After Democracy:
Autocratization and the Revaluation of Political Capital

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Abstract

How are authoritarian regime coalitions constituted after democratic breakdown? Research on autocratization has focused on how elected leaders erode institutional constraints, but has paid less attention to how new authoritarian orders generate and stabilize elite support once power-sharing arrangements collapse. This article advances a theory of political-capital revaluation to explain how autocratizing incumbents renew regime coalitions under conditions of narrowing inclusion. Rather than merely reallocating positions within a shrinking elite, autocratization transforms the opportunity structures through which political influence is attained. Because political capital is accumulated through long-term specialization, elites enter authoritarian transitions with unequal portfolios and unequal capacities to adapt. Revaluation therefore shifts relative advantage within the elite field, disproportionately benefiting actors whose resources align with the new rules. We test this argument in post-2021 Tunisia, a critical case combining a decade of competitive party-based democracy with rapid executive consolidation. Drawing on 87 elite interviews, original data on more than 900 candidate profiles, and district-level returns from the 2022 legislative elections, we show that electoral reforms elevated individualized, locally embedded capital while reducing the relative returns to party-mediated careers, generating geographically uneven advantages and a cohort of elites structurally aligned with the emerging authoritarian order.

Keywords: Autocratization, Political Capital, Political Elites, Democratic Breakdown, Tunisia

Introduction

How are authoritarian regime coalitions constituted after democratic breakdown? Research on democratic backsliding has focused primarily on the process of autocratization itself, often treating the construction of a new authoritarian order as a residual outcome. Much less attention has been paid to how autocratizing leaders reconstitute regime coalitions once democratic institutions collapse, and how they secure the support of new or existing elites under conditions of growing exclusion and uncertainty.

This omission is consequential. A large body of research demonstrates that elite support is crucial for the survival of autocratic regimes. This work has highlighted how authoritarian power-sharing can secure elite support (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Geddes et al., 2018; Meng et al., 2023; Svolik, 2012), and how formal institutions—such as ruling parties, elections, and parliaments—help manage elite relations under autocracy (Blaydes, 2010; Magaloni, 2008; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). Research on autocratization has, in parallel, generated a

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rich understanding of how democratically elected leaders erode institutional constraints and centralize executive authority (Bermeo, 2016; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Waldner & Lust, 2018; Svolik, 2019). Yet this literature has paid less attention to the implications of democratic breakdown for elite coalition dynamics.

Autocratization simultaneously narrows the winning coalition and undermines the institutions that sustain elite cooperation. As power concentrates in the hands of the ruler, leaders must govern through smaller, more exclusionary coalitions (Baturo & Tolstrup, 2023; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005). At the same time, the erosion of power-sharing institutions weakens credible commitments and limits rulers' capacity to co-opt elites (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Magaloni, 2008). How, then, can autocratizing incumbents sustain or renew elite support? Addressing this question requires shifting analytical attention away from *who* is included in the regime coalition toward *how* elites gain access to and maintain positions within it.

This article advances a theory of political-capital revaluation to explain how autocratizing incumbents generate elite support while simultaneously undermining power-sharing. We argue that autocratization reshapes regime coalitions not only by changing who is included, but by transforming the opportunity structures through which elites gain access to political office and influence. Through this revaluation of political capital, autocratization advantages some elites while disadvantaging others, generating a group of elite actors whose career interests become aligned with the emerging authoritarian order.

We test this argument in the context of post-2021 Tunisia. Tunisia offers unusual analytical leverage because it experienced a decade of competitive electoral politics after the 2011 revolution, followed by rapid autocratization after President Kais Saied's *autogolpe* in 2021. This sequence makes Tunisia a critical case for examining post-democratic coalition building. Empirically, the article draws on an original mixed-methods research design. We combine 87 elite interviews with original data on more than 900 candidate profiles and district-level electoral returns from the 2022 elections, the first legislative election following democratic breakdown. Electoral reforms adopted prior to these elections altered the relative returns to different forms of political capital. This revaluation shifted the competitive balance among elites: forms of capital that had been central under party-mediated democracy declined in relative value, while locally embedded, individualized capital became more electorally effective. Crucially, given Tunisian political geography, these effects were geographically uneven: Where parties had monopolized access to political power during the democratic period, elites struggled to adapt to the new environment, but could also draw on residual party-based influence. By contrast, in areas were party gatekeeping had been weaker, previously marginal actors relied on individualized, localist strategies to gain access to the political elite. This competitive process generated a cohort of previously marginal elite actors whose career prospects were structurally aligned with the emerging post-democratic order.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the theory of political-capital revaluation and derives expectations about coalition formation after democratic breakdown. We then introduce the Tunisian case, describing the transition from party-based to localist forms of political capital in the wake of democratic breakdown. The empirical section presents the quantitative analysis of electoral outcomes and candidate profiles. We estimate multilevel regression models to demonstrate the geographically uneven effects of capital revaluation and exploit a quasi-experimental design to address endogenity concerns. We then illustrate causal mechanisms through a paired, qualitative comparison of a high and low party gatekeeping district. The conclusion discusses the implications for comparative research on autocratization and authoritarian elite dynamics.

Theory: Autocratization and the Revaluation of Political Capital

Political order is built through the incorporation of elites committed to regime survival. Such coalitions—variously termed the "winning coalition" (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005), the "ruling group" (Geddes et al., 2018), the "ruling coalition" (Svolik, 2012), or the "regime coalition" (Kavasoglu & Koehler, 2025)—consist of actors who,

together with the ruler, "hold enough power to be both necessary and sufficient for a regime's survival" (Svolik, 2012, 57). Research has explored the dynamics of power-sharing between dictators and their supporters (Geddes et al., 2018; Meng et al., 2023; Svolik, 2012), including the role of formal institutions such as ruling parties, elections, and parliaments in elite management (Blaydes, 2010; Magaloni, 2008; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). Others have examined the trajectories of political elites across regime change (Albertus, 2019; Albertus & Deming, 2021; Olar, 2025; Loxton & Mainwaring, 2018) as well as how autocrats pursue selective appointment strategies or purges in the bureaucracy to consolidate power after regime change (Goldring & Matthews, 2023; Ketchley & Wenig, 2023). We bring together insights from these diverse strands of research to understand the emergence of an autocratic regime coalition following democratic breakdown.

How does regime change affect elite trajectories? Influential arguments going back to the classical elite theories of Gaetano Mosca (1939, [1896]), Vilfredo Pareto (1991, [1900]), and Robert Michels (2017, [1911])—or even further to the sociology of Ibn Khaldun (1967, [1377])—suggest that changes in political order are driven by and, in turn, engender the circulation of elites. In this intellectual tradition, regime change marks the breakdown of elite cohesion: incumbents lose their capacity to monopolize power, challengers gain the upper hand, overturn the political status quo, and ultimately take the place of status-quo elites. Elite circulation is thus treated as a structural outcome of political transformation, ensuring the renewal of ruling minorities and preventing the long-term closure of elite strata.

Subsequent research, however, has painted a more nuanced picture of the relationship between regime change and elite trajectories. Some have argued that elite circulation can be both a source of regime persistence and regime change (Robinson, 2012). Empirical findings underline this point. Scholars studying post-socialist transformations showed that rates of elite continuity and displacement varied substantially across countries (Higley & Pakulski, 1995), as well as across elite domains, with political, economic, and cultural elites following distinct trajectories (Szelényi & Szelényi, 1995). Research on revolution and market transformation in China similarly debated the extent to which regime change disrupted elite composition or instead enabled the recombination and persistence of preexisting advantages (Nee, 1996; Walder & Hu, 2009). Detailed historical studies of Germany (Scheuch, 2003), Italy (Adinolfi, 2022), and Japan (Matsumoto & Okazaki, 2023) further underscored that regime change rarely produces uniform elite replacement, instead yielding complex patterns of selective turnover, adaptation, and survival. More recently, a growing cross-national literature has begun to systematically examine the post-authoritarian fate of autocratic political elites, documenting wide variation in their capacity to retain influence, or return to office after regime breakdown (Albertus, 2019; Albertus & Deming, 2021; Olar, 2025; Loxton & Mainwaring, 2018).

Taken together, these findings suggest that regime change alone is insufficient to explain elite trajectories, directing attention to the mechanisms through which institutional change reshapes elite opportunity structures. We highlight the concept of *political capital* to explain this variation. Political capital has been understood in different ways across theoretical traditions in political science and sociology. In accounts inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, political capital is typically understood as a form of symbolic capital rooted in reputation, recognition, and legitimacy accumulated within the political field over time (Bourdieu, 1981, 14; Bourdieu, 2000, 39–40; also see Garrido-Vergara, 2020; Joignant, 2018). Other strands of the literature adopt a more instrumental perspective, defining political capital as the capacity of political actors to influence outcomes by shaping interactions, mobilizing support, and participating in decision-making processes (French, 2011; Sørensen & Torfing, 2003). A third set of approaches treats political capital as a composite resource produced through the mobilization and conversion of economic, social, and cultural capital for political ends (Casey, 2008; Gratton et al., 2022; Nee & Opper, 2010).

In line with this latter perspective, we conceptualize political capital in a deliberately narrow and instrumental sense, referring to the resources that aspiring elites can deploy to attain and sustain elite status within a given political order. We draw on selectorate theory to develop this point. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005) distinguish two core groups in any political regime, the winning coalition—the group of elite actors who profit from the status quo

and on whose support the incumbent relies (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005, 67)—and the selectorate—the group of actors who could potentially become members of the winning coalition (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005, 58). Political capital denotes the resources which can be converted into access to the selectorate, or into advancement from the selectorate into the winning coalition under a specific political order. In other words, political capital refers to the resources that aspiring elites deploy in order to attain elite status and advance within the ranks of the political elite.

The relative value of these resources is regime-specific. As Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005, 58) maintain, "an individual can qualify for selectorate membership in one polity and yet have no possibility of qualifying in another." In other words, regime change entails a *revaluation of political capital*, altering the resources through which elites and would-be elites access and sustain power. The resources that facilitate elite advancement under one regime often do not retain their value once regime change has taken place as "the distinguishing feature of political capital is that it is embedded in social relationships and in political institutions" (Nee & Opper, 2010, 2108). Political capital is accumulated over time as elites invest resources into advancement within a given opportunity structure. They therefore differ systematically in the portfolios of capital they possess at the moment of regime change. Regime change does not mechanically replace elites wholesale; instead, it reshuffles the payoff structure associated with different elite endowments, creating relative winners and losers within the pool of aspiring and incumbent elites.

In the next section, we link these opportunity structures to elites' individual capital endowments at the moment of regime change. We argue that autocratizing incumbents have particular incentives to revalue political capital in such a way as to create winners and losers within the elite pool, privileging previously marginal actors whose career aspirations align with autocratization.

Capital Portfolios and Post-Democratic Coalition Building

The revaluation of political capital takes on particular importance after democratic breakdown. This follows from a structural dilemma faced by autocratizing incumbents: Unlike democratization, autocratization simultaneously narrows political access and undermines institutionalized mechanisms of elite circulation. Studies of political elites remind us that all political regimes involve some vertical stratification of power (Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956; Pareto, 1991; Putnam, 1976). From this perspective, autocratization does not so much introduce elite rule as it narrows the circle of politically influential actors and undermines institutionalized mechanisms of advancement. In the words of selectorate theory, autocratization reduces the size of the winning coalition, but also that of the selectorate itself. Autocratization is therefore exclusionary in that it reduces the number of elite actors who profit from the status quo, while simultaneously restricting who can hope to access elite status in the first place and what type of resources can be converted into political power.

Following Schumpeter (1959), democracy can be understood as a method for selecting political leaders through regulated competition. This institutionalized competition makes elite exclusion temporary, increasing even excluded actors' incentives to remain in the game in order to participate (and potentially win) in the next round (Przeworski, 1991). Mosca (1939) identified this form of institutionalized elite circulation as a key condition of any stable political order. Autocratization undermines these mechanisms by centralizing power and restricting elite access. As a consequence, elites' prospects of future inclusion and rents become increasingly uncertain. As the authoritarian power-sharing literature demonstrates, institutions such as parties, legislatures, and elections help sustain elite cooperation by making promises of power-sharing credible (Blaydes, 2010; Geddes et al., 2018; Magaloni, 2008; Meng, 2020; Meng et al., 2023; Svolik, 2012). Autocratization weakens these institutions, casting doubt on the credibility of power-sharing arrangements. As a result, autocratization produces a political environment in which power is increasingly concentrated and elites' positions become more precarious, as established mechanisms of access, advancement, and power-sharing are hollowed out.

In this context, the revaluation of political capital becomes strategically central. This process creates relative winners and losers within the selectorate—the pool of current and potential elites. Members of the democratic winning coalition experience a relative decline in the value of their political assets, as their claims to power rest on institutions that no longer structure advancement. These actors have often made substantial investments in building their positions—investments that are difficult to recover or convert. The value of these sunk investments declines with decreasing centrality in the democratic winning coalition. Less central members suffer smaller relative losses, having invested less under the old order; some may even plausibly expect to improve their standing within a narrower, post-democratic winning coalition. This dynamic applies even more directly to those who enter the selectorate for the first time as a result of the revaluation of political capital. For them, autocratization may represent an opportunity, as it opens access previously blocked by established elite networks. Autocratizing incumbents have strong incentives to exploit this asymmetry—weakening or excluding central members of the democratic winning coalition while selectively elevating less central elites and political outsiders.

Research on the dynamics of personalization offers evidence consistent with this claim. Like autocratization more broadly, personalization shifts authority from institutions to the leader, reducing the bargaining power of central political elites. From a political capital perspective, personalization replaces institutionally mediated forms of elite advancement—such as party careers, bureaucratic networks, or military rank—with personal loyalty. As a result, political capital is revalued as elites face increasing incentives to invest in access to the ruler, rather than institutional positions. Leaders often sustain personalization by elevating less central actors who stand to profit from this revaluation of political capital. Research on the personalization of the Republican Party under Trump in the United States and of the Likud under Netanyahu in Israel reinforce this point. In both cases, institutionalized channels of party-based advancement were hollowed out as political capital was revalued toward personal loyalty (Harmel et al., 2024; Kenig & Rahat, 2024). In the U.S. case, in particular, this elevated previously marginal actors to positions of influence (Harmel et al., 2024). Nor are these dynamics restricted to democracies undergoing autocratization. In North Korea, for example, personalist succession was facilitated through the promotion of relative outsiders (Goldring & Ward, 2024), a pattern that also appears in other hereditary transitions (Brownlee, 2007). In Turkey, less central members of the regime coalition were significantly more likely than insiders to endorse personalization during the transition to an executive presidency (Kavasoglu & Koehler, 2025). Similarly, in Russia, more vulnerable elites have been shown to be disproportionately eager to praise Putin (Baturo et al., 2025). While these studies do not focus directly on post-democratic coalition building, they reveal a consistent logic: rulers consolidate power by revaluing political capital, thus weakening central elites and empowering outsiders as well as more peripheral coalition members.

The revaluation of political capital generates heterogeneous elite responses through two analytically distinct mechanisms. First, revaluation alters the relative returns to different forms of political capital, thereby devaluing some existing portfolios while elevating others. Political capital is accumulated through sustained investment in regime-specific networks, reputations, and organizational roles. Because elites face finite resource constraints—time, reputation, networks, organizational effort—investments in one pathway necessarily crowd out others, encouraging specialization rather than diversification (Lopez, 2002). As a result, elites tend to build careers around particular institutional channels. When political rules shift, these investments become partially sunk. Economists argue that investments in political influence are tailored to specific institutional environments and therefore constrain adaptability when political rules change (Gratton et al., 2022). Political science research documents similar dynamics: party-based careers under one regime can become "authoritarian baggage" after institutional transformation (Loxton & Mainwaring, 2018), and prolonged exposure to discredited institutions can generate reputational penalties (Dinas & Northmore-Ball, 2020). By contrast, elites whose capital is less tightly bound to specific institutional arrangements—such as technically skilled actors—may prove more adaptable across regime shifts (Olar, 2025). Revaluation thus redistributes relative advantage within the elite by changing which accumulated resources translate most effectively into political influence.

Second, revaluation transforms the structure of elite competition itself. Political capital yields returns relationally: its value depends not only on an individual's portfolio, but on the distribution of capital among competing actors. When institutional change elevates alternative forms of capital, it reshapes the competitive environment by altering which pathways are viable and how crowded they are. Research on the historical professionalization of European parliamentary elites illustrates this dynamic. As Best & Cotta (2000) note, the consolidation of party-centered careers increased the opportunity costs of alternative elite trajectories, producing "an autonomous breed of professional politicians rooted much more in political organizations than in societal positions" (Best & Cotta, 2000, 22), echoing Weber's analysis in *Politics as a Vocation* (Weber, 1965). Institutional change therefore reorders the competitive field by expanding some pathways while compressing others. Actors whose capital had previously been peripheral may become comparatively more viable entrants, while those endowed with formerly dominant capital confront intensified rivalry or declining marginal returns.

This framework yields general expectations about coalition formation under autocratization. When democratic institutions erode and political capital is revalued, elites do not respond uniformly. First, because political capital is accumulated through specialized, regime-specific investments, shifts in institutional rules alter the relative value of existing capital portfolios. Elites whose accumulated resources align with the new criteria of advancement gain comparative advantage, while those whose portfolios are tied to declining institutional channels experience relative loss. Second, revaluation operates at the group level by transforming the competitive environment. As the relative returns to different forms of capital shift, the pool of viable contenders expands or contracts across pathways, altering how crowded particular routes to influence become. Coalition formation under autocratization therefore reflects a competitive process shaped by both the redistribution of advantage across differentiated capital portfolios and the restructuring of elite competition. Autocratizing incumbents consolidate support not simply by co-opting loyalists, but by reshaping opportunity structures in ways that generate a cohort of elites whose existing resources—and future investments—are structurally aligned with the emerging order. In the next section, we apply this logic to the Tunisian case, showing how autocratization shifted opportunity structures for elite advancement from party mediation toward localist pathways, and how this revaluation produced geographically heterogeneous effects given Tunisia's distinctive political geography.

Tunisia: From Party Mediation to Localism

On 25 July 2021, Tunisian President Kais Saied staged a self-coup, dismissing the prime minister and cabinet, suspending parliament, and assuming emergency powers. Saied publicly justified this rupture by portraying the legislature and the political class as a threat to the nation, repeatedly depicting parliament as a site of chaos and violence.[1] Over the following year, Saied ruled by decree and rewrote Tunisia's institutional framework. A new hyper-presidential constitution was adopted by referendum in July 2022 with around 95% approval but only 30% turnout. The constitution weakened parliament and strengthened the presidency: the government was no longer accountable to parliament; the president could appoint and dismiss cabinet members; presidential draft laws received priority consideration; and parliamentary proposals could be blocked if they were deemed to "disrupt the financial balance of the state."[2] Controversy surrounding the drafting process—most notably the public disavowal of the new constitution by law professor Sadok Belaïd who had chaired the commission charged with developing the constitutional reforms—underscored the extent to which the process was controlled by the presidency.[3]

These reforms ended Tunisia's post-2011 democratic institutional equilibrium. The Tunisian democratic transition

[1] Presidence Tunisie, رئيس الجمهورية يترأس اجتماعا طارئا للقيادات العسكرية والأمنية (President Heads an Emergency Meeting of Military and Security Leaders) [Video], Facebook, 25 July 2021; Watania Replay, كلمة السيد قيس سعيد رئيس الجمهورية في موكب الإعلان عن تركيبة الحكومة الجديدة (Speech by Mr. Kais Saied, President of the Republic, at the Reception Announcing the Formation of the New Government) [Video], YouTube, 11 October 2021. Also see: Tarek Amara and Angus McDowall, Tunisia unveils new government but with no sign of the end to crisis, Reuters, 11 October 2021.

[2] Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia (2022), Articles 68–69, 101–102.

[3] France 24, En Tunisie, l'auteur de la nouvelle Constitution désavoue le texte publié par la présidence, 4 July 2022.

after 2011 had relied to a significant extend on elite bargaining channeled through political parties (Boubekeur, 2016; Jermanová, 2021). While this system sustained the democratic transition, it also fueled popular disenchantment with political parties, amplifying long-standing criticism of Tunisia's post-2011 order as a "partytocracy" which had cut short and diverted the revolution's transformative potential (Koehler, 2023). This anti-party position found expression in the 2019 electoral cycle and in particular in the stridently anti-party brand of populism espoused by Kais Saied in his presidential bid. Once in power, Saied began to move against the party-based political elite. He unilaterally changed the electoral system and staged legislative elections in December 2022 and January 2023, while also initiating a broader reconfiguration of political personnel through repeated reshuffles of cabinets and governors, as well as purges within the judiciary.[4]

The legislative elections held in two rounds in December 2022 and January 2023 are particularly significant for two reasons. First, parliament was the institutional arena Saied explicitly targeted to justify the July 2021 rupture. Second, these elections constituted the first systematic attempt to renew the political elite under the new regime. They therefore provide unique leverage for identifying mechanisms of elite replacement and coalition reconstitution after democratic breakdown. The next sections outline the revaluation of political capital following democratic breakdown in Tunisia. We begin by describing the opportunity structure for elite advancement under conditions of party mediation between 2011 and 2021, where institutionally weak parties acted as gate-keepers for elite access. Second, we highlight how the institutional rupture following the 2021 self-coup gave rise to new constraints which privileged localism over party mediation.

Democracy and Party Mediation

At the macro level, Tunisia's post-2011 political order was unmistakably party-dominated. Political competition and elite bargaining were structured through parties both institutionally and coalitionally. Government formation relied on inter-party pacts, most notably the *troïka* coalition formed by the Islamist Ennahda party (حركة النهضة), the Congress for the Republic (المؤتمر من أجل الجمهورية, CPR[5]), and the center-left party Ettakatol (التكتل الديمقراطي من أجل العمل والحريات, FDTL[6]) between 2011 and 2013, and the successive coalitions between the secular Nidaa Tounes party (حركة نداء تونس) and Ennahda which supported governments between 2014 and 2019. These coalition patterns reflected what observers described as a form of "consensus democracy," in which parties remained indispensable despite growing public disenchantment (Cimini, 2020; Grewal & Hamid, 2020; Resta, 2023; Rivera-Escartin, 2022). Interviews across party families reveal that access to political office, ministerial portfolios, and legislative influence overwhelmingly depended on party affiliation or party sponsorship during this period.[7] This reflected an institutional environment centered on party-list proportional representation and a semi-presidential system that vested parliament—and thus party groups—with significant authority over legislation, government formation, and appointments.

At the same time, most Tunisian parties were organizationally weak. With the partial exception of Ennahda (McCarthy, 2023; Wolf, 2017), parties lacked dense grassroots structures, routinized internal career ladders, and predictable mechanisms of cadre promotion. This pattern is consistent with the broader finding that Tunisian party politics remained weakly institutionalized throughout the democratic decade and, if anything, experienced deconsolidation over time (Geisser & Perez, 2016; Koehler, 2023; Mutlu & Yasun, 2024). Respondents from secular

[4]The main steps were the appointment of the Bouden cabinet on 11 October 2021, followed by major reshuffles on 1 August 2023, and 25 August 2024, see France24, La drôle de nomination de Najla Bouden à la tête du gouvernement tunisien, 1 October 2021; Le Monde, En Tunisie, Ahmed Hachani remplace Najla Bouden à la tête du gouvernement, 2 August 2023; and Businessnews, Officiel - Composition du gouvernement de Kamel Maddouri, 25 August 2024. Major reshuffles of governors occurred in June 2022 (in the run-up to the July 2022 constitutional referendum) and September 2024 (just ahead of the presidential elections in October 2024), see Middle East Monitor, Tunisia president replaces 13 governors ahead of referendum, 7 June 2022; and Middle East Monitor, Saied appoints new governors across Tunisia weeks before presidential election, 10 September 2024.

[5]After the French name Congrès pour la République.

[6]After the French name Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés.

[7]See the summary of interview evidence in Table 13 in the Appendix, Section C.

parties repeatedly described their organizations as internally fragmented, personalistic, lacking programmatic ambitions and dependent on charismatic leadership or ad hoc coalitions rather than institutionalized procedures.[8] Party members often referred to the rapid expansion of party organizations as the source of internal divisions and organizational fragility, pointing to the reopening of democratic competition after 2011 which drew newly mobilized activists and elites into partisan politics.[9] More broadly, these accounts point to a shared perception of parties as weakly institutionalized and primarily instrumental. Several interviewees explicitly characterized Tunisian parties as "electoral vehicles," "labels," or "[tools] to find a job in a ministry" rather than durable organizations.[10]

Yet this organizational fragility did not diminish parties' gatekeeping role. On the contrary, because formal access to elected office was monopolized by parties, elites were compelled to engage with party structures even when they distrusted them. Interview evidence nonetheless indicates that party affiliation was widely perceived as a necessary but insufficient condition for advancement. Respondents stressed that parliamentary candidacies, ministerial appointments, and senior legislative roles were rarely attainable without party sponsorship, but that parties themselves offered few autonomous career trajectories.[11] Advancement therefore depended on elites' ability to convert non-party forms of political capital into party-mediated opportunities. Within Ennahda, former political prisoners and dissidents drew on symbolic capital accumulated under authoritarian repression to gain visibility on party lists.[12] Professionals—particularly lawyers, academics, and doctors—also leveraged reputational capital and sectoral expertise to gain inclusion in Ennahda party slates.[13] In other partisan organizations, bureaucrats and technocrats relied on administrative experience and policy expertise to secure party backing for executive or parliamentary appointments.[14] In most parties, local notables mobilized social standing, family networks, local reputation or regional influence to negotiate candidacies.[15] For example, an MP from Ettakatol elected in 2011 reported that party leaders viewed him as a "winning horse," owing to his personal local visibility and his family's broader reputation at the regional level.[16] Taken together, this system produced strong incentives to convert diverse resources into party-mediated forms of political capital.

Accounts of candidate selection further underscore the centrality of party mediation. Respondents consistently emphasized that list placement was rarely determined by party service alone—although seniority within the party and ideological commitment was at times formally codified as a criterion for candidate nomination[17] Instead, party leaders prioritized candidates who could "add value" electorally or symbolically by attracting votes, signaling moral authority, or enhancing the party's technocratic profile.[18] Even within Ennahda, which displayed comparatively stronger organizational discipline and whose members emphasized that electoral support was mainly directed toward the party rather than individual candidates,[19] interviewees described advancement as contingent on combining party loyalty with additional forms of capital, such as professional credentials, reputational standing, or local embeddedness.[20] For instance, an MP from Ennahda, first elected in 2011, explained that she was not re-nominated by the party in 2014 because she was perceived by regional party officials as lacking sufficient local support relative to other prospective candidates.[21] Similarly, a female MP of the Ettakatol party elected in 2011 explained that she was recruited by the party shortly before the election and placed at the top of the electoral list based on her local embeddedness.[22] Members of the Islamist Dignity Coalition (ائتلاف الكرامة) similarly recognized that local visibility

[8] Interviews 475-1; 001-39; 078-21; 401-28; 162-47; 268-5; 195-33; 921-10; 001-39; 015-18; 445-40; 482-48
[9] Interviews 475-1; 015-8
[10] Interviews 001-39; 834-27; 001-39
[11] Interviews 162-47; 200-37; 195-33; 502-9
[12] Interviews 210-11; 301-23; 145-35; 156-25; 391-12
[13] Interviews 391-12; 666-45; 638-24; 902-55; 424-16; 444-20; 638-24
[14] Interviews 102-26; 1083-56
[15] Interviews 078-21; 294-41; 629-53; 195-33; 444-20; 921-10; 312-19
[16] Interview 921-10
[17] Interviews 100-18; 215-52
[18] Interviews 001-39; 078-21; 268-5; 834-27
[19] Interview 666-45; 638-24
[20] Interviews 210-11; 391-12; 444-20; 599-22; 666-45; 022-34; 249-46
[21] Interviews 210-11
[22] Interview 312-19

constituted the foremost criterion in the candidates selection process.[23] Parties appropriated local embeddedness as an electoral resource by granting locally embedded candidates favorable list positions in exchange for sustained party control over access to office.

Taken together, the evidence in this section shows that Tunisia's democratic period combined strong party mediation with weak party institutionalization. Parties monopolized access to elected office and executive influence, compelling elites to invest political capital through partisan channels even when they distrusted party organizations or perceived them as unstable and instrumental. Advancement therefore hinged less on routinized party careers than on elites' capacity to translate non-party resources—symbolic authority, professional reputation, bureaucratic expertise, or local notability—into party-backed candidacies and appointments. This configuration produced a distinctive form of party dominance: parties functioned as indispensable gate-keepers without offering durable or predictable career ladders. As a result, political capital accumulated under democracy was heavily concentrated in partisan mediation. The next section examines how President Saied's post-2021 autocratizing reforms revalued political capital by dismantling party mediation and elevating localized forms of political capital.

Autocratization and the Rise of Localism

Following his July 2021 power grab, President Saied proceeded to adapt the opportunity structure for elite advancement. The new electoral law, enacted by presidential decree on 15 September 2022,[24] constituted a decisive break with the institutional configuration through which political elites had been recruited and had advanced in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution. Most importantly, the new law eliminated party lists and mandated exclusively individual candidacies.[25] Prospective candidates were required to reside in the constituency in which they sought office and to collect 400 signatures from registered voters in that constituency, in addition to submitting an electoral platform to the electoral commission.[26] As in other authoritarian contexts where electoral rules and districting strategies are designed to discourage the emergence of overtly political legislators in favor of locally rooted representatives (Lust-Okar, 2006; Vannetzel, 2016), these requirements sharply reduced the value of partisan organizational capital while elevating locally embedded resources—personal reputation, dense social networks, and everyday visibility—as prerequisites for political entry. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that candidates without deep local roots, even if nationally prominent, struggled to meet the signature threshold or mobilize credible support.[27] For instance, one candidate, an engineer in her early thirties with no prior political or partisan experience, who did not qualify for the second round, attributed her defeat to the relative advantages of her competitors, noting that the leading candidate benefited from dense family ties within the district, while the runner-up exercised substantial local influence through ownership of a local radio station.[28]

The reform simultaneously altered the material foundations of electoral competition. All public financing of electoral campaigns was abolished, and candidates were required to finance their campaigns privately through either self-funding or private donations.[29] Political parties were not merely excluded from nominating candidates, but were explicitly prohibited from campaigning on behalf of candidates.[30] This institutional design stripped party-affiliated elites of both organizational infrastructure and financial backing, further devaluing partisan political capital accumulated under the democratic order. Numerous candidates reported financing their campaigns through

[23] Interview 022-34

[24] Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne. 15 September 2022. Décret-loi n° 2022-55 du 15 septembre 2022, modifiant et complétant la loi organique n° 2014-16 du 26 mai 2014, relative aux élections et référendums, No. 102, 2636–2651.

[25] It also made former members of government, heads of cabinet, governors, delegates and other officials ineligible in the year following the end of their mandate

[26] Décret-loi n° 2022-55, Article 21.

[27] Interview ID14, 29 September 2023; Interview ID21, 31 October 2023; Interview ID27, 10 January 2024.

[28] Interview ID27

[29] Décret-loi n° 2022-55, Article 75.

[30] Espace Manager, Tunisie : Les partis politiques interdits de faire campagne pour les législatives anticipées, 29 September 2022.

personal savings or private loans, underscoring the privatization of political competition.[31] Crucially, these material constraints did not affect all elites symmetrically. Candidates with access to business networks, local associations, or informal resource channels were better positioned to absorb the costs of individualized campaigning, while former party elites lacking such portfolios faced acute disadvantages.[32] At the same time, the law introduced severe penalties for illicit campaign financing, including fines, loss of mandates, and bans from future elections.[33] Limits on campaign financing were imposed for donations from legal entities, but not private individuals. Alongside the absence of regulations on loans from banks, the law therefore favored candidates with significant economic capital and connections to wealthy individuals.[34] While some candidates welcomed stricter oversight in principle, others argued that enforcement was uneven and that locally entrenched competitors could mobilize resources informally, at times even engaging in vote-buying, without sanction despite harsher penalties under the new law.[35]

The revaluation of political capital induced by the new electoral rules helps explain the widespread party boycott of the elections. Ennahda and the secular Heart of Tunisia party (قلب تونس)—the two strongest parties in the 2019 parliament—both boycotted the contest and joined the National Salvation Front (جبهة الخلاص الوطني) led by veteran politician Ahmed Najib Chebbi and openly opposed to President Saied. But the boycott extended beyond parties opposed to President Saied's power grab to include actors that had initially supported his actions. The anti-Islamist Free Destourian Party (الحزب الدستوري الحر, PDL[36]), which had initially been supportive of Saied, also withdrew from the contest.[37] Other parties that initially acquiesced with the suspension of parliament, such as the Democratic Current (التيار الديمقراطي), Afeq Tounes (آفاق تونس), and the Popular Front (الجبهة الشعبية), later condemned the move as a coup.[38] Several independent candidates observed that the absence of parties fundamentally reshaped voter expectations, shifting competition away from ideological alignment toward assessments of personal integrity, proximity, and concrete local service provision.[39]

This revaluation was further reinforced by the territorial restructuring of electoral districts. Under the pre-2021 system, candidates competed as part of party lists in 27 multi-member constituencies broadly corresponding to Tunisia's provinces.[40] The new system reduced the number of MPs and introduced 151 single-member constituencies composed of one or more of Tunisia's second-order administrative divisions (معتمديات, delegations).[41] Candidates consistently emphasized that these smaller districts amplified the electoral returns to direct personal contact—door-to-door campaigning, family ties, and long-standing involvement in local associations—while diminishing the relevance of national visibility or programmatic coherence.[42] Some candidates also welcomed this new electoral map, arguing that the smaller size of constituencies enabled individuals with fewer financial resources to campaign effectively—something they viewed as impossible had the campaign been conducted at the provincial level.[43]

The cumulative effect of these reforms was to incentivize candidates to employ localized appeals, while ignoring or downplaying national-level, programmatic issues. Consequently, campaign discourse largely avoided questions

[31] Interview ID04, 27 November 2023; Interview ID07, 14 December 2023; Interview ID10, 7 October 2023; Interview ID18, 1 November 2023; Interview ID21, 31 October 2023, Interview ID24, 7 December 2023

[32] Interview ID03, 8 December 2023; Interview ID16, 6 November 2023; Interview ID28, 10 January 2024.

[33] Décret-loi n° 2022-55, Article 163.

[34] Marsad Chahed, "Report on the Observation of the Stage of Accepting Candidacies for the Legislative Elections on 17 December 2022" [in Arabic], November 2022; Shabab bi-la Hudud, "Final Report on the Conditions of the Constitutional Referendum and the 2022 Legislative Elections" [in Arabic], 2023; Democracy Reporting International, "The New Constitutional and Legal Framework for the Elections of the People's Assembly of Representatives" [in Arabic], 17 December 2022

[35] Interview ID05, 24 November 2023; Interview ID06, 6 December 2023; Interview ID08, 24 October 2023; Interview ID09, 24 October 2023; Interview ID19, 26 October 2023; Interview ID30, 11 January 2024.

[36] After the French name Parti destourien libre.

[37] See Aljazeera.net, 31 May 2022; *Tunisie Numérique*, 7 September 2022.

[38] The People's Movement (حركة الشعب) is the only party represented in the 2019-21 parliament that maintained its support for President Saied.

[39] Interview ID09, 24 October 2023; Interview ID26, 9 January 2024.

[40] Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne. 27 May 2014. The exception being the populous provinces of Nabeul, Sfax, and Tunis, which were split into two constituencies each. In addition, there were 6 districts abroad, bringing the total to 33.

[41] Décret-loi n° 2022-55, Annex A. In addition to the 151 domestic districts, there were 10 constituencies abroad.

[42] Interview ID10, 7 october 2023; Interview ID14, 29 September 2023; Interview ID21, 31 October 2023; Interview ID27, 10 January 2024; Interview ID29, 11 November 2024; Program ID15.

[43] Interview ID19, 26 October 2023

related to the new constitution, democratic backsliding, or the weakened role of parliament. Instead, candidates focused on highly localized issues such as hospital upgrades, agricultural roads, water access, or youth clubs.[44] For example, a former member of the Popular Front who ran as a candidate in 2022 explained: "Elections were organized at the delegation level, which clearly oriented campaigns toward local problems and interests […]. I therefore focused on local concerns, within a broader commitment to supporting the change of July 25."[45] Several interviewees reported that voters approached them with parochial requests, including securing employment for family members.[46] While some candidates claimed to have rejected such expectations as outside the formal role of an MP, they simultaneously alleged that competitors promised precisely such assistance.[47] By contrast, other candidates criticized their rivals for lacking sufficient familiarity with the delegation and for being inattentive to the everyday problems faced by local residents.[48] In any case, candidates who refused to focus on local issues and to engage in localized exchanges often performed poorly, while those embedded in dense local networks—or able to convert material resources into localized favors—were perceived as more electorally viable.[49]

These transformations closely aligned with President Saied's ideological project of "construction from below" (البناء القاعدي), which sought to reconfigure political representation by stripping it of partisan mediation and anchoring it in territorially bounded constituencies (Saied, 2013). From a theoretical perspective, however, the electoral reform did not simply decentralize representation. Rather, it revalued the forms of political capital through which elites could credibly claim access to power. Under the democratic order, elites rationally invested in partisan channels, as parties constituted the primary avenues of political advancement. Following autocratization, party-based capital declined in relative value compared to localized, non-institutional resources—such as personal proximity to constituents, reputational standing, knowledge of local networks, and material brokerage. As a result, elites whose careers had been built around party-mediated advancement experienced a relative devaluation of their accumulated political capital, while actors endowed with individualized, locally embedded resources saw their comparative position improve. Importantly, this shift was not absolute. Partisan capital did not disappear; rather, its marginal returns declined relative to alternative forms of capital. Established elites could still convert residual party-based resources into political advantage, but they no longer occupied the dominant position they had held under the prior institutional order. In the following section, we show that the revaluation of political capital was not spatially homogeneous, but followed a distinct geographical pattern shaped by uneven levels of party organizational penetration across the country. We leverage this spatial heterogeneity to derive explicit expectations for the empirical analysis.

The Spatially Heterogeneous Effects of Capital Revaluation

Although the institutional reforms underpinning Tunisia's autocratization were implemented uniformly nationwide, their political effects unfolded against a backdrop of long-standing regional inequalities that had already structured electoral competition during the democratic period. Tunisian electoral dynamics were shaped by a persistent center–periphery cleavage rooted in the country's postcolonial development model, which concentrated state investment in the northern and coastal regions—the so-called *Sahel*—while systematically neglecting the interior and the south (Boughzala & Hamdi, 2014; Berman & Nugent, 2020). These territorial inequalities translated not only into uneven socioeconomic outcomes but also into distinct patterns of political participation and vote choice. In the 2011 elections, for example, while voter turnout was high in coastal cities and in the southwest, western, northwestern and southernmost delegations exhibited lower turnout and cast disproportionately high shares of votes for marginal parties that failed to secure parliamentary representation (Ben Rebah et al., 2016). Studies

[44] Program ID01; Program ID15; Program ID27.
[45] Interview ID10, 7 October 2023.
[46] Interview ID02, 13 December 2023; Interview ID07, 14 December 2023; Interview ID08, 24 October 2023; Interview ID25, 4 December 2023.
[47] Interview ID02, 13 December 2023.
[48] Interview ID18, 1 November 2023.
[49] Interview ID01, 7 December 2023; Interview ID02, 13 December 2023; Interview ID05, 24 November 2023; Interview ID30, 11 January 2024.

also show that electoral support for Ennahda and the populist Popular Petition (حزب العريضة الشعبية, PP) in the same contest closely tracked this center–periphery divide, with Ennahda performing better in political and economic centers while the Popular Petition drew its strongest support from peripheral regions (Koehler & Warkotsch, 2014; Van Hamme et al., 2014). These territorial patterns persisted across subsequent electoral cycles. In the 2014 legislative elections, preferences over redistribution and lustration mattered more for vote choice in historically advantaged districts, while Ennahda performed best in the South and peripheral urban areas and its secular rival Nidaa Tounes dominated privileged coastal cities (Berman & Nugent, 2020; Gana & Van Hamme, 2016). The 2019 elections, finally, reproduced these spatial inequalities, with peripheral regions characterized by lower turnout, greater volatility, and higher levels of party fragmentation (Govantes et al., 2025). Taken together, this literature documents a durable center–periphery cleavage that structured electoral politics in democratic Tunisia across successive electoral cycles.

We argue that this durable center–periphery cleavage was closely associated with a second, frequently underappreciated feature of Tunisian political geography: spatial variation in the extent to which political parties functioned as gate-keepers to political office and elite advancement. During the democratic period, Tunisian parties were generally weak as organizations. Yet the closed-list proportional electoral system nevertheless endowed them with formal control over candidate selection and list placement, thereby assigning parties a central gatekeeping role. Critically, however, parties' capacity to exercise this role was not evenly distributed across space. In historically favored regions, parties were better embedded and advancement within party structures was more consequential for political careers. In peripheral and marginalized regions, by contrast, weaker party penetration reduced parties' effective control over access to office. This geographically uneven capacity for party gatekeeping constitutes one core source of variation exploited in our empirical design.

The three legislative elections held during the democratic period were core avenues of elite recruitment in democratic Tunisia. We exploit variation in the degree to which political parties were able to monopolize access in these elections to operationalize party gatekeeping. For each district, we calculate the vote share obtained by nationally organized parties—defined as parties competing in at least half of all constituencies—in the 2011, 2014, and 2019 legislative elections.[50] These three election-specific measures are then averaged to capture the extent to which parties consistently structured electoral competition in a given district over time. The resulting index is standardized to facilitate interpretation and comparison across districts. Conceptually, higher values of this measure indicate districts in which access to political office was more persistently mediated by party organizations during the democratic period, while lower values reflect contexts in which non-party actors and alternative pathways played a greater role. By aggregating across elections, the measure is designed to capture a durable spatial legacy of party gatekeeping rather than election-specific fluctuations. A principal-components analysis reported in Appendix B.3.1 confirms that the three components load strongly on a single latent dimension.

Figure 1 highlights that party gatekeeping during Tunisia's democratic period was not only uneven, but systematically aligned with the country's longstanding center–periphery divide. Higher levels of gatekeeping cluster in northern and coastal districts—areas historically favored by state investment and more deeply integrated into national party networks—while much of the interior and southern periphery exhibits markedly lower values. This spatial configuration closely parallels earlier findings on regional variation in electoral alignment, volatility, and party competition, suggesting that geographic inequalities extended beyond voter behavior to shape the very channels through which political elites were recruited and promoted. Where parties were more deeply embedded, elite advancement was more strongly mediated by partisan organizations; where they were weaker, alternative, non-party pathways—such as local independent lists or regionally limited party organizations—played a greater role. The map therefore provides visual evidence that party gatekeeping constituted a territorially differentiated legacy

[50] The 2011 elections did not technically elect a legislature, but a constituent assembly tasked with drafting the post-revolutionary constitution. The NCA nonetheless acted as a *de facto* parliament until the 2014 elections.

of democratic politics, one that conditions how a uniform national reconfiguration of institutions subsequently translated into uneven patterns of elite turnover and replacement.

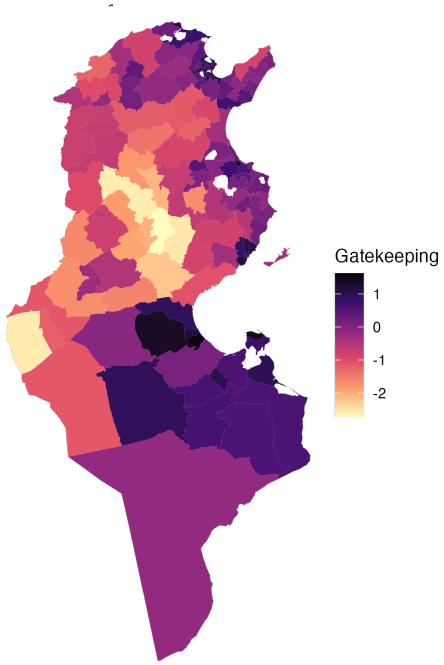

Figure 1: Party gatekeeping by 2022 Districts

As a result, when autocratization reduced the relative value of party-based capital and elevated individualized, localist pathways to office, these pre-existing differences conditioned elites' ability to convert their accumulated political capital into political access. A uniform institutional reform therefore generated geographically heterogeneous effects—not simply because elites adapted differently in the moment, but because both their capital portfolios and the structure of local competition varied systematically with levels of historical party gatekeeping.

These dynamics yield observable implications at the district level. First, during the democratic period, elites in districts characterized by strong (weak) party gatekeeping were more (less) likely to invest in partisan career pathways rather than cultivate autonomous local embeddedness. Consequently, at the point of democratic breakdown, elites' capital endowments differed systematically across districts, shaping the credibility and effectiveness of localist campaign appeals. Second, because political capital is revalued relationally, the competitive environment also varied. Candidates in districts with high party gatekeeping faced stronger competition from entrenched elites able to draw on residual partisan capital, whereas candidates in low-gatekeeping districts encountered a less crowded field of such actors. Taken together, these mechanisms imply that the effectiveness of localist electoral appeals should vary systematically across districts:

> **H1:** Localist electoral appeals are more electorally effective in districts with low historical party gatekeeping than in districts with high gatekeeping.

The next section details the research design and data we use to test this hypothesis.

Research Design and Data

To test the hypothesis of spatially heterogeneous returns to the revaluation of political capital following regime change, we estimate a series of multilevel linear regression models in which the dependent variable is the candidate's

first-round vote share in the 2022 parliamentary elections. The primary independent variable is a candidate-level measure of localness derived from campaign platforms, capturing the extent to which electoral appeals emphasize constituency-specific concerns. To assess whether the electoral payoff of local appeals varies across political contexts, we include a cross-level interaction between localness and a district-level measure of historical party gatekeeping. The models include random intercepts at the district level to capture baseline differences in electoral competitiveness, as well as random slopes for localness, allowing the effect of localized appeals to vary across districts beyond what is explained by observed covariates. This specification ensures that the estimated interaction captures systematic moderation by historical party gatekeeping rather than unmodeled district-specific heterogeneity. We additionally control for candidate-level characteristics and district-level covariates related to political experience, competition, turnout, and peripherality.

We collect data from a variety of sources (see Appendix B for details on sources and data preparation). Our dependent variable is candidates' first-round vote shares in Tunisia's 2022/23 legislative elections. We obtained the complete first-round results for all 151 domestic single-member districts from the Tunisian electoral commission (الهيئة العليا المستقلة للانتخابات, ISIE). These results were available as scanned official documents for each district and are no longer accessible online; we manually extracted candidate names and vote totals from these documents. The first-round results contain 1,052 candidates, with the number of candidates per district ranging from 1 to 22. Vote share is calculated as the candidate's votes divided by the total valid votes cast in the district in the first round. Because vote shares are defined within districts, they are mechanically interdependent: increases in one candidate's vote share necessarily imply decreases in the shares of competing candidates. Substantively, this implies that coefficients should be interpreted as relative performance effects within districts: they capture whether candidates emphasizing certain attributes or strategies outperform other candidates competing in the same district, holding constant district-level electoral conditions.

Localness

Our core independent variable is the degree of localness in candidates' campaign platforms. To measure this, we rely on candidate profiles published by Tunis Afrique Press (وكالة تونس إفريقيا للأنباء, TAP), Tunisia's government-run news agency. TAP provided a special section on the 2022 elections in which they published profiles for 911 of the 1,052 candidates running in the contest (87% of candidates). We obtained the profiles by systematically scraping the TAP website from the date when candidate registration closed and until the first round of the elections on 17 December 2022 and then filtering out entries which contain candidate profiles. The profiles follow a rather standardized structure, introducing the candidate and covering core parts of their platforms (see Appendix B.2, Figure 7 for an example). There is no evidence that more prominent (and thus arguably more successful) candidates were more likely to be covered by TAP. The percentage of first-round winners covered in profiles is 85% (17 out of 20), and the percentage of successful candidates overall covered by profiles is also 85% (127 of 150). We also conducted a more formal analysis to determine whether profiles can be considered missing at random (conditional on observables) which did not produce evidence to the contrary (see Appendix B.2.3).

We use the profiles to code the degree to which candidates make concrete, localized promises. Given the specific institutional context discussed above, all profiles contain promises directed specifically at the candidate's constituency. However, these promises differ significantly in terms of their concreteness. We code the *localness* of campaign statements on a three-point scale. A score of 0 indicates vague or purely ideological rhetoric, limited to abstract or national-level themes such as sovereignty, anti-normalization, or transparency. A score of 1 denotes somewhat specific promises, where candidates mention service sectors or generic projects—for example in education, health, housing, transport, the environment, or industrial zones—but without a clear local anchor. Finally, a score of 2 captures highly specific commitments that are tied to concrete places, infrastructures, local agencies, or district-wide problems, such as repairing deteriorated roads in a specific locality or rehabilitating a named canal or lake. Table 1

shows examples of text snippets falling into the three categories.

Score	Extract	Translation
0	القيروان 15 ديسمبر [...] الحبيب الجهيناوي [...] المحاسبة ومكافحة الفساد المالي والإداري [...] تكريس السيادة الوطنية في الخارج والسيادة الشعبية في الداخل، وتحقيق السيادة على الثروات، وتعبئة الموارد الداخلية بديلا عن المديونية	Kairouan, 15 December [...] Habib Jhinaoui [...] accountability and combating financial and administrative corruption [...] entrench national sovereignty abroad and popular sovereignty at home, to achieve sovereignty over national resources, and to mobilize domestic resources as an alternative to indebtedness.
1	أريانة 8 ديسمبر [...] محمد غسان الشابي [...] إحداث مناطق صناعية وشركات تعاونية [...] ضمان حقوق الفئات الهشّة، ومقاومة الظلم والخصاصة والبطالة والانقطاع المدرسي والإدمان، وضمان حق الشغل، ومجانية التعليم، ودعم القطاع الصحي والبنية التحتية والسكن الاجتماعي، وتحسين النقل والثقافة والرياضة، والإصلاح التربوي [...] تشريك المواطن في اتخاذ القرار وتطوير الخدمات المحلية.	Ariana, 8 December [...] Mohamed Ghassan Chabbi [...] establishing industrial zones and cooperative companies [...] Ensuring the rights of vulnerable groups; combating injustice, deprivation, unemployment, school dropout, and addiction; guaranteeing the right to work; providing free education; supporting the health sector, infrastructure, and social housing; improving transport, culture, and sports; and pursuing educational reform [...] involving citizens in decision-making and developing local services.
2	القيروان 15 ديسمبر [...] نبيل الحامدي [...] كهربة الابار السطحية وتسوية وضعية الآبار العميقة العشوائية، وربطها بالكهرباء أو تزويدها بالطاقة الشمسية [...] إعادة الحياة لقناة وادي بالأسود نبهانة التي تضمن تزويد منظومة الري نبهانة، وإنقاذ المناطق السقوية عين بومرة الفريوات وهماد وسرديانة [...] صيانة وتهذيب بحيرة الكوكات بعين جلولة	Kairouan, 15 December [...] Nabil Hamdi [...] electrification of surface wells and regularization of informal deep wells, connecting them to the electricity grid or supplying them with solar energy [...] reviving the Oued Bel Aswad–Nebhana canal, which ensures the supply of the Nebhana irrigation system, and rescuing the irrigated areas of Ain Boumra, Friewat, Houmad, and Sardiana [...] maintenance and rehabilitation of Lake Koukat in Ain Jeloula.

Table 1: Examples of localness scores

To code the campaign statements, we relied on an LLM-powered automatic coding procedure (see Appendix B.2.2 for details). To anchor the coding, we supplied five illustrative examples drawn from actual candidate statements, covering the full range from purely ideological appeals to highly specific infrastructure-related commitments. The model returned standardized outputs with localness scores, along with short evidence quotes from the Arabic texts that justified the assigned scores. Only 8% of candidate profiles are scored 0 on localness, while 44% receive the highest score of 2 and the remaining 48% fall in the intermediate category.

Party gatekeeping

Our theory implies that the effects of localism on electoral dynamics will be moderated by historical patterns of party gatekeeping. As discussed above, we operationalize gatekeeping with the extent to which political parties controlled access on the district level across Tunisia's three democratic legislative elections. More specifically, we calculate the delegation-level (or municipality-level in the case of the 2019 election) vote share of *nationally organized parties* for all three elections. We then aggregate the 2011, 2014, and 2019 electoral returns to 2022 districts using area-weighted crosswalks constructed via spatial overlays (see Appendix B.3).

We define *nationally organized parties* as those that compete in at least half of Tunisia's 27 constituencies in a given election year ($\geq$ 14 constituencies; see Table 12 in Appendix B.5.2). For each district and election year, we compute the vote share received by these nationally organized parties relative to total valid votes. Party gatekeeping is then operationalized as the standardized average of district-level party vote shares across 2011, 2014, and 2019. Higher values indicate districts in which party organizations more consistently structured access to elected office during the democratic period. A principal component analysis confirms the validity of our measure (Appendix B.3.1).

Controls

To isolate the relationship between localness, party gatekeeping, and electoral performance, we include controls capturing candidate characteristics, district context, and competitive environment. We measure whether candidates

previously held elected office using reference lists of politically relevant actors from the democratic period, including parliamentary rosters (2009–2011, 2011/12–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2021), 8,200 municipal councilors elected in 2018, and names of list leaders in the 2019 legislative election (see Appendix B.4 for details).

To control for structural differences between urban and peripheral contexts, we include a composite peripherality index combining (i) building density derived from OpenStreetMap building footprints (as a proxy for settlement intensity) and (ii) distance from the district centroid to the nearest governorate capital (as a proxy for administrative remoteness). After log-transforming building density, both components are standardized and combined so that higher values denote more peripheral districts (Appendix B.6). Finally, we control for basic features of the electoral environment that may shape both campaign strategies and vote outcomes. These include turnout, the effective number of candidates in the district, and indicators capturing whether other candidates in the district also emphasize local appeals.

Estimation Strategy

We estimate multilevel linear models to assess how historical party gatekeeping conditions the electoral value of *local campaign promises* in the 2022 legislative elections. The unit of analysis is the individual candidate, with candidates nested within electoral districts. The models include random intercepts at the district level to capture baseline differences in vote concentration across districts. In addition, the effect of candidates' reliance on locally concrete campaign promises is allowed to vary by district, reflecting heterogeneity in how localistic appeals translate into electoral support across territorial contexts, net of party gatekeeping.

Formally, we estimate models of the following form:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 L_{ij} + \beta_2 G_j + \beta_3 (L_{ij} \times G_j) + \mathbf{X}_{ij}\boldsymbol{\gamma} + u_{0j} + u_{1j} L_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

where y_{ij} denotes the first-round vote share of candidate i in district j, L_{ij} is a three-point scale measuring the concreteness of candidates' local campaign promises, G_j denotes historical party gatekeeping at the district level, $\mathbf{X}_{ij}$ is a vector of candidate- and district-level controls, u_{0j} is a district-specific random intercept, u_{1j} is a district-specific random slope on local promise concreteness, and ε_{ij} is the idiosyncratic error term. The dependent variable is the candidate's first-round vote share, measured as a proportion. Because vote shares within districts sum to one, the outcome captures the *distribution and concentration of votes across candidates* rather than absolute electoral gains.

Results

Table 2 reports the results of our multilevel models. Across both specifications, the average (main) effect of *local canpaign promises* is negative and either statistically weak or modestly significant. At average levels of historical party gatekeeping, articulating more concrete local promises does not systematically increase candidates' vote shares. Localistic appeals, taken in isolation, are therefore not a universally effective electoral strategy in the post-party electoral environment, consistent with their near-universal adoption in the 2022 campaign.

The core theoretical finding concerns the interaction between *local campaign promises* and *historical party gatekeeping*. The interaction is negative and statistically significant in both models, indicating that the electoral returns to localistic appeals decline as historical gatekeeping increases. In districts characterized by weak party gatekeeping, candidates who articulate more concrete, place-specific promises are able to concentrate a larger share of the district vote relative to candidates relying on vague or generic appeals. As historical gatekeeping increases, this advantage erodes and ultimately reverses.

Table 2: Heterogeneous Effects of Localness

	Baseline	Controls
Localness	−0.006	−0.016**
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Party gatekeeping	0.089***	0.039**
	(0.017)	(0.018)
Localness × Gatekeeping	−0.016***	−0.015**
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Other local candidates		−0.102***
		(0.027)
Local councilor		0.027***
		(0.008)
Former MP		0.020
		(0.018)
Party list leader		0.015
		(0.013)
Other candidates' prior office		−0.044
		(0.034)
Peripherality		0.007
		(0.006)
Effective number of candidates		−0.006
		(0.004)
Turnout		0.018***
		(0.003)
Num. Obs.	867	867
ICC (district intercept)	0.852	0.826

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

ICC refers to the random intercept and captures baseline district-level clustering; models additionally allow the localness effect to vary by district.

This pattern is consistent with the two mechanisms of political capital revaluation outlined above. The negative interaction between localness and historical party gatekeeping captures the individual-level mechanism of portfolio devaluation. In districts characterized by strong party gatekeeping during the democratic period, elites were more likely to specialize in party-mediated career pathways—such as internal brokerage, list positioning, and partisan coordination—facing opportunity costs that limited parallel investment in locally embedded political capital. When party mediation was removed in 2022, these specialized portfolios did not disappear but declined in relative value. As a result, the marginal electoral return to localized campaign appeals was weaker in historically party-saturated districts. By contrast, in districts with weaker historical gatekeeping, elites' capital portfolios were less tightly bound to party channels and more compatible with individualized, territorially grounded appeals, making localness electorally more productive.

The positive main effect of historical gatekeeping reflects the second, group-level mechanism: the transformation of the competitive field. Districts with high gatekeeping exhibit greater vote concentration even in the post-party environment, suggesting that residual partisan capital and accumulated political visibility continue to structure competition. In such contexts, entrenched elites crowd the field, compressing the marginal payoff of localized campaign strategies. Where historical gatekeeping was weaker, competition is more fragmented and less dominated

by actors endowed with residual partisan capital, allowing locally embedded appeals to translate more directly into vote gains.

The magnitude of the conditional effect is substantively meaningful. A formal contrast test shows that moving from a low-gatekeeping district (one standard deviation below the mean) to a high-gatekeeping district (one standard deviation above the mean) reduces the electoral return to a one-unit increase in local promise concreteness by approximately 3 percentage points of the district vote ($z = -2.53$, $p = 0.012$). Given the three-point scale of the concreteness measure, moving from fully vague to fully concrete local promises ($0 \rightarrow 2$) implies a swing of roughly 6 percentage points of vote share between low- and high-gatekeeping contexts. With the average candidate receiving about 14 percent of the vote, this corresponds to a change of nearly 40 percent of a typical candidate's electoral support. Given the zero-sum nature of electoral competition, these gains reflect meaningful reallocation of votes across candidates rather than marginal changes in participation.

Importantly, once controls are introduced, the direct association between historical gatekeeping and vote share attenuates, indicating that gatekeeping does not mechanically advantage candidates in the post-party system. Rather, its legacy operates indirectly—through the composition of capital portfolios and the structuring of local competitive environments—shaping which campaign strategies remain electorally effective after party mediation disappears.

Finally, the large intra-class correlation coefficients indicate substantial baseline clustering of vote shares within districts. Beyond differences in baseline vote concentration, a likelihood-ratio test strongly favors the random-slope specification ($\chi^2 = 20.04$, $p < 0.001$), indicating substantial cross-district heterogeneity in the electoral returns to localistic campaign appeals beyond baseline differences in vote concentration. This heterogeneity is not a byproduct of model overfitting: the random-slope model is well behaved and non-singular. Moreover, introducing the interaction between promise concreteness and historical party gatekeeping reduces the unexplained variance in district-level slopes by approximately 14 percent, suggesting that party gatekeeping accounts for a meaningful share of the observed heterogeneity in how local promises translate into votes. At the same time, the correlation between district-level intercepts and slopes remains strongly negative (approximately -0.95), indicating that districts with higher baseline vote concentration systematically exhibit weaker electoral returns to localistic appeals even after accounting for historical party gatekeeping. Taken together, these results indicate that historical party gatekeeping captures an important but incomplete component of the geographical structure of electoral competition: it systematically conditions the average effectiveness of local campaign promises, but does not fully explain why localism is electorally productive in some districts and not in others.

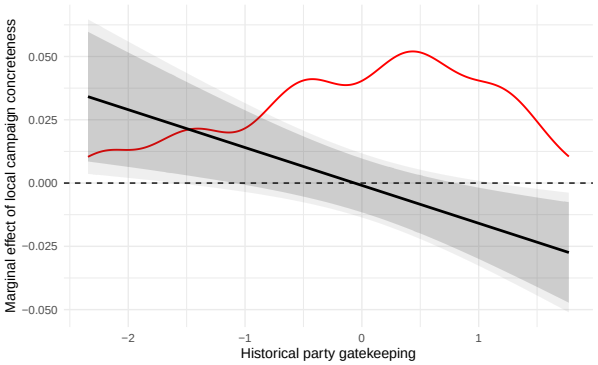

Figure 2: Declining Electoral Returns to Local Campaign Promises

Notes: Bands show 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals; the red line shows the rescaled density of historical party gatekeeping.

Figure 2 visualizes the conditional marginal effect of campaign promise localness across the observed range of historical party gatekeeping. The figure reveals a clear decline in the electoral returns to localistic appeals as party gatekeeping increases. In low-gatekeeping districts, increasing the localness of campaign promises is associated

with positive and substantively meaningful gains in candidates' vote shares. As historical gatekeeping rises, these returns steadily erode and eventually turn negative, indicating that locally grounded promises cease to be an effective electoral strategy in contexts historically dominated by party mediation.

Taken together, these findings indicate that localism functioned as a compensatory form of political capital in the post-democratic context. Candidates competing in districts with weaker historical party gatekeeping were able to translate concrete local promises into meaningful electoral gains. Conversely, in districts with stronger party gatekeeping during the democratic period, localistic appeals yielded little additional benefit. This pattern supports the broader theoretical claim that autocratization in Tunisia led to a revalutation of political capital which systematically privileged outsiders, while diminishing the relative advantages of elites who had accumulated party-mediated forms of political capital.

A Quasi-Experiment

A central concern in the preceding analysis is that historical party gatekeeping may be correlated with unobserved district-level characteristics that also shape patterns of vote concentration in 2022. Although we control for a range of socio-economic and political covariates, districts characterized by weak party mediation during the democratic period might still differ systematically from high-gatekeeping districts along persistent, unobserved dimensions—such as political culture, territorial cleavages, or long-standing patterns of local elite organization. If this was the case, the interaction between localism and gatekeeping could reflect structural differences rather than the revaluation of political capital induced by autocratization.

To address this concern, we implement a quasi-experimental border discontinuity design at the delegation level. The design exploits two institutional features of the 2022 electoral reform. First, electoral districts were constructed within governorate boundaries and did not cross them. Second, candidates were legally required to reside in the district in which they ran, eliminating strategic relocation across district lines. As a result, adjacent delegations located on opposite sides of a governorate border were assigned to different 2022 electoral districts and therefore exposed to different district-level gatekeeping environments, despite their geographic proximity.

We identify pairs of delegations separated by governorate borders. Within each pair, delegations share geographic and structural characteristics along observable socio-economic dimensions, including poverty rates, urbanization, and educational abandonment, but differ in the historical party gatekeeping environment to which they were exposed through district assignment. We then estimate delegation-level models with pair fixed effects, clustering standard errors at the pair level. This strategy absorbs all time-invariant differences across adjacent territories, isolating variation in historical gatekeeping that is plausibly orthogonal to persistent structural factors.

To avoid duplication and ensure clear contrasts, each delegation enters the analysis only once and is matched to the cross-border pair that maximizes the within-pair contrast in gatekeeping. In addition to estimating models on the full set of matched pairs, we also restrict the sample to the top half of pairs in terms of gatekeeping contrast, thereby focusing on cases where the institutional discontinuity is most pronounced. This design allows us to examine whether the moderating effect of historical party gatekeeping on the returns to localism persists under conditions of tight geographic and structural comparability. By leveraging quasi-random exposure to distinct historical gatekeeping environments at governorate borders, the analysis strengthens causal identification and reduces concerns that our main findings are driven by unobserved regional heterogeneity.

Table 3: Border Discontinuity Design

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
					High ΔG pairs
Localism	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.004	−0.007
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.012)
Gatekeeping	0.002	0.022	0.025	0.026	0.050***
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.016)
Localism × Gatekeeping		−0.013**	−0.011*	−0.010	−0.017**
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Former MP			−0.008	−0.013	−0.024
			(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.054)
Councilor			0.034***	0.035***	0.047**
			(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.017)
List Leader			0.036	0.036	0.019
			(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.029)
Poverty rate				0.003	0.004***
				(0.003)	(0.001)
Secondary abandonment				−0.007	−0.022***
				(0.017)	(0.006)
Urban share (2014)				−0.008	−0.030*
				(0.058)	(0.017)
Population (2014)				0.000	0.000***
				(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	594	594	594	594	301
R^2	0.612	0.615	0.627	0.630	0.336
Border-Pair FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* p <0.1, ** p <0.05, *** p <0.01

The results of the border discontinuity analysis in Table 3 reinforce the central findings of the district-level models. Across specifications, the interaction between localism and historical party gatekeeping retains the predicted negative sign. The magnitude of the interaction term is substantively comparable to that observed in the full-sample district models. Including delegation-level controls modestly attenuates the interaction in the full matched sample. However, when the analysis is restricted to delegation pairs exhibiting the strongest gatekeeping contrasts, both the magnitude and statistical significance of the interaction are restored. This pattern is consistent with an institutional discontinuity mechanism: where exposure to distinct historical gatekeeping environments is most clearly differentiated, the moderating effect of gatekeeping on the returns to localism becomes more pronounced.

Importantly, because the 2022 electoral system eliminated party labels and prohibited cross-district candidacy, these effects cannot plausibly be attributed to contemporary party coordination or strategic candidate sorting. Rather, they reflect the enduring consequences of historical party mediation for the distribution of political capital at the local level. Adjacent delegations with similar socio-economic profiles exhibit systematically different patterns of vote concentration depending on the extent to which party gatekeeping structured elite advancement during the democratic period. Taken together, the discontinuity analysis substantially mitigates concerns that the observed interaction is driven by long-standing territorial cleavages or unobserved regional characteristics. Instead, the findings are consistent with the interpretation that historical variation in party mediation shaped the structure of

local elite competition, which in turn conditioned the electoral returns to localist appeals under autocratization.

Mechanisms

The statistical analysis above demonstrates a consistent interaction between historical party gatekeeping and the electoral returns to localist appeals. In the multilevel models, the marginal effect of candidate-level localness becomes significantly more negative as district-level gatekeeping increases. The border discontinuity design further corroborates this pattern: even among geographically proximate delegations with comparable socioeconomic characteristics, higher historical party mediation is associated with weaker electoral payoffs to localized campaign content. The mechanisms section probes how this interaction is produced on the ground by examining how historical gatekeeping environments shape candidate capital portfolios and competitive field configurations under the 2022 institutional rules. Under these rules, localist rhetoric was adopted to varying degrees by almost all candidates across districts, but its electoral payoff varied systematically with the strength of historical party gatekeeping.

To illustrate the causal mechanisms, we conduct a paired comparison of two districts that are widely separated along the historical gatekeeping spectrum: Bardo/Tahrir in the Tunis metropolitan area and Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour in the country's interior west. The districts are not geographically adjacent. Rather, they are selected to reflect the enduring political-geographic cleavage introduced earlier: the contrast between the administrative and economic center and the historically marginalized periphery. Tunis represents the institutional core of party-mediated competition, while Kasserine has been emblematic of territorial exclusion, protest mobilization, and weaker partisan penetration. As Table 4 shows, this broader center–periphery divide remains visible in poverty levels. At the same time, the districts are similar along several other relevant covariates—including population size, urbanization, and school abandonment—allowing us to isolate how differences in historical party gatekeeping translate into distinct contemporary payoff structures.

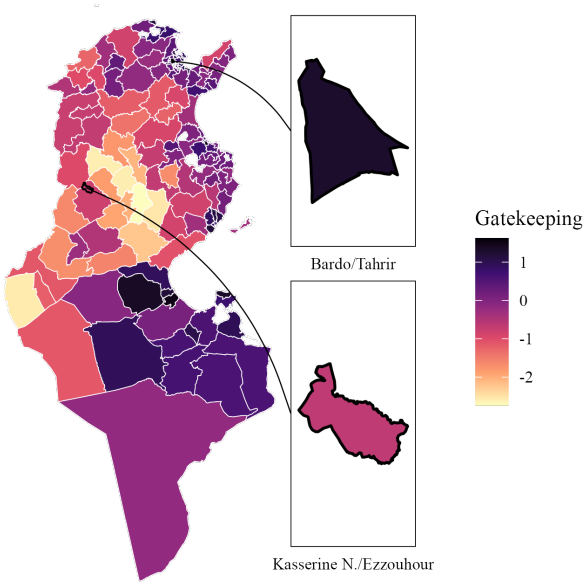

Figure 3: Bardo/Tahrir and Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour

Table 4: District-Level Covariates

District	Pop. 2014	Poverty (%)	Urban Share (%)	School Abandon. (%)	District G
Bardo/Tahrir	93,670	1.85	100	3.32	1.560
Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour	106,050	22.30	97.4	5.16	-0.316

Population, urbanization, and school abadonment from the 2014 census; poverty rate from the INS/Worldbank Poverty Map.

The contrast between the two districts is stark when examining party gatekeeping. During the democratic period, nationally organized parties consistently dominated competition in Bardo/Tahrir, capturing 69.4% of the vote in 2011, 96.5% in 2014, and 76.3% in 2019. In Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour, party penetration was markedly weaker (51.0% in 2011, 77.4% in 2014, and 62.3% in 2019). This divergence underpins the sharp difference in the gatekeeping index (1.560 vs. -0.316), situating the two cases in markedly different regions of the historical party mediation spectrum, with Bardo/Tahrir among the more party-saturated districts within the 4th quartile of the distribution and Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour located on the less mediated side within the second quartile.[51]

Crucially, the divergence extends into the post-party electoral arena. In Bardo/Tahrir (7 candidates), the estimated slope of localness on vote share is negative (-0.0209). Substantively, this implies that, within this district, moving from a non-local to a fully local campaign strategy is associated with a 4 percentage-point decrease in the vote share, or about one-fifth of first-round leader's vote share. In other words, greater emphasis on territorially specific projects and granular neighborhood-level promises did not improve candidates' electoral standing; if anything, it was penalized. In Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour (22 candidates), by contrast, the slope is slightly positive (0.004). Moving from a fully non-local to a fully-local campaign strategy increases the vote share by 0.8 percentage points, or about 6.7% of the leading candidate's vote share. While modest in magnitude, this is significant given the tight vote margins in Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour and is comparable in size to the separation between the top candidates in the first round.

The contrast between the two districts is significant: Holding candidate promise-localness constant, a fully local candidate would be expected to perform about five percentage points worse in Bardo/Tahrir than in Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour, reflecting the different historical gatekeeping environments. The difference between the two slopes is thus not merely directional but substantively meaningful: in the historically party-saturated district, localism carried diminishing or negative returns, whereas in the historically less mediated district, it was electorally viable. These district-level contrasts mirror the aggregate interaction estimated in the full sample: where party gatekeeping was historically dense, localized campaign appeals yield weaker returns; as historical gatekeeping decreases, local appeals are no longer penalized and eventually translate into electoral gains. Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour sits in the range of the historical party gatekeeping distribution where the marginal effect of localism transitions from negative toward positive.

The comparison that follows unpacks how these differential payoff structures emerge. We show that in the high-gatekeeping district, the candidate field is saturated with politically professionalized actors whose residual partisan capital compress the electoral value of localized rhetoric. In the low-gatekeeping district, by contrast, competition is more fragmented and locally embedded, and the credibility of territorially grounded appeals depends less on prior party mediation and more on associative and social embeddedness. Together, the cases illustrate how historical gatekeeping environments shape both the composition of candidate capital portfolios and the contemporary returns to localism under individualized electoral competition.

[51] Across districts, the gatekeeping index ranges from -2.345 to 1.772 (Q1 $= -0.634$, median $= 0.141$, Q3 $= 0.743$). Bardo/Tahrir ($G = 1.560$) is located in the top quartile, while Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour ($G = -0.316$) falls in the lower half of the distribution, but not at the lower extreme.

Bardo/Tahrir

Bardo/Tahrir is located in the western part of the Tunis metropolitan area. The district encompasses politically and administratively dense urban territory, including the Bardo Palace complex and surrounding residential neighborhoods such as Hay al-Tahrir and Qasr al-Sa'id. It is an integrated part of the capital's institutional core, characterized by established municipal infrastructure, mixed-income neighborhoods, and sustained exposure to national-level political competition. As highlighted above, this also meant that party gatekeeping was consistently high during the democratic period, with political parties monopolizing access to elite status.

As a result, the 2022 candidate field in Bardo/Tahrir was densely populated by politically experienced actors. Rather than attracting primarily first-time entrants or socially embedded outsiders, the district saw competition among individuals with substantial prior exposure to party politics, electoral competition, and municipal office. Several candidates combined municipal officeholding with prior party trajectories. Dhafer Sghairi, a municipal councillor with prior links to Afek Tounes, emphasized environmental challenges, infrastructure renewal, market rehabilitation, and legislative reform aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship.[52] Hassan Yaacoub, President of the Bardo municipality who ran for the independent We are all Bardo (كلنا بردو) list in the 2019 legislative election, foregrounded direct engagement with residents, investment reform, purchasing power, and administrative simplification.[53] Zakia Kasraoui, long active in political and civil society spheres and affiliated with the Loyalty to the Homeland party (حزب أوفياء للوطن), presented herself as an experienced political actor committed to district renewal.[54] Mansour Belhaj, who had previously led the Nidaa Tounes list for the 2019 legislative elections in the Tunis 2 district, campaigned on neighborhood-level projects, including municipal markets, sports facilities, and transport infrastructure.[55] Taken together, three out of seven candidates had prior party-based careers, and one had run for an independent list in the 2019 election. In other words, almost half of all candidates looked back on party-mediated political careers.

Alongside these party-socialized figures were candidates rooted more squarely in local associative activity. Wajdi el-Majri, active in civil society, articulated one of the most granular local programs in the race, proposing measures such as reopening the municipal swimming pool, creating additional public transport lines, rehabilitating green areas, expanding access to social assistance booklets, and increasing the administrative autonomy of the Tahrir municipal district.[56] Fatima Ben Hussein, who emphasized that she was entering electoral politics for the first time in a radio interview with *Diwan FM*, focused her program on legislative reform under the new constitutional framework and emphasized accountability mechanisms such as withdrawal of confidence.[57] Noureddine Abdelkader stressed referenda, youth employment, and infrastructural upgrading.[58]

Crucially, localist rhetoric was widespread. Nearly all candidates promised infrastructure repair, employment creation, youth support, transport improvements, and the rehabilitation of public facilities. What differentiated candidates was not whether they invoked local concerns, but their prior political capital portfolios. The field was saturated with party-affiliated activists and politically socialized elites whose reputational networks extended back into the party-centered democratic period. These elites possessed partisan and institutional capital rather than the type of locally embedded capital that individualized competition now rewarded. Instead, in a high-gatekeeping context, they could translate residual party-based capital into electoral gain. Indeed, the four top-placed candidates in the first round all had party-based careers (Dhafer Sghairi in Afek Tunis, Zakia Kasraoui in Loyalty to the Homeland, Mansour Belhaj in Nidaa Tounes), or prior experience in running for legislative elections (Hassan Yaacoub on the list of We are all Bardo in 2019). By contrast, the candidates without prior party-mediated experiences cluster in

[52] See the TAP profile of Dhafer Sghairi.
[53] See the TAP profile of Hassan Yaacoub.
[54] The candidate does not have a TAP profile, but a 3-minute audio profile on Diwan FM, see: Zakia Kasraoui; her party affiliation is mentioned on the Facebook profile of حزب أوفياء للوطن.
[55] The candidate does not have a TAP profile, but one on Diwan FM, see: Mansour Belhaj.
[56] He does not have a TAP profile, but an audio profile on Diwan FM, see: Wajdi el-Majri.
[57] See the Diwan FM interview with Fatma Ben Hussein; she later ran in local elections for the 25 July Movement (حراك 25 جويلية) supportive of President Saied, see DiwanFM حراك 25 جويلية يُقدم مطالب لسحب الوكالة من 5 نواب في البرلمان.
[58] See the TAP profile of Noureddine Abdelkader.

the lower end of the first-round vote distribution. The negative slope of localness on vote share is consistent with this competitive environment in which residual partisan capital and accumulated political visibility crowded out the marginal electoral payoff of localized campaigning. In such a field configuration, localized rhetoric without accumulated political capital was insufficient to overcome entrenched reputational advantages.

The seat was won by Dhafer Sghairi who entered the run-off with approximately 22.8% of the vote, narrowly ahead of Hassan Yaacoub with 21.4%. Both were experienced municipal actors, Sghairi as a municipal councilor elected in 2018, and Yaacoub as president of Bardo municipality (بلدية); both could look back on prior experience with electoral politics, Sghairi in a party-mediated career within Afek Tounes and Yaacoub with prior activity in an independent electoral list.[59] Sghairi won the second round against Yaacoub with 54% over 46%.[60] The outcome did not represent a breakthrough by a politically unembedded outsider relying solely on hyper-local appeals. Instead, it reflected competition within a politically professionalized field shaped by durable organizational networks and reputational capital accumulated under high party gatekeeping. Both run-off candidates held local office, increasing their local visibility and credibility. Yet, neither of them relied on local credentials alone. Indeed, the eventual winner combined party-based with local political capital. Bardo/Tahrir thus exemplifies a high-gatekeeping district in which individualized campaigning unfolded within a structurally dense political environment. Even after the formal removal of party labels, historically embedded partisan infrastructures continued to shape electoral competition, compressing the returns to localism and privileging candidates endowed with prior political capital.

Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour

Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour lies in Tunisia's interior west, a region long associated with socio-economic marginalization, protest mobilization, and unresolved distributive grievances. Unlike the capital's institutional core, the district is structured by high unemployment, land disputes, water scarcity, and strained public infrastructure. Electoral competition here unfolded in a context where developmental claims are not rhetorical embellishments but central political currency.

The 2022 candidate field was large and socially diverse. To begin with, Kasserine/Ezzouhour counted a total of 22 candidates—among the highest in the country and significantly above Bardo/Tahrir's 7. Many contenders came from professional backgrounds rooted in the district—teachers, public employees, small business owners, and civil society activists. Their programs converged strongly around employment creation,[61] agricultural support,[62] and infrastructural repair,[63] emphasizing concrete territorial issues such as resolving collective land disputes,[64] improving irrigation systems,[65] and facilitating access to microcredit for young entrepreneurs.[66]

Unlike in Bardo/Tahrir, the field was not dominated by sitting municipal councilors with deep party pedigrees. Of the 22 candidates in the district, only one was a former municipal councilor (compared to 4 councilors among Bardo/Tahrir's 7 candidates). Instead, several candidates framed their entry as corrective action on behalf of an abandoned region.[67] Their legitimacy claims rested less on prior partisan careers and more on social proximity and responsiveness to everyday grievances. Campaign discourse repeatedly referenced the needs of unemployed graduates, peripheral neighborhoods, and small farmers, positioning the parliamentary seat as a lever for territorial redress rather than legislative engineering. At the same time, the district did not lack politically experienced figures. With Mahmoud Kahri, a former MP (2014-19) and regional leader of the Free Patriotic Union (الاتحاد الوطني الحر,

[59] Indeed, the official facebook page of his 2022 campaign appears to be simply a renamed version of the Facebook profile of We are all Bardo, see: حسن يعقوب الصفحة الرسمية للمترشح للإنتخابات التشريعية.
[60] See the official second-round results.
[61] See the TAP profiles of Omar Bartouli and Tariq Rtibi.
[62] See the TAP profiles of Makram Dakhili, Monawer Gassoumi, Omar Bartouli, and Hassan Rahimi.
[63] See the TAP profiles of Tijani Qahiri, Tariq Rtibi, Walid Belkacemi, Adnan Al-Nasri, and Haykel Rouafi.
[64] See the TAP profiles of Farouk Nasrli or Haykel Rouafi.
[65] See the TAP profiles of Makram Dakhili or Monawer Gassoumi.
[66] See the TAP profiles of Nasr Ghodhbani, Hassan Rahimi and Tariq Haddawi.
[67] See the TAP profiles of Chawki Janhawi, Walid Khadhraoui, Redha Chekhari, and Omar Bartouli.

UPL[68]) entered the race, carrying the symbolic capital of prior national office.[69] Kahri had left the UPL during his parliamentary term to join Nidaa Tounes. In the 2019 election, he then reemerged as the leader of Return to the Roots (الرجوع إلى الأصل) a local independent list in Kasserine.[70] This trajectory is emblematic for political elites in the secular spectrum, highlighting both the fluidity of political alignments, but also the continued relevance of party organization. This prior party-based experience did not translate into electoral success. The former MP performed poorly, finishing well behind locally anchored competitors. This outcome is analytically important: prior national officeholding, in the absence of a credible territorial anchoring under the new individualized system, was insufficient to secure support in a low gatekeeping environment.

Just as in Bardo/Tahrir, all candidates made local promises. Promises included employment initiatives, youth training programs, infrastructural upgrades, and agricultural revitalization. What varied was not the presence of local appeals, but their framing and the capital portfolios underpinning them. While some candidates had the necessary embeddedness to render local campaign promises credible, others lacked this specific form of political capital. Crucially, and in contrast to Bardo/Tahrir, there was no shortage of locally embedded candidates whose credibility did not rely on party-based careers or formal municipal office. As a result, the marginal benefit of localist promises increased.

Electoral performance ultimately reflected this competitive environment. The eventual winner, Hatem Labawi, was a secondary school teacher of 20 years, and the regional president of the Tunisian Red Crescent for Kasserine as well as the secretary general of the Civil Protection Volunteer Association. His program focused specifically on the medical sector, promising to increase the number of specialist doctors in Tunisia's interior regions—including in Kasserine—and drawing on his own experience with the shortcomings of medical infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic.[71] He entered the run-off with 12% of the vote. His second-round competitor, Makram Dakhili, by contrast, offered a highly localist campaign platform, promising support for young unemployed and small businesses, the reinvigoration of Roman heritage sites in the region, as well as the construction of a dam to create irrigation areas. In addition, he signaled his alignment with President Saied's agenda pledging to "move forward with the construction from below experience" (المضي قُدما في تجربة البناء القاعدي). Dakhili's local credibility came from his role as the Deputy Director at the Regional Commission for Agricultural Development in Kasserine.[72] He captured 11% of the first round vote. In the second round, Labawi narrowly carried the day with 50.5% over Dakhili's 49.5% (5,068 vs. 4,962 votes, a difference of merely 106 votes).[73]

Two things stand out about electoral dynamics in Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour: First, the competitive environment was extremely fragmented from the start. 22 candidates competed for one seat and the two top-placed candidates entered the run-off with only 12% and 11% of the vote, respectively. This fragmentation, coupled with low turnout (6.5% in the first round and 11.5% in the second) meant that vote margins were extremely small. Indeed, the runner up entered the run-off with a margin of 481 votes over the third-placed, and the contest was decided with a margin of 106 votes in the second round. Second, given this competitive context, what made the difference was a combination of local promises combined with the local embeddedness that made these promises credible. By contrast, residual partisan political capital did not have independent electoral traction following capital revaluation in this low gatekeeping context.

[68] After the French Union patriotique libre

[69] See the TAP Profile of Mahmoud Kahri, also see his entry in Marsad Majlis.

[70] See al-Chourouk, قائمة الرجوع الى الأصل تتعهد بإنجاز المشاريع المبرمجة...لقصرين [Kasserine: The Return to the Roots List Promises to Implement Planned Projects], 28 September 2019.

[71] See the TAP profile of Hatem Labawi.

[72] See the TAP profile of Makram Dakhili.

[73] See the official second-round results.

Comparative Observations

Taken together, the paired comparison clarifies how political capital revaluation operates through both individual-level and group-level processes. At the individual level, historical gatekeeping shaped the composition of elites' capital portfolios. In Bardo/Tahrir, where party mediation had long structured advancement, many candidates entered the post-democratic contest with capital rooted in partisan careers and institutional visibility. These portfolios retained residual value but were less compatible with an electoral environment that formally privileged individualized, territorially grounded appeals. In Kasserine Nord/Ezzouhour, by contrast, a larger share of candidates possessed capital anchored in associative activity, professional roles, and social embeddedness, rendering localist appeals more credible and electorally viable. The same campaign content therefore translated into different returns because the underlying capital endowments differed systematically across contexts.

At the group level, revaluation reshaped the competitive field. In the high-gatekeeping district, competition was compressed by a concentration of politically professionalized actors endowed with residual partisan capital, crowding the electoral space and reducing the marginal payoff of localized rhetoric. In the low-gatekeeping district, the field was more fragmented and less dominated by entrenched partisan networks, allowing locally embedded actors to compete on more equal footing. Electoral outcomes thus reflected not only differences in individual adaptation, but relational differences in how elites competed and how hierarchies were reproduced.

The mechanisms evidence therefore substantiates the interaction identified in the quantitative models: historical party gatekeeping conditioned both the distribution of political capital and the structure of competition, generating systematically divergent returns to localist appeals. Political capital revaluation after democratic breakdown did not simply reorder individual careers; it reconfigured the elite field itself, producing heterogeneous pathways into the emerging authoritarian coalition.

Conclusion

This article has addressed a central but insufficiently theorized puzzle in the study of autocratization: how do autocratizing leaders maintain or generate elite support precisely at the moment when the winning coalition contracts and institutionalized promises of power-sharing become less credible? As power concentrates and formal mechanisms of elite circulation erode, incumbents face a structural dilemma. Narrowing inclusion risks alienating established elites, while weakening institutions undermines the credibility of commitments to those who remain. How, under these conditions, can authoritarian consolidation proceed without provoking destabilizing elite defection?

We have argued that one solution lies in the revaluation of political capital. Autocratization does not merely exclude actors from a shrinking coalition; it reshapes the opportunity structures through which access to elite status is obtained. By altering the rules governing recruitment, advancement, and competition, autocratizing leaders change the exchange rate of political capital within the selectorate. Because political capital is accumulated through long-term specialization within regime-specific institutions, elites enter moments of democratic breakdown with unequal portfolios and unequal capacities to adapt. Institutional redesign therefore creates structured winners and losers. Some forms of capital lose value; others gain it. Through this process, incumbents can generate a cohort of elites whose career interests are newly aligned with the emerging authoritarian order.

The Tunisian case illustrates these dynamics. The post-2021 reconfiguration of electoral rules dismantled party-centered mechanisms of elite advancement while elevating individualized, territorially embedded forms of political capital. Drawing on elite interviews, original candidate-level data, and district-level electoral returns, we showed that locally embedded capital became electorally advantageous in the 2022 legislative elections, whereas party-mediated careers experienced declining relative returns. Crucially, these effects were geographically uneven. In districts historically characterized by strong party gatekeeping, localism did not yield electoral dividends and residual

partisan capital retained influence. In districts where party mediation had been weaker, by contrast, actors relying on individualized and locally embedded strategies gained relative advantage. Rather than producing wholesale elite displacement, this process rebalanced elite circulation and elite continuity. Some incumbents persisted by leveraging residual capital; others were marginalized; and previously peripheral actors entered the elite arena under newly favorable rules. The result was not random turnover but selective recomposition.

This perspective yields two broader implications. First, it provides a systematic account of differential elite survival after regime change. Instead of framing elite continuity and elite circulation as competing outcomes, the framework demonstrates how regime transformation restructures the relative value of political assets, producing patterned persistence alongside patterned displacement. Autocratization reorganizes the elite field through competitive filtering. Elites whose careers were deeply embedded in institutions weakened by democratic breakdown face structural disadvantages, while actors whose capital aligns with the new rules may experience upward mobility. Elite survival is thus conditioned by portfolio alignment rather than by loyalty alone.

Second, the argument shifts analytical emphasis from democratic breakdown to authoritarian consolidation. Authoritarian regime coalitions need not be assembled exclusively through top-down cooptation, patronage distribution, or repression. By redesigning institutional arenas—most visibly electoral systems—autocratizing leaders can generate new elite constituencies through structured competition. In Tunisia, the transformation of electoral rules created incentives for a cohort of actors whose political prospects became tied to the post-democratic order. Coalition formation therefore proceeded not only through exclusion and coercion, but through the creation of opportunity structures that selectively advantaged elites compatible with the new regime logic.

These findings contribute to research on authoritarian power-sharing, elite circulation, and democratic backsliding by foregrounding capital revaluation as a mechanism linking institutional change to elite recomposition. More broadly, they underscore that democratic breakdown is not solely a process of institutional erosion. It is also a process of institutional recomposition that reshapes incentives within the elite field. The durability of emerging authoritarian orders may depend not only on repression or material side-payments, but on whether institutional revaluation successfully produces a stratum of elites whose career trajectories are structurally bound to regime survival.

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A Appendix: Robustness

A.1 Weighted Linear Regressions

As a robustness check, we re-estimate the core specifications using weighted linear regressions with standard errors clustered at the district level. In this alternative approach, observations are weighted by the inverse of the number of candidates in each district so that all districts contribute equally to the estimation, while clustering accounts for within-district dependence among candidates competing in the same electoral contest. Unlike the multilevel models, this specification does not model district-level heterogeneity explicitly, but instead relies on a design-based correction to inference. The results, reported in Table 5, closely mirror the multilevel estimates: the interaction between localness and party gatekeeping remains negative and statistically significant, and the substantive pattern of conditional electoral returns to localism is unchanged. This consistency across estimation strategies strengthens confidence that the findings are not driven by modeling assumptions specific to the multilevel framework.

Table 5: Electoral Effects of Local Campaign Promises

	Model 1	Model 2
Localness	−0.031	−0.009
	(0.020)	(0.012)
Party gatekeeping	0.095***	0.043**
	(0.024)	(0.020)
Localness × gatekeeping	−0.048**	−0.044**
	(0.024)	(0.021)
Other local candidates		−0.076
		(0.055)
Prior office		0.025
		(0.019)
Other candidates' prior office		−0.089
		(0.073)
Peripherality		0.015
		(0.013)
Effective number of candidates		−0.007***
		(0.003)
Turnout		0.020***
		(0.005)
N	867	867
R^2	0.161	0.326

* p <0.1, ** p <0.05, *** p <0.01
Standard errors clustered at the district level.
Observations weighted so that each district contributes equally.

A.2 District Fixed Effects

As a robustness test, we estimate district fixed effects (FE) models that restrict identification to within-district variation. By including a full set of district indicators, these specifications absorb all observed and unobserved characteristics that are constant within districts, such as baseline electoral competitiveness, historical voting patterns, party gatekeeping legacies, and local socioeconomic context. Coefficients are therefore identified exclusively

through comparisons among candidates competing in the same electoral district.

Substantively, the FE models ask whether candidates who articulate more concrete and locally grounded campaign promises outperform their direct competitors facing the same electorate. This provides a stringent test against the concern that the baseline multilevel results are driven by cross-district differences—for example, if localist campaigns are more prevalent in districts that also exhibit systematically different vote distributions for reasons unrelated to campaign strategy.

Because district fixed effects absorb all district-level variation, these models are not designed to estimate the causal effects of district-level characteristics such as historical party gatekeeping, nor are they well suited to identifying cross-level interactions that operate primarily between districts. Instead, the FE specifications are best interpreted as a diagnostic for within-district candidate sorting: whether, holding constant the district context, candidates who employ more localistic campaign rhetoric differ systematically from their competitors in ways that affect electoral performance.

Table 6: Robustness: District Fixed Effects

	FE Model 1	FE Model 2
Localness	0.004	0.018**
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Party gatekeeping	0.033***	0.060***
	(0.003)	(0.016)
Localness × gatekeeping	−0.008	−0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Other local candidates		0.148**
		(0.074)
Prior office		0.036***
		(0.008)
Other candidates' prior office		−0.026
		(0.059)
N	867	867
R^2	0.677	0.694

* p <0.1, ** p <0.05, *** p <0.01
Standard errors clustered at the district level.

The FE estimates reported in Table 6 show that the coefficient on *localness* remains positive and becomes statistically significant once candidate- and district-level controls are introduced. This indicates that, even among candidates competing in the same district, those who articulate more locally grounded campaign promises tend to concentrate a modestly larger share of the district vote. This within-district association suggests that localistic rhetoric has some independent electoral value beyond purely contextual effects.

By contrast, the interaction between *localness* and *party gatekeeping* becomes statistically insignificant in the FE specifications. This result is expected. The moderating role of historical party gatekeeping operates at the district level and reflects long-run differences in political-capital accumulation across districts. Once district fixed effects absorb this cross-district variation, the interaction is no longer identified. The disappearance of the interaction under FE therefore does not undermine the core theoretical claim; rather, it clarifies that the revaluation of localistic campaign strategies operates primarily *between* districts, not through differential sorting among candidates within the same district.

Taken together, the FE results reinforce the interpretation of the multilevel models. They show that while local

campaign promises may confer a small within-district advantage, the broader conditional pattern—whereby the electoral returns to localistic rhetoric increase as historical party gatekeeping declines—reflects systematic differences across districts shaped by long-run political-capital revaluation rather than short-run candidate selection effects.

B Appendix: Data Preparation

B.1 2022 Electoral Results

We obtained the full first-round results of the 2022 elections from the Tunisian electoral commission (الهيئة العليا المستقلة للانتخابات, *Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections*, ISIE).These results came in the form of scanned official documents for each of the 151 domestic constituencies and are no longer available online (Figure 4 shows an example document). We manually extracted the candidate names and and number of votes from these documents.[74] The first-round results list 1,052 candidates across Tunisia's 151 domestic districts, with the number of candidates per district ranging from 1 to 22 (see Figure 5).

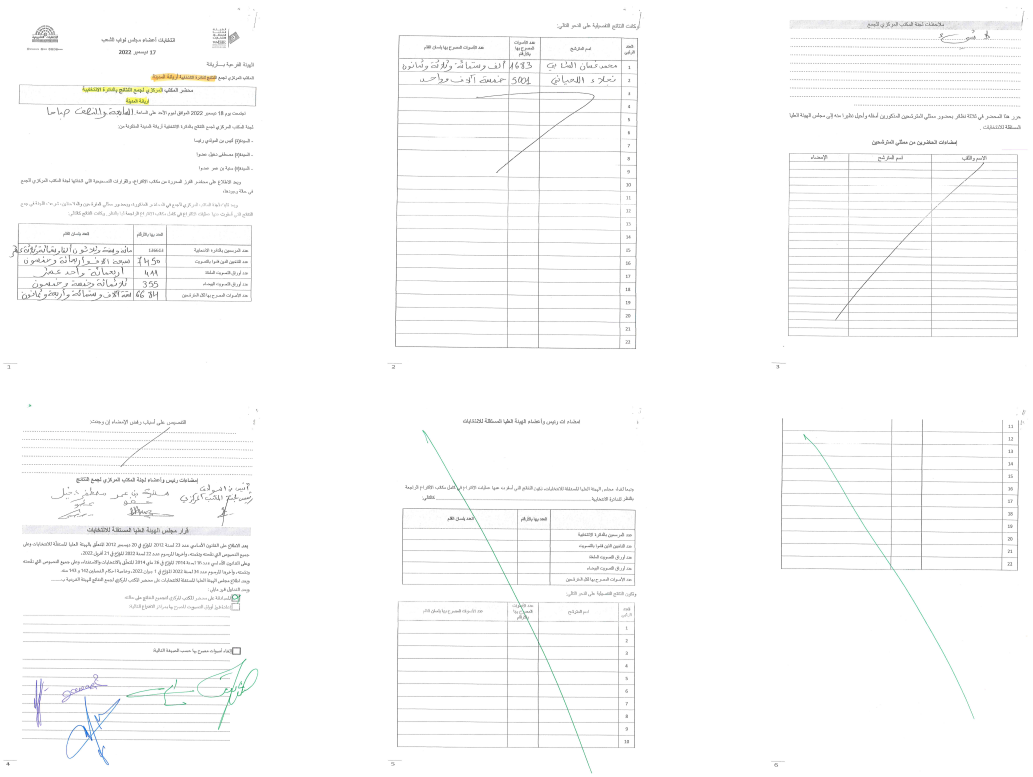

Figure 4: First-round results for Ariana Medina

[74] Thanks to Sara Tonsy for her work on transcribing the results.

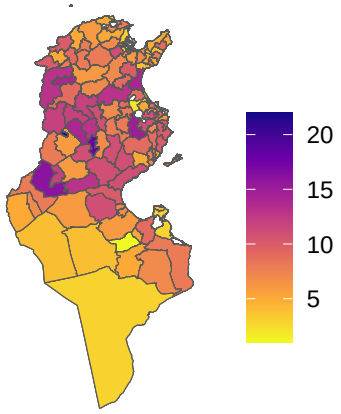

Figure 5: Candidates per district

B.2 Candidate Profiles

The website of Tunisia's official press agency, Tunis-Afrique-Presse, has a section focusing on the 2022/23 legislative election. Each URL in this section starts with `https://www.tap.info.tn/ar/2022-` ويب-سيت-الانتخابات-التشريعية/, followed by a 8-digit ID. Unfortunately, the IDs are not specific to the section but appear to be unique identifiers assigned to each entry on `tap.info.tn`. The challenge therefore was to isolate all entries on the elections.

For this purpose, we wrote code to check all 470,000 URLs on the `https://www.tap.info.tn/ar/2022-` ويب-سيت-الانتخابات-التشريعية/ section of the website with IDs between 1553000 and 16000000 using parallel processing.[75] We started with 1553000 because entries in this range refer to dates around 15 September 2022, the day when the election was announced, while the end point refers to content from late January 2023, after the second round of the contest. The code simply went through all possible URLs and checked whether they pointed to a valid website. If yes, the URL was maintained, if no, the code recorded a redirect or an error. Through this process, we identified 1,772 valid URLs pointing to election reporting. The first election-related entry had ID 15553292 from 2022-09-16, the last 15997511 from 2023-02-11. Figure 6 shows that election-related news, not very surprisingly, cluster around the two rounds on 17 December 2022 and 27 January 2023.

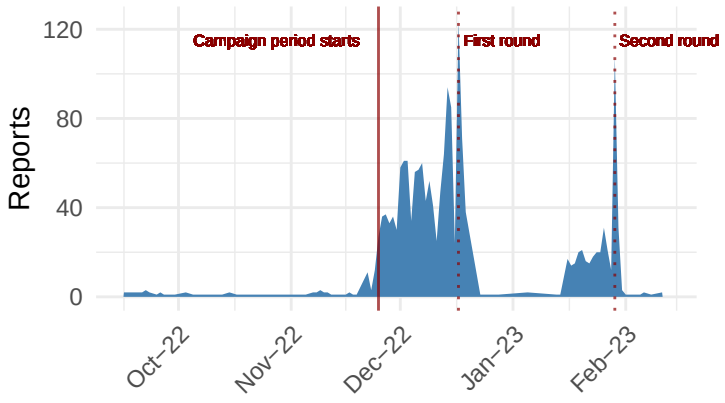

Figure 6: Number of Reports by Day

B.2.1 LLM-assisted processing of candidate profiles

Next, we processed the raw election reports through the OpenAI API, prompting GPT-4o-mini to extract systematic information and provide translations on the headlines. We submitted each report along with the following prompt:

[75] The code took several days to run.

> Here is the headline of a profile describing a candidate in the Tunisian legislative elections. What is the name of the candidate. Begin your answer with 'name:'. Give the name in Arabic, followed by the English version in brackets. Which electoral district is mentioned in the headline? Begin your answer with 'district:'. Give the district name in Arabic, followed by the English version in brackets. Which Tunisian province is mentioned in the headline? Begin your answer with 'gov:'. Give the province name in Arabic, followed by the English version in brackets. Provide a complete translation of the headline in English. Begin your answer with 'head:'. Is the name traditionally considered a male or female name? Answer just male or female. Begin your answer with 'gender:'. If information is not available for any question, reply with 'NA'.

This produced a systematic dataset of all 1,772 election-related reports on `TAP.info.tn`. We further prompted GPT to classify the reports into candidate profiles and other reports. This was achieved with the following prompt:

> Does this text deal with one, and only one, candidate in the 2022/23 legislative elections in Tunisia? Reply only with 1 for yes and 0 for no.

Of the 1,772 entries, 911 are profiles of individual candidates as classified by GPT 4.o-mini. This leaves us with 861 entries with other reporting on the electoral campaign. Figure 7 is an example of the candidate profiles.

أريانة-تشريعية: التدهور البيئي والاصلاح التربوي
أبرز محاور البرنامج الانتخابي للمترشحة عن دائرة
أريانة المدينة نجلاء اللحياني

10:26 29/11/2022، أريانة/تونس

الانتخابات التشريعية
17 ديسمبر 2022
رقم
2
أريانة في عينينا
وتونس في القلب

أريانة، 29 نوفمبر (وات/مكتب أريانة) - أكدت المترشحة لانتخابات مجلس نواب الشعب عن دائرة اريانة المدينة نجلاء اللحياني، أن معالجة الوضع البيئي "الكارثي" في الجهة والنهوض بالتعليم يمثلان أحد أهم أولويات برنامجها الانتخابي.

وأوضحت في تصريح لـ"وات"، أنها ستعمل على وضع حد للتجاوزات الخطيرة للديوان الوطني للتطهير في أريانة الشمالية التي أصبحت معضلة حقيقية، كما ستعمل على إحداث مراكز لرسكلة وتثمين النفايات.

وانطلاقا من قناعتها بأن الاصلاح التربوي قاطرة لكل الاصلاحات، قالت أنها ستحرص في حال انتخابها على رسم برنامج وطني لتنمية قدرات التلاميذ وتطوير مهاراتهم، وبدعم انفتاح المؤسسة على محيطها إضافة إلى معالجة مشكل اهتراء البنية التحتية والنقص الفادح في التجهيزات والربط بشبكات الانترنات، وظاهرة الاكتظاظ ومراجعة طرق التقييم والزمن المدرسي ومعالجة الاختلال بين الجهات الذي يضرب في العمق ديمقراطية التعليم.

كما وعدت بالحرص على دعم الديمقراطية التشاركية ومكاسب حرية والإعلام والتعبير وعلى إعادة المصداقية للعمل النيابي واسترجاع ثقة المواطنين، كما اكدت أنها ستعمل على مراجعة مجلة الاستثمار وعلى مقاومة الاحتكار والمضاربة وتشجيع الاستثمارات، وستعمل على تحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية ومحاربة الفساد والتهرب الجبائي وتبييض الأموال، مع مزيد العناية بذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة ودعم دور المرأة في المجتمع.

وأكدت اللحياني على أهمية إصلاح الطرقات المهترئة بكل جهات أريانة في إطار برنامج متكامل للعناية بالبنية التحتية، وتنقيح قانون الهياكل الرياضية بما يمكن الجمعيات من الاستقرار المادي.

وتعمل نجلاء اللحياني أستاذة لغة فرنسية وناشطة في المجتمع المدني.

ويبلغ عدد المسجلين بدائرة أريانة المدينة حوالي 136 ألفا ويتنافس على المقعد المخصص للدائرة مترشحان.

Figure 7: Example Profile

B.2.2 Measuring Localism

The coding procedure is grounded in an explicit conceptualization of *localism* as the degree to which candidates' campaign promises are **specific and geographically anchored**. This concept is operationalized through a set of

predefined coding rules that distinguish between abstract political rhetoric and locally specific commitments, and through a small set of adjudicated examples that serve as calibration cases.

At the core of the scheme is a three-point scale of *promise concreteness*. A score of 0 is assigned to statements that are purely ideological or national in scope–such as references to sovereignty, anti-normalization, or transparency–that are not tied to any locality or concrete intervention. A score of 1 captures statements that are programmatic but only loosely localized: candidates refer to recognizable policy sectors (e.g. health, education, housing, transport, environment) or generic projects (such as creating industrial zones or improving services) without anchoring these commitments to a named place, facility, or localized problem. A score of 2 is reserved for highly specific promises that are explicitly grounded in place, including commitments tied to named sub-localities or sites, specific infrastructure assets (such as canals, lakes, hospitals, or roads), the operations of local public agencies in a defined area, or clearly identified, tangible problems to be addressed across the district.

In addition to this core measure, the coding scheme records several complementary dimensions. A binary indicator captures whether candidates explicitly reference the district or its sub-localities (*LocalScope*). Substantive content is classified by policy sector (*LocalSectors*), including areas such as agriculture, water, health, housing, transport, youth, and the environment, and by the type of concrete interventions proposed (*LocalProjectTypes*). Further indicators capture whether candidates promise citizen participation or co-production (*Participation*), the relative prominence of national or ideological rhetoric (*MacroIntensity*), and whether national-level economic policy is discussed (*EconProgrammatic*). For transparency and replicability, each coded observation is accompanied by short verbatim excerpts from the campaign text that justify the assigned codes.

Five few-shot cases then instantiate the rules:

- **Example 1 (Raoued 2 – Bousma)** is coded as 0 because, while it outlines broad reformist ambitions—including revising economic legislation, digitizing administration, reducing bureaucracy, and providing universal health coverage—the program remains general and abstract. Proposals such as "بعث مؤسسات اقتصادية في ساعة واحدة" (creating enterprises in one hour) and "توفير تغطية صحية للجميع" (providing health coverage for all) lack contextual grounding or site-specific implementation details. There is no reference to local challenges or named places within Raoued 2, and the emphasis is placed on national institutional renewal rather than local interventions.

- **Example 2 (Ariana – Chabbi)** is coded as 1 because it lists sectoral priorities and generic projects, including "إحداث مناطق صناعية" (establishment of industrial zones), support for "القطاع الصحي" (the health sector), "السكن الاجتماعي" (social housing), and improvements in transport, culture, and sports. The statement also includes a participation cue—"تشريك المواطن" (citizen participation). While the program is explicitly framed in local terms (e.g. "الخدمات المحلية" (local services)), it does not refer to a named site or a clearly specified local problem, and therefore remains at the intermediate level of concreteness.

- **Example 3 (Ariana – Lahyani)** is coded as 2 because it contains multiple hard local anchors. The candidate names a specific sub-locality ("أريانة الشمالية", North Ariana) and ties promises to the operations of a specific public agency ("الديوان الوطني للتطهير", National Office for Sanitation), alongside tangible interventions such as "إحداث مراكز لرسكلة" (creation of recycling centers) and "إصلاح الطرقات المهترئة" (rehabilitation of deteriorated roads). These features satisfy several of the criteria for highly specific, place-based commitments.

- **Example 4 (Kairouan – Hamdi)** is also coded as 2, but illustrates a different pathway to high local specificity through the systematic use of named infrastructures and sites, including "قناة وادي بالأسود نبهانة" (Wadi al-Aswad–Nebhana canal), "بحيرة الكوكات بعين جلولة" (Lake al-Koukat in Ain Jelloula), and named irrigation zones such as "عين بومرة" (Ain Boumra) and "سرديانة" (Sardiyana). This example demonstrates that promises can qualify as highly specific through place and infrastructure references.

- **Example 5 (Kairouan North – Belti)** is coded as 1 despite listing multiple village names—"الغابات، المرازيق، الحوامد…" (Al-Ghabat, Al-Mrazig, Al-Hawamed…). The substantive content of the program remains primarily sectoral and generic, focusing on youth centers, cultural and tourism facilities, and the conversion of a sports complex, rather than on a clearly specified localized problem tied to a particular infrastructure asset or agency failure. This case therefore serves as an important boundary condition: references to places can increase LocalScope without necessarily raising PromiseConcreteness to the highest level when commitments remain generic.

System prompt:

You are a research assistant coding Tunisian candidate campaign statements. Your task: classify the localness of promises and extract structured information. **Scoring rule for `PromiseConcreteness`:**

- **0 = Vague / ideological only** (sovereignty, anti-normalization, abstract economic reform, transparency).
- **1 = Somewhat specific.** Candidate mentions sectors or generic service promises (education, health, housing, roads, transport, sanitation, environment, etc.) or generic projects (build industrial zones), but with no concrete local anchor.
- **2 = Highly specific.** Candidate makes promises tied to:
  - a specific sub-locality or named site (e.g. أريانة الشمالية, عين جلولة), OR
  - a specific infrastructure asset (e.g. طرقات في جهة محددة, مستشفى, بحيرة، قناة), OR
  - a local agency's operations tied to the locality (e.g. الديوان الوطني للتطهير في أريانة الشمالية), OR
  - district-wide commitments to fix a named, tangible problem (e.g. إصلاح الطرقات المهترئة في كامل المنطقة).

Other variables to code:

- `LocalScope`: 1 if candidate explicitly references the district or its sub-localities, else 0.
- `LocalSectors`: list of service/policy areas (health, education, water, agriculture, transport, environment, housing, etc.).
- `LocalProjectTypes`: list of concrete projects or infrastructure.
- `Participation`: 1 if promises citizen participation, local democracy, or co-production, else 0.
- `MacroIntensity`: 0-2 scale of ideological/national emphasis.
- `EconProgrammatic`: 1 if profile discusses national-level economic policy.
- `Evidence`: quote key phrases that justify the coding.

Return only valid JSON with these fields.

Table 7 shows the resulting scores.

Table 7: Promise Concreteness Scores

Score	Count	Percentage
0	70	7.9
1	387	43.8
2	427	48.3

B.2.3 Missing at Random

Table 8 shows the results of a logistic regression with profile missingness as the dependent variable. We include all available candidate-level variables which are not derived from the profiles themselves. As the results show, none of these variables is systematically related to whether or not a profile was published by TAP. These results increase our confidence that there is no systematic process explaining profile missingness.

B.3 Party gatekeeping

This section documents the empirical properties of the district-level party gatekeeping measure used in the main text. The measure aggregates party vote shares from the 2011, 2014, and 2019 legislative elections and is intended to capture a durable spatial legacy of party-mediated elite recruitment during the democratic period.

Table 8: Determinants of Missingness

	Dependent variable:
	missing_profile
Periphery	0.047
	(0.077)
Councillor	0.013
	(0.225)
Old MP	−1.532
	(1.028)
Civil servant	0.140
	(0.272)
Vote share	−1.055
	(1.110)
Winner	0.123
	(0.306)
First-round winner	0.490
	(0.822)
Constant	−1.545***
	(0.159)
Observations	1,051
Log Likelihood	−459.204
Akaike Inf. Crit.	934.408
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As a first diagnostic, we examine the pairwise correlations among the election-specific party vote share measures. As shown in Table 9, party vote shares are positively and statistically significantly correlated across all three elections. Correlations are strongest between the 2014 and 2019 measures ($r \approx 0.60$), but remain substantively meaningful even when comparing the exceptional 2011 election to later contests ($r \approx 0.39$ with 2019). These patterns suggest that, despite election-specific shocks and changes in the national party system, districts exhibiting relatively strong party presence in one election tend to do so in others as well.

Table 9: Correlations among party vote shares and the gatekeeping measure

	2011	2014	2019	gatekeeping
Party share 2011	1.00			
Party share 2014	0.47	1.00		
Party share 2019	0.39	0.60	1.00	
gatekeeping	0.82	0.79	0.79	1.00

Notes: Entries report Pearson correlation coefficients.
All correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.
gatekeeping refers to the standardized additive index used in the main text.

Importantly, the additive gatekeeping index is strongly correlated with each of its constituent components, with correlations exceeding $r = 0.79$ in all cases. This indicates that the index does not merely reflect a single election year, but captures common variation shared across the democratic period.

We further assess whether any single election dominates the aggregated measure by comparing the dispersion of party vote shares across years. The standard deviations of the district-level party share measures are comparable in magnitude (2011: 0.14; 2014: 0.08; 2019: 0.11), suggesting that no single election mechanically drives the variance of the additive index. While the 2011 election exhibits greater dispersion—consistent with its highly

fragmented and transitional character—this variation is substantively meaningful rather than anomalous, and is therefore retained in the aggregation.

B.3.1 Principal-Components Analysis

To further assess whether the three election-specific measures capture a single underlying construct, we conduct a principal-components analysis (PCA) on the district-level party vote shares for 2011, 2014, and 2019. The analysis is restricted to districts with complete and finite observations on all three components.

Table 10: Principal-components analysis of party vote shares (2011–2019)

	PC1	PC2	PC3
Party share 2011	−0.53	−0.83	0.17
Party share 2014	−0.61	0.24	−0.75
Party share 2019	−0.59	0.50	0.63
Proportion of variance	0.66	0.21	0.13
Cumulative proportion	0.66	0.87	1.00

Notes: PCA conducted on districts with complete observations for all three elections. Loadings reported after standardizing variables. The sign of the first component is arbitrary.

The first principal component explains approximately 66 percent of the total variance, while the remaining components account for substantially smaller shares. All three election-specific measures load strongly and with similar magnitude on the first component, indicating the presence of a dominant latent dimension. The remaining components primarily reflect election-specific deviations rather than substantively distinct dimensions of party competition. These results support the interpretation of party gatekeeping as a persistent, district-level characteristic rather than an election-specific artifact. On this basis, we rely on a standardized additive index of party vote shares as a transparent and substantively interpretable measure of party gatekeeping. Results are robust to alternative constructions based on the first principal component.

B.4 Old Elites

We draw on lists of politically relevant elites published before the 2021 *autogolpe* to trace candidates' political histories. This includes lists of MPs in the 2009-2011, 2011/12-2014, 2014-2019, and 2019-2021 legislatures,[76] a list of the members of municipal councils elected in 2018 as published by the Tunisian electoral commission, as well as the names of list leaders for all electoral lists competing in the 2019 legislative election. These lists were published as audio recordings by the Tunisian electoral commission (Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections, ISIE). The recordings were initially available on the ISIE website, but have since been removed. They remain available in an archived version via the Wayback Machine in a capture from 26 October 2019.

We transcribe the 2019 candidate lists using OpenAI's Whisper, implemented in the `audio.whisper` package in R and extract the names of all list leaders from the transcripts using the following prompt:

> This text gives information on electoral lists. Extract the number of each list, start your answer with 'num:'. Extract the name of each list, start your answer with 'name:'. Extract the type of each list, start your answer with 'type:'. Extract the name of the list president, start your answer with 'leader:'.

Taken together, we have

- 911 former MPs;

[76] These lists are no longer available on the official parliamentary website, but they are available at Marsad Majles for 2014-19 and 2019-21, and 2011-14

- 1,372 names of 2019 list leaders; and
- 8,200 municipal councillors elected in the 2018 election.

B.4.1 Name matching

We developed a Python script for Arabic name matching.[77] This script performs systematic name matching by combining linguistic normalization with multiple levels of string similarity. It first standardizes Arabic text by removing diacritics, tatweel, and orthographic variants (e.g. different forms of alif, ya, ta marbuta), ensuring that superficial spelling differences do not obstruct comparison. It then applies a sequence of matching strategies—exact matches, partial containment, and approximate (fuzzy) matching using token-based similarity scores from the `RapidFuzz` library—to identify plausible name correspondences. To avoid duplication, matched pairs are deduplicated across methods while retaining information on the type of match. The final output is a consolidated dataset of matched name pairs, classified by match type and saved for downstream validation and analysis. We used this script to match the old MPs, 2019 list leaders, and municipal councilors to the 2022 candidates and manually validated the results.

Table 11: Name matching results

Former MPs	List leaders	Councilors
24 (2.3%)	52 (4.9%)	192 (18.3%)

B.5 Mapping Electoral Data

This appendix describes the procedures used to (i) harmonize electoral data from the 2011, 2014, and 2019 legislative elections, (ii) map these results onto the 2022 legislative districts, (iii) standardize party list names across elections, and (iv) compute district-level party vote shares.

B.5.1 Mapping Electoral Results to 2022 Districts

Electoral results from the democratic period were originally reported using different territorial units across elections. The 2011 and 2014 legislative elections were conducted in 27 multi-member constituencies roughly corresponding to governorates, yet the results are reported on the level of 264 delegations (ADM3 units), while the 2019 legislative election reported results at the level of 350 municipalities. To enable consistent spatial comparison and aggregation, all electoral data were mapped to the 2022 legislative districts, which serve as the common geographic unit of analysis in this study.

2022 electoral districts. Under the 2022 electoral law, Tunisia's 161 MPs (down from 217 in 2019) are elected in single-member constituencies. 151 of these are domestic districts consisting of one or more of Tunisia's 264 delegations.[78] In most cases, the 2022 districts are either identical to individual delegations or consist of combinations of multiple delegations. In some rare cases, delegations are split across two constituencies (as in Monastir, for example), or constituency boundaries do not exactly coincide with delegation boundaries. These cases were manually corrected based on the constituency maps published by ISIE. Figure 8 shows an example. This step produces a shapefile of the 2022 legislative districts and a complete crosswalk between the 2022 electoral districts and the delegations.

[77] I used Python because fuzzy matching with `RapidFuzz` performs much faster than available options in R.
[78] Décret-loi n° 2022-55, Annex A.

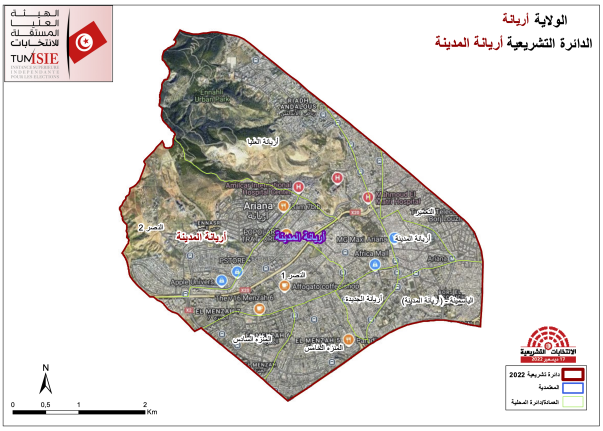

Figure 8: Example district map (Ariana Madina)

Mapping. We start with the series of Tunisian administrative level shape files compiled by Julia Clark. This collection contains shapefiles for the 2014 (and 2018 delegations), as well as the 2018 municipalities. To aggregate delegation-level electoral data to the 2022 legislative districts, we construct a spatial crosswalk between the 2014 delegation polygons and the 2022 district polygons. The key challenge is that the 2022 district shapefile contains minor geometric inconsistencies (including overlaps and invalid geometries) that can cause standard polygon intersection routines to fail or to double-count areas. To obtain a stable and reproducible mapping, we therefore implement a two-step procedure that (i) enforces a non-overlapping district partition and (ii) computes area-based overlap shares between delegations and this partition.

First, we read the 2014 delegation shapefile and the 2022 district shapefile, harmonize identifiers (delegations by a stable delegation ID; districts by a district label), and transform both layers to a planar coordinate reference system (UTM Zone 32N; EPSG:32632) to ensure that areas are measured in meters. We then validate both layers' geometries and convert them to `terra` vector objects, which provide robust geometric operations.

Second, to eliminate district overlaps, we convert the 2022 district layer into a non-overlapping partition using a rasterization–polygonization approach. Specifically, we rasterize the district layer at a fixed spatial resolution (75 meters), assigning each raster cell to a single district ID (winner-take-all where overlaps occur). We then polygonize this raster back into vector polygons, producing a district partition that is non-overlapping by construction. This step ensures that each point in space is assigned to at most one district, preventing double-counting in subsequent intersections. The resolution parameter trades off geometric precision against computational stability; we set it to 75 meters, which preserves district boundaries at a fine scale while reliably removing topological artifacts.

Third, we compute the spatial intersection between 2014 delegations and the partitioned 2022 districts. For each delegation–district pair, we calculate the area of the intersected piece and divide it by the total area of the delegation, yielding a share that sums (approximately) to one across districts for each delegation. We then re-normalize shares to sum exactly to one per delegation to account for small numerical discrepancies arising from geometry cleaning and rasterization. The resulting crosswalk provides, for each 2014 delegation, the set of 2022 districts it overlaps with and the corresponding overlap share.

Finally, we export the crosswalk as a CSV file containing the delegation identifier, the 2022 district identifier, and the overlap share. This file is subsequently used to aggregate delegation-level electoral returns to the 2022 district level by weighting delegation vote totals by their spatial overlap shares and summing within districts.

In addition to the delegation-to-district crosswalk, we construct an analogous mapping from the 2018 municipality polygons to the 2022 legislative districts. This step is required because parts of the electoral data are available at the municipal level (e.g., the 2019 legislative returns and the 2018 municipal election data) and must be consistently aggregated to the 2022 district geography.

The procedure closely follows the delegation-to-district mapping described above, with municipalities replacing delegations as the source polygons. The final output is a crosswalk file listing each municipality (`mun_uid`), the 2022 legislative district identifier (`const2022`), and the corresponding area-based overlap share. This crosswalk is subsequently used to aggregate municipality-level vote totals to the district level by weighting each municipality's values by its overlap shares and summing within districts.

B.5.2 Calculating Party Shares

We need the share of votes in each district that went to national-level parties, defined as those parties which competed in at least 14 of the 27 constituencies. This involves counting how frequently a party-list name appears in the data. Party list names in the raw electoral data exhibit extensive variation across and within elections. Some of this variation is due to the fact that party lists in some constituencies included the name of these constituencies (as in قائمة حركة النهضة بأريانة in the 2019 election, for example), but most variation is due to differences in spelling conventions, the use of prefixes (e.g., *qā'ima*), diacritics, and OCR-related noise. To ensure comparability across elections, we implemented election-specific standardization procedures.

Delegation-level results for the 2011 Tunisian elections are obtained from a dataset of official electoral returns containing delegation-level vote shares and turnout (Koehler & Warkotsch, 2014). The data report electoral outcomes for major parties in 2011, including Ennahda, the Congress for the Republic (CPR), and Ettakatol, alongside overall turnout.

Delegation-level results for the 2014 Tunisian legislative elections are obtained from publicly available electoral returns compiled by Dhafer Malouche and made available on GitHub. The data are provided as separate CSV files at the governorate level, each reporting vote totals by list across delegations within a governorate. All CSV files are read programmatically and reshaped into a unified long-format dataset in which each observation corresponds to a *list–delegation* pair, with associated vote counts and governorate identifiers. We then applied a rule-based standardization procedure tailored to the structure of the 2014 returns. After Arabic text normalization and prefix stripping, a set of deterministic regular-expression rules was used to map common spelling variants and OCR errors to standardized party names. This procedure focused on ensuring consistent identification of major nationally organized parties while preserving the distinction between party lists and non-party lists.

We obtained municipal-level results of the 2019 election from a Tunisian NGO. These results were produced through OCR and party list names were affected by particularly high levels of orthographic variation and OCR noise. We therefore combined deterministic string normalization with distance-based matching. After initial normalization and aggregation at the list–municipality level, cleaned list names were matched to canonical party labels using Jaro–Winkler distances. Ambiguous or low-confidence matches were resolved through manual crosswalks. Importantly, the 2019 data include an official classification of lists into party lists, coalitions, and independent lists, which we exploit to exclude non-party lists.

Across all three elections, we define *nationally organized parties* as those parties that competed in at least half of all constituencies in the respective election. This criterion excludes purely local electoral vehicles while retaining parties with meaningful national reach. Table 12 displays these parties by election.

Table 12: Nationally organized parties by election year

Election year	Party	Constituencies
2011 Constituent Assembly election		
	حركة النهضة (Ennahda)	27
	المؤتمر من أجل الجمهورية (CPR)	24
	العريضة الشعبية (Popular Petition)	23
	التكتل الديمقراطي من أجل العمل والحريات (Ettakatol)	16
	الحزب الديمقراطي التقدمي (PDP)	15
2014 Legislative election		
	حركة النهضة (Ennahda)	27
	حركة نداء تونس (Nidaa Tounes)	27
	الجبهة الشعبية (Popular Front)	27
	الحزب الجمهوري (Republican Party)	27
	التيار الديمقراطي (Democratic Current)	27
	الاتحاد الوطني الحر (UPL)	26
	حركة وفاء (Wafa)	26
	آفاق تونس (Afek Tounes)	25
	حركة الشعب (People's Movement)	25
	حزب التحالف الديمقراطي (Democratic Alliance)	25
	التكتل الديمقراطي من أجل العمل والحريات (Ettakatol)	24
2019 Legislative election		
	حركة النهضة (Ennahda)	27
	قلب تونس (Qalb Tounes)	27
	تحيا تونس (Tahya Tounes)	27
	الحزب الدستوري الحر (Free Destourian Party)	27
	آفاق تونس (Afek Tounes)	27
	التيار الديمقراطي (Democratic Current)	26
	حركة الشعب (People's Movement)	26
	مشروع تونس (Machrouu Tounes)	26
	الجبهة الشعبية (Popular Front)	25
	الاتحاد الشعبي الجمهوري (UPR)	21
	المؤتمر من أجل الجمهورية (CPR)	17
	التكتل الديمقراطي من أجل العمل والحريات (Ettakatol)	15

Notes: National parties are defined as parties competing in at least half of Tunisia's 27 constituencies in a given election year (i.e., ≥ 14 constituencies).

B.5.3 Construction of District-Level Party Vote Shares

Using the harmonized and standardized data, we compute district-level party vote shares for each election. For a given district and election year, the party vote share is defined as the proportion of valid votes cast for nationally organized party lists relative to the total number of valid votes cast in that district. Formally, for district d in election year t, the party vote share is calculated as:

$$\text{PartyShare}_{dt} = \frac{\sum_{p \in \mathcal{P}_t} V_{pdt}}{\sum_{l \in \mathcal{L}_{dt}} V_{ldt}},$$

where $\mathcal{P}_t$ denotes the set of nationally organized parties in election t, $\mathcal{L}_{dt}$ denotes the set of all lists competing in district d in year t, and V_{pdt} and V_{ldt} denote the votes received by party p and list l, respectively.

These district-level party vote shares for 2011, 2014, and 2019 form the building blocks of the party gatekeeping measure used in the main text. By mapping all elections to a common set of districts and applying consistent party

classifications, the resulting measures capture spatial variation in the degree to which party organizations structured access to elected office during Tunisia's democratic period.

B.6 District peripherality

In order to control for urban/rural differences, we construct a measure of *district peripherality*. Conceptually, the measure combines a proxy for settlement intensity (building density) with a measure of remoteness from administrative centers (distance to the nearest governorate capital).

B.6.1 Building density (OSM-based proxy for settlement intensity)

We downloaded a Open Street Map PBF file from geofabrik.de to extract building footprints via an SQL query. The query selects all multipolygon features with a non-null building tag, restricting the extraction spatially to the bounding box of the district layer and clipping features on read to improve performance. The resulting building geometries are validated, projected to UTM, and filtered to remove very small polygons (< 20 m^2), which are likely to represent artifacts or non-structural features. To count buildings per district, each building polygon is converted to a centroid, and centroids are spatially joined to district polygons using a within-district criterion. The number of building centroids per district (`n_buildings`) is then computed. Building counts are merged back into the district dataset. District area is calculated in square kilometers, and building density is defined as the number of buildings per km^2. This measure captures variation in the intensity of the built environment across districts and serves as an inverse proxy for geographic and infrastructural peripherality.

B.6.2 Distance to the nearest governorate capital (administrative remoteness)

We then construct a point layer of Tunisian governorate capitals using latitude and longitude coordinates from Wikipedia. These points are converted to an sf object, projected to UTM 32N, and treated as administrative centers. For each district, the centroid is computed and the full matrix of straight-line (Euclidean) distances to all governorate capitals is calculated. The minimum of these distances is retained for each district, yielding `dist_capital_km`, the distance (in kilometers) to the nearest governorate capital. This variable captures remoteness from the closest regional administrative hub, independently of national centrality.

B.6.3 Composite peripherality index

Finally, the composite peripherality index is constructed by standardizing (z-scoring) its two components and combining them additively. To account for the strong right skew in building density, this component is log-transformed prior to standardization. The index therefore combines:

- the inverse of standardized log building density, so that denser districts are coded as less peripheral; and
- standardized distance to the nearest governorate capital, so that greater distance implies greater peripherality.

The resulting index is unitless, centered at zero, and increases with both lower settlement intensity and greater administrative remoteness. Figure 9 plots district peripherality quintiles.

C Interview Evidence

XXX Description of field work process here XXX

Fieldwork included 30 interviews with candidates at the 2022-23 elections between September 2023 and January 2024 and 57 interviews with former MPs conducted in February-March 2024.

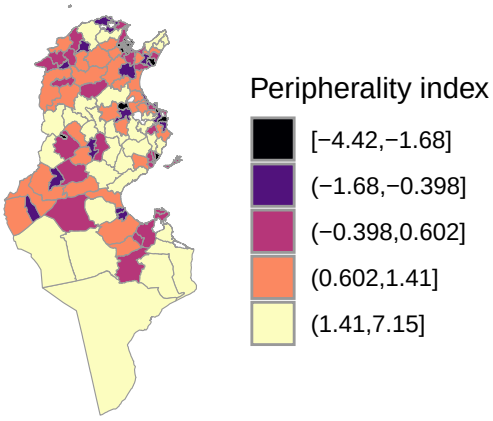

Figure 9: District peripherality (quintiles)

In the first step, we relied on the official list of candidates at the 2022-23 elections to identify potential interviewees. We contacted 242 candidates whom we could find on Facebook, including almost all those who passed to the second round (but lost). We could not select them randomly due to the difficulty of finding Facebook contacts for all candidates and due to low response rates; nor could we interview candidates from all districts. However, we selected interviewees to represent as many electoral districts as possible and avoid geographical concentration; interviews were distributed over 26 different delegations out of 151, and 15 governorates out of 24. We conducted 30 phone interviews that lasted for an average of 30 minutes and up to 1:15 hour. The main language was Arabic, followed by French. Our interviewees sample include: 21 who did not pass to the second round and 9 who did; 24 men and 6 women; an average and median year of birth in 1978 (meaning they were 44-45 years old at the time of the elections); 29 who had university-level education; 27 employed, 2 retired, and 1 unemployed; 27 who presented themselves as independent and 3 who claimed membership in a political organization at the time of the elections; 13 who ran in elections between 2011 and 2022; 19 who voted for Kais Saied at the 2019 presidential elections, 6 who voted for another candidate, 3 who refused to answer, 1 who abstained, and 1 unsure; 20 who voted yes at the constitutional referendum, 4 who abstained, 3 who voted no, 1 blank, and 1 unknown.

The second step consisted in conducting face-to-face interviews with former MPs. We relied both on a remunerated local intermediary and on snow-ball sampling to contact interviewees. Interviews lasted between 1 and 6 hours, depending on interviewees' availability. Interview language included French, Arabic, and occasionally English. 38 interviews were conducted in Greater Tunis, 13 in coastal cities in the North and East (Bizerte, Nabeul, Hammamet, Sousse, Monastir, Ksar Hellal), 5 in Paris, and 1 online. Our sample includes 29 individuals elected in 2011, 26 in 2014, 21 in 2019, and 3 before 2011 (note that 19 individuals were elected twice or thrice). Interviewees belonged to Ennahdha, CPR, Ettakatol, Nidaa Tounes, Tayyar Dimuqrati, Afeq Tounes, Qalb Tounes, Itilaf al-Karama, Jabhah Cha'biyya, UPL, al-Qutb al-Dimuqrati/al-Massar, and al-Aridha. All interviews were audio recorded (except two) and fully transcribed using both automatic and manual techniques. We then coded interview transcripts on QualCoder; codes include both theory-driven and inductively-constructed categories.

In both steps, interviewees were fully anonymized and given numeric identifiers. All data were stored in a protected university server.

Table 13 summarizes relevant interview-based evidence.

Table 13: Party advancement

#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
1	147-43	Predominantly pre-2011 (Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras; marginal post-2011 reflections)	PSD / RCD (authoritarian ruling party)	Party-centered advancement through formal PSD/RCD hierarchies (local sections → regional leadership → central committee → parliamentary candidacy), reinforced by bureaucratic careers (ministries, public enterprises, diplomatic posts) and strong local embeddedness. Party position structured access; bureaucracy and locality were complementary, not substitutes.
2	162-47	Mainly pre-2011, with post-2011 political entry	Peripheral RCD exposure; post-2011 parties (Nidaa Tounes, Qalb Tounes)	Primarily bureaucratic and professional advancement pre-2011, with weak party ladder-climbing under authoritarianism. Post-2011 political advancement relied on personal networks, elite brokerage, and reputation, reflecting weak party gatekeeping and fragmented party structures rather than hierarchical promotion.
3	210-11	Late authoritarian period (1980s–2010) and post-2011 transition	MTI / Ennahdha (Islamist opposition → governing party)	Strongly party-centered advancement within an oppositional movement, based on long-term organizational labor (women's bureau, regional leadership). Post-2011 progression via internal party nomination to ANC, bloc leadership, Majlis al-Shura, and political bureau. Career depended on party loyalty and central trust, later reversed through intra-party marginalization after dissent; bureaucratic access was secondary and party-mediated.
4	391-12	Long pre-2011 period (1960s–2010) and full post-2011 democratic cycle (2011–2021)	Student unions → Ennahdha → reformist splinter (post-2019)	Movement- and party-driven advancement, rooted in student union leadership, activism, and repression pre-2011 (imprisonment, human-rights work). Post-2011 advancement via party nomination to head electoral lists, ministerial office, and parliamentary committee leadership. Career relied on organizational reputation and competence, with local embeddedness formally required but secondary to national party credibility.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
5	444-20	Pre-2011 repression period (1980s–2011) and post-2011 transition (2011–2014), with later retrospective evaluation	Islamist movement → Ennahdha (school- and mosque-based networks; UGTE member)	Party- and movement-centered advancement, rooted in pre-2011 Islamist activism (school clubs, mosques, UGTE, informal cells under repression) rather than bureaucracy. No formal state career before 2011. Post-2011 entry into politics occurred through party list nomination, not self-selection; parliamentary entry via list replacement. Advancement depended on party discipline, ideological credibility, social trust, and community embeddedness (teacher, imam, associative work). Deselection in later elections reflected intra-party sanctioning for insufficient conformity and resistance to compromise, highlighting strong party gatekeeping and limited tolerance for dissent.
6	599-22	Pre-2011 authoritarian period (1990s–2010) and post-2011 transition (2011–2014)	Independent Islamist student networks → Ennahdha (youth bureau, parliamentary bloc)	Movement- and party-based advancement, rooted in pre-2011 underground student activism (Independent Students, informal coalitions with leftist student unions) rather than bureaucracy or family patronage. Politicization occurred through ideological socialization, repression, and campus activism, without formal leadership roles pre-2011. Post-2011 advancement followed central party selection (youth bureau → imposed candidacy → election to ANC), with strong top-down party control over campaigning and list placement. Career relied on symbolic capital (repression, veiling), activist credibility, and party trust, while local embeddedness played a secondary, instrumental role. Bureaucratic career (teaching) existed in parallel but did not drive political advancement.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
7	666-45	Late authoritarian period (late 1980s–2010) and entire post-2011 democratic cycle (2011–2021)	UGTE (student union) → legal profession (bar association) → Ennahdha	Hybrid movement–professional–party pathway. Pre-2011 advancement rooted in student syndical activism (UGTE) and repression-based symbolic capital (imprisonment), followed by professional advancement within the bar association (elected positions), which built credibility, autonomy, and cross-ideological legitimacy. Post-2011 political entry and advancement were clearly party-mediated: election to Ennahdha executive bureau, party nomination to ANC lists, repeated re-election as head of list in Kairouan, and elevation to committee presidency. Electoral success was described explicitly as vote for the party, not the individual, while individual reputation and local presence reinforced list placement. Bureaucratic channels were absent; professional and syndical capital complemented—but did not substitute for—party gatekeeping.
8	739-32	Exclusively post-2011 (2011–2014), with retrospective critique of the transition	Independent lists → Al-Aridha (Popular Petition), later de facto independent	Non-party, anti-party advancement driven by personal initiative, local campaigning, and populist programmatic appeal, rather than hierarchical party structures. No pre-2011 political career. Entry into politics occurred via independent lists branded under Al-Aridha, with recruitment initiated personally by Hechmi Hamdi. Advancement relied on door-to-door mobilization, rural embeddedness, and programmatic promises, not organizational careers. Strong rejection of party discipline and central leadership led to rapid rupture with Al-Aridha and subsequent independence in parliament. Bureaucratic channels were absent and explicitly rejected; party structures were viewed as rent-seeking, oligarchic, and internally undemocratic.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
9	921-10	Long pre-2011 period (1970s–2010) and early post-2011 transition (2011–2014)	UGTT (base-level union activism) → Ettakatol	Hybrid professional–syndical–party pathway. Pre-2011 trajectory rooted in academic career (university professor) combined with long-term UGTT base-level activism (strikes, demonstrations, opposition causes), without formal party advancement under authoritarianism. Political capital accumulated through professional status, local notoriety, and syndical embeddedness, especially in Béja. Post-2011 entry into politics occurred via party recruitment by Ettakatol, facilitated by personal contacts and strong local organizational work (regional leadership, creation of local cells). Advancement to ANC followed party nomination based on local visibility and service, not ideology or bureaucratic patronage. Party discipline later clashed with voter expectations (Ennahdha–Ettakatol alliance), leading to exit from party and reputational recovery through local accountability, highlighting the primacy of local embeddedness over party loyalty.
10	001-39	Predominantly post-2011 (2011–2014)	Afek Tounès	Elite recruitment into a weak party structure. No pre-2011 party career. Political entry occurred through direct invitation by party leadership, motivated by media visibility, professional credibility, and perceived electoral appeal. Advancement relied on individual campaigning and intensive local embeddedness rather than internal party ladders. Party organization functioned as a thin electoral shell; internal resistance from long-standing members highlights absence of routinized party-based advancement and limited gatekeeping capacity.
11	015-8	Long pre-2011 (1970s–2010)	Informal Marxist / worker milieus (non-party)	Extra-party, class-based politicization without institutional conversion. Political capital accumulated through workplace rebellion, ideological self-education, and labor conflict, not through formal parties or unions with career ladders. Absence of party membership meant no channel for elite advancement, illustrating a trajectory of politicization disconnected from institutional access.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
12	22-34	Post-2011 (2011–2019)	Itilaf al-Karama	Late-entry party advancement under weak organizationalization. No pre-2011 party or bureaucratic career. Recruitment based on revolutionary credentials, regional visibility, and activist reputation. Advancement via party list nomination, with minimal internal hierarchy, weak discipline, and heavy reliance on social media mobilization and personal networks rather than sustained party careers.
13	023-30	Mainly pre-2011 (1970s–1998)	None (democratic socialization abroad)	Non-partisan, professional trajectory with blocked political conversion. Political attitudes shaped through long-term democratic socialization abroad, but authoritarian Tunisia offered no viable party or bureaucratic channel for advancement. Politics remained normative and intellectual rather than career-oriented; absence of organizational embedding prevented elite incorporation.
14	078-21	Post-2011 (2014–2019)	UTICA → Nidaa Tounès (electoral)	Economic-notability pathway with instrumental party use. Advancement driven by business ownership, regional economic dominance, and associative leadership (UTICA, sports clubs, local philanthropy). Party affiliation served as an electoral vehicle, not a career ladder; political authority derived from local economic and social capital, with party structures largely peripheral.
15	80-49	Pre-2011 exile + post-2011	Ennahdha (diaspora → central party)	Classic party-centered advancement. Political capital accumulated through family repression, diaspora activism, and long-term loyalty, followed by structured internal party responsibilities (youth, foreign affairs). Advancement occurred via internal elections and list leadership, illustrating a routinized party career path with strong gatekeeping and organizational discipline.
16	099-6	Pre-2011 (2000s)	PDP + UGTT	Syndical–party opposition pathway. Advancement combined union leadership (UGTT secondary education) with formal opposition party roles (PDP), including pre-2011 candidacies. Party and union reinforced one another as channels of political capital under authoritarianism, creating a coherent oppositional career ladder despite repression.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
17	100-18	Post-2011 (2011–present)	CPR → Courant démocrate	Pure party-institutional career path. No pre-2011 activism. Political advancement followed party membership → leadership → candidacy, including party founding, internal elections, and sustained leadership roles. Strong emphasis on procedural legitimacy, internal democracy, and organizational loyalty as the basis of advancement.
18	102-26	Long pre-2011 (1990s–2010)	State bureaucracy (Finance Ministry)	Technocratic-bureaucratic elite pathway. Advancement driven by formal education, technical expertise, and hierarchical promotion within the state, largely independent of party affiliation. Political entry was late and secondary; bureaucratic capital substituted for party-based advancement.
19	145-35	Pre-2011 repression + post-2011	MTI / Ennahdha	Movement-survival to party-conversion pathway. Early activism, imprisonment, and underground organization generated symbolic and moral capital under repression. After 2011, this capital was converted into political relevance through party reintegration and recognition, illustrating delayed but party-mediated elite advancement rooted in sacrifice and endurance.
20	156-25	Long pre-2011 repression (1980s–2010), limited post-2011	MTI / Ennahdha (underground → exile)	Hard-core movement career under repression. Advancement occurred entirely through clandestine Islamist organizational work (student leadership, information bureau, international media liaison), combined with repeated imprisonment and exile, which generated strong symbolic and organizational capital. No bureaucratic or professional conversion was possible under authoritarianism due to formal exclusion. Post-2011 relevance derived from movement seniority, sacrifice, and transnational networks, not electoral campaigning or local embeddedness.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
21	147-33	Exclusively post-2011 (2011–2014)	Associative sector → party entry (likely Ennahdha-adjacent)	Associational-to-political conversion. No pre-2011 political or party career. Political entry followed a long trajectory of civil society leadership (NGOs, Rotary, environmental associations) and managerial professional capital. Advancement relied on organizational skills, local reputation, and perceived competence, rather than ideological militancy or party hierarchy; party served mainly as a vehicle for translating associational capital into parliamentary access.
22	200-37	Post-2011 (2011–2014)	Ennahdha (local bureau)	Top-down party nomination with weak internal career. No pre-2011 activism or party involvement. Candidate selection occurred through local party bureau nomination, motivated by local notability, social respectability, and perceived developmental competence, not prior organizational labor. No subsequent party responsibilities; advancement stopped at parliamentary entry, illustrating thin party incorporation and shallow career ladders for late recruits.
23	215-52	Long pre-2011 (1970s–2010)	UGTT / postal sector activism → later partisan proximity	Syndical–contentious pathway. Career advancement rooted in labor militancy within state sector (PTT), including leadership in a major national strike (1984), followed by repression, imprisonment, and temporary exclusion from employment. Political capital accumulated through class-based mobilization, union solidarity, and endurance, not party hierarchy. Post-2011 relevance stems from historic syndical legitimacy, not structured party promotion.
24	228-2	Pre-2011 activism + post-2011 diaspora politics	Digital activism → diaspora lists (independent/party-backed)	Non-party activist-to-electoral pathway. Political capital built through pre-2011 digital activism, repression, and forced exile, rather than parties or unions. Lacking local or partisan roots, advancement occurred through diaspora constituencies, online mobilization, and individual visibility. Parties played at most a secondary, instrumental role; absence of territorial embeddedness constrained advancement inside Tunisia.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
25	249-46	Long pre-2011 repression + post-2011	MTI / Ennahdha (youth → exile → return)	Classic Islamist party career with transnational segment. Advancement began through early recruitment, structured internal promotion (lycée → regional → international responsibilities), followed by long exile. Post-2011 advancement relied on organizational seniority, ideological reliability, and trust, with party hierarchies clearly structuring candidacy and leadership opportunities.
26	268-5	Primarily post-2011 (2019–), long pre-political professional phase	Qalb Tounes (co-founder)	Technocratic–founder pathway. Political entry followed a long career as policy consultant and international expert, with politics initially approached through technocratic governance rather than parties. Advancement occurred through party founding and leadership, not rank-and-file progression. Party functioned as an elite coordination platform rather than a mass organization or career ladder.
27	294-41	Pre-2011 (international elite) + post-2011	Destourian diplomatic milieu → independent/notable	Elite-notability pathway detached from parties. Political capital derived from family diplomatic pedigree, international professional career, and economic autonomy. No reliance on party structures for advancement; parliamentary entry reflects status, resources, and autonomy, with parties marginal to career logic.
28	301-23	Long pre-2011 repression (1980s–2010)	MTI / Ennahdha (student → women's leadership)	Movement-to-party career with gendered organizational ladders. Advancement rooted in early student activism, internal leadership roles (faculty, dormitory, women's structures) and exposure to repression. Post-2011 advancement followed party-mediated nomination and leadership, with strong emphasis on organizational labor, loyalty, and ideological commitment rather than professional or bureaucratic capital.
29	312-19	Post-2011 (2011–2014)	Diaspora background → party list (secular-left)	Diaspora professional-to-political conversion. No pre-2011 Tunisian political career. Advancement relied on professional experience, symbolic family capital (syndical/leftist lineage), and gender representation, with party acting as an entry gate, not a long-term career ladder. Political engagement remained episodic and weakly institutionalized.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
30	326-3	Mainly post-2011 (2011–2014)	French left (PS milieu) → Tunisian secular parties (post-2011)	Diaspora-political conversion via ideological socialization abroad. No pre-2011 Tunisian party career. Political capital accumulated through student politics and party activism in France, combined with legal education and bicultural competence. Post-2011 advancement relied on symbolic cosmopolitan capital, language skills, and ideological positioning, with parties acting as entry gates rather than career ladders.
31	333-29	Long pre-2011 (1960s–2010) + post-2011	Cultural opposition → international organizations → independent/notable	Cultural-intellectual dissidence pathway. Advancement rooted in artistic production (theatre, cinema), imprisonment, exile, and international careers (UN system) rather than parties. Political relevance post-2011 derived from moral authority, international stature, and oppositional credibility, not party-based promotion.
32	401-28	Post-2011 (2011–2021)	CPR → Courant démocrate	Technocratic party-building pathway. Entry into politics motivated by professional expertise (accounting, fiscal policy) rather than activism. Advancement followed party founding, internal leadership (treasurer), and electoral progression, illustrating a procedural, party-institutional career with relatively strong organizational gatekeeping compared to other post-2011 parties.
33	441-36	Post-2011 (2011–2014)	Associative sports networks → Afek Tounes → Nidaa Tounes	Local notability-to-party conversion. Political capital accumulated through sports associations and financial management roles, providing local visibility and elite access. Party affiliation was instrumental and sequential, with advancement depending on local organizational entrepreneurship (founding local bureaus) rather than ideological commitment or national party ladders.
34	445-40	Pre-2011 (limited) + post-2011	Islamist student activism → CPR (diaspora) → return	Movement-to-cross-ideological party pathway. Early advancement through UGTE leadership, repression, and exile, generating symbolic capital. Later conversion into founding role within CPR relied on bridge-building across ideological camps, with party advancement structured but less hierarchical than Ennahdha.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
35	475-1	Long pre-2011 (1980s–2010) + post-2011	UGTE → exile academia → civil society leadership	Syndical–intellectual opposition pathway. Career advancement rooted in student syndical leadership, repression, exile, and academic production, not bureaucratic or party careers. Post-2011 relevance derived from human-rights expertise and transnational networks, with parties largely peripheral.
36	482-48	Post-2011 (2011–2014)	UGET (weak) → CPR	Late-entry party advancement via charismatic leadership. No strong pre-2011 party or syndical career. Political entry driven by personal identification with Moncef Marzouki and rights-based discourse. Party functioned as mobilization platform, with limited internal career differentiation.
37	502-9	Post-2011 (2011–2014)	Professional elites → party lists	Professional-to-electoral conversion. Advancement based on professional status and managerial competence, with party affiliation serving as an electoral wrapper, not a ladder. Party discipline and internal careers weak.
38	576-42	Long pre-2011 (cultural activism) + post-2011	Cultural field → humanitarian activism → politics	Cultural-moral authority pathway. Political capital accumulated through cinema, feminist engagement, and humanitarian intervention, not parties. Entry into politics occurred through issue-based legitimacy, with weak party embedding and high personal autonomy.
39	629-53	Very long pre-2011 (1970s–2010) + post-2011	Legal profession → Destourian/nationalist milieus	Professional-legal elite pathway. Advancement rooted in law, family nationalist capital, and early exposure to regime politics, rather than party ladders. Post-2011 parliamentary role reflects status, seniority, and moral authority, not party-based promotion.
40	638-24	Long pre-2011 (1990s–2010) + post-2011	Ennahdha + legal profession (barreau)	Dual party–professional pathway. Early political capital accumulated through long-term Islamist activism from adolescence, combined with legal education and human-rights defense. Advancement before 2011 occurred outside formal party office (bar, associations), under repression. After 2011, movement seniority, sacrifice, and professional legitimacy translated into parliamentary office. Party-based advancement was strong but reinforced by professional authority as a lawyer, not replaced by it.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
41	824-7	Pre-2011 (1990s–2010)	State security bureaucracy (police)	Pure bureaucratic career path. Advancement driven by competitive exams, internal training schools, specialization, and hierarchical promotion within the Ministry of Interior. No party affiliation; political relevance derives from institutional position and expertise, not partisan capital. Illustrates a non-party elite insulated from party channels until democratization.
42	834-27	Post-2011 (2011–2019)	Afek Tounes (founder)	Professional-notable party creation. No pre-2011 political or syndical career. Political entry via elite peer networks (professionals educated abroad) and personal ties to party leadership. Advancement relied on founding status, professional success (medicine), and social capital, not on internal party ladders. Party served as a collective vehicle for upwardly mobile professionals, with weak routinization.
43	879-54 / 879-541	Long pre-2011 (1980s–2010)	Islamist social milieu (informal) → legal profession	Latent ideological socialization without organizational conversion. Strong early exposure to Islamist circles and oppositional media, but no formal party membership before 2011. Career advancement followed professional-legal tracks, with political relevance emerging through ideas, networks, and intellectual capital, not party careers.
44	902-55	Pre-2011 (1980s–2010) + post-2011	UGTE (student syndicalism) → Ennahdha (post-2011)	Delayed party conversion via syndical activism. Political capital built through student union leadership and professional associations (doctors) under authoritarianism, without formal party membership. After 2011, this capital was retrospectively absorbed by Ennahdha, enabling electoral candidacy. Party served as a post-hoc aggregator rather than formative career channel.
45	963-57	Very long pre-2011 (1970s–2010) + post-2011	Tejdite → Al-Massar (leadership)	Classic party-intellectual career. Advancement through union leadership, opposition campaigns, and formal party roles under authoritarianism, followed by clear internal promotion (spokesperson → secretary general). Strong example of routinized party-based advancement, sustained by ideological coherence and organizational continuity.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
46	987-44	Pre-2011 (1970s–2010) + post-2011	Independent intellectual (no party)	Deliberate non-party elite trajectory. Political capital accumulated through academic prestige, informal influence, and oppositional discourse, while explicitly rejecting party membership. Parliamentary role post-2011 reflects status-based co-optation, not party advancement. Illustrates anti-party elite incorporation.
47	1000-50	Long pre-2011 (1960s–2010)	State administration (governorate)	Administrative-notable pathway. Entry via law degree and early civil-service appointment (delegate of governor). Advancement followed territorial administration hierarchies, independent of parties. Political authority rooted in state presence and local governance experience, not partisan careers.
48	1032-51	Very long pre-2011 (1970s–2000s)	Left–Islamist intellectual networks → journalism / civil society	Ideological-intellectual hybrid pathway. Political capital built through writing, debate, cross-ideological networks, and informal leadership, not through formal party hierarchies. Career advancement depended on symbolic authority and bridging capacity, with parties peripheral or episodic.
49	1083-56	Very long pre-2011 (1970s–2010) + limited post-2011	State administration (Justice → Interior → governorships → diplomacy → SOEs) + MDS (parliamentary affiliation)	Classic high-state bureaucratic career with late partisan conversion. Advancement operated overwhelmingly through elite administrative circuits: law + ENA training, early ministerial cabinet work, rapid promotion via patronage from senior ministers, followed by governorships, consular diplomacy, and leadership of public enterprises. Political capital accumulated through territorial governance, proximity to the presidency, and technocratic reliability, not party activism. Entry into parliament in the 1990s occurred through controlled pluralism, with party label (MDS) serving as a formal vehicle rather than a career ladder. Even post-2011, authority remains rooted in bureaucratic seniority and notability, not partisan competition.

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#	ID	Time-frame covered	Organizational affiliation	Career advancement mechanism
50	TUN-112-4	Long pre-2011 (1980s–2010) + strong post-2011	Ennahdha (clandestine → diaspora → leadership)	Canonical movement-party career. Political advancement structured almost entirely through long-term Islamist organizational investment: early recruitment in secondary school, clandestine cell leadership, repression and exile, diaspora re-organization (UGTE, regional structures), and gradual ascent to Majlis Shura prior to 2011. Post-revolutionary electoral selection followed clear internal hierarchy: seniority, sacrifice, and organizational control of diaspora constituencies translated directly into list leadership and parliamentary office. This is a rare case of fully routinized party-based advancement, where the party is both school, gatekeeper, and allocator of office.
51	TUN-378-31	Exclusively post-2011 (2012–2021)	Agricultural association → single-issue party → independent MP	Anti-party issue-based notability pathway. No pre-2011 political or organizational career. Political entry triggered by sectoral crisis (agriculture/milk) and absence of representation, leading to creation of an interest-based association, rapidly converted into a party for electoral access. Advancement relied on sectoral legitimacy, personal wealth, and populist anti-party stance, not organizational discipline. Parliamentary influence exercised through individual activism, media visibility, and procedural obstruction, while remaining deliberately outside blocs and party hierarchies. Illustrates a non-party, anti-system elite career, enabled by weak party gatekeeping after 2011.