in the democratic framework and its compatibility with Islamic values has meant that he has maintained a high profile as a leader and an Islamic scholar. It will be shown that whilst the Ennahda Movement had very little involvement in the 2011 popular uprisings that began in December 2010, and that whilst the party experiences widespread apprehension and distrust, they have become one of the strongest and most influential political parties in Tunisian politics.

Thus, the analysis will make a general conclusion that whether Ennahda achieves success in the short-term through parliamentary elections in October 2011, or whether their influence will grow and manifest over a longer period of time, the movement will remain key players in post-revolution landscape of Tunisian politics provided they remain committed to democratic process, modernization, supporting women’s rights and political and personal freedoms.

Islamists have been the focus of state violence and hostility in both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes but they have also been placed at the centre of political consciousness in Tunisia. Bourguiba’s increasing hostility and violence towards Islamists and his insistence on a retrial of eighty-nine Islamists arrested in 1987 and the imposition of the death penalty for all suspects, prompted Prime Minister Ben Ali to assume power under Article 57 of the Constitution, fearful of a possible breakdown in public order. Bin Ali’s declaration on 7 November 1987, immediately after the coup, which promised democratic reform and Islamists participation must be understood in this context. The new government moved quickly to legitimize the regime, garner support from the Islamists and to resolve issues that formed the catalyst of mainstream Islamist opposition, namely the lack of political expression, economic opportunities, moral laxity, corruption and mismanagement.

Measures implemented that sought to legitimize the regime and garner Islamist support included abolishing The State Security Court, used by Bourguiba to trial Islamists and other opposition forces, most political prisoners were released including over 600 MTI members, in May 1988 he pardoned its most prominent leader, Rachid Ghannouchi and in September, he allowed the group’s secretary-general, Abd al-Fattah Mourou to return home from exile. Islamists were also allowed to take part in the Islamic High Council and to establish the Islamic Student Union. Ben Ali also instituted other symbolic measures such launching an Islamic ethics campaign, which increased surveillance of cafes, malls and other public places to prevent ‘un-Islamic’ behaviour and Islam was given a more visible presence in everyday life through the broadcasting of the call to prayer and religious programs and increasing the use of Islamic references in official rhetoric. Furthermore, symbolic changes such as the presidential prize for Qur’anic learning, and Ben Ali’s highly publicized pilgrimage to Mecca as his first trip as President were part of a concerted drive for symbolic re-Islamisation of the RCD and of Tunisian society, whilst simultaneously undercutting Islam appeal.

The accommodation of Islamists was short-lived. Electoral competition in the lead-up to the April 1989 elections marked a turning point in the process of escalation between Ennahda and the government. According to unpublished government polls, Ennahda candidates polled over fifty per cent in some constituencies in the 1989 elections, and officially won 14.5 per cent of the vote nationally, and as much as thirty per cent in some

2. Vanderwalle, From the New State to the New Era, 618.
7. Rogers, There is no Room for a Religious Party, 15.
major cities. This meant Ennahda polled second only to the ruling party, the RCD. Although the Islamists fell short of popular victory, they confirmed their position as the main power contenders and opponents to the regime. Their success during the parliamentary elections and were alarmed at their increasing profile and the expansion of their support and Ben Ali became adamant that religion and politics should be kept separate, insisting that “no single group should monopolize the claim to be Islamic since all Tunisians are Muslims.” In 1990, Article 8 of the Constitution was changed to prohibit political parties based on religion, thus re-banning Ennahda, as well as six other opposition groups, and prevented them from participating in the June 1990 local elections. On 21 May 1990, the Minister for the Interior announced there would be clampdown on opposition following the discovery of Islamic cells within the security forces and a five-phase plot against the regime, which resulted in a spiral of repression that swiftly neutralized the Islamist opposition. State regulatory and control policies were tightened, civil society organizations were infiltrated by party members and an array of measures designed to promote women’s labor rights and their status in the family were introduced to give support to the regime’s progressive image. The suppression of Islamists was also presented as a security concern that was needed to safeguard the economic gains of tourism and foreign investment. The government drew links between Islamists and was able to reject Islamists as unpatriotic, as subverting religious and national unity and placing the country in danger while attempting to illegitimately monopolize the common good. Ennahda, as the most influential Islamist actor, were the focus of government campaigns against Islamism, whose membership was punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

An attack by Ennahda militants on an RCD office in February 1991 marked a turning point in which the Islamists lost the battle for public opinion and were abandoned by other opposition parties. Three months later, some of Ennahda’s leaders were accused of plotting to overthrow the Ben Ali regime after alleged plots, assassination plans and arms caches were apparently discovered by the regime. Ghannouchi denied the existence of such plans, arguing it was an excuse for the government to crackdown on his group; he went into self-imposed exile in London in protest. By 1991, the level of repression was greater than that experienced during the Bourguiba era and it had become clear that ‘the government had succeeded in isolating the movement through the gradual process of exclusion and delegitimization.’ The success of the government in exploiting the event and establishing a link between Ennahda and terrorism, and with its main figures, including leader Rachid Ghannouchi, either in jail or in exile overseas, political Islam effectively disappeared from the political stage in Tunisia by the end of the year. In June 1996, Ennahda organized its first congress overseas in Belgium in order to evaluate their strategy and it was decided that its culture of confrontation should give way to a more moderate policy.

Whilst living in exile in London, Rachid Ghannouchi remained an influential Islamic scholar. According to Tamimi, ‘Ghannouchi’s main interest has been to stress the need for democracy, to prove its compatibility with Islam.’ Whilst Tamimi’s glowing endorsement of Ghannouchi in Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within

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8. El-Khawas, Revolutionary Islam, 394.
10. S. Ismail, Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 148-149.
15. Ismail, Rethinking Islamist Politics, 158.
17. Rogers, There is no Room for a Religious Party, 10.
18. Ibid., 7.
19. Ibid., 22-23.
21. Ibid.
22. Rogers, There is no Room for a Religious Party, 24; also see A. S. Tamimi, Rachid Ghannouchi—A Democrat Within Islamism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71.
25. Tamimi, Rachid Ghannouchi, 102.
Islam might need to tempered by the knowledge of his Islamist orientation, evidence of Ghannouchi’s (and mainstream MTI/Ennahda’s) commitment to the democratic framework and non-violence can be found since 1981.\(^{26}\) However where this commitment is put into question is with regards to the long-term ambitions of the movement; whilst adamant that they must work within the democratic framework in order to advance their goals, it stems from the belief that an Islamic society or state cannot be imposed but must be rebuilt gradually through participation in institutions that can be reformed.\(^{27}\) Ennahda’s social and political goals have remained rather nebulous, because whilst with a clear intent to influence public policy in a way that is consonant with their vision of Islam, and that there is a need to reform the understanding of Shari’a so that it is able to better respond to the modern questions and problems (thus not denying the imposition of Shari’a), they have stated they do not seek to monopolize political expression, for this only replaces one dictatorship with another.\(^{28}\) Ghannouchi’s later writings argue that Shari’a provides a broad set of guidelines that are compatible with democratic governance, and that democracy is needed in order to implement to Islamic concept of Shura, meaning consultation between the political authority and the people.\(^{29}\)

After two decades of one-party rule, it was not the Islamist movement that finally toppled the Ben Ali regime to become the first of the “Arab Spring,” but rather grew out of a native desire for democracy, human rights and opportunity. Roy argues that the ‘Jasmine Revolution’ should be considered a revolt, rather than a revolution, because the uprisings had no leader, no structure and no political parties who were promising to undertake the task of anchoring democracy.\(^{30}\) The self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi, a computer science graduate frustrated by a lack of employment opportunities, sparked the popular uprising that used social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to organize and mobilize; activism was framed by calls for democracy, personal and political freedom and economic opportunity.\(^{31}\) With forty per cent of the population under twenty-five years of age, Chrisafis notes, ‘The curse of unemployment and the young generation’s distrust at corruption were key to the protests that ousted the dictator.’\(^{32}\) Indeed, Rachid Ghannouchi concurs, ‘A quarter of a million unemployed graduates—that’s the basis of this revolution.’\(^{33}\) That the Jasmine Revolution would be inspired by these circumstances is historically consistent; whilst rebellion against power as an end in itself has not been a feature of Tunisian history, its history is littered with uprisings against unjust rule over food or taxation, such as those in 1864, and the bread riots of the 1970s and 1980s.\(^{34}\) Thus it could be argued that the political culture in Tunisia centers on paying deference to political rule provided it does not impinge on livelihood.\(^{35}\)

The December 2010 uprisings did not ‘spring’ from nowhere. Social tension and a growing disaffection with the Ben Ali regime were simmering long before the Jasmine Revolution erupted in December 2010. Larbi Sadiki identifies three recent crises that shook the regime and clearly demonstrated the democratic limitations of the regime as well as its human rights abuses.\(^{36}\) The first of these crises was the Bin Brik Affair in April and May 2000, involving Tawfiq Bin Brik, a Tunisian journalist and correspondent for the French newspaper La Croix, whose showdown with the government over his harsh treatment for writing critical articles about the regime sparked a media frenzy both domestically and abroad, and was also responsible for galvanizing civil society support.\(^{37}\) Bourguiba’s death on 6 April 2000 prompted a national sense of grievance in Tunisia, but when the regime did not televise his funeral, apart from a few minutes on the main news bulletin, it prompted unrest in Bourguiba’s birth town of Montasir on the day of the funeral, during which anti-Bin Ali slogans were sung; the

27. Vanderwalle, From the New State, 612.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
mis handling of Bourguiba’s death also received wide media coverage abroad. Strained relations with France and the French media also served to put pressure on the Ben Ali regime. Whilst the French and Tunisian intelligence services had collaborated against ‘Islamists,’ the French eventually withdrew their cooperation, based on the lack of evidence to support accusations of terrorism leveled against Islamists in exile. French leaders were also more outspoken in their concern over the lack of substantive democratic reform in Tunisia and its media was particularly vocal in condemning the Tunisian government and President Ben Ali, leading to a strain in relations between the two governments. As Sadiki notes, these three crises differed in intensity and gravity but all presented Ben Ali and his regime with a crisis of confidence, posed questions about the democratic limitations of the regime and exposed the violation of citizenship rights and the tight control of media reporting. The crises also prompted protests and coalition building within civil society.

Olivier Roy argues that the uprising in Tunisia reflects that of a post-Islamist generation. Despite Ennahda being the strongest opposition force to the Ben Ali regime before the crackdown, the Islamists did not appear to be a leading force during the wave of protests that led to the downfall of Ben Ali. As Basly notes, ‘From 1992 to 2011, Al-Nahda [Ennahda] was almost completely absent from Tunisia, and played no part in the overthrow of the authoritarian regime.’ Ennahda were the only party to not make an independent appearance during the protests, however The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb released a statement sympathizing with demonstrators and called for Shari’a law to be implemented. However protestors have largely rejected calls for Shari’a law to be implemented, as many advocate for a democratic system that separates religion and political demands. Furthermore, the murder of a Polish priest, Marek Rybinski, an accountant at a private religious school near the capital has been attributed to “fascist terrorists with extremist attitudes” by the Interior Ministry; along with verbal attacks on Jewish people and Islamist protestors attempting to set fire to a brothel, has prompted hundreds of Tunisians to protest with posters reading, ‘Secularism—Freedom and Tolerance’ and ‘Stop Extremist Acts.’ Ennahda have strongly condemned these acts and in response to the murder of Rybinski, have called on Tunisian authorities to discover the real circumstances of the murder and those responsible. Thus, the ‘Jasmine Revolution’ cannot be considered Islamic in character, but rather represents a broad-based call for democracy and human rights that was spread by a new Facebook and Twitter generation.

After the fall of Ben Ali in January 2011, Rachid Ghannouchi announced that he would return to Tunisia to relaunch the Ennahda Movement, accompanied by other members of Ennahda who were living in exile. Thousands welcomed Ghannouchi to Tunisia on 30 January 2011, whilst a group of half a dozen protesters held up banners reading, ‘No Islamism, no theocracy, no Sharia, and no stupidity!’ The number of supporters suggests that the group has maintained some of its popularity. Since Ghannouchi’s arrival, Ennahda has been legalized by, and accepted into, Tunisia’s interim government and has announced that the movement plans to

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39. Ibid., 75.
42. Roy, *This is not an Islamic revolution*, 25.
46. Roy, *This is not an Islamic revolution*, 26.
48. Ibid.
take part in the October 23 parliamentary elections, but will not field a presidential candidate and Ghannouchi also announced that he would not compete for any public offices. The Higher Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Transition to Democracy, the provisional government, has been tasked with enabling a democratic, sound and quiet transition until a Constituent Assembly is elected on 23 October, along with members from other political parties, civil society organizations and other prominent figures. Ennahda have also opened dozens of local offices in preparation for the elections, and it is reported that imams are promoting Ennahda in Mosques. The party’s weekly newspaper, Al-Fajr (The Dawn), resumed publication in April after a twenty-year absence, and now sells around 70,000 copies per week according to party officials.

According to many analysts and commentators, Ennahda are likely to emerge as one of the strongest and most influential parties in Tunisian politics after the October elections, which will determine the constituent assembly that will be tasked with rewriting the Constitution and deciding on the shape of the country’s future political system. Indeed, according to Sayare, “the Islamists of the once-banned Ennahda Party have emerged from obscurity, returned from abroad and established themselves as perhaps the most powerful political force in post-revolution in Tunisia.” Polling suggests that Ennahda enjoys broader support than Tunisia’s other eighty-two authorized political parties, and stands to dominate the election. Some predict Ennahda may poll thirty-five to forty per cent of the vote, and is expected to do particularly well in the conservative south and in the impoverished interior. Ennahda have years of organizational experience, a vast membership and decades of credibility as an enemy of Ben Ali, and they have proved to be better-equipped than any other political party in Tunisia to step into the political void. Additionally, Ghannouchi is a respected Muslim scholar and is widely considered to be moderate with beliefs in the compatibility of democracy and Islam. This reflects Ennahda’s more moderate ideology and stance, with Ghannouchi and party leaders likening Ennahda to Turkey’s AK Party in that it accepts Tunisia’s Personal Status Code and the place of women as free agents in society, along with a reciprocal and equal coexistence with the west. Ennahda is also adamant that a non-clerical form of political Islam can exist with secular democratic politics.

Despite predictions that Ennahda are likely to enjoy widespread support during the elections, there are also many reports of widespread apprehension and distrust of the movement. The popularity and organizational strength of Ennahda is of growing concern for many, who fear that the secular revolution might result in the birth of a conservative Islamic government. For many, Ennahda’s modernist discourse is too good to be true. Ibrahim Letaief, a radio host of the popular radio station Mosaique FM, said, ‘They’re doing doublespeak, and everyone knows it’ and is openly critical of the Islamists, arguing they are espousing a moderate rhetoric in order to win votes, but once in power they will impose strict Islamic law. This view is spurred by confusion over Ennahda’s stance on Shari’a law and the relationship between religion and state. Anti-Ennahda Facebook groups have tens of thousands of supporters, and protesters have denounced the party throughout Tunisia, with

54 Sayare, Tunisia Is Uneasy Over party of Islamists.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.; Steele, Tunisians known Ben Ali was not democracy’s only block.
57 Sayare, Tunisia Is Uneasy Over party of Islamists.
59 Al-Alawsat, Tunisia’s leading Islamist to return from exile; Sayare, Tunisia is Uneasy Over Party of Islamists.
60 Sayare, Tunisia is Uneasy Over Party of Islamists.
61 Ibid.; Pitel, Triumphant return for Tunisia’s Islamist leader.
62 Ryan, Challenges to Tunisia’s fast-track democracy.
63 Sayare, Tunisia is Uneasy Over Party of Islamists.
64 Trabelsi, Ennahda Movement returns to Tunisian politics.
65 Sayare, Tunisia is Uneasy Over Party of Islamists.
some fear associated with uncertainty about who will lead the party following the announcement that long-time leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, will not seek office and will step down as leader later this year.\textsuperscript{67}

Furthermore, following confrontations between Salafi-Jihadists, a militant faction within the Islamic Salafi movement who favour the strict implementation of Islamic religious law (\textit{Shari\'a}) based on a literalist understanding of the Qur’an and who reject the division of religion and state.\textsuperscript{68} Salafi-Jihadists believe that Muslims must actively engage in \textit{jihad}, understood in its aggressive form, until an Islamic state has been established on as large a territory as possible.\textsuperscript{69} A car bomb outside La Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba in 2002, confrontations with Salafi-Jihadists in December 2006 and January 2007, as well as rumors of attacks on unveiled women, artists, bars and brothels since the revolution, has led to a growing fear that Muslim radicals will increase their presence in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{70} For some, these fears may have proven to be legitimate with increasing action being taken by “conservative Islamic groups” such as by Salafist supporters who attempted to storm a university in Sousse, 150km south of the capital on 8 October and two protests on October 9 in Tunis.\textsuperscript{71} One of the Tunis protest was in response to the closure of a Mosque near Tunis university (and which was once a hotbed for activism early in Ben Ali’s reign) and the other involved around 200 Salafists (who, according to Al-Jazeera were mostly students) attempting to attack the headquarters of the private television station of Nessma, who aired an animated film depicting Allah, a practice that is forbidden by Islam.\textsuperscript{72} In the lead up to the October 23 election there has been increasing tension between religious groups and secularists, who fear their liberal values are under threat, especially since latest polls indicate that Ennahda are expected to win the largest share of the vote.\textsuperscript{73}

Competing claims of both widespread support and widespread resistance to Ennahda makes predicting what role, and to what extent political Islam will influence the political arena following the Jasmine Revolution difficult. A fault line has developed between those who wish to maintain Tunisia’s secularist past.\textsuperscript{74} Of those polled in a July 2011 Al Jazeera poll, twenty-one per cent of respondents said they would vote for Ennahda, followed by the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) with eight per cent and the Tunisian Communist Workers Party with five per cent.\textsuperscript{75} In terms of political ideology, forty-seven per cent of the Tunisians polled said they strongly agreed with political Islam, nineteen per cent with the Tunis protests was in response to the closure of a Mosque near Tunis university (and which was once a hotbed for activism early in Ben Ali’s reign) and the other involved around 200 Salafists (who, according to Al-Jazeera were mostly students) attempting to attack the headquarters of the private television station of Nessma, who aired an animated film depicting Allah, a practice that is forbidden by Islam.\textsuperscript{72} In the lead up to the October 23 election there has been increasing tension between religious groups and secularists, who fear their liberal values are under threat, especially since latest polls indicate that Ennahda are expected to win the largest share of the vote.\textsuperscript{73}

In the short-term, it can be predicted that political Islam, in the form of Ennahda, will have a significant role in the October 2011 parliamentary elections, and that it will only continue to influence and interact with Tunisian politics. Whether Ennahda’s brand of soft Islamism can and will communicate with Tunisia’s new generation remains to be seen.\textsuperscript{76} Success will depend on the Ennahda’s commitment to the principles that motivated the revolution, particularly democracy and human rights and their position on the relationship between religion and

\textsuperscript{67} Sayare, \textit{Tunisia is Uneasy Over Party of Islamists}; Yackley, \textit{Update 2}.
\textsuperscript{68} A. Moghadam, \textit{The Globalization of Martyrdom} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 95, 99.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{70} Allani, \textit{The Islamists in Tunisia}, 265.
\textsuperscript{71} Al-Jazeera, 2011a, \textit{Tunisian police clash with protesters}.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Al-Jazeera, 2011b, \textit{Tunisians undecided ahead of October election}.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Faath, \textit{A Long Term Gestation Process}.
\textsuperscript{78} Ryan, \textit{Challenges to Tunisia’s fast-track democracy}.
state, particularly the implementation of Shari’a. According to Allani, Ennahda’s political life depends on three main principles: Firstly, that they accept the framework of the national state; second, they agree to safeguard the tradition of modernization in Tunisia, and; third that they adopt progressive attitudes towards Arab and Islamic identity.⁷⁹ Should they deflect from these principles, Ennahda will be relegated to the ‘political cold.’⁸⁰ However, it is also possible that Ennahda’s presence and support will decrease as new parties increase their public profile, develop policies and a well-defined political orientation. Ennahda’s support has historically stemmed from an opposition movement to an imposed secular regime, which is contrasted to the political climate of Tunisia today, where a multitude of parties are able to operate freely and openly, and thus may lose its appeal. How Ennahda responds to the more conservative or radical elements within Islamism will also have a bearing on their long-term success, with many distrusting their commitment to democracy and the principles that propelled the uprisings, fearing an Islamist government will result in the rise of radical Islam and an end to the secular state.

In conclusion, it is clear that although Ennahda had very little involvement in the revolution, and that there is widespread apprehension and distrust of the party, they will play a significant role and have a continued impact on Tunisian politics. It has been shown that the movement was the strongest opposition to the Ben Ali regime, who through a process of exclusion and de-legitimization were able to neutralize the Islamist challenge and liquidate the Ennahda party in the early 1990s. Despite this, the party has returned to Tunisia after two decades of absence, as one of the strongest contenders for the October parliamentary elections. Based on their level of support, their moderate attitude and commitment to the principles that motivated the revolution, it be predicted that Ennahda will continue to play a significant role and have an impact on Tunisian politics in the years to come.

⁷⁹ Allani, The Islamists in Tunisia, 267. ⁸⁰ Ibid.