

**Inheriting the Past:
Trajectories of Single Parties in Arab Republics**

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For most of their post-colonial history, electoral politics in Arab republics was dominated by single party organizations. Examples include the Iraqi and Syrian Ba’th (renaissance) parties, the Egyptian Arab Socialist Union (ASU, *al-Ittihad al-Ishtiraki al-Arabi*) and its successor parties, the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN, *Jabha al-Tahrir al-Watani*), the Tunisian Destour (Constitution) party and its later incarnations, as well as the General People’s Congress (GPC, *al-Mu’tammir al-Sha’bi al-‘Amm*) in what was then the Arab Republic of Yemen (North Yemen) and the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP, *al-Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-Yamani*) in the People’s Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). In brief, just as in other parts of the developing world, single party politics at one point seemed to be the modal form of governance in the post-independence Middle East and North Africa (Huntington and Moore 1970).

Appearances can be deceptive, however. While many of these single party organizations dominated legislative bodies and party systems, their institutional strength varied considerably—and, as a consequence, so did the political dynamics surrounding these parties. The Egyptian ASU (Harik 1973) or the Yemeni GPC (Burrowes 1987) were less instruments of interest aggregation or elite recruitment, but rather tools which bound relatively autonomous local elites to the political center. The extent to which these organizations could shape political processes thus remained limited. The Tunisian Destour (Moore 1965) or the Syrian Ba’th (Hinnebusch 2002), on the other hand, possessed considerable institutional strength. These parties not only dominated parliamentary politics, but also played significant roles in other areas at least at some point in their development.

Differences in institutional strength were thrown into stark relief during a first wave of liberalization when many regimes in the Arab World opened up their formal political systems to controlled competition. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, Egypt introduced multipartyism (1979), followed by Tunisia (1987), Algeria (1989), and Yemen (1990). In all of these cases, however, the formal (re-)introduction of multiparty politics did not spell the end of regime control over the electoral arena. Rather, this first wave of liberalization generally marked a transition from single party systems to hegemonic party dominance (Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2006). The degree to which former single parties actually controlled electoral politics varied considerably. While in Syria and Tunisia, formal rules guaranteed the respective parties almost complete control and party discipline was enforced, in Egypt and Yemen, the hegemonic ruling parties saw significant amounts of intra-party competition.

A second wave of change occurred in the wake of the 2011 uprisings. Hegemonic parties were outlawed and formally dissolved in Egypt¹ and Tunisia;² in Yemen, the GPC split into competing factions aligned with different sides in the civil war,³ while in Syria, the monopoly of the Ba‘th party was formally abolished in a constitutional amendment in 2012.⁴ The ongoing political struggle in Algeria might yet lead to the demise of the FLN as well. Ostensibly, the Arab Spring seems to have brought the era of Arab single parties to an end. To what extent the dissolution of single parties also changed the composition of political elites, however, remains an open question.

This chapter traces the emergence, evolution, and dissolution of single party organizations in the post-colonial Middle East and North Africa (MENA), focusing mainly on the contrasting experience of Egypt and Tunisia. The chapter is structured around three junctures: The first section discusses the *emergence* of single party organizations in the region by contrasting the external mobilization of the Tunisian ruling party with the internal mobilization of its counterpart in Egypt (on the concepts, see: Shefter 1994). The following section then traces party *transformation* throughout the first wave of liberalization. It illustrates the top-down, elite-driven nature of the transition to multipartyism and suggests that this helped sustain regime dominance over the electoral arena even in cases where hegemonic parties were institutionally weak. The last empirical section, finally, discusses the *rupture* which came about with the dissolution of former hegemonic parties in Egypt and Tunisia. It shows that, somewhat paradoxically, the influence of old ruling party cadres is more formalized in the context of Tunisia’s democratic transition than in Egypt’s authoritarian regression. The concluding section reflects on the state of the art in the study of Middle Eastern ruling parties and suggests avenues for further research.

Ruling Parties

Interest in ruling parties within the larger subfield of Comparative Politics came in waves. From a modernization theoretical perspective, early analysts saw ruling parties mainly as instruments of national integration in the context of political development (Huntington and Moore 1970; Weiner, LaPalombara, and Binder 1966; Zolberg 1966). Single party organizations, the argument went, were instruments of nation building and as such characteristic of a specific stage of post-colonial political development.

Reflecting the institutionalist turn in the larger discipline as well as in the study of authoritarianism (Art 2012), by contrast, later contributions focused on the relation between

¹ See al-Akhbar, ‘*Hakm tārikhī nihā’ī li-idāriya al-‘āliya hall al-hizb al-watani al-dīmuqrātī wa i’āda amwalihi li-l-dawla*’ (Historical Ruling by the Supreme Administrative Court on Dissolution of NDP and Return of Its Funds to the State), 16 April 2011.

² Leaders, ‘Le Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique dessous,’ 9 March 2011.

³ See al-Araby al-Jadid, ‘*Al-mu’tammar al-yamani yanqasim rasmiyan: ra’īs jadīd bi-ishrāf al-huthiyyūn*’ (The Yemeni Congress Is Officially Divided: A New President Under the Supervision of the Houthis), 8 January 2018.

⁴ Given the escalating civil war in Syria, it is hard to disagree with a headline in the pan-Arab (and Saudi-funded) daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* which read “Syria Begins Parliamentary Elections Today... And Nobody Cares.” See al-Sharq al-Awsat, ‘*Sūryā tabda’u al-intikhabāt al-barlamāniyya al-yaum... wa lā aḥad yahtamū*’ (Syria Begins Parliamentary Elections Today... And Nobody Cares), 7 May 2012.

ruling parties and authoritarian durability. Building on Geddes' (1999) original intuition, scholars such as Lisa Blaydes (2011), Jason Brownlee (2007), Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2012) and Beatriz Magaloni (2006, 2008) have shown how the presence of ruling parties widens actors' time horizons and makes them less likely to defect from the regime in the face of immediate losses. By forming a political party, the argument goes, the dictator transfers some of his discretionary power over access to spoils and offices to the party. Given this partial institutionalization of access to power, political elites, in turn, have reason to believe that exclusion from such access will be only temporary and that continued loyalty is preferable to immediate defection. In other words, ruling parties perform important functions of elite management in authoritarian regimes (see especially the formal elaboration of this dynamic in Magaloni 2008). This basic argument structured the study of ruling parties in the MENA up to the Arab Spring.

The uprisings of 2011 seemed to contradict such expectations. In Egypt and Tunisia, presidents were overthrown despite their reliance on ruling parties; in Syria and Yemen, the presence of a ruling party did not prevent civil war onset. What is more, ruling parties were conspicuous mainly by their absence throughout these regime crises. These experiences thus remind us that institutions do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they emerge from concrete historical situations and therefore to some extent reflect the constellation of forces which give rise to particular institutional forms (Slater 2010).

While institutionalist scholarship has focused on institutional effects, it has failed to produce comparably strong explanations for the origin of institutions. To quote Benjamin Smith, we "lack an explanation for how powerful authoritarian regimes come into being in the first place since institutions are taken as given. Missing from the study of authoritarianism is a causal account linking origins to institutions and institutions to outcomes, that is, a theory of how the origins of regimes shape their long-term prospects for survival" (Smith 2005, 421).

The origin of ruling parties matters, not least because it shapes their institutional strength. Smith, for example, goes on to suggest that strong parties only emerge against opposition and in the absence of easy access to rents (Smith 2005); similarly, Levitsky and Way (2012) have suggested that experiences of violent struggle forge cohesive party organizations. More generally, such arguments reflect the difference between external and internal mobilization in the emergence of party organizations which has been noted by Martin Shefter (1994). Describing the impact of external mobilization on the characteristics of political party organization in the U.S., Shefter argues that "the more 'external' the circumstances of the party's origin—the fewer the allies it had within the preexisting regime, the greater the social and ideological distance between the party's founders and that regime, the greater the resistance the party is compelled to overcome in order to gain power—the less likely it is that the party will decay into a patronage machine after it does come to power" (Shefter 1994, 32).

This dynamic captures the essence of single-party emergence in the post-independence MENA: Where parties emerged from more or less protracted anti-colonial or domestic political conflict—as in the cases of Algeria, Iraq, Syria, and Tunisia—party organizations developed into relatively strong institutions; where, on the other hand, parties were formed to prop up existing regimes—as was the case in Egypt and Yemen—party organizations

remained weak. The following section illustrates this dynamic by focusing on a comparison of ruling party emergence in Tunisia and Egypt.

Emergence: Anti-Colonial Struggle and the Origin of Single Parties in Tunisia and Egypt

Throughout their post-independence history, the political regimes of Egypt and Tunisia both to some extent relied on ruling parties to control political processes. The Tunisian Neo-Destour and its successor parties—most notably the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD)—and the Egyptian Arabic Socialist Union and its successor, the National Democratic Party (NDP), dominated the political scene in their countries for about 50 years, first as formal single parties, and later as hegemonic parties under the conditions of heavily controlled multipartyism. This is reflective of a more general trajectory which was replicated in other Arab republics as well.

Yet, similarities notwithstanding, ruling party organizations showed a number of crucial differences as well. In a nutshell, while some parties were instruments of elite recruitment and control, others mainly served to bind locally influential elites to the political center but had little independent institutional power. The Tunisian Neo-Destour represents the first part, while the Egyptian ASU exemplifies the second. This difference reflects the fact that the Neo-Destour was mobilized externally during the anticolonial struggle, while the ASU was mobilized internally in a top-down fashion after the 1952 coup in Egypt. While the Neo-Destour thus developed a strong organizational structure and deep roots in the social and political landscape of the country, its Egyptian counterpart never developed a comparable level of penetration.

The original Destour Party was founded in 1920. Though the Destour was the leading force in the Tunisian nationalist movement, its initially elitist orientation prevented it from linking its political agenda to growing social and economic grievances in the country. This is especially visible in the Destour's failure to maintain links with the first nationalist Tunisian labor union that broke away from the existing French dominated union in 1924. Initially, the Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (CGTT) was founded with the active involvement of Destour members, but before long the relationship soured over the CGTT's confrontational stance and the Destour officially distanced itself from the union which was shut down by the authorities less than a year after its foundation (Alexander 1996, 72; Anderson 1986, 164–65).

Worsening economic conditions in the context of the global recession of the 1920s and 1930s were one factor behind the emergence of a split within the nationalist movement (Moore 1964, 73; Nouschi 1970) and the foundation of the Neo-Destour. In contrast to its mother organization, the Neo-Destour explicitly aimed at mobilizing the rural hinterlands, relying on a mixture of preexisting networks, service provision, and organizational strategies (Anderson 1986, 167–77) and cooperated extensively with urban-based 'national' organizations such as the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (*al-Ittiḥād al-ʿĀmm al-Tūnisī li-l-Shughl*, UGTT) which had succeeded the CGTT. The Neo-Destour thus "appealed mainly to the new middle classes rather than to the Old Destour's broad-based but entirely traditional elite. This difference helps to explain the success of the Neo-Destour, for socially

and politically the newer classes, created but not compromised by the colonial situation, were more prepared to spearhead political change” (Moore 1964, 81).

The Neo-Destour subsequently became the dominant political force in the Tunisian nationalist movement and led the resistance against the French. This role was reflected in membership figures: The Neo-Destour counted 100,000 in 1954, 325,000 in 1955, and 600,000 in 1957; (Moore 1962, 467; Rudebeck 1969, 33 and 141). With Tunisia’s population reaching five million only in 1970 this still reflected an organizational density of more than 10 percent of the population at the time of independence. Moreover, the Neo-Destour Party commanded a range of so-called national organizations that organized different social interests and bound them to the party in a corporatist arrangement, most notably the UGTT, the country’s powerful trade union, but also the Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie, du Commerce et de l’Artisanat (*al-Ittīhād al-Tūnisī li-l-Ṣanā‘a wa-l-Tujjāra wa-l-Ṣanā‘āt al-Taqlīdiyya*, UTICA), the main employer’s association (Bellin 2002). Taken together, reflecting its origin in the anticolonial struggle, the Neo-Destour developed into a relatively strong organization which dominated political life in the country for more than half a century.

Party development in Egypt followed a different path. The rough equivalent to the Tunisian Destour party was the Wafd (delegation) party. The Wafd emerged from the 1919 revolution and remained the main organizational expression of the Egyptian movement against British colonialism until the 1952 coup (Deeb 1979; Reid 1980). The social coalition backing the Wafd included traditional elite sectors such as large and medium landholders who, by virtue of their control over the peasantry, furnished the party with rural mobilization potential (Deeb 1979, 154), along with more progressively oriented forces such as an emerging group of national capitalists (Davis 1983) and urban members of the *effendiyya* such as students, professionals, and government employees (Abdalla 2009, 18; Botman 1991, 56 and 87–89). Held together by their common opposition against the British, this cross-class coalition dominated pre-independence Egyptian politics.

While the Wafd continued to dominate electoral politics due to its control of the rural electorate, it progressively lost appeal in the politicized urban strata to extra-parliamentary challengers throughout the late 1930s and 1940s. By the end of World War II, this loss of influence became blatant in the violent uprisings of spring 1946 that could neither be controlled nor contained by the Wafd. Moreover, as a result of the palace incident of 1942 in which a Wafd-led government was imposed on the Egyptian king by the force of British tanks, the Wafd lost its credibility as a champion of Egyptian nationalism (Gordon 1989).

This opened the way for radical challengers to seize power through the military. The party which had been at the forefront of the Egyptian nationalist movement for more than three decades thus did not develop into an instrument of regime formation. Instead, the Free Officers who took power through a military coup in 1952 dissolved all existing political parties, including the Wafd, and tried to channel political support through a succession of single party organizations in which the social groups that profited from the regime’s development policies constituted the dominant forces (Harik 1973).

The first of these attempts was the Liberation Rally (*Hay‘a al-Taḥrīr*, LR) active between 1953 and 1958, followed by the National Union (*al-Ittihad al-Qawmi*, NU) in the context of union with Syria in the United Arab Republic (UAR) between 1958 and 1961, and the Arab

Socialist Union (*al-Ittihad al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki*, ASU) after 1961. These organizations did not function as tools for the mobilization of support but “served mostly to bind locally influential people to the regime, and to prevent Nasser’s opponents from running for office” (Harik 1973, 86). As Mark Cooper suggested (1982, 32), “in practice, discipline at the elite level never originated in the party and discipline at the mass level never flowed through the party. The elite was disciplined by Presidential appointment and dismissal; the masses were disciplined by the police.” Reflecting their emergence from top-down attempts at institution building, Egyptian single parties thus never developed strong organizational structures or institutional clout. This also influenced the form of electoral control which emerged under the new conditions of multipartyism and hegemonic party politics.

Transformation: From Single to Hegemonic Parties

The emergence of multipartyism in the MENA was largely an elite-driven process as several countries dissolved former single parties as part of larger dynamics of political and economic reform. Two sets of factors shaped this process and the emerging party systems: As constitutional or legal frameworks protecting the leading role of single parties were removed, competing parties often emerged from among former members of the single party; secondly, significant differences in institutional systems and the strength of party organizations combined to create distinct party systems and electoral dynamics in each country undergoing reform.

Egypt was the first country to open up to multipartyism. In 1974, President Anwar al-Sadat endorsed the concept of different platforms (referred to as *manabir*, pulpits) within the ASU. This led to an explosion of political pluralism within the single party and, in late 1975, 43 such platforms had emerged and applied for official recognition (Beattie 2000, 190). In March 1976 of the 43 original platforms proposed, three were authorized to operate within the ASU, including a platform of the Left, one of the Center, and one of the Right. The rightist platform was led by Mustafa Kamal Murad, a Free Officer and personal friend of Sadat, and was generally supportive of the President’s policies. From this grouping, the Liberal Socialist Party (*Hizb al-Ahrar al-Ishtiraki*) was to emerge. To the left, a platform under the leadership of Free Officer Khalid Muhi al-Din was authorized, that would later develop to become the National Progressive Unionist Party (*Hizb al-Tagammu' al-Watani al-Taqaddumi al-Wahdawi*, or *Tagammu'*, in short). The political center was organized in the Egyptian Arab Socialist Organization that later was transformed in several stages first into the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party (*Hizb Masr al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki*) under the leadership of Prime Minister Mamduh Salim (Beattie 2000, 192–96), and then into the National Democratic Party (*Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati*, NDP). These former parts of the ASU formed the nucleus of Egypt’s party system up to 2011.

The emergence of multipartyism in Tunisia followed a similar pattern. Ben Ali’s constitutional coup in 1987 was initially greeted with high expectations in terms of political reforms (Angrist 1999; Erdle 2010 Chapter 3). A National Pact in 1988 charted the contours of Tunisia’s political and economic development and included members of the opposition and even unofficial representatives of the Islamist movement; the ruling party was renamed

Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (*al-Tajammu' al-Dusturi al-Dimuqrati*, RCD) and by the 1994 elections there were six legal opposition parties.

The core of the party-political landscape in Tunisia emerged from splits within the Neo-Destour (see Camau and Geisser 2003 Chapter 6). These successive splits also represented a narrowing of the regime's social constituency: The first such breakaway from the single party was the Mouvement d'Unité Populaire (*Haraka al-Wahda al-Sha'biyya*, MUP) that split in 1973. Founded by Ahmad bin Salah, the main architect of Tunisia's radical phase in the 1960s, the MUP gathered supporters of socialist policies and collectivization and could draw on support in the UGTT, although it never developed into a mass party. After an internal split in 1977, a moderate faction of the MUP was officially recognized in 1983 and became a loyal opposition party under the name of Parti d'Unité Populaire (*Hizb al-Wahda al-Sha'biyya*, PUP). Another opposition party, the Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes (*Haraka al-Dimuqratiyyin al-Ishtirakiyyin*, MDS), originated in a group of Neo-Destour elites around Ahmad al-Mistiri in 1978. Representing a moderate leftist current, the MDS became the strongest loyal opposition party under Ben Ali and a split from the MDS in 1992 led to the establishment of the Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (*al-Takattul al-Dimuqrati min ajli-l-'Amal wa-l-Hurriyat*, FDTL). Together with two communist parties and a number of smaller loyal opposition parties, notably the Union Démocratique Unioniste (*al-Ittihad al-Dimuqrati al-Wahdawi*, UDU) and the Parti Social Libéral (*Hizb al-Ijtima'i al-Tahriri*, PSL), these groups constituted the main players on the formal political scene in Tunisia under Ben Ali.

The similarities between the Egyptian and Tunisian experiences of liberalization notwithstanding, the two hegemonic parties differed quite significantly—not least in terms of institutional strength. Having experienced some organizational decline in the later Bourguiba-era, under President Ben Ali the newly re-branded RCD saw a revival and counted 7,800 party cells as well as around 2 million members (Angrist 1999, 93–94; Erdle 2004, 217), numbers which are quite impressive for a country of about 10 million inhabitants even if the degree of active participation might well be questioned (Hibou 2011). Moreover, the RCD exerted considerable control over its members. According to Michelle Angrist (1999, 99), “some RCD deputies have reportedly described themselves as ‘prisoners’; others routinely refer to them as such. RCD deputies sometimes ask opposition colleagues to raise criticisms they themselves do not feel free to voice. [...] The fear is that deputies perceived by the RCD leadership as disloyal or undisciplined will not be proposed as candidates in subsequent legislative elections.”⁵

Now, by way of contrast, consider the Egyptian NDP. Before the uprising of 2011, the NDP officially claimed a nationwide membership of some 1.9 million. While this is slightly less than the Tunisian RCD's membership even in absolute terms, the difference is really much more pronounced given the fact that Egypt with its 80 million inhabitants is about eight times the size of Tunisia. NDP members were organized on three administrative levels, the unit (*qism*), district (*markaz*), and governorate (*muhafaza*), with elections being held at each level and top-down relationships prevailing among the levels (Collombier 2007, 109). Despite

⁵ In an interview with the author, a former RCD cadre in the Tunis-area confirmed that party discipline was strictly enforced; interview with former RCD cadre, Tunis, 29 September 2012.

these organizational structures, observers agree that the party was actually “structured along very simplistic lines” (Kassem 1999, 77), that it was the “government’s party” rather than the “governing party” (Soliman 2006, 249), and that intra-party procedures lacked efficiency.⁶

Moreover, in terms of the party’s control over its official representatives, the contrast to Tunisia could hardly be more pronounced: Most importantly, the party could not enforce its selection of candidates against its own membership and thus did not control access to office. Ever since the 1990 elections, the party’s official standard bearers were regularly challenged by independent candidates who, once elected to parliament, joined the NDP’s caucus (see Koehler 2008, 2018; Zahran 2006 on this phenomenon). Despite its control over parliament, the NDP did thus not really control electoral processes in Egypt. In fact, the share of seats secured by the party’s official candidates reached an all-time low of 33 percent in the 2005 elections (Koehler 2018, 104). In contrast to the Tunisian RCD, the potential of not being re-nominated as the official party candidate did little to discipline NDP members.

Despite these differences in the degree of electoral control, the RCD and NDP both dominated their respective legislatures. In the Tunisian case, this was guaranteed partially through a rather unusual electoral system in which a (changing) majority of seats in parliament was contested in a majoritarian tier, while a smaller number of parliamentarians was elected through proportional representation. Thus, in 1994, the RCD finished with 98 percent of the vote, taking all 144 seats in the majoritarian tier while four of the six legal opposition parties were collectively awarded 19 seats via the proportional tier. The proportion of opposition deputies was increased after the 1999 elections due to a change in the electoral law that brought the number of seats distributed via the proportional tier up to 34, or about 19 percent of the 182 seats. All 148 majoritarian seats were again swept by the RCD, while this time five opposition parties were accorded a share of the 34 proportional seats. The same pattern was repeated in 2004 when the RCD claimed 87 percent of the vote and all majoritarian seats. The number of opposition representatives increased to an all-time high of 53 (24 percent) in the last elections before the revolution held in 2009. As these patterns clearly demonstrate, elections in Tunisia were firmly controlled by the RCD. Not only was the number of oppositional deputies a direct function of the electoral laws rather than of electoral competition, but given the closed list electoral system applied in the majoritarian tier the party also retained a close grip on candidate nomination (see Angrist 1999).

In Egypt, on the other hand, legislative dominance was produced informally by re-integrating NDP members who had run and won against the official party candidates into the hegemonic party’s parliamentary caucus. Institutionally, the re-introduction of an electoral system based on individual candidacy in 1990 was a precondition for this form of electoral competition and from the 1990 elections onwards, the number of NDP-affiliated candidates per seat increased steadily, with party members who had unsuccessfully attempted to secure nomination as the official candidate running as independent (or rather ‘NDPendent’) candidates instead and rejoining the party’s parliamentary bloc once they had been successful. In 1990, 95 NDP members of parliament (22 percent of NDP deputies) were

⁶ Author’s personal interview with Muhammad Kamal, member of the NDP’s influential Policies’ Secretariat, Cairo, October 2005.

elected this way; these numbers grew to 100 (or 23 percent) in 1995, 218 (or 56 percent) in 2000, and 170 (or 53 percent) in 2005 (Koehler 2008); in the 2010 elections the party even gave up all pretense of controlling its own members and nominated several official candidates per seat.⁷ This system of competitive clientelism gave political entrepreneurs an opportunity to translate financial and social capital into limited political influence and, more importantly, opportunities for further self-enrichment. Given these incentives, elite competition for inclusion into the regime's networks reproduced the dominant status of Egypt's NDP despite the introduction of party pluralism but simultaneously made sure that the party remained weak institutionally.

Rupture: The Dissolution of Single Parties

The regime crises which shook the MENA in 2011 also led to the emergence of new institutional forms (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2015). In Egypt and Tunisia, the 2011 regime crises spelled the end of the era of single-party politics. The former hegemonic parties were officially disbanded and no equally dominant successor parties have emerged—even though *Nidaa Tounes* (Call for Tunisia) emerged as a standard bearer of former Destourian elites in Tunisia since 2014 and individual *feloul* (remnants) gained access to the Egyptian legislature in 2015.

Egypt and Tunisia took similar steps to reform their formal political arena after the fall of Mubarak and Ben Ali. The two formerly hegemonic parties were dissolved in April and March 2011, respectively (see Debbich 2011a; Koehler 2013), new laws regulating the foundation of political parties and electoral procedures were promulgated, and a host of both pre-existing and new political parties were legalized. Within a matter of weeks from the ouster of Mubarak and Ben Ali, the party political landscapes of Egypt and Tunisia had been fundamentally altered (see Allal & Geisser 2011; Debbich 2011a; Ferjani 2012 on Tunisia; Koehler 2013 on Egypt).

Of course, the formal dissolution of party organizations did not remove the elite networks which had undergirded ruling party hegemony. In Tunisia, former RCD office holders were officially banned from running in the first post-revolutionary elections by law.⁸ Despite this, nine post-RCD parties participated in the October 23, 2011 elections to the constituent assembly (Heurtaux 2018, 108). Most notably, the National Destourian Initiative (*al-Mubadara al-Wataniyya al-Dusturiyya*), a party led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamel Morjane, won five seats in the assembly. In Egypt, concerns voiced by some over a massive return of former NDP cadres in the 2011/12 parliamentary elections proved unfounded as the assembly was swept by Islamist candidates affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (*Hizb al-Hurriya wa-l-'Adala*, FJP) or the Salafist *Hizb al-Nur* (Party of Light), respectively (Koehler 2013).

Over the following years, however, the initial marginalization of former regime supporters began to weaken in both countries. In Tunisia, to begin with, the emergence of Nidaa Tounes

⁷ For 2010 see the lists of NDP-candidates published by al-Masry al-Yaum, (<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/taxonomy/term/59620>).

⁸ Article 15 of law 2011-35 of 2011.

as the main competitor against the Islamists and the fact that Nidaa won the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, led to the re-emergence of former RCD cadres on the highest levels of Tunisian politics. Most notably, the current Tunisian president, Béji Caïd Essebsi, is a former minister under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali; moreover, a government reshuffle in September 2018 led to a record number of 18 ministers who had been affiliated with the old regime.⁹ More generally, and at least partially as an effect of the politics of reconciliation between Nidaa Tounis and the Islamist al-Nahdha, “post-Ben Ali Tunisia is characterized by the near-absence of a politics of disqualification of agents of the Ben Ali regime” (Gobe 2018, 155).

In Egypt, on the other hand, the recycling of political elites has been less formal. Despite the fact that the backbone of the military-led regime returned in the 2013 coup (Holmes and Koehler 2018), this has not led to a formal revival of the NDP—or indeed of any successor party. Former NDP members, however, have gained representation in parliament as independents, or on the lists of a number of different political parties. In the run-up to the last elections held in 2015, Mubarak-era politician and former prime minister Kamal al-Ganzouri, moreover, unsuccessfully tried to bring together different pro-regime forces, many of which drew support from former NDP-members. Following President al-Sisi’s direct call on party leaders to unite in a single coalition,¹⁰ such a group finally emerged in the form of the Fi Hub Masr (For the Love of Egypt) coalition which brought together a wide range of pro-military groups to contest the 2015 elections. Having won the elections, however, the coalition fell apart (Koehler 2016). Despite this and similar attempts, a coherent pro-regime political force has yet to emerge in Egypt after 2013.

Conclusion

The study of ruling parties in Arab republics has gone through different stages. While early studies were mainly interested in the contribution of party organizations to political development (Binder 1966; Huntington and Moore 1970; Moore 1965; Weiner, LaPalombara, and Binder 1966), the focus later shifted to understanding the effects of ruling parties, in particular in terms of authoritarian regime stability (Blaydes 2011; Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2006; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Connecting these two perspectives, moreover, some scholars have tried to understand the historical emergence of ruling parties as well as their organizational characteristics (Smith 2005).

In this chapter, I have examined the origin, transformation, and dissolution of ruling parties in Arab republics by focusing on the experiences of Egypt and Tunisia. Needless to say, the trajectories examined here—albeit illustrating larger trends—do not perfectly reflect of other cases. Idiosyncratic features inevitably produce variations in the concrete historical development of ruling parties in other cases. There are also commonalities, however. One of these commonalities is how the conditions of party emergence structures their

⁹ See Le Monde, ‘En Tunisie, les anciens bénalistes passent de l’ombre à la lumière,’ 29 January 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/01/29/en-tunisie-les-anciens-benalistes-passent-de-l-ombre-a-la-lumiere_5248856_3212.html.

¹⁰ Daily News Egypt, ‘Al-Sisi calls for ‘1 political coalition’ in meeting with political party leaders,’ January 13, 2015.

organizational characteristics, with strong parties only emerging from situations of conflict and struggle. A second commonality concerns the transformation of single into hegemonic parties. Where such a transformation occurred in Arab republics, it was driven by top-down processes of institution building, not by bottom-up initiatives. Given the strongly controlled nature of these reform periods, it cannot come as a surprise that party dominance was reproduced under new conditions. The rupture of the Arab Spring might be a different case. While it is still too early to tell what the final result of this process might be, it is clear that the regime crises which shook many Arab republics have also fundamentally disrupted the model of ruling party dominance.

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