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Democracy, women's rights, and public opinion in Tunisia

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Abstract

The Arab Spring demonstrated that public opinion can powerfully affect the region's political life. Tunisia is particularly important in this regard; it is the Arab country where democracy has taken firmest root and is therefore of enormous geopolitical significance insofar as it can serve as a model for other countries in the region. This article assesses the state of Tunisian democracy using data from a 2015 survey of 1580 Tunisian adults. It finds that most of the country's citizens are ambivalent or skeptical about the Arab Spring's benefits, while support for freedom of speech has weakened in recent years. A multivariate analysis assesses the impact of socio-demographic factors and support for women's rights (key to the entrenchment of democracy in Tunisia) on democratic attitudes. It is concluded that, while Tunisia's political record to date provides grounds for cautiously forecasting that democracy will endure, its path is unlikely to be easy.

Keywords

Arab Spring, democracy, public opinion, Tunisia, women's rights

Public opinion and democracy in the Arab world

In the second half of the 20th century, social scientists debated the question of whether public opinion helped to account for the persistent weakness of democracy in the Arab world. On one side were analysts who argued that Arabs were too traditional, patriarchal, and Islamic to care much about popular rule (Huntington, 1993; Lerner, 1958). Even as democracy embedded itself in Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, East Asia,

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Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa from the 1970s to the 1990s, Arabs supposedly remained indifferent.

On the other side were researchers who held that democratic sentiment was actually widespread in the Middle East and North Africa. In their view, authoritarian regimes effectively suppressed the political action that otherwise might have flowed from public opinion. From this standpoint, hefty oil revenues and generous Western backing enabled military repression and economic control that rendered public opinion largely irrelevant to political life (Diamond, 2010; Gause, 2011).

It was only in the first decade of the 21st century that polling helped to undermine the claim that public opinion explained the weakness of democracy in the Arab world. Surveys conducted in the decade before the Arab Spring indicated that about 80% of Arab adults regarded democracy as the best form of government (although the percentage supporting the fundamental democratic freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion was around 50%). Polls also showed that Arabs generally understood democracy to mean the same thing as Westerners did (Andersen et al., 2011; Braizat, 2010; Jamal and Tessler, 2008; Norris and Inglehart, 2002). In 2010 and 2011, the unexpected fall of dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya had a similarly corrosive effect on the view that authoritarian regimes could always be expected to neutralize widespread democratic sentiment in the Arab world. The reinstatement of authoritarianism in Egypt and the outbreak of civil wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq demonstrated that democracy was hardly guaranteed in the Middle East and North Africa. Nonetheless, it was now clear that public opinion matters, at least in some circumstances.

It is in this context that the uniqueness of the Tunisian experiment and the value of studying public opinion in that country should be understood. Tunisia is the sole exception to the Arab Spring's record of precipitating military dictatorship and civil war (Masoud, 2015). It is therefore of great geopolitical significance insofar as it can serve as a model for other countries in the region. Since 2011, Tunisia has seen free and fair elections lead to a peaceful transfer of power from an Islamist party to a unity government that is largely secularist, though it includes Islamists. The country's first elected president now holds office. Moreover, a new constitution entrenches some women's rights (Charrad and Zarrugh, 2014). This development is significant because many analysts claim that increased recognition of women's rights is a necessary condition for the spread of democracy in the Arab world (Coleman, 2004). Our multivariate analysis below adds substance to this assertion. In short, public opinion data on attitudes toward democracy and women's rights can help us assess the state of Tunisia's fledgling democracy and its prospects.

To that end, we employ new data from a recent, representative, nationwide poll of Tunisian adults. Our analysis does not seek to test competing theories of attitudes toward democracy. However, it has substantive value insofar as it adds credibility to the judgment that Tunisian democracy is not yet well entrenched. Most importantly, support for freedom of speech has waned significantly in recent years, while most citizens are ambivalent or negative about the benefits of the Arab Spring. Our findings also suggest that support for women's rights in Tunisia is relatively weak in important respects. At the same time, we provide evidence that most Tunisians are optimistic about the country's democratic future while fewer of them support non-democratic forms of government than was the case in the recent past.

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The poll

Our data were collected by Arab World for Research and Development, a respected survey research firm that has done extensive polling throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and its affiliate in Tunisia, ELKA Consulting. A stratified random sample of 1580 Tunisians over the age of 17 was drawn. The sample covered the entire country except for regions close to the dangerous and sparsely populated areas bordering Algeria and Libya (for a map of which, see GOV.UK, 2015). Trained and experienced interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in Arabic in respondents' households between 31 January and 8 February 2015. In accordance with cultural norms, female respondents were given the choice of being interviewed by female interviewers. The duration of interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes, with an average duration of 15 minutes. The survey focused on respondents' attitudes toward various forms of government, democratic principles, women's rights, activities during the Arab Spring, and personal security. To assess change in public opinion, we replicated questions from the 2009 Gallup World Poll and the 2013 World Values Survey. We would have preferred using only comparative data collected before the Arab Spring but, unfortunately, the first Tunisian poll in the World Values Survey dates only from 2013.

Democracy and the Arab Spring

Ever since John Locke (1823 [1689]: 106) wrote that perfect freedom is the natural human state, the idea of freedom has formed a pillar of liberal democratic thought and practice. Accordingly, analysts commonly include questions on political freedoms in addition to questions asking directly about attitudes toward democracy in omnibus surveys such as the General Social Survey and the World Values Survey and in specialized surveys that seek to measure attitudes toward democracy (Gibson, 1998; Inglehart, 2003; National Opinion Research Center, 2015; see also Zakaria, 1997). We follow this tradition. Specifically, we tap public opinion on freedom of speech, religion, and assembly prior to the Arab Spring using data from the 2009 Gallup World Poll, which asked Tunisians the following standard questions, all with response options of 1 = agree, 2 = disagree, 97 = don't know, and 98 = no answer:

> Suppose that someday you were asked to help draft a new constitution for a new country. As I read you a list of possible provisions that might be included in a new constitution, would you tell me whether you would probably agree or not agree with the inclusion of each of these provisions?
>
> - Freedom of speech – allowing all citizens to express their opinion on the political, social, and economic issues of the day?
> - Freedom of religion – allowing all citizens to observe any religion of their choice and to practice its teachings and beliefs?
> - Freedom of assembly – allowing all citizens to assemble or congregate for any reason or in support of any cause?

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Table 1. Support for democratic freedoms, 2009 and 2015 (in percent).

	2009[a] (n = 992)	2015 (n = 1517–1553)
Freedom of speech	97	92**
Freedom of religion	92	90
Freedom of assembly	71	73
All three freedoms	69	64**

[a]Andersen et al. (2011: 67–70).
**$p < .05$ for the difference between 2009 and 2015 percentages (two-tailed t-test).

To assess the impact of the Arab Spring on public opinion, we asked the identical questions in 2015.

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who selected 'agree' for each option. The Arab Spring does not appear to have had a positive influence on democratic values. For example, over the six-year span under consideration, there was no statistically significant increase in the percentage of Tunisians agreeing that freedom of religion and freedom of assembly should be constitutionally protected. Perhaps most surprisingly, the percentage of Tunisians supporting constitutional protection for freedom of speech dropped significantly between 2009 and 2015. At first glance, then, the Arab Spring seems not to have had a positive impact on fundamental liberal-democratic values.

When in 2015 we asked respondents directly to assess the impact of the Arab Spring, their responses were in line with their attitudes toward political freedoms. Specifically, we asked:

- How beneficial or harmful was the Arab Spring for your country?
- How beneficial or harmful was the Arab Spring for you personally? (response options for both questions: 1 = very harmful to 10 = very beneficial; recoded as 1–3 = harmful, 4–7 = neutral, 8–10 = beneficial).

As Table 2 shows, in 2015 more than 85% of Tunisians believed that the Arab Spring was not beneficial either for their country or for them personally. Approximately half of those who did not regard it as beneficial felt neutral about the results of the Arab Spring, while about half thought the results of the Arab Spring were harmful.

It is not difficult to understand why so many Tunisians had misgivings. First, 34% of our respondents claim to have supported the Ben Ali regime, which was overthrown in 2011. Second, the attitude of many other Tunisians undoubtedly stemmed from a fact emphasized by Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa just ahead of the 2014 parliamentary election: the Arab Spring caused Tunisians' expectations of rapid economic improvement to soar but little on this front has been delivered to date. As Jomaa admitted, 'The mistake made immediately after the revolution was to say that all the disparities were going to disappear, that everyone was going to have a job and so on. The whole of Tunisia's political class made this mistake' (quoted in Byrne, 2014). In the event, commitments to lower the disparity in living standards between coastal towns and the interior have gone largely

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Table 2. Arab Spring beneficial or harmful, 2015 (in percent).

	Nationally (n = 1548)	Personally (n = 1536)
Beneficial	13	12
Neutral	43	48
Harmful	44	40

unfulfilled (Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014). According to the World Bank (2014), Gross National Income per capita and the unemployment rate have hardly budged since 2010. Meanwhile, income inequality has increased, with the Gini index of household income inequality rising from .358 in 2010 to .380 in 2015.[1] In this context, a dour evaluation of the results of the Arab Spring is not surprising.

Responses to a set of questions about preferred form of government reinforce our assessment. Here we are limited to comparing our 2015 data with comparable data from two years earlier. Specifically, we replicated the following set of questions from the 2013 World Values Survey (2015), all with response options ranging from 1 (very good) to 4 (very bad):

> I'm going to describe various types of political system and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country?
>
> - Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections?
> - Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country?
> - Having the army rule?
> - Having a democratic political system?

To this set of questions we added one more because of its current political significance in the Middle East and North Africa:

- Having a *khilafa* [caliphate] or religious rule by *sharia* law?

Table 3 compares the 2013 and 2015 responses. Over this two-year period, the number of Tunisians claiming that rule by a strong leader would be fairly good or very good fell by 14.4% while the number saying that rule by experts would be fairly good or very good fell by 10.0% – both statistically significant declines. On the other hand, the number responding that a democratic political system would be fairly good or very good also fell – by 5.1%, a decidedly smaller but still statistically significant drop. In absolute terms, the percentage of Tunisians asserting that non-democratic forms of government are fairly good or very good remained substantial: 31.6% for a *khilafa*, 33.9% for a strong leader, 38.4% for rule by the army, and 66.7% for rule by experts. In sum, while opposition to non-democratic forms of government has grown recently,

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Table 3. Preferred form of government, 2013 and 2015 (percent responding 'fairly good' or 'very good').

Response option	2013[a] (n = 1026–1107)	2015 (n = 1406–1491)
Having a *khilafa* or religious rule by *sharia* law	n.a.	31.6
Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections	48.3	33.9**
Having the army rule	37.4	38.4
Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country	76.7	66.7**
Having a democratic political system	93.2	88.1**

[a]World Values Survey (2015).
**$p < .05$ for the difference between 2013 and 2015 percentages (two-tailed t-test).

so has opposition to democracy. These findings are consistent with the view that a general political disillusionment or political fatigue has gripped many Tunisians since the Arab Spring (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Democracy and women's rights

The association between pro-democracy attitudes and support for women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa has been documented in richly detailed United Nations *Human Development Reports*, among other sources (United Nations, 2002, 2006).[2] The view that these two sets of attitudes are related gains trenchancy from the fact that anti-democratic forces in the region routinely and often violently oppose women's rights (Association for Women's Rights in Development and Women's Learning Partnership, 2013). Hence the importance of examining attitudes toward women's rights in any discussion of Tunisian democracy.

Tunisia undoubtedly enjoys the most progressive legal framework for women's rights in the Arab world (Welchman, 2007). Our questionnaire includes three items that allow us to examine the public's attitudes toward three of these rights. In our judgment, these items have high face validity. Each question has response options ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important):

- In your opinion, how important is it that women in your country are able to freely choose their future husbands?
- In your opinion, how important is it that women in your country are able to choose to work outside the home if they wish to?
- In your opinion, how important is it that women in your country are elected members of parliament?

We found that while 87% of respondents in our survey said that women should have the right to choose their future husbands, just 70% supported women's right to work outside the home. Moreover, in Tunisia, support for women's right to work outside the home was relatively infrequently put into practice. Only 25% of people over the age of 14 in the paid

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labor force are women (World Bank, 2015b). It is true that some of our respondents probably did not think of unpaid work by women on family-owned plots of land – a common practice in rural Tunisia, home to a third of the population – as work outside the home. Moreover, a high female unemployment rate (25.6% in 2013) and rate of female illiteracy (28% in 2011) are structural barriers to female participation in the paid labor force (Langsten and Salem, 2006; *Tunis Times*, 2014; World Bank, 2015d). The fact remains, however, that public support for women's right to work in the paid labor force and women's actual rate of participation in the paid labor force are relatively low in Tunisia.

Forty percent of our respondents said it was important for women to be elected to parliament.[3] Follow-through is robust. In 2015, 31% of members of parliament were women, placing Tunisia 32nd in a ranking of the world's countries in terms of the percentage of women in parliament (Women in National Parliaments, 2015). On this dimension, Tunisia performs better than many Western countries, although one should remember that female parliamentary representatives do not necessarily support women's rights (Bashevkin, 2009).

The foregoing analysis describes how, in Tunisia, certain attitudes toward democracy have changed since the Arab Spring. It also describes the level of support in Tunisia for the associated issue of women's rights. However, our analysis has not assessed the independent and combined effects of variables that the literature identifies as having a significant influence on attitudes toward democracy. We now turn to a multivariate analysis that will allow us to make such an assessment.

Influences on democratic attitudes

Dependent variable

To measure attitudes toward democracy, we combined three of our questionnaire items to form a scale. The first item, quoted earlier, asks whether having a democratic system is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing Tunisia. The two other questions are as follows:

- Some people say that democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government. What do you think about this statement?
- In your opinion, should this country have a completely democratic political system? (response options for both questions: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree).

Scores on the three items were standardized, added together, and divided by 3. Cronbach's alpha for three items is .723, indicating that they form a reliable scale.

Independent variables

The research literature suggests that, in general, support for democracy is highest among people who lack sustained exposure to democratic ideas and practice (Brym et al., 2014; Glenn and Hill, 1977; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; Milligan et al., 2014; Nakhaie and Brym, 2011).

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Table 4. Regression of democratic attitudes scale on predictors (standard errors in parentheses).

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	–.103 (.172)	–.474 (.188)
Age	.007 (.002)***	.007 (.002)***
Gender (male = high)	–.040 (.043)	.025 (.045)
Years of education	.027 (.005)***	.024 (.005)***
Community size	–.077 (.027)**	–.076 (.027)**
Women's rights scale		.049 (.010)***
Adjusted R^2	.027	.042

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Typically, such support is negatively associated with age because, in most societies, young people are less traditional in their outlook than their elders are. Moreover, in less developed societies, democratic ideas and institutions tend to be relatively recent innovations, so young people often have less experience with authoritarian rule than their elders do.

Support for democracy is typically positively associated with urban residence and years of formal education. Cities are commonly the epicenters of democratic movements; as an old German saying has it, *Stadtluft macht frei* (city air makes you free). People with more years of formal education tend to receive more sustained and sympathetic exposure to democratic ideas than do people with fewer years of formal education.

Finally, in less developed countries, support for democracy is positively associated with being a man because relatively few women are in the paid labor force. Women are therefore less exposed than men are to trade unions, political parties, and public life in general.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, it might reasonably be expected that, in Tunisia, young, male, highly educated urban dwellers are more likely than others are to support democracy.

Table 4 displays two regression models that allow us to test these arguments by predicting scores on our democratic attitudes scale.[4] Model 1 includes our four socio-demographic predictors. For social and historical reasons outlined immediately below, three of these variables do not behave as the literature leads one to expect. Let us briefly consider each of the socio-demographic predictors in turn.

Age. Contrary to expectations derived from the literature, support for democracy increases significantly with age. This finding is likely the result of the rise of Islamism in recent decades and the importance of pro-women policies *before* the Arab Spring. It seems likely that pro-women policies initiated and enforced by President Habib Bourguiba (in office from 1957 to 1987) and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (in office from 1987 to 2011) influenced older Tunisians to support women's rights – and therefore democracy in general – more than younger Tunisians do on average. Bourguiba legalized abortion, outlawed polygamy, and granted women equal divorce rights. His successor promoted women's education and employment and expanded their parental, divorce, and custody rights. As two experts on

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the subject remark, the 1957 Code of Personal Status and its subsequent legal evolution were 'part of the fabric of Tunisian society in the second half of the twentieth century' but are 'not part of the collective memory of the younger generation' (Tchaïcha and Arfaoui, 2012: 234). Some younger Tunisians even became skeptical of these policies because they seemed a democratic sop to the West and a justification for suppressing Islamists (*The Economist*, 2011). Other members of the younger generation have been influenced by the rise of Islamist conservatism and they question women's rights. Observers have noted the more frequent appearance of headscarves in public places in recent years, a symbol of the fact that Islamic conservatism has secured a legitimate place in Tunisian society since the Arab Spring. Such generational differences may explain why age is positively and significantly associated with pro-democratic attitudes.

Gender. The literature suggests that, in less developed countries, men are generally more pro-democratic than women are. However, Model 1 shows that there is no significant difference between Tunisian men and women in their support for democracy. Although we cannot demonstrate the point with our data, we speculate that Tunisian women tend to support democracy as much as men do because many of them learned before the Arab Spring that they have a material interest in doing so. The women's rights that were promoted during the Bourguiba and Ben Ali years – including the right to hold political office – may have taught many women that they can gain much by supporting women's rights and that democratic rule can expand their rights further.

Education. Tunisians who enjoy more years of formal education tend to express stronger support for women's rights, as the literature leads us to expect. This trend may be expected to strengthen because more than 35% of Tunisians now enter an institution of higher education within five years of completing secondary school – 10% higher than the comparable rate in the Arab world as a whole (World Bank, 2015c).

Community size. The size of the community in which respondents reside is statistically significantly associated with support for democracy – but not in the direction suggested by the literature. That is, in Tunisia, pro-democratic attitudes are stronger in smaller communities than in larger communities. This unexpected finding may be a consequence of the Tunisian pattern of regional economic development. Tunisia's coastal regions are highly urbanized and have benefited disproportionately from economic development. Poverty is disproportionately concentrated in the country's interior (Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014). As a result, it is possible that many residents of small cities and towns have come to recognize that improving their welfare depends on more intensive democratic participation in the affairs of their country. Consistent with this interpretation, anti-regime riots were widespread in the country's interior in late 2010 and 2011, especially in Sidi Bou Said, Kasserine, and Gafsa. A disproportionately large number of people killed and injured by the Public Order Brigades (the national police force responsible for riot control) came from these towns; the number of injuries was more than 50% higher in Kasserine (population, about 87,000) than in Tunis (population, about 2.7 million) (Justice Transitionelle en Tunisie, 2013: 66).

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In Model 2 we add a women's rights scale as a predictor to see whether support for women's rights and support for democracy are associated, net of our socio-demographic variables. The women's rights scale is composed of the sum of the 10-point scores for the three women's rights items cited earlier, divided by 3. The three items have a Cronbach's alpha of .668, indicating that the index has an acceptably high level of reliability. Introducing the women's rights scale barely changes the magnitude of the coefficients of the statistically significant socio-demographic variables. And, as expected, the women's rights scale has a highly statistically significant impact on the democratic attitudes scale. This finding adds weight to the view that attitudes toward women's rights are independently associated with attitudes toward democracy in Tunisia.

Discussion

To gain perspective on Tunisians' attitudes toward democratic freedoms and women's rights, it would be useful to have a basis of comparison. It makes little sense to compare Tunisia with a country that is vastly different in terms of variables that are correlates of attitudes toward democratic freedom and women's rights, such as GDP per capita, duration of experience with autocratic and democratic rule, legal entrenchment of political rights and civil liberties, and so on; it would not be surprising or informative to find that the level of support for democratic freedoms and women's rights is substantially lower in Tunisia than in, say, Canada. It would be more revealing to compare Tunisia with the country that is most similar on a range of pertinent economic, political, and social indicators. That is what we did. The exercise identified Indonesia as the best comparator country.

In 2014, GDP per capita at purchasing power parity was US$11,400 in Tunisia and US$10,200 in Indonesia. Tunisia was 99% Muslim and Indonesia 87% Muslim. In the post-colonial period, both countries endured long periods of authoritarian rule – 54 years in Tunisia, 42 years in Indonesia. As of 2015, experience with democracy had been brief in both countries – 16 years in Indonesia and 5 years in Tunisia. Freedom House combines measures of political rights and civil liberties in each of the world's countries on a seven-point scale, with low scores indicating high freedom. In 2015, Tunisia scored 2 and Indonesia scored 3. In recent years, both countries have had to confront violent, dissident Islamicist groups (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015; Freedom House, 2015). No two countries are identical, but Tunisia and Indonesia are quite similar along dimensions that are germane to our analysis.

It is therefore telling that only 73% of Tunisians agree that freedom of assembly should be enshrined in a country's constitution, compared to 85% of Indonesians.[5] Eighty-eight percent of Indonesian adults support women's right to work outside the home, compared to just 70% of Tunisian adults (Pew Research Center, 2010). Moreover, in Tunisia, support for women's right to work outside the home is relatively infrequently put into practice. Twenty-five percent of people over the age of 14 in the paid labor force are women, compared to 51% in Indonesia (World Bank, 2015b). Only with respect to the percentage of parliamentarians who are women do we find that Tunisia outperforms Indonesia (31% vs. 17%) (Women in National Parliaments, 2015). We conclude that, on most available measures, support for democracy and women's rights is weaker in Tunisia than in a country that is similar to Tunisia in many relevant respects.

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These are trying times for Tunisians. Economic growth is modest – too slow to absorb all new members of the labor force. Consequently, the official unemployment rate has hardly improved since the Arab Spring, hitting highly educated youth especially hard. Some 30% of university graduates are unemployed (World Bank, 2014). Meanwhile, Islamic extremists routinely infiltrate from Algeria and Libya. About 3000 Tunisians have left the country to fight for ISIS, making the Tunisian contingent one of the largest, if not *the* largest, national contingent of ISIS militants. The problem was brought into tragic relief when, in March 2015, attackers killed 22 people and injured 50 others at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and, in June 2015, when 39 people were killed and another 39 were wounded by an ISIS operative at the beachside Imperial Marhaba Hotel in the town of Sousse. In response to these attacks, the government restricted the right of assembly, increased the powers of the security services, and allowed the army to expand the areas within which it could operate (Gall, 2015). In the political realm, tensions persist. The unity government includes socialists, Islamists, and representatives of just about every political stripe in between. It is anyone's guess whether the coalition can hang together, especially in light of the economic and security issues it must confront.

Although opposition to some forms of non-democratic government has increased in recent years, the survey results we have reviewed indicate that Tunisians have faltered in their support for democratic freedoms. Most of them are lukewarm or negative in their assessment of the effects of the Arab Spring. In general, they express less support for freedom of assembly and for most women's rights than do the citizens of our comparator country, Indonesia. We asked our respondents:

> In your opinion, in how many years will the citizens of your country be ready for democracy? (response options: 1 = they are ready now; 2 = within one decade; 3 = within two decades; 4 = within three decades; 5 = in more than three decades; 6 = they will never be ready).

Forty-seven percent responded 'within one decade' and another 17% said within two or three decades. These opinions, representing nearly two-thirds of our sample, do not strike us as wholly unrealistic. To the degree that the prospects for democracy depend on attitudinal support, our impression is that the door remains ajar, although it will take much effort over many years to push it wide open and keep it in that position.

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Notes

1. The Gini index ranges from 0 (indicating that each household earns exactly the same income) to 1 (indicating that one household earns all income). We calculated the 2015 index from our survey data. The 2010 Gini index is from World Bank (2015a). Note that economic inequality is inimical to support for democracy (Andersen, 2012).
2. In their quantitative, cross-national comparison of 150 countries, Donno and Russett (2004) question the existence of a direct causal link in either direction between non-attitudinal indicators of democracy and women's rights: 'Arab tradition reduces democracy and women's rights, and Islamic tradition reduces democracy, but controlling for these traditions the direct connections between democracy and women's rights are tenuous.' Donno and Russett (2004: 601, 602) conclude that the mechanisms accounting for the observed relationships are thus 'more puzzling than ever.'
3. Interpretation of this result must be tempered by the fact that anti-democratic Tunisians do not support the right of men to be elected to parliament either.
4. To ensure that the same respondents were included in our regression models, we incorporated in both models only the cases found in our final model. We were initially concerned about possible bias in our results because more than a fifth of cases were excluded due to missing data. We therefore decided to impute five data sets and pool the results to create new estimates. The new estimates were not substantively different from the old ones, so we elected to present analyses based on the original data.
5. The latest Indonesian figure we have been able to find is for 2009. We are grateful to the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center for access to data from the 2009 Gallup World Poll. Unfortunately, comparative data on the two other freedom items in our survey are not available.

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Résumé

Le printemps arabe a démontré que l'opinion publique peut avoir une influence considérable sur la vie politique d'une région. Le cas de la Tunisie revêt à cet égard une importance particulière : c'est le pays arabe où la démocratie s'est le plus solidement enracinée, ce qui lui donne une importance géopolitique considérable dans la mesure où il peut servir de modèle à d'autres pays de la région. Cet article évalue l'état de la démocratie tunisienne à partir de données issues d'une enquête menée en 2015 auprès de 1.580 Tunisiens adultes. Il ressort de cette étude que la plupart des citoyens tunisiens ont un point de vue ambivalent ou sceptique sur les effets bénéfiques du printemps arabe, alors que le soutien à la liberté d'expression a diminué ces dernières années. Une analyse multivariée permet d'évaluer l'impact des facteurs sociodémographiques et de la défense des droits des femmes (essentielle dans la consolidation de la démocratie en Tunisie) sur les positions démocratiques. Nous en arrivons à la conclusion que, si à ce jour le bilan politique de la Tunisie donne des raisons de penser, avec prudence, que la démocratie est là pour durer, la voie démocratique risque de ne pas être facile.

Mots-clés

Comportement politique, mouvements sociaux, relations hommes-femmes, sociologie politique

Resumen

La Primavera Árabe demostró que la opinión pública puede afectar poderosamente la vida política de la región. Túnez es particularmente importante a este respecto; es el país árabe donde la democracia ha echado raíces más firmes y por tanto es de enorme importancia geopolítica en la medida en que puede servir como modelo para otros países de la región. En este trabajo se evalúa el estado de la democracia tunecina utilizando datos de una encuesta de 2015 a 1.580 tunecinos adultos. Se ha hallado que la mayor parte de los ciudadanos del país son ambivalentes o escépticos sobre los beneficios de la primavera árabe, mientras que el apoyo a la libertad de expresión se ha debilitado en los últimos años. Un análisis multivariante evalúa el impacto de los factores sociodemográficos y del apoyo a los derechos de las mujeres (clave para el afianzamiento de la democracia en Túnez) sobre las actitudes democráticas. Se concluye que, mientras que la evolución política de Túnez hasta la fecha ofrece motivos para prever con cierta cautela que la democracia perdure, es poco probable que el camino sea fácil.

Palabras clave

Comportamiento político, movimientos sociales, relaciones de género, sociología política

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