

Tunisia's Institutional Change after the Revolution: Politics, Institutions and Change Agents

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Abstract

The Arab Uprisings started with the Tunisian revolution. These events brought the country to profound change, especially in its institutional asset. Relying on New Institutionalism theory and in particular on the Gradual Change Theory by Mahoney and Thelen, this paper analyses three fundamental dimensions of institutional change in order to establish which type of institutional change has occurred in post-revolution Tunisia. The paper looks at the characteristics of the institutions, the characteristics of the political context and the type of dominant change agent to determine the type of institutional change. In Tunisia, a low level of discretion in the interpretation of norms and rules, weak veto possibilities for the former regime supporters and an insurrection type of dominant change agent have resulted in a so-called “displacement” type of institutional change, where the removal of old rules is accompanied by the introduction of new ones.

Keywords

Gradual Change; Institutional Change; New Institutionalism; Tunisia; Tunisian Revolution

Introduction

The Arab Uprisings were initiated in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and evolved and spread across the whole Arab world the following year. Scholars still study the effects of these events at a global, regional and national level from many different perspectives. One of the most relevant consequences of the Uprisings has been the process of institutional change that has been undertaken in order to react to the protesters' demands. Institutional change can occur to different degrees. Sometimes it entails a new set of institutions, sometimes institutions do not change but rules do. Understanding the type of institutional change in Tunisia can help disentangle all the other phenomena linked to this major event.

For these reasons, this paper aims to analyse Tunisia's institutional change. Its driving question is: what kind of institutional change took place in Tunisia after the revolution? Building on a model of gradual institutional change, drawn from New Institutionalism theory, this paper analyses the characteristics of Tunisian institutions and political context and the type of dominant change agents in order to understand the features of the change that has occurred in the country. The claim is that the change that occurred Tunisia represents a sort of "displacement" (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) with the removal of old rules and institutions and the introduction of new ones through the approval of the new constitution in 2014.

Literature Review

Tunisia is a semi-presidential Republic, where the President of the Republic is the Head of State and the Prime Minister, appointed by him, is the Head of Government. After independence in 1956, Tunisia had just two presidents, Habib Bourguiba (1959-1987) and ben Ali (1987-2011). Bourguiba ruled the country since independence in 1956, with a personal charismatic leadership. The socialist experiment was abandoned by 1970s, but the social agenda was still on the run, supported by a substantial economic growth in those years. Pro-western foreign policy was accompanied by a bureaucratization of the economy and the centrality of the *Parti Socialiste Destourien*¹ (PSD).

In his book, Erdle (2010: 421) demonstrates how Ben Ali's system was made up of people carefully picked by the President whose aim was not to reform Tunisia, but rather "to preserve and perpetuate the decisional and distributive monopoly of the established political order." The system was based on a structure of patronage, where loyalty was fundamental to the leader's power. Opposition parties accepted in that period to participate in the elections

¹ Destourien means constitutional.

despite these were managed by the majority; in this way, they were able to enter in the parliament, anyhow they were too weak and fragmented to propose an effective opposition (Sassoon, 2017).

This political situation also explains the absence of the political parties during the 2011 protests that were led by Civil Society organizations and popular movements (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012), and they appeared just after. The political parties previously repressed such as the islamists, along with many other civil society groups that proliferated with the revolution, were able to enter the political arena because of the new momentum brought about by the revolution. Competitive multi-party elections favoured the preparation for a national dialogue, fundamental for the reconstruction of the social and political tissue of the country and for the redefinition of the rules of the game. None of the politically relevant members of the Tunisian elites had the power to govern by himself, so this favoured a climate of dialogue and cooperation in order to avoid civil conflicts (Heydemann, 2016).

The revolution started in late 2010 with several spontaneous popular revolts in the south-eastern region and spread, after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouaziz, across the whole country. The period after the fall of Ben Ali is seen by Zemni (2015: 2) as “as more than a legal and technical process of institution-building aimed at creating a new political system, and as more than the institutionalization of revolutionary demands”. The transition process represents a gradual shift “from the moment in which the people exercised – through mass mobilizations – its sovereignty directly to the moment in which political change became institutionalized” (Zemni, 2015: 3). In this phase, there is a dialectical tension between the “constitutional legality of the government and the revolutionary legitimacy of street politics [...] with high levels of uncertainty and the spread of violence” (*ibid.*).

The set of events that brought forth the revolution and the institutional change of Tunisia has been the object of study of several scholars; I endeavour to systematically classify the type of institutional change that occurred based on this literature. To do so, a theoretical framework is proposed in the next section.

Theoretical Framework

New Institutionalism is a body of literature that has developed since the 1960s. While providing a complete literature review on the topic is an almost impossible, this section aims to highlight the most fundamental tools and concepts developed within New Institutionalism which can be useful for this paper’s purpose. New Institutional literature has produced three schools of thought: the rational choice, the sociological and the historical institutionalism.

Rational-choice institutionalism emerged from economic research that focused on behaviour. Its main assumption is that every individual seeks to maximize his/her own gain and does so rationally, by calculating the most convenient strategy (Shepsle and Weingast, 1987). Similarly, sociological institutionalism puts emphasis on the individual but from a different perspective. Considering cultural factors, the approach retains that institutions are not necessarily driven by efficiency but rather are the result of socio-cultural practices. Thirdly, historical institutionalism emphasizes how institutions matter, by looking closely at state and formal organizations. This approach conceives of institutions as the “the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity. [...] In general, historical institutionalists associate institutions with organizations and the rules or conventions promulgated by formal organization” (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 6-7).

Given its emphasis on formal institutions, historical institutionalism is the most appropriate for the aims of this study, even though elements of analysis from the other two schools might be borrowed later in the analysis. This includes Mahoney and Thelen’s (2010) model to understand the types of institutional change. The model proposed is part of a wider theoretical framework, the Gradual Change Theory, which – inspired by New Institutionalism and belonging to its historical tradition – attempts to include in the analysis both endogenous and exogenous factors of institutional change. Indeed, these scholars underline how all types of institutionalist theories face problems in explaining institutional change: previous theories overrate the importance of exogenous shocks underestimating the role played by endogenous developments that gradually unfold inside the institutions. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) consider three main aspects which may shape the type of institutional change: the political context, characteristics of the institutions and type of dominant change agent. It is possible to identify the mode of institutional change based on these three dimensions. For each dimension, the authors ask a sub-question which brings them to identify four modal types of institutional change (shown in Table 1).

For the first dimension, the question concerns which level of discretion political actors detain in interpreting and implementing rules and norms; for the second dimension, the question concerns whether former regime supporters hold strong or weak veto possibilities; for the third dimension, the question concerns which the type of dominant change agent is. Following this typology, I will now gauge the different features of Tunisian institutional change, by analysing each dimension in order to finally classify the type of institutional change that has occurred in Tunisia after the Arab Uprisings.

Table 1. Types of Institutional Change and related characteristics

Type of Institutional Change	Characteristics of the Institutions <i>(Level of Discretion)</i>	Characteristics of the Political Context <i>(Veto Possibilities)</i>	Type of Dominant Change Agent
Layering	Low	Strong	Subversive
Displacement	Low	Weak	Insurrectionaries
Drift	High	Strong	Symbionts
Conversion	High	Weak	Opportunists

Source: Elaborated by the author from Mahoney and Thelen(2010).

Methodology and Data

As the aim of this paper is to historically reconstruct the institutional change in Tunisia in order to interpret it based on the theoretical framework discussed earlier, the methodology adopted is Process Tracing (PT). PT has been developed by historians, comparatists and case study scholars; its aim is to get an in-depth understanding of a case study and how certain outcomes have been produced by using a within-case inference. PT focuses on the mechanisms of causality and effect within a single case. Its purpose is to explain how an outcome has been produced by looking at its process.

Van Evera (1997: 64) underlines that in PT “the cause-effect link that connects independent variable and outcome is unwrapped and divided into smaller steps; then the investigator looks for observable evidence of each step.” The author finds three variants of PT that can be distinguished based on their purpose. The first one is theory-testing: this kind of PT wants to look at whether the causal mechanism is present and if it works as theorized. A second one is a theory-building PT which looks at what is the causal mechanism between the dependent and independent variables to induce a plausible hypothetical causal mechanism. Both these variants of PT are theory-centric, while a third variant, Explaining Outcome Process Tracing (EOPT), is more case-centric. EOPT seeks to find the causes of a particular outcome. The ambition is to find a minimal sufficient explanation of a particular outcome that accounts for all its important aspects. For this paper, EOPT is used to unpack the events in order to understand institutional change.

Applying PT is not an easy task and further considerations are necessary. First, it is important to trace all the events that occurred in the considered process. This means that it will be necessary to investigate all the interactions between the considered actors that brought about the institutional change of Tunisia after the revolution. Thus, it will be essential to start by dividing the sets of events into smaller components. After that, every single part will be

analysed through the use of descriptive inference which answers the question of what happened between X and Y in a form of narrative, unpacking the events into smaller observable steps. These smaller observable steps are the factors which explain the different outcomes of the institutional change process.

As we are mainly dealing with qualitative data, and in particular historical data, their main source is secondary literature. Following the division suggested by the theoretical framework, the paper subsequently goes into deeper analysis by discussing the context, actors and events of the Tunisian revolution.

Characteristics of the Institutions in Tunisia

Firstly, an understanding of the characteristics of Tunisian institutions is fundamental: do the targeted institutions afford political actors with opportunities for exercising discretion in the interpretation or enforcement of norms and decisions? This section will show that because of weak opposition, constitutional rigidity, political control and repression as well as the penetration of the party in the state apparatus, Tunisian institutions show a low level of discretion available for political actors in the interpretation and enforcement of norms and decisions.

Ben Ali's regime was secure and seemed to be politically stable and as the first president, Ben Ali is today still considered as the father of the country; his image has had an influence in Tunisian politics for decades. President Habib Bourguiba was deposed by then-Prime Minister Ben Ali in 1987 following the so-called medical coup d'état when, on the basis of Article 56 of the constitution, Ben Ali asked some doctors to declare the Bourguiba unfit for office due to health problems. This bloodless coup made Ben Ali welcomed by the population, but the hopes for more political openness were soon betrayed. Ben Ali continued the policies of secularism and gender equality of the previous president but was unable to cope with the economic problems of the country, such as young graduates' unemployment, lack of prospects and the position of the country in the world economy. Corruption and nepotism become traits of the regimes, along with the concentration of power in Ben Ali's family (Schiller, 2011).

Constitutionalism has been a fundamental character of Tunisian institutions since 1860 when it had its first Arab constitution. Constitutionalism favoured separation of powers, at least until independence when Bourguiba's *Neo-Destour* party established its political dominance within the system with the constitutional reform of 1959. Nonetheless, the coup of 1987 was made possible following constitutional rules, as it was justified on the basis of Article 56. Similarly, in 2011, the transition followed constitutional rules, as

Gannouchi's attempt to overtake the constitution was promptly stopped by legal means. This historical legacy of institutionalism is relevant to the political transition of Tunisia, alongside elements of the old regime such as patterns of corruption, patrimonial behaviours and elements of distrust towards institutions (Murphy, 2013).

When Ben Ali took the power in 1987, he maintained the status quo and expanded his control over society and state institutions. The *Destour* party was changed into the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD)² and Ben Ali has never separated the party from the state. The electoral democracy that he created afterwards was just another example of managed elections where loyal opposition was allowed to participate. No genuine political reform has taken place in Tunisia and real political opponents were not allowed to participate or speak up. The state was also controlling economy in order to foster political control over the population and Ben Ali's popularity (Sadiki, 2002). However, episodes of revolt have taken place during Ben Ali's regime, despite the centralized state having created mechanisms of co-optation of the young generation in order to control them and foster national identity through programs of public administration employment (Paciello and Pioppi, 2018). He started economic restructuring (until the end of 1990s) by introducing neoliberal reforms that include abolishing price control and state subsidies as well as fostering privatization. Ben Ali also promised political reforms and at the beginning he allowed the legalization of some parties. However, these parties were those that had not challenged the regime. In the meantime, the regime created a new image of itself by renaming the PSD as the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD). Islamist parties were not legalized, as they were seen as a threat to the regime and secularism. However, episodes of repression were present (Murphy, 1997). The regime, since 1987, has always maintained a tight control by using mechanisms of co-optation of opposition figures instead of attacking them directly.

Ben Ali and the RCD party enjoyed wide popular support in the beginning (1987) and the dictator invited many figures of the opposition to join the party or be candidates on its party lists. With the election of 1989, the RCD became more repressive, as the ministerial appointments made by Ben Ali can attest. Likewise, at the local level, security was reinforced in order to strengthen political control. The party started to expand into all sectors of the state, from universities to public companies and administrative bodies. However, from 2002, the increased personal power of Ben Ali saw him concentrating power in the hands of his family members and closest lobbies. At the same time, he modified the constitution in order to allow the President to rule for more than two terms. This created frustration and internal

² Constitutional Democratic Rally.

dissent in the party. Some scholars consider this dissent a factor for the fall of Ben Ali, because RCD was not supportive enough of its leader after the outbreak of protests (Wolf, 2017). Ben Ali's attempts at reforms in terms of press freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of association were disappointing. Legal opposition was weak and not credible. The RCD members in the Parliament were very abiding, making it almost impossible for opposition and the same majority's members to emend laws; in general, the legislative branch was quite weak in relation to the executive power, being subordinated to the party-state apparatus (Angrist, 1999).

After Ben Ali left Tunisia in January 2011, the then-Prime Minister Mohamed Gannouchi tried to appoint himself as President of the Republic on the basis of Article 56³ of the constitution (Murphy, 2011) in an attempt to repeat the famous *coup d'état medical* that Ben Ali had previously done towards Habib Bourguiba. But the Constitutional Council, just a few hours after, condemned this attempt and the President of the Tunisian Parliament Fouad Mebazaa⁴ was nominated President according to the constitutional reading of Article 57, during the transitional period that would have brought to the new elections within 45 and 60 days. The new parliamentary elections were held in October 2014 and the presidential election on 23 November 2014. In December 2014, Beji Caid Essebsi⁵ from the secularist *Nidaa Tounes* party was elected as the new President of Tunisia, in alternation to the moderate islamist party *Ennahda*.

The systematic repression and the lack of freedom of expression weakened the opposition forces during the whole of Ben Ali's regime. The legal opposition had no influence over the regime's agenda. Social policy was used as a means to maintain legitimacy and control even during economic structural adjustments (Paciello and Pioppi 2018). All these elements underline the low level of discretion that political actors enjoyed in Tunisia during Ben Ali's regime. The weak opposition, constrained by constitutional rigidity and tight political control, was repressed for decades. At the same time, with the penetration of the state into sectors of the economy and the state, it hampered any attempt by any political actor to promote any change during period of Ben Ali's rule.

Characteristics of the Political Context in Tunisia

Second, an analysis of the characteristics of the political context of Tunisia is necessary to disentangle the institutional change that resulted in the wake of the Arab

³ About the temporary unavailability of the President of the Republic.

⁴ Both of them, Mebazaa and Mohamed Gannouchi, were persons close to the former dictator Ben Ali.

⁵ Former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Habib Bourguiba and Prime Minister in 2011 after Ben Ali's departure.

Uprisings. The question here is whether the supporters of the former regime enjoyed strong or weak veto possibilities. The proliferation of parties and civil society organizations, the consequent multi-partitism that originated (despite the dominance of two major parties, and the prohibition to former regime supporters to run as candidates in the election outline a political context where supporters of the former regime enjoys very weak veto possibilities. The introduction of a new democratic constitution also reinforces the plurality of the system and weakens veto possibilities of detractors.

While widespread corruption, coercion and authoritarianism defined the whole of Ben Ali's period, his party was hegemonic, other opposition organization had little space of manoeuvre. Moreover, the 2008 bill on presidential candidates stipulated that a candidate has to be leader of a party for at least two years. This excluded many opposition leaders from candidature. Tunisia claimed to have a multi-party system, but, in fact, the main party of the post-colonial period was the *Neo-Destour*, renamed Constitutional Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste Destourien*) in 1964 and *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique* (RCD – Constitutional Democratic Rally) in 1989.

The majority of parties were founded and recognized only after the revolution, with the exception of the secular-leftist DFLL (*Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties*) and the PDP (*Progressive Democratic Party*) (Çarkoğlu et al. 2018). In Tunisia, opposition cooperation happened pre- and post- elections with the formation of electoral alliances (even though a deeper analysis suggests a stronger ideological divide among opposition parties) (Lust, 2011). During Ben Ali's regime, Tunisian opposition failed to confront the regime not only because of the repression, but also because of the lack of coordination among the forces, their ideological differences and the personal rivalries of their leaders. Islamist parties such as *Ennahda* had been for long repressed by Bourguiba's regime first and later Ben Ali's regime. Since 1980 till the fall of Ben Ali's regime, the relationship has been confrontational and conflictual, despite *Ennahda* representing a moderate islamist party that is different from the Salafist movements that rose in North Africa (Allani, 2009). Ben Ali was unable to co-opt this opposition party and thus then he decided to ban the party and promoted controlled elections where the RCD was able to win the majority. In the first post-revolution elections however, *Ennahda* won the majority, thanks also to the lack of complicity with the previous regime (Hinnebusch, 2015).

In the post-Ben Ali era, two of the major parties who are competing for power in Tunisia are the moderate islamist *Ennahda* and the counter-coalition *Nidaa Tounes*. The latter gathers seculars, some of the remnants of the old ruling party and components of the trade

union movement. They favoured the dialogue during the transitional period, by avoiding ideological polarization and believing in the new political and electoral system (Hinnebusch, 2017). The political arena in this period was characterized by competition and compromise, especially between the two major actors *Ennahda* and *Nidaa Tounes*. The bargained competition among them prevented the institutionalization of rules and configured a space of action that is outside the normal institutional rules. They monopolized the political arena, preventing more political inclusiveness and re-channelled revolutionary demands into a reductive form of party pluralism, where islamist confront some former regime representatives. At the beginning of the revolution, opposition parties and civil society movements were not on the same line as to whether to cooperate with former members of the regime or to continue with the revolution; *Ennahda* pushed for the marginalization of the loyalists but at the same time bargained with them.

Ennahda and *CPR* were then successful in their proposal in prohibiting the candidature of former RCD top officials in the 2011 elections. This is according to Article 15 of the proportional electoral law, which states that all senior executives of the RCD party and those who supported publicly the candidature of Ben Ali in 2009 were forbidden to run in the elections. *Nidaa Tounes*, which represents a heterogeneous group of secularist people – some of whom were former supporters of the regime – supported the choice. With the assassination of the second leader Mohamed Brahmi of the Popular Front in July 2014, *Nidaa Tounes* was able to pressure *Ennahda's* government to resign. However, the bargained competition between these two main political actors has not brought about a compromise on the rules of the game but has instead led to a strong polarization in the political debate. This polarization of the Tunisian political system could however block access to politics for many other social actors and jeopardize transparency and accountability of institutions (Boubeker, 2016).

The process of constitution-making started in March 2011, two months after Ben Ali left the country. The figures at the forefront of these events, who are no longer in Tunisian politics, had a long-lasting effect on the process. The process was also pushed by protests in the streets. Politicians and administrators in Tunisia all belong to the same elite group, possessing similar education and service. Despite maintaining control over state apparatus and institutions during the period of transition, they disengaged from the previous regime and negotiated an honourable way out and a new role in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Parolin, 2015). Thus, the political context after the 2011 revolution is characterized by a presence of several parties and civil society organizations that compete through elections in order to gain

the power to govern. Along with the exclusion of top officials of the former regime from the elections, these two characteristics describe a political context where the veto possibilities for the former supporters of the regime are weak, since the democratic change enshrined by the introduction of the new constitution in 2014 stabilized a plural feature of Tunisian politics.

Change Agents in Tunisia

A third step to uncover the type of institutional change that resulted in Tunisia after the Arab Uprising is to understand what type of dominant change agent there was. According to the framework adopted by Mahoney and Thelen (2010), two questions can help identify the type of dominant change agent: do these agents seek to preserve institutions and do they respect existing institutional rules? By answering these two questions, it is possible to identify four different types of change agents:

1. Insurrectionaries: does not want to preserve institution nor follow institutional rules;
2. Symbionts: seek to preserve institutions without following institutional rules;
3. Subversives: follow the rules of institutions but do not want to preserve them;
4. Opportunists: may or may not follow the rules and preserve the institutions.

In the case of Tunisia, the answer to both questions is negative. The dominant change agents in Tunisia were not willing to preserve the institutions (they even created new ones) and in doing so they did not follow the existing institutional rules but adopted extra institutional rules such as revolts which sometimes included episodes of violence.

The main actors involved in the revolution were youth and labour movements which had socio-democratic demands, such as fighting against unemployment and liberal neo-patrimonial regimes (Hanafi, 2012). The Trade Union UGGT quickly mobilized a lot of people in order to overthrow the regime of Ben Ali and afterwards played the role of mediator between all the political parties and civil society organizations to favour the transition (Cavatorta, 2015). Collective mobilization has been relevant since the 2008 protests in Gafsa; in the wake of the 2011 uprising, collective mobilization was able to exert political influence on the elites and institutions through conflictual action. However, the revolutionary character of these movements was insufficient to grant them legitimacy over the whole transition and with the election in 2014, the demands of protesters were in the end channelled into the political and institutional system (Antonakis-Nashif, 2016).

On 20 January 2011, one week after the departure of Ben Ali, opposition forces created the 14th January Front “that saw itself as the only legitimate authority to speak in the name of the people and opposed the transition from above that the legal government was

proposing. For the Front, the usage of article 57 of the constitution constrained the possibilities for political change too much” (*ibi*, p.4). According to them, 60 days would have been too short a period for organizing free and fair elections and there was the risk of a personalization of presidential power, especially within the same constitutional boundaries and the same parliament as Ben Ali’s rule. For these reasons, the Front requested the dissolution of Ben Ali’s party, the RCD, and of the two chambers of the parliament in order to elect a National Constituent Assembly. Street protests supported these actions and at the end of the month, the RCD ministers resigned from the government.

The desire to radically change the institutional setting was supported by mass demonstrations and extra-institutional movements that, in the informal public political space, represented the insurrectionary character of the change agents in Tunisia. They introduced a tension between the legality of the system and the revolutionary legitimacy, refusing to follow the existing institutional rules that would be contrary to the aims of the revolution. The attempt to concentrate the powers of the chambers into the hands of the President, as proposed by Prime Minister Mohamed Gannouchi due to the deteriorated security situation in the country, had the only effect of inciting the popular protest, which in discord with the idea of a controlled transition led by the government, gathered in the *Conseil National de protection de la Révolution* (CNPR, National Council for the Protection of the revolution). This body grouped the 14 January Front, the Bar Association, human rights organizations and the UGTT. The islamists too joined the 14th January Front and the Council formed by the Front, that was recognized by the interim government despite some reluctance. The recognition of the CNPR by the government was a necessary step to re-channel into an institutional setting the initiative, which clearly did not follow the usual institutional rules.

However, protests continued till February 2011, when Prime Minister Mohammed Gannouchi proposed as provincial governors 19 out of 24 former members of the RCD party. On March 3, the President announced the elections for the new constitutional assembly and abrogated the Tunisian constitution by passing the Law Decree n.14 on the provisional organization of public authorities. With this, the institutional setting of Ben Ali’s Tunisia started to collapse. The process would finish with the approval of the new constitution in 2014. These events show that change agents in Tunisia did not want to preserve the previous institutions and were ready to achieve these results by going against the existing institutional rules.

According to Mahoney and Thelen (2010), these change agents are classified as insurrectionaries. After the Law Decree n.14, a new institution was created in order to

organize the next elections after the revolution, the *Haute Instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, des réformes politiques et de la transition démocratique* (High Authority for the realization of the objectives of the revolution, for political reforms and democratic transition, or High Authority). This represents a further step in the process of institutional change: the removal of existing rules with the introduction of new ones. This corresponds to the displacement type of institutional change. Similarly, the modification of the old bicameral parliament, with the introduction of the NCA first and the unicameral Assembly of Representatives later, reinforces this reading of the institutional change process in Tunisia. Recently, the High Authority also created the ISIE (*Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les élections*), the Superior Independent Instance for the Elections, to be in-charge of supervising the new elections.

The assassination of the Member of the Parliament (MP) Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013 opened a political crisis in Tunisia. This concerns the electoral legitimacy of the National Constituent Assembly and the Troika Government (Ben Salem, 2015). The latter ruled after the elections in 2011 of the NCA and was formed by the Islamist *Ennahda* party, the secular centre-left party Congress for the Republic (CPR, *Congrès pour la République*) and the social democratic party Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL, *Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés*, also known as *Ettakatol*). The crisis was solved with the constitution of the National Dialogue (ND) composed by the Quartet that was awarded with the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2015: the UGTT, *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens*, the Tunisian General Labour Union; the UTICA, *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts; the LTDH, *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme*, the Tunisian Human Rights Ligue; and the National Bar Association, the *Conseil de l'Ordre des Avocat* (COA). This Quartet was able to set the rules of the political arena through an agreement (a road map) signed for the organization of the elections. In the meantime, the moderate social-democratic secular party *Nidaa Tounes* (Call for Tunisia) emerged as an alternative for government to the *Ennahda*, and the Popular Front *Front Populaire* (FP) was relegated to the opposition. Indeed, in the elections of 2014, the Popular Front did not receive enough votes and along with its intransigence it could not become a potential ally for any party. The new political alliance was formed by *Ennahda*, *Nidaa Tounes* and *Afek Tounes* (a centre-right secular party).

However, new elections were held only in October 2011 and not for the renewal of the Tunisian Parliament (which before 2011 was a bicameral one), but for the election of a National Constituent Assembly and the President of the Tunisian Republic. The human

rights activist of the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme and founder of the political party *Congrès pour la République* Mancef Marzouki, became the president and remained in power until December 2013. The NCA was then dissolved and replaced by the new unicameral Parliament (Assembly of the Representatives of the People) on 26 October 2014 after the new constitution was adopted in the month of January of the same year.

The events of the revolution and those subsequent to it which constitute the transition of Tunisia to democracy illustrates that the dominant change agent, represented by popular movements and civil society organizations, had an insurrectionary character. They challenged the whole political process throughout threats of revolts and also created new bodies, such as the Council for the Protection of the revolution, in order to change the institutions and defend their demands. Doing this through an extra-parliamentary activity as well as with episodes of violence (including the assassination of two political leaders) describe the change agents as insurrectionaries which, in the end, the political system was able to absorb even though minor protests are always present in Tunisia. With this last step, the circle is complete in order to classify the type of institutional change that has occurred in Tunisia.

Conclusion

This paper analysed Tunisia's institutional change using an institutionalist approach, in particular the analytical framework from Gradual Change Theory. In order to understand institutional change, three dimensions have been taken into consideration: the characteristics of the institutions (with their level of discretion in interpreting and implementing rules and norms), the characteristics of the political context (with the related force of the veto possibilities for the supporters of the former regime) and the type of dominant change agents, the latter identified by considering whether the dominant change agents seek to preserve institution and/or follow the rules of the institution.

The analysis of the institutional change in Tunisia after the Arab Uprisings has uncovered a displacement type of institutional layering. Table 2 summarizes all the elements necessary for the classification of institutional change in the Tunisian case.

As for the characteristics of the institution, Tunisia reveals a low level of discretion in interpreting and implementing rules and norms; this is due to the penetration of the party in the state, the political control and repression used during the former regime, a weak opposition and a strong rigidity of the constitution which do not allow for more room of action in the institutional context. However, when looking at the characteristics of the political context, this paper finds weak veto possibilities for the former regime supporters.

This is due to a new constitution and the decision of excluding former top officials of the RCD party from candidature in the elections. Moreover, the proliferation of parties and civil society organizations helped promote a strong multi-party system.

Finally, this paper looked at the type of dominant change agents in Tunisia. Because change agents did not want to preserve institutions, they promoted methods of opposition that have not followed the former institutional rules. These two elements, along with the fact that insurrectionaries promoted the creation of new institutions, delineate the type of dominant change agent as insurrectionaries.

In conclusion, a low level of discretion in the institutional context, weak veto possibilities for the former regime supporters in the political context and the presence of insurrectionaries as dominant change agent describe the type of institutional change in Tunisia as displacement. This finding helps us to disentangle not only which type of institutional change has occurred in Tunisia, but even who have been the relevant actors. Moreover, the results contribute to widen the knowledge of the national peculiarity of Tunisia and might be useful for any comparative research who takes into account different countries of the region. In particular, the evidences seem to underline how Arab Uprisings, despite sharing common features, have been singular from one country to another: further research should be directed to understand the specificities of the institutional changes occurred in the other countries of the region, as they are deemed fundamental to understand regional specificities and dynamics.

Table 2. Type of Institutional Change and Related Characteristics in Tunisia

TUNISIA	
Characteristics of the Institutions <i>(Level of discretion)</i>	<u>LOW</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penetration of the party in the state • Political control and repression • Weak opposition and constitutional rigidity
Characteristics of the Political Context <i>(Veto Possibilities)</i>	<u>WEAK</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of former RCD top official from candidature • Proliferation of parties and civil society organizations • New constitution
Type of Dominant Change Agent	<u>INSURRECTIONARIES</u>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not want to preserve institutions (create new ones) • Do not follow institutional rules (revolts, episodes of violence)
Type of Institutional Change	DISPLACEMENT

Source: Author

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