

Is there a Morsi Effect? An Overview of Political Islamists' Electoral Performances Since 2013

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Abstract: The 2013 coup in Egypt, ending the presidency of Muhammad Morsi after a chaotic year in power, was seen by many to symbolize the weakening of Islamist parties' political appeal in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. However, what has been the actual electoral effect on Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties? This article takes a closer look at parliamentary elections involving Brotherhood-affiliated political parties that have taken place in the region since 2013. In looking at these elections, we see that there has been no apparent "Morsi effect" which has negatively affected Brotherhood-affiliated parties post-2013. Rather, local political contexts and factors in these countries appear to have been the driving forces behind the performance of Brotherhood-affiliated parties.

Introduction

Since the July 2013 military coup in Egypt that resulted in the end of Muhammad Morsi's presidency, there have been wide-ranging discussions about the future of Islamist political parties in the MENA region.¹ The fallout of Morsi's ouster has placed the spotlight on the Muslim Brotherhood's future political prospects not only in Egypt, but in other countries with Brotherhood-affiliated political parties. Additionally, this conflict, which on the surface appears to be being fought between political actors and the military in Egypt, is also part of a wider regional competition for political power and influence. On one side, states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have sought to ban or, at the very least, severely limit the political strength of Brotherhood-affiliated organizations. Conversely, countries such as Qatar and Turkey are seen as supportive of Brotherhood-affiliated groups and are open competitors to Saudi Arabia and the UAE for regional influence. This has resulted, in the case of Qatar, in political tensions with other Gulf states and in large part has led to the current economic and political blockade of Qatar by a number of Arab countries.

The competition for regional influence and power among Gulf countries as well as the long-term consequences of the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have understandably been a primary focus of observers of the region. However, this article will instead focus on the direct implications, if any, that the events in Egypt may have had on the electoral performance and prospects of other Islamist political parties in the MENA region, particularly those parties tied to Brotherhood branches or which have taken their founding principles from the Muslim Brotherhood's school of political thought.² At first glance, there may be a tendency to see the chaotic end of Muhammad Morsi as having a

direct detrimental effect, or “Morsi effect,” on the electoral prospects of other Brotherhood-affiliated Islamist parties in the MENA region. This assumption requires closer examination. In looking at these Brotherhood-affiliated groups, a brief summary of each party’s history will be provided along with some context for each party’s political performance in post-2013 parliamentary elections.

Even though there is a tendency to group political parties whose origins are associated with Muslim Brotherhood or which were started as Brotherhood branches, each party should be studied and understood with reference to these parties’ particular political, economic, and social contexts. Each political party discussed in this article has its own distinct history, electoral strategies, and political environment that has shaped their individual character over the last several decades. Moreover, political parties in the MENA region with origins in Brotherhood political thought have differing relationships to other Brotherhood organizations. For instance, Hadas in Kuwait has its founding roots in Muslim Brotherhood thought. However, the party broke off its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait³ due to their disagreement over the U.S. intervention to end this occupation. Another example is the Moroccan Justice and Development Party, whose founders were informed by Muslim Brotherhood political thought, even though some of its leaders have recently denied any close connections to the Brotherhood.⁴ While it is important to discuss these parties within the wider framework of examining how Sunni Islamist parties, and particularly those with roots in Brotherhood political thought, have performed in elections since 2013, each context must be examined in light of a particular party’s independence in dealing with local and national concerns and issues.

The first section of this article will examine seven countries in the MENA region (Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) that have conducted parliamentary elections since 2013 in which Brotherhood-affiliated parties participated. These post-2013 electoral results will be compared with the past electoral performances of Brotherhood-affiliated parties in these countries. The focus of this section is not to make any definitive claims about how the events in Egypt have influenced particular elections in the region, but to study the parliamentary election results in these countries to determine if any overarching trends or patterns are evident. The second section of this article will then take a closer look at the Tunisian and Moroccan contexts and discuss what type of effect the events in Egypt may have had in the region. The final section will then discuss the future electoral prospects of Brotherhood-affiliated political parties in light of their electoral performances since 2013.

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Parliamentary Elections Before and After 2013: Country Overviews

In order to better analyze the electoral results of Brotherhood-affiliated parties, it is necessary to compare these parties’ pre-2013 electoral performances with their performances post-2013. It is important to note that the political contexts in which each party operates differ widely depending on many different factors. In providing some



structure to understanding how these parties have performed since 2013, it is helpful to divide them into categories based on the political environment in which they exist. The first grouping will examine Morocco and Tunisia, countries where Brotherhood-affiliated parties have represented, at some point, the largest parliamentary bloc in parliament and where it should be easiest to detect some sort of detrimental effect stemming from the events in Egypt. The second grouping will look at Jordan, Kuwait, and Mauritania, where Brotherhood-affiliated parties are one of the larger parliamentary blocs but are nonetheless relatively small compared to the total number of parliamentary seats. The third and final grouping will examine Iraq and Lebanon, where Brotherhood-affiliated parties operate in sectarian contexts and have mostly been overshadowed by other political parties.

1) Parliamentary Powers: The Cases of Morocco and Tunisia

Morocco

The core political tenets of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (JDP) have their origins in the Muslim Brotherhood's political thought. However, as stated in the introduction, party leaders have disputed the connection and have instead pointed out that while they share common, broad ideological similarities and influences from writers associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, they deny any further relationship with the Brotherhood. The official founding of the JDP occurred in 1998, although its ideological roots can be traced back to the Islamic movements formed in the early 1990s and led by future JDP leaders.⁵ The JDP slowly became a political force, culminating in winning the most seats of any political party in the 2011 parliamentary elections.

The JDP has been involved in a number of elections since its inception in 1998.

However, for the purposes of this article, the results of the 2011 and 2016 parliamentary elections will be the focal point, as these elections serve as important data points for the trajectory of the party in the post-2013 MENA region. The 2011 parliamentary elections witnessed a strong showing for the JDP when it won a total of 107 seats out of the 395 available parliamentary seats.⁶ As a result, the JDP, along with two other non-Islamist parties, formed the majority bloc in parliament with JDP leader Abdelilah Benkirane becoming Prime Minister.

Even after the events that led to the downfall of Morsi in Egypt, the 2016 parliamentary elections witnessed even a stronger showing from the JDP than in the previous election, with the party going on to win 125 parliamentary seats.⁷ This strong electoral showing, however, brought several challenges in the forming of a government. In all, Prime Minister Benkirane was unable to form a coalition government, with King Muhammad VI intervening and tapping JDP member Saad Eddine Othmani with the task of forming a government and Othmani eventually becoming Prime Minister.⁸ While Othmani is a member of the JDP, King Muhammad VI has both demonstrated his power in installing a Prime Minister more to his liking as well as fueling rifts within the JDP. The competition among different factions of the JDP may adversely affect the party in the future, especially considering the attempts by the King to weaken the party's political power and prospects.

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Tunisia

The Tunisian Ennahda Party traces its roots to the early 1970s, although it was not officially a political party in the country until 2011.⁹ The overthrow of longtime dictator Zine al-Abidine Bin Ali in January 2011, was a result of mass protests in Tunisia, marked the beginning of events widely known as the Arab Spring. This string of events abruptly changed the political landscape of the country and region. Ennahda, having built a strong organizational base in the years prior to 2011, was poised to play a major political role in the country's future.

There have been two post-Bin Ali parliamentary elections in Tunisia occurring in 2011 and 2014 respectively. The 2011 election results demonstrated Ennahda's strong organizational prowess when it won 90 of the 217 parliamentary seats, thus becoming the biggest party bloc in parliament.¹⁰ This allowed Ennahda to form an interim government with two non-Islamist political parties and to control important posts such as the prime ministry and also exert influence on the democratic transition of the country. However, in the years that followed, political tensions rose, economic and political progress was slow, and the assassination of leftist politicians who were Ennahda's political opponents led to a political crisis in the country. Moreover, political tensions surrounding the rule of Muhammad Morsi in Egypt furthered the perception that Islamist parties could not effectively lead a government, a perception that contributed to Ennahda's calculations in trying to find a peaceful and workable political solution to the crisis. An agreement between major political forces which stemmed from months of dialogue beginning in the fall of 2013 (sponsored by the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet), allowed for new parliamentary and presidential elections as well as the writing of a new constitution to avoid further political

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deterioration and perhaps widespread violence.

The 2014 parliamentary elections saw Ennahda's number of parliamentary seats reduced to 69, where it was the second largest party bloc in the Tunisian parliament.¹¹ Ennahda then entered into a coalition government with Nidaa Tounes, which had won the most parliamentary seats and was seen as Ennahda's strongest rival.¹² However, Ennahda recently announced it would leave this coalition, which appears to be a political calculation to better position itself for the upcoming 2019 parliamentary elections.

2) Represented but Weak: The Cases of Jordan, Kuwait, and Mauritania

Jordan

The political branch of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is called the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and is a relatively recent creation, having been founded in 1992.¹³ The Islamic Action Front has participated in a number of elections since its creation, but has also boycotted several parliamentary elections due to complaints about the Jordanian parliamentary electoral system. The party boycotted the 2010 and 2013 parliamentary elections, arguing that the Jordanian electoral system benefited tribal parties to the detriment of better organized political parties.

In parliamentary elections, there are 110 available seats in the Jordanian parliament and parties are relatively weak in the country. In the 2003 parliamentary elections, the Islamic



Action Front performed well, winning 17 seats.¹⁴ However, the 2007 election was seen as a failure for the IAF when the party won only six parliamentary seats, a result that led to electoral boycotts.¹⁵ After boycotting both the 2010 and 2013 elections due to what it saw as an unfair electoral system, the IAF ran as part of a diverse electoral coalition which included non-Islamist candidates and parties in 2016. This coalition won a total of 15 seats, with the Islamic Action Front being given 10 seats from this total.¹⁶ As a result, the IAF became the largest party-bloc in Jordan even though it accounted for a relatively small share of parliamentary seats.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has witnessed a few notable breakaway groups in recent years, which have now become electoral rivals to the organization's Islamic Action Front. For example, the Zamzam Initiative, officially founded in 2013, was formed by Brotherhood members aligned with the more "moderate" wing of the organization. Candidates associated with the Zamzam faction won a total of five seats, although it is important to note that these winning candidates were non-Islamist members of the electoral list from tribal areas.¹⁷ Another breakaway group calling itself the Muslim Brotherhood Society was officially formed in 2015 and won one seat in the 2016 parliamentary elections.¹⁸ Finally, the al-Wasat Party was founded in 2001 and has since been a competitor to the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁹ By some estimates those aligned with this party won seven parliamentary seats, although the exact number is still up for debate.²⁰

Relative to other political parties in Jordan, Islamist parties performed well in the 2016 parliamentary elections despite the creation of breakaway parties. While the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections may be encouraging for some in

the Muslim Brotherhood, the recent division and splits within the organization present challenges for the Islamic Action Front. Additionally, the Jordanian police forced the closure of the Jordanian Brotherhood's headquarters in 2016, a move viewed by many as aiming to stifle the Brotherhood's political and social outreach, although the IAF still operates legally in the country.²¹ The threat of a restriction or ban of the Jordanian Brotherhood represents another major challenge for the organization and the IAF in the coming years.

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Kuwait

The Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait traces its origins back to the 1950s although its political participation through the Islamic Constitutional Movement, better known by the name Hadas, is relatively new and has only been operational since the 1990s.²² While Hadas has its founding roots in Brotherhood ideology, its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood on an international level was severed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.²³ It should also be noted that discussing the performance of political parties in Kuwait is difficult. This stems from the fact that political parties are technically illegal in Kuwait, so it can be difficult to assign individual parliamentary seats to any one party or group.²⁴ For instance, all winning candidates of the state's 50-seat National Assembly in the 2016 election were labeled as "independents."²⁵ Nonetheless, Hadas is an active political organization in Kuwait and is typically labeled as an "opposition" group.

The electoral history of Hadas in the last decade has been mixed, with members of Hadas running in several elections while boycotting others. Because political parties



are forbidden, governments are unstable, and several parliamentary elections have been called in the last decade, it is at times difficult to precisely assign seats to Hadas members. However, there have been a number of parliamentary elections in the past in which Brotherhood members have participated. For instance, it has been reported that Hadas won six seats in the 2003 parliamentary elections while winning fewer seats consecutively in the 2006, 2008, and 2009 elections.²⁶ Hadas then improved on past electoral performances by winning five parliamentary seats in the February 2012 election.²⁷ Beginning with the second parliamentary election in 2012 and then again in 2013, Hadas and other political groups considered as part of the opposition staged a boycott to protest the move to a new voting system.²⁸ In the latest parliamentary election, held in October 2016, Hadas and other opposition groups performed well. While it is difficult to determine exactly how many Hadas members were elected to parliament, some estimates place Hadas-linked and other Islamist politicians as having secured 12 seats.²⁹

The political environment in which Hadas exists in Kuwait is unique in some respects due to the fact that Kuwait is a Gulf country and an ally of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The existence of Hadas in Kuwait may be tolerated because the party's focus appears to be on internal policies and politics, making the party's existence less controversial outside Kuwait's borders. However, Hadas must also deal with a political environment in Kuwait that has been rather unstable in recent years.³⁰ The constant collapse of governments and call for new elections has created instances where there can be more than one parliamentary election per year.³¹ These conditions, along with the fact that individuals must run as independents, has created a challenging political environment which Hadas must continually navigate.

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Mauritania

The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political group in Mauritania is called the National Assembly for Reform and Development but is mostly recognized by its shortened name Tawassul. This political party has not been widely studied in comparison to the other countries in the MENA region with participatory Islamist parties. This has to do, in part, with the fact that the party was not legalized until 2007, as the Mauritanian government forbade Islamist parties from obtaining legal status.³² However, before 2007 the members of the party had run as independent candidates and some of its members gained electoral experience in this way.³³ It should also be noted that the political system in Mauritania is dominated by the Union for the Republic Party, which is headed by powerful president Muhammad Ould Abdel Aziz. This has resulted in the Union for the Republic Party dominating electoral politics in recent years.

In the short time Tawassul has been an official party, it has seen moderate successes in the two elections since 2013. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, Tawassul managed to win 16 seats in the 147 seat parliament.³⁴ In the 2018 parliamentary elections, Tawassul managed to win 14 seats and is currently the largest opposition party in Mauritania, although its number is dwarfed by the 89 seats held by the Union for the Republic Party.³⁵ The president of Mauritania, Muhammad Ould Abdel Aziz, is a loyal ally of Saudi Arabia and has used strong rhetoric against the Muslim Brotherhood in Mauritania while refusing to differentiate between violent extremists and other Islamists who seek



to participate in elections.³⁶ Moreover, since 2013, there have been government-led efforts to stifle charities with links to the Muslim Brotherhood while also preventing some gatherings of the party.³⁷ Even though the party has the second largest bloc of seats in parliament, its political future is tenuous and may be affected by continuing efforts to marginalize the party.

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3) Brotherhood-Affiliated Parties in Sectarian Contexts: The Cases of Iraq and Lebanon

Iraq

The Iraqi Islamic Party is the Brotherhood-affiliated party in Iraq and was founded in 1960, although its roots in the country can be traced back to 1945.³⁸ It is one of the largest Sunni political movements in Iraq and operates an extensive charity network. During the rule of Saddam Hussein, the party was outlawed and some leaders of the party left the country to control operations from abroad.³⁹ It should also be noted that some party leaders have recently stated that the party is not directly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and have emphasized its independence from the organization, although its relationship with the Brotherhood is unclear in this respect.⁴⁰ Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Islamic Party has oscillated between political participation as part of multi-party coalitions and forgoing electoral competition altogether. There are four elections to discuss in this regard.

Even though the first post-Saddam Hussein election in Iraq was held in 2005, the Iraqi Islamic Party boycotted this election after its demand to postpone elections was not met as well as other concerns stemming from the U.S. presence in Iraq.⁴¹ The party did participate in the 2010 election where it ran as part of the Iraqi Accord Front, a Sunni-oriented political list, which had won 44 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections.⁴² However, in large part due to internal splits and disagreements, this electoral coalition only won a total of six parliamentary seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections.⁴³ In the 2014 election, the Iraqi Islamic Party ran as part of an electoral list called Muttahidoon, which gained a total of 23 seats in parliament, representing an improvement on the results of the Sunni-aligned Iraqi Accord list during the previous election cycle.⁴⁴

Even though it had participated in both the 2010 and 2014 parliamentary elections, the Iraqi Islamic Party announced in February 2018 that it would not participate in the parliamentary elections of that year.⁴⁵ However, individuals who were affiliated with the party or were part of the party themselves were allowed to run.⁴⁶ By some estimates, around 14 individuals affiliated with the party won parliamentary seats.⁴⁷ The 2018 parliamentary elections in Iraq also witnessed a strong showing by political parties with Shia roots, demonstrating the overall strength of these parties.⁴⁸ The Iraqi Islamic Party now faces a number of challenges in charting its future, especially in light of the strength of Shia parties in Iraq and the need to rebuild the

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country structurally and politically. There have also been criticisms leveled against the party and its leaders concerning the party's perceived failures to champion Sunni causes in Iraq and doubts about the abilities of its leaders to make the party a strong political force in the country.⁴⁹ Both the sectarian political context of Iraq and criticism of the party from segments of the Sunni population appear to be the primary challenges the party faces in the future.

Lebanon

The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated group in Lebanon is called the Islamic Group and traces its origins to the 1950s, although it first participated in the electoral system in 1972.⁵⁰ The electoral impact of this group has been marginal in terms of parliamentary seats even though it maintains an active social outreach program. There are two elections to note: the first being in 2009 with the latter in 2018: there was a delay in running elections due to political issues in the country.⁵¹ The political system is divided along sectarian lines and political competition among many parties complicates political co-operation.

The Islamic Group's electoral performance in Lebanon has not been notable and the party has failed to become a major political player in the country. In the 2009 parliamentary election, the party ran as part of the March 14 Alliance.⁵² However, the party only secured one seat as a result of this election and was a marginal player in the coalition.⁵³ In the 2018 elections, the party put forward a disappointing electoral performance where none of the four candidates it ran won a parliamentary seat.⁵⁴ Overall, the 2018 election was a struggle for other Sunni political groups with Prime Minister Saeed Hariri's party performing poorly in the elections.⁵⁵ The primary issue for the Islamic Group's future in Lebanon appears to be how to distinguish itself from other

Sunni political parties and operate in a fractious political environment.

Electoral Results:

JDP Electoral Results in Morocco

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2011 Parliamentary Election	107
2016 Parliamentary Election	125

Ennahda Electoral Results in Tunisia

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2011 Parliamentary Election	90
2014 Parliamentary Election	69

IAF Electoral Results in Jordan

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2003 Parliamentary Election	17
2007 Parliamentary Election	6
2010 Parliamentary Election	Boycotted
2013 Parliamentary Election	Boycotted
2016 Parliamentary Election	10

Hadas Electoral Results in Kuwait

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
First 2012 Parliamentary Election	5
Second 2012 Parliamentary Election	Boycotted
2013 Parliamentary Election	Boycotted
2016 Parliamentary Election	~12 (estimated total includes seats won by Hadas and other Islamists)

Tawassul Electoral Results in Mauritania

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2013 Parliamentary Election	16
2018 Parliamentary Election	14

Iraqi Islamic Party Electoral Results in Iraq

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2010 Parliamentary Election	6 (total includes total seats from the Iraqi Accord Front coalition)
2014 Parliamentary Election	23 (total includes total seats won by the Muttahidoon coalition)
2018 Parliamentary Election	~14 (estimated total)

Islamic Group Party Electoral Results in Lebanon

Parliamentary Election:	Number of Seats Won
2009 Parliamentary Election	1
2018 Parliamentary Election	0

A Tale of Two Political Contexts: The Performance of Ennahda and the Justice and Development Party

A few brief observations concerning these different groups should be made before further examining the Tunisian and Moroccan contexts. First, there is little evidence to suggest that there is much of a concentrated “Morsi effect” superseding other electoral factors in determining the outcomes of post2013- elections. Second, the local political contexts and environments appear to be the primary factors in determining how Brotherhood-affiliated parties performed post2013-. With this in mind, it is important to look more closely at the Moroccan and Tunisian case studies as these would represent perhaps the clearest examples of whether the chaotic and short rule of Morsi in Egypt may have had a negative political effect on other Islamist parties.

Both Morocco and Tunisia have Brotherhood-affiliated parties that have seen electoral successes in the past and appear to be in position to become active political players in the future. As Brotherhood-affiliated parties were in positions of power to varying degrees in both Tunisia and Morocco during the time of Morsi, it is conceivable that the reverberations of his overthrow and the political tension and polarization that marked his time in power would be felt most strongly here. For example, it could be that citizens in Morocco and Tunisia would have seen the turbulent rule of Morsi in Egypt as an indictment of Islamist parties in their own countries. With this in mind, further discussion about Tunisian and Moroccan political contexts should be undertaken with a focus on determining why the Tunisian Ennahda Party lost some ground in its post2013- parliamentary election while the Moroccan JDP performed better in the post2013- parliamentary election even despite the events that transpired in Egypt.

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The political environments of post-Arab Spring Tunisia and Egypt were similar in some respects, with both countries transitioning from longtime authoritarian rule while also having well-organized Islamist political parties ready to capitalize on a newly-freed political environment. Throughout the first few years of the post-Arab Spring democratic transition in Egypt and Tunisia, both parties won impressive electoral victories. However, the euphoria of victory for



both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia quickly morphed into difficulties in dealing with challenges of governing while attempting to improve the economic and security situation of their respective countries.

Numerous events contributed to the increasing political, economic and security instability in Tunisia, as it became clear that political tensions, lack of economic progress, and the high-profile assassinations of leftist politicians would doom Ennahda's first political experiences in the country. A fear that Islamist parties were attempting to control the political future of MENA region countries may have factored into the actions of some activists and voters in Tunisia. However, there was no shortage of internal grievances from Tunisians, ranging from the lack of economic development in general to Ennahda's political shortcomings in particular.⁵⁶

In light of what happened in Egypt, Ennahda appears to have made a calculated move aimed at long-term political survival in finding a workable political solution between Tunisian political powers, especially considering the string of political missteps that befell the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This undoubtedly spurred the agreement of the dialogue of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet beginning in the fall of 2013 that helped the country avoid the political turmoil that had occurred in Egypt. Ennahda's decision to enter into a grand coalition of sorts with Nidaa Tounes and the signing of the Carthage Agreement in July 2016 also demonstrated that the party and its leaders were willing to make pragmatic political compromises. However, as some have pointed out, the government coalition was only between large and powerful political parties and did not address the political marginalization of smaller parties, thus making the goal of political inclusion more difficult.⁵⁷

In the last few years Ennahda has attempted

a political reorientation and rebranding arguing that the party should not be labelled as an Islamist political party. For example, in 2016, Ennahda's leader Rachid al-Ghannouchi announced that the party should not be labeled as Islamist but rather should be considered "Muslim Democrats," who champion democracy, stating "We are leaving political Islam and entering democratic Islam."⁵⁸ Al-Ghannouchi also argued that religious and political activities should be separated.⁵⁹ These much-publicized changes appear to be an attempt to distance the party from the political turmoil of other Islamist parties, specifically in Egypt, and inaugurate a new chapter in the party's political history by demonstrating it is open to all segments of Tunisian society.

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While the Carthage Agreement and parliamentary coalition with Nidaa Tounes may have averted disaster for Tunisia, there are still monumental challenges in front of the ruling coalition, especially concerning the economy. With Nidaa Tounes as the largest parliamentary bloc party and President Beji Caid Essebi leading the country, there have been major protests against the lack of economic progress and lack of political reform in Tunisia.⁶⁰ During the spring and summer of 2018, there were also strong disagreements between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda regarding economic reforms as well as on cabinet positions.⁶¹ As a result, the parliamentary coalition between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes has come to an end, with each party charting an independent path for the future.⁶² In the midst of economic and political problems,



Ennahda is positioning itself as an opposition party to a government that, in the minds of some Tunisians, has failed to address core economic and political demands.

Even though these are new developments, Ennahda appears to be in a position to remain a major political player. The results of local elections, held in 2018, witnessed Ennahda winning 27.5 percent of the vote compared to Nidaa Tounes' 22.5 percent.⁶³ While neither party won a majority of the vote, these local elections demonstrate that Ennahda is still capable of garnering significant support. After a tumultuous political period in 2014-2013, Ennahda is positioning itself to run as an opposition party during a time that economic disenchantment is rising, even though it was part of a coalition government that failed to adequately address these issues.

While the Ennahda Party was weakened by its own political mismanagement, the fact it gained the largest share of votes out of any party in the local elections shows its political vitality and is also a sign that its political future was not severely hampered by the events in Egypt. In all, it appears that Ennahda took close notice of the Brotherhood's mistakes in Egypt and attempted to distance itself from the negative perception of Islamism, although in light of its own problems and errors in Tunisia, the party might have needed to devise similar political strategies and revisions anyway. However, in terms of the party's political future, there are signs that patience is wearing thin with all major political parties in Tunisia due to overarching political and economic conditions. First, voter turnout was low, demonstrating political apathy and overall frustration with the political and economic conditions in Tunisia, while second, even though Ennahda performed the best of any party, no party appears to be especially strong in electoral terms.

In Morocco, the strong electoral showing of the JDP in 2011 was, in part, helped by electoral reforms that allowed for a freer electoral system spurred on by the Arab Spring. After the 2011 parliamentary elections in which it secured the largest party bloc in parliament, there were signs that the JDP and its parliamentary coalition were effective in crafting political and economic policies to improve the situation in Morocco.⁶⁴ These successes, in addition to the wave of calls for democratic reform in the MENA region, made the JDP a growing matter of concern for the Moroccan king. Even with the promises and hopes of the Arab Spring waning, the JDP's 2016 electoral performance helped propel it to a bigger share of parliamentary seats than in the 2011 parliamentary elections. These results alone serve as strong evidence against the idea that Morsi's performance in Egypt had a detrimental effect on the JDP's political prospects.

It is clear that the JDP has tried to chart an independent path from other Muslim Brotherhood organizations and that the events of 2013 provided an opening for some political forces to attempt to marginalize the JDP by lumping it in with the Egyptian Brotherhood

While the JDP has seen electoral successes in the last decade, there are a number of challenges it faces in the coming years quite independent of external factors. First, there have been increasing protests over economic underdevelopment in several parts of the country. These protests stem from dissatisfaction with the speed and scope of economic development, especially in rural regions in Morocco which lag far behind other regions in developmental terms.⁶⁵ With the JDP as the largest parliamentary bloc, dissatisfaction associated with a perceived lack of governmental support could



be detrimental to the JDP in upcoming elections. Second, King Muhammad VI still holds significant power and appears to enjoy popular approval in Morocco.⁶⁶ It appears that the king views the JDP as a growing power and political rival and favors the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) instead.⁶⁷ This comes in the midst of strong criticisms of the JDP by the PAM concerning the former's economic management of Morocco.⁶⁸ A third challenge concerns internal competition and splits in the JDP, especially regarding how internal power structures and rivalries play out. Possible splits in the party by those supporting Abdelilah Benkirkare and those supporting Saad Eddine Othmani could make it difficult for the party to remain united in the midst of an internal power struggle.⁶⁹

It is clear that the JDP has tried to chart an independent path from other Muslim Brotherhood organizations and that the events of 2013 provided an opening for some political forces to attempt to marginalize the JDP by lumping it in with the Egyptian Brotherhood. The results of the 2016 parliamentary elections seem to demonstrate that the party still enjoys strong political support in Morocco. Public opinion about the party appears to stem from its legislative activities and achievements rather than from other Brotherhood groups.⁷⁰ From its electoral successes and the fact that it has, for the time being, overcome past obstacles both from other political parties and those aligned with King Muhammad VI, the JDP has effectively distanced itself from the narratives that have sought to associate it with the Egyptian Brotherhood. This is not to say that the JDP will continue its political rise in Morocco, as it faces stiff political competition, a powerful king wary of the party's strength, and economic unrest in some parts of the country. However, the JDP's post-2013 political performance demonstrates that

it largely avoided any ill-effects from the Brotherhood's downfall in Egypt due to its performance rather than suffering electorally because of the Egyptian Brotherhood's performance.

All in all, Morocco and Tunisia serve as two important case studies when discussing the future of Islamist political parties in the MENA region, as the Tunisian Ennahda and Moroccan JDP are both poised to continue to play major roles in their respective countries. While both parties appear to have learnt from what happened in Egypt, there is not much evidence to suggest that the events in Egypt themselves drastically affected either parties' political performance. For Ennahda, its own political missteps and political tension within Tunisia seem to account for its decline in electoral performance more than what may have happened in Egypt. For the JDP, its continued rise has less to do with outside forces than how it manages the country's economic future and its relationship with the king.

Political Prospects for Brotherhood-Affiliated Parties

In light of the fast-paced developments and changing power dynamics of the MENA region, it is difficult to determine with certainty what lies in the political future of Islamist parties, particularly those who are affiliated or have their founding roots in Muslim Brotherhood thought. While political events in one country certainly have reverberations in others, country-specific conditions and factors are the most significant indicators as to how well these Brotherhood-affiliated parties have performed in post-2013 parliamentary elections. Additionally, there does not appear to be a clear case demonstrating that Morsi's performance in Egypt had a detrimental effect on other Brotherhood-affiliated parties in the region.

While this article has only looked briefly at some of the electoral results of Brotherhood-affiliated parties in the MENA region, there appear to be a number of possible political trajectories for these parties in the future depending strongly on the specific political contexts in which each party exists. In countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, Brotherhood-affiliated parties face political environments with sectarian divisions, with Shia-oriented parties having strong electoral showings recently. At best, Brotherhood-affiliated parties in these countries will serve as minority partners in political coalitions for the foreseeable future. In places such as Mauritania, Kuwait, and Jordan, Brotherhood-affiliated parties may lead small parliamentary blocs, albeit ones that fall well short of obtaining any significant political power. In these countries, the strong power of the executive branch – whether it be a president, emir, or king – and the threat of a crackdown or limitation of the political activism of the group serve as prominent challenges to these parties' future success. At this point, only Brotherhood-affiliated parties in Tunisia and Morocco appear to have a chance of forming a government and holding a significant parliamentary bloc. However, in these contexts, as demonstrated earlier, there are several challenges that face large parties with control of, or influence on, government decisions and policies concerning demands for economic and political progress.

Additionally, even though the success or failure of Brotherhood-affiliated parties in the MENA region is largely dependent on the internal political environment, outside forces will continue to play some role in affecting the political environment. For instance, Saudi Arabia's campaign against Brotherhood organizations in the MENA region has certainly had some effect. In this sense, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties within the MENA region have become part of a proxy-war of

sorts among regional powers, although this is not a powerful factor in every country and would be the case regardless of what happened in Egypt. However, the clampdown on opposition political activism associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in places like Mauritania and Jordan appears to be aimed at the local political and social influence of these organizations. This is inspired by concerns about the Brotherhood's political appeal in those countries, which would have been relevant independent of the events in Egypt.

It should also be noted that there are countries that were not covered in this article where Brotherhood-affiliated parties may have a future political role or at least be involved in electoral competition. For instance, the Movement of the Society for Peace, Algeria's Brotherhood-affiliated party, has announced that it would field a candidate in the upcoming presidential election in 2019.⁷¹ In Yemen, the Brotherhood-affiliated party, Islah, may play a role in the country's political future if a workable solution is found for the current civil war in the country. Lastly, while the Egyptian Brotherhood is fighting for its survival, it has a history of withstanding government-led oppression and rebuilding the organization and may again reappear in Egyptian political life.

While much is yet to be determined regarding the future of Islamist parties, the electoral results from parliamentary elections in the MENA region since 2013 suggests that there has not been any widespread and detectable "Morsi effect" on the electoral performance of Brotherhood-affiliated parties. These parties face distinct challenges depending on different political circumstances. With more elections scheduled in the coming years, further data and information will soon be available to help us better understand Brotherhood-affiliated parties' political prospects.



Endnotes

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