When National Unity Governments are neither National, United, nor Governments: The Case of Tunisia

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December 14, 2018

Abstract

Is power-sharing an effective way for endangered transitional democracies to reduce political tensions and improve government performance? We provide one of the first quantitative tests of this question in Tunisia, the Arab Spring's only success story. We argue that power-sharing may reduce polarization for a limited time, but at the cost of undermining democratic institutions. To measure polarization, we examine all rollcall votes from Tunisia's first and second post-transition parliaments. We employ a time-varying ideal point model and examine whether power-sharing agreements led to convergence in political parties' ideal points. Our analysis reveals that Tunisia's national unity government in 2015 temporarily moderated political tensions and allowed for parliamentary activity to resume. However, despite a broadening of the coalition in mid-2016, polarization reemerged and crucial legislation stalled. Moreover, longitudinal survey data suggest that the failure of power-sharing in Tunisia contributed to disillusionment with political parties, parliament, and democracy.¹

1. Code and data for these models is available from https://github.com/saudiwin/tunisia_parliament. Online appendix is available at <https://osf.io/59qa3/>. We thank the Tunisian NGO Al-Bawsala for recording roll-call votes and making this data available to the public, and Hamza Mighri for helpful research assistance. We also thank Steven Brooke, Elizabeth Nugent, and attendees of the 2018 American Political Science Association annual conference for helpful feedback and suggestions.

Although power-sharing is a common prescription for transitional democracies (Lijphart 1977; Norris 2008; Matheson 2012), the evidence supporting this policy as a medicament for ailing regimes is mixed. To its proponents, power-sharing,² especially in the form of national unity governments (NUGs), entails the setting aside of arbitrary and menial ‘political’ differences in favor of acting in the national interest. By this account, NUGs should reduce polarization and thereby permit the government to focus on important democratic and economic reforms.

Power-sharing, however, has been criticized by other scholars for its loss of democratic accountability and the lack of a strong opposition (Jung and Shapiro 1995; Maphai 1996; Spears 2000; Rothchild and Roeder 2005; Kriger 2012; Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017). NUGs may also hinder democratic consolidation by facilitating a “politics of collusion” (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010; Roop 2018), where elites in power capture resources while action on necessary but potentially polarizing decisions is delayed.

Few studies have attempted to adjudicate between these competing accounts and determine what effect power-sharing has on polarization, government effectiveness, and democracy. Most of the literature on power-sharing instead focuses on post-conflict environments (i.e., Cammett and Malesky 2012; Daly 2014; Haass and Ottmann 2017), examining whether such agreements succeed or fail in preventing a relapse into violence. This is a significant oversight, as the majority of cases of power-sharing actually occur not in post-conflict countries but in new democracies with no recent history of conflict. According to data from Strom et al. (2017), of 813 country-years featuring grand coalitions between 1975-2010, only 21% occurred in post-conflict settings, defined as countries experiencing civil wars in the past 10 years (Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017). The majority, 61%, occurred in democracies that had been peaceful for at least 10 years.³ It is therefore worth systematically examining whether power-sharing is effective not only in preventing violence, but also in reducing polarization, improving government effectiveness, and strengthening democracy.

We wade into this debate by examining the national unity government in Tunisia, the one democracy that has managed to emerge from the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions. This country offers an important test for this theory because this country recently transitioned to democracy and experienced multiple national unity coalitions in a short period of time, permitting over-time within-case inference. After three years of severe secular-religious polarization, Tunisia in 2015 formed a NUG consisting of both secular and Islamist parties. The resulting coalition, which was further broadened by a national pact in 2016, incorporated the vast majority of the parliament. These efforts at power-sharing were intended to help Tunisia move beyond the polarization that had plagued its transitional democracy’s early

2. Power-sharing is a broad term whose constituent parts has been helpfully defined by (Strom et al. 2017). In this article, we focus narrowly on one, well-known aspect of power-sharing, namely, grand coalitions or national unity governments

3. The remaining 18% occurred in non-democracies without civil wars. Results are substantively similar when looking at 5 or 15 year windows.

years and allow it to pursue much-needed political and economic reforms.

In this paper, we examine whether Tunisia’s national unity government was able to achieve its intended goals: a reduction in polarization and an improvement in governance. The empirical basis for this examination comes from extensive data collected on the first and second parliaments of Tunisia’s transitional democracy. Thanks to the heroic efforts of Tunisia’s nascent civil society, we have access to an extraordinary amount of information about the legislature, including all roll-call votes on both final legislation and on every amendment to each piece of legislation. In total, our dataset contains 380,000 votes cast in the earlier National Constituent Assembly (NCA) during 2012 to 2014 and more than 800,000 individual votes cast by parliamentarians in Tunisia’s Assembly of People’s Representatives (ARP) during 2015 to 2018 . We analyze this parliamentary voting data using time-varying ideal points models to measure political polarization in addition to analyzing over-time changes in legislative productivity and process.

With this data, we make two arguments about the effects of power-sharing on Tunisian politics. First, in terms of polarization, the gains from the national unity government were modest and temporary. The 2015 NUG maintained a modestly lower level of polarization for about 1.5 years. By mid-2016, despite doubling down on power-sharing with a formal agreement, polarization reemerged, nearly returning to 2013-crisis levels. Moreover, while the NUG was intended to move beyond secular-religious tensions, these tensions in fact remained prominent throughout the coalition’s tenure, with such issues continuing to divide the parliament.

Second, not only did the formal trappings of the NUG fail to reduce polarization over the long term, it also undermined government performance by significantly reducing legislative activity. As with polarization, the NUG produced an initial short-term burst in legislative activity, and then a considerable decline by mid-2016. Part of the issue was the NUG simply delayed consideration of important but polarizing issues in an attempt to maintain consensus. Even constitutionally-mandated but polarizing legislative actions, such as authorizing municipal elections and approving the members of constitutional court, were delayed for years. Even more consequentially, the parliament has struggled to pass legislation which could push back at endemic public sector corruption and help spur entrepreneurship and economic growth. Although many MPs would cite these exact goals as their priorities, the NUG has on the whole failed to improve the parliament’s ability to tackle these pressing concerns.

In short, the national unity government in Tunisia has proven to be neither “national” – failing to incorporate all parties, “united” – failing to permanently reduce polarization, nor a “government” – failing to pass important legislation. Meanwhile, alongside these failures, the NUG has also undermined democracy in at least three ways. First, the NUG facilitated informal decision-making between members of the coalition behind closed doors, rather than public debate in the parliament, marginalizing the assembly and contributing to an uptick in absenteeism. Second, without

a strong opposition, the NUG was able to pass a series of a problematic laws that have contributed to democratic backsliding, such as a counterterrorism law that has facilitated police abuse and a reconciliation law that has facilitated corruption. Finally, as parties compromised and found consensus, they no longer represented meaningful, distinct policy platforms. Longitudinal representative surveys accordingly show a marked disillusionment with political parties, the parliament, and democracy during the duration of Tunisia’s NUG.

In the remainder of this article, we first provide background on power-sharing and democratic consolidation, and introduce Tunisia’s recent experience with democracy. Section 2 presents our data collected on the Tunisian parliament and our methods. We then implement models that estimate the ideal points of the parliamentarians and show how power-sharing has – or has not – affected the policy space within the parliament. We then discuss the effectiveness of the parliament, and conclude with thoughts on the implications of NUGs for democratic stability and accountability in transitional democracies.

1 Background

A commonly-cited threat to the survival of democracy is political polarization. Empirically, polarization has led new democracies to break down into civil wars (Horowitz 1985; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005), and sparked crises that provided opportunities for military coups and incumbent takeovers (Thompson 1975; Lorch 2017). Accordingly, scholars and policymakers have long advocated for power-sharing between mutually antagonistic groups as a means of reducing polarization and thereby facilitating democratic consolidation (Lijphart 1977; Norris 2008). In contradistinction to the quotidian practice of power-sharing as a necessary compromise to form governing coalitions in parliamentary democracies, national unity governments (NUGs), our focus in this paper, vastly expand coalitions to *all* major actors in the political system—at least in theory.

The record of power-sharing, however, is mixed. Existing literature finds that while certain types of inclusive power-sharing, such as NUGs, may be important in transitioning to democracy, they do not appear to increase the likelihood that these democracies consolidate (Maphai 1996; Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017), at least when considering data collected at the country-year level. Moreover, scholars contend that power-sharing may undermine democratic consolidation in at least two ways:

First, power-sharing via NUGs entails a loss of democratic representation and accountability (Jung and Shapiro 1995; Kriger 2012). If people elect a party whose preferences are presumably similar to their own, then joining a grand coalition must force that party to ignore those very preferences in favor of unity. In strategic terms, the larger

that a power-sharing government exceeds the minimum winning coalition (Riker 1980), the more likely that coalition members will be pressured to vote far from their actual ideal points in the policy space.

Second, power-sharing precludes the presence of a strong opposition, which is a central element of a well-functioning democracy. Without a meaningful opposition, national unity governments may collude to maintain their power rather than implement critical democratic reforms. Power-sharing may therefore facilitate a “politics of collusion, [where...] political leaders use unity government as a screen [to...] cultivate an ‘anti-reform’ alliance that sounds the death knell for attempts to end the culture of impunity” (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010, p. 207).

Proponents of power-sharing, however, counter that by reducing polarization, national unity governments can be more effective in implementing democratic reforms (Norris 2008). By putting aside ideological differences, NUGs should be able to focus on the technical reforms needed and demanded by the people, especially in improving the economy.

One of the difficulties in weighing the pros and cons of power-sharing formulas like NUGs is that there have not been formal empirical tests of the proposed mechanisms. A NUG should reduce polarization between major actors in the political space, allowing them to reach consensus on important topics of policy debate. By reducing polarization, NUGs should increase the space for compromise that ultimately helps actors get things done. However, while we have excellent qualitative studies at the country level and strong evidence about the link between democratic consolidation and power-sharing at the country-year level, we still do not have precise ways of testing whether power-sharing agreements directly affect the polarization of political actors, arguably the key component of power-sharing agreements.

To weigh in on this debate, we examine a treasure trove of data from Tunisia, a country that transitioned to democracy very recently. While power-sharing has typically been proposed as a solution to ethnically-divided countries emerging from civil wars, “the prescription for power-sharing institutions originated from close study of societies that were ethnically homogeneous – notably, Austria and the Netherlands – and had not experienced ethnic civil war in recent history” (Rothchild and Roeder 2005, p. 29). Accordingly, power-sharing should stand its best chance of success in similarly homogeneous countries with no histories of civil war, such as Tunisia. By demonstrating that even in Tunisia, power-sharing undermines democratic consolidation, we hope to show that power-sharing is problematic even in these ‘easy’ cases where it should be most likely to succeed, and with much greater precision than prior studies.

2 Power-sharing in Tunisia

Tunisia is an ethnically and religiously homogeneous country in North Africa, with 99 percent of its citizens being Sunni Muslim. It transitioned to democracy in 2011 after a popular revolution ousted 23-year-dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The first democratic elections, held in October 2011, were won by an Islamist party, Ennahdha (the Renaissance). Ennahdha's victory, and its subsequent heading of a coalition government, sparked considerable secular-Islamist polarization at both the elite and mass levels (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2015; Grewal 2015; Kubinec and Owen 2018). After two secular politicians were assassinated in 2013, this ideological polarization grew debilitating, paralyzing the only elected body, the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Dueling protests between secularists and Islamists throughout the summer of 2013 contributed to fears that Tunisia would descend into civil war like neighboring Libya or provide basis for a military coup like in Egypt (Grewal 2016).

Tunisia emerged from this crisis, however, through consensus. In fall 2013, four civil society organizations, the Quartet, helped to broker a deal between Ennahdha and its secular rivals, who had coalesced into an anti-Islamist catch-all party, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia). After passing a consensual constitution in January 2014, Tunisia held its second democratic elections in November-December 2014, which were won by Nidaa Tounes.

Yet Nidaa Tounes' margin of victory – 86 of 217 parliamentary seats, or 39.6 percent – forced a coalition government. Mathematically, Nidaa Tounes only needed its two closest secular allies, the Free Patriotic Union (UPL, 16 seats) and Afek Tounes (8 seats) to gain a majority, which would form a minimum-winning coalition of parties with fairly similar policy preferences. However, shocking observers, Nidaa Tounes chose to also include its former rival, Ennahdha (69 seats), forming a grand, national unity government with 82 percent of parliamentary seats. While the NUG did not represent the entire policy space, excluded parliamentarians were too small a group to exert any meaningful opposition. The opposition did, however, represent important social actors, especially the working class, who were effectively marginalized.

Leaders of Nidaa Tounes explained that it was time to put aside the secular-Islamist cleavage so that the government could tackle the nation's more pressing concerns. "The country's true enemies are poverty, illiteracy, and economic underdevelopment," asserted Nidaa Tounes MP and executive board member Mondher Belhaj Ali. "We can even have excellent relations with [Ennahdha]."⁴ Similarly, Nidaa Tounes MP Mohamed Troudi claimed that: "Under the current economic situation, there must be political consensus."⁵

Ennahdha president Rached Ghannouchi agreed, emphasizing the need to reduce polarization: "Democracy in

4. Quoted in Laurence 2015.

5. See <https://www.babnet.net/rttdetail-99624.asp>.

Tunisia is in a transitional stage and cannot handle a return to the conflict between the state and an opposition force. This is why we believe that a [mere] majority is incapable of leading the next stage and that the solution is consensus based on mutual trust between Tunisia's various [political] actors. [...] After the elections, voters do not expect to see political conflict, but rather a strong state that achieves security, stability and economic development." Warning of the polarization in Egypt, Ghannouchi concluded: "Our goal is to ensure democracy triumphs over chaos and dreams of coup d'état."⁶

This national unity government, formed in February 2015 at the start of the ARP,⁷ then underwent a significant expansion in July 2016. In what was dubbed the "Carthage Agreement" (named after the location of the presidential palace), the national unity government was expanded from these four original parties to include five others (Mashrou' Tunis, al-Moubadara, al-Jumhuri, al-Massar, and Harakat al-Shaab) and three civil society organizations (the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (UTICA), and the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fishery (UTAP)).⁸ In addition, the Carthage Agreement specified a list of six priorities for the national unity government to tackle: terrorism, job creation, corruption, fiscal policy, regional disparities, and governmental efficiency.

The stated intent of the Carthage Agreement was to double down on power-sharing, believing it would further reduce polarization and thereby allow the government to implement much-needed but difficult reforms. "If the [economic] situation continues like this, then in 2017 we will need a policy of austerity, and dismiss thousands of public sector employees and impose new taxes," explained Prime Minister Youssef Chahed at the time.⁹ President Beji Caid Essebsi concurred: "It is time for everyone to participate in the next government, including civil society organizations."¹⁰ The Carthage Agreement both expanded the grand coalition and formalized its priorities, and as a result should have further reduced polarization and improved government effectiveness.

These power-sharing agreements ended in October 2018, when Nahda and Nidaa Tounes, the primary Islamist and secular parties, parted ways in anticipation of the 2019 elections.¹¹ Accordingly, it is an appropriate time to look back and evaluate the national unity government. Some observers have noted that power-sharing in Tunisia has had a dark

6. See <https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/k-benyounes2/news-middle-east/tunisia-ghannouchi-calls-for-national-unity-government>.

7. See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-politics/tunisias-islamist-party-agrees-to-join-coalition-government-idUSKBN0L510B20150201>.

8. See <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/tunisian-parties-groups-sign-carthage-declaration-/607563>.

9. See <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/tunisia-government-wins-parliamentary-approval-160827040549717.html>.

10. See <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2016/8/24/tunisias-political-shake-up-welcome-change-or-legitimacy-undermined>.

11. The precise source of friction between Nahda and Nidaa Tounes was the former's refusal to sack Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, who had been competing with President Essebsi's son for leadership of Nidaa Tounes.

side for democracy, as “there has been no real opposition to exert a check on the [national unity] government,” and “the parties [have become] nearly intinguishable, [...] weaken[ing] the very notion of democratic representation” (Grewal and Hamid 2018).

In this paper, we assess to what extent Tunisia’s national unity government succeeded in achieving its two goals: reduced polarization and more effective governance. We also provide quantitative tests on whether power-sharing has helped or hurt Tunisia’s democratic institutions.

3 Data and Methods

Our primary data source for this paper is a dataset of rollcall votes collected from the first and second sessions of the Tunisian parliament. Although the legislative body remained fundamentally the same between both sessions,¹² the title changed, from the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to the Assembly of Representatives of the People (ARP). As such, we refer to the first and second sessions of the parliament by these acronyms. The Tunisian NGO Al-Bawsala has been collecting roll-call votes since 2012,¹³ and has made this data freely available through a website, Marsad Majles (<http://www.majles.marsad.tn>). We used web-scraping techniques to extract the information into a machine-readable format,¹⁴ producing a dataset of rollcall votes in both the NCA and ARP.

Al-Bawsala employed a very thorough methodology in recording legislative activity, tabulating roll-call votes on both final legislation and individual amendments on each piece of legislation. The votes on amendments are important because they provided the opposition an opportunity to push legislative changes that would never have passed through committees. This universe of rollcall votes makes this dataset one of the more complete records of legislative activity in a transitional democracy. We were able to collect 5,381 roll-call votes on legislation and amendments over an eight-year time period. In total, we have 388,864 individual legislator vote records—no, abstain, yes and absent—from the NCA and 800,218 individual legislator vote records for the ARP. Because we employ ideal-point models designed to incorporate the legislator absence and absention (described below), we utilize all of this data in our models without dropping any records.

To measure polarization, we estimate time-varying ideal points of each party and of major cleavages in the legislature to understand how their political position has changed over time. An ideal point model is a form of a latent

12. The primary difference is that the NCA had the additional responsibility of drafting and approving the constitution, not just legislation. Votes on the constitution are included in our dataset.

13. The first vote in Al-Bawsala’s dataset is the removal of the Central Bank governor on July 18, 2012.

14. Al-Bawsala also sent us the NCA data directly.

variable model that has been employed by political scientists to study legislative behavior primarily in the U.S. context (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers 2004; Armstrong et al. 2014). An ideal point represents an unobservable quantity: the position of the legislator in a hypothetical policy space. The closer a piece of legislation is to a legislator's ideal point, the more likely that the legislator will vote on the bill. While the original application of ideal point models to the U.S. Congress led to the description of ideal points as representing a legislator's ideology, in fact ideal points can be influenced by several factors, including the party to which the legislator belongs and the strategic nature of vote trading. As such, it is better to think of an ideal point as representing the political position of a legislator relative to other legislators: who is with whom and against whom. The ideal point model's purpose is to compress the large amount of roll-call votes in a parliament down into a single-dimensional score that can represent each legislator's political position relative to every other legislator. In our case, we examine party-level and cleavage-level ideal points rather than individual ideal points as most of the variation in ideal points in parliamentary systems happens at the party level rather than the individual level (Bräuninger, Müller, and Stecker 2016).

We employ a variant of the ideal point model that incorporates two features that are not standard in the literature. First, we explicitly incorporate abstentions and absences in our model rather than treating these types of vote records as missing data and excluding them from the analysis. Including absences and abstentions is crucial in the Tunisian parliament because legislators in the ARP often indicate their opposition to bills, especially when they are officially members of the ruling coalition, by abstaining. As can be seen in Table 2 of Appendix C, abstentions are nearly as likely to occur as actual no votes among legislators. Furthermore, as noted in Figure 11, absences are very common among legislators and explicitly accounting for absences in the model is important because whether or not a legislator shows up for a vote is a potential signal of that bill's salience with regard to cleavages in the legislature. To adjust for absences, we inflate the ideal point estimates by the probability that legislators at either end of the political spectrum are likely to be absent on a particular bill.

Second, while most ideal point models employed in the literature are static models, we instead use a time-varying ideal point model (Martin and Quinn 2002; Park 2011; Kropko 2013), allowing us to examine change over time. We first employ the standard random walk model, which permits ideal points to wander over the policy space over time, to plot and describe the overall trends. While this model is excellent for descriptive inference—identifying over-time trends and visually assessing divergence in ideal points—its simplicity also limits the ability to test for the effect of covariates on the random walk.¹⁵ To test the effect of covariates—such as the formation of the national unity government or the signing of the Carthage agreement—we also employ a new time-varying model, AR(1) or stationary ideal point

15. In other words, if the walk of the ideal points is truly random, then there cannot be an over-time covariate with a single effect without adding static drift and changing the model.

processes, which allows us to test for the effect of over-time covariates on movement in party- and cleavage-level ideal points in the Tunisian parliament. The implementation of these variants of the standard ideal point model are described fully in [REDACTED]. In short, we use the random-walk model to identify inflection points while formally testing with covariates in the stationary model.

With these ideal points models, we examine the following hypotheses:

- H1 After the initiation of the national unity government in February 2015, party-level ideal points of secular and Islamist parties should converge.
- H2 After the Carthage Agreement in July 2016, party-level ideal points of secular and Islamist parties should converge.

The way that we can statistically test these hypotheses in our framework is to include dummy variables for pre- and post-NUG, coded as 0 before and 1 after the initiation of a NUG.¹⁶ We can then interact these dummy variables with indicators for each party,¹⁷ examining if MPs from the Islamist party Nahda on average voted significantly more ‘secular’ after these agreements while its secular rivals voted more ‘Islamist,’ thus creating convergence. Such an analysis also allows us, therefore, to examine if only side moved closer to the other.

For H1, we need to compare the first parliamentary session to the second. This analysis is complicated by the fact that there are a whole host of new secular parties in the second session. The major secular parties in the NCA (the first session) – CPR (29 seats), Popular Petition (26), Ettakatol (20), and PDP (16) – only managed to win between 0-4 seats each in the 2014 elections. The second session instead prominently features Nidaa Tounes (89 seats), a party with no equivalent in the NCA. Accordingly, other than for the Islamist party Nahda, we cannot simply trace the ideal point of the same party from one session to the next.

When comparing the two sessions, we therefore estimate one ideal point for Nahda, as the only Islamist party, and one for all the rest, representing the secular forces. This cleavage-based classification fits both the literature on Tunisia, which suggests that the secular-religious cleavage was the dominant cleavage during the transition (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2015; Ozen 2018; Grewal and Monroe 2019), and an ideal point analysis of each parliamentary session separately, which shows Nahda consistently on one end of the political spectrum. For H1, therefore, we employ this simplification to Islamists and secularists. For testing H2 (Carthage), in which we only need the second session, we also present each party separately.

To estimate the model, we employ Bayesian inference with the Stan engine for Markov-Chain Monte Carlo (Car-

16. As noted earlier, including such time-varying covariates requires a stationary over-time ideal point model

17. These party covariates are also time-varying, given that MPs, especially secular ones, often switched parties over time.

penter et al. 2017) in the [REDACTED]. For this analysis, we opted to use an approximation to full Bayesian inference via a black-box variational approximation of the full posterior that is described in Kucukelbir et al. (2015). The variational approximation enables us to estimate a model with a substantial amount of data within a reasonable time window. To ensure that the approximation converges, we run the same models multiple times and check to make sure that the estimates are the same.¹⁸ To identify the rotation of the ideal points, we constrain the ideal point of the Islamist party Nahda to be positive and the ideal point of the secular opposition party Front Populaire to be negative. For the cleavages model, we constrain the Islamists to similarly be positive. For the party-level model, we aggregate the bills to each day in the legislature. For the larger combined model, we aggregate all bills to one month as this produces a reasonable number of time points over the much longer time period (six years).

We also set restrictions on the over-time variances of these models. We follow Martin and Quinn (2002) in limiting the over-time standard deviation of the random walk to no more than 0.1. This restriction means that ideal points are unlikely to jump more than 0.3 or 0.4 in a single time point. This restriction is important because we do not expect party-level ideal points to change so quickly, and prevents the model from assuming that parties could oscillate around the policy space from one day to the next.

The stationary ideal point model is somewhat less prone to high oscillation in ideal points, and so we set the upper limit of over-time change at 0.25. This higher limit is also important to give the model enough flexibility to estimate the effect of covariates on the party-level ideal points. If the limits on variance are increased, we find some blocs, such as the independents, making unreasonable jumps across the policy space from time point to time point.

4 Results

4.1 Polarization

We first look at the results from the cleavage-based model. Figure 1 shows the random-walk ideal points for the parliament from 2012 to 2018. Each ideal point line includes a credible interval around it representing the 5% to 95% density of the posterior estimates (similar in nature to a confidence interval). For descriptive inference, we emphasize Figure 2 where we plot the difference between the Islamist and secularist ideal points from the random-walk model in Figure 1.

The figures show that as the negotiations between Nahda and secular forces commenced in late 2013, eventually

18. This is a similar process to the procedure of checking $\hat{R}$ values for Markov-Chain Monte Carlo runs. However, we do not report $\hat{R}$ s as this statistic is only properly defined for true MCMC chains.

Figure 1: Random Walk Cleavage-level Ideal Points for Combined 1st and 2nd Tunisian Parliaments

Figure 2: Difference in Islamist and Secularist Ideal Points for Combined 1st and 2nd Tunisian parliaments

culminating in the January 2014 constitution, Nahda moved closer to the secularists, and continued to do so in the lead up to the fall 2014 elections. By the time the second session – and the national unity government – commenced

in February 2015, Nahda had nearly reached the nadir of its moderation. This reduced level of polarization was then maintained for about a year and a half (February 2015 to mid-2016) before Nahda began to subsequently move away from secularists.

In short, these descriptive plots show some degree of depolarization beginning in late-2013, though it had mostly completed even before the 2015 NUG began. To its credit, the NUG maintained that (lower) level of polarization, though only for 1.5 years, at which polarization began to creep back to 2013 levels.

Overall, however, both de-polarization and polarization in the plots are modest. The axis in Figure 2 shows a maximum range from 1.50 to 1.30. As the scale was standardized, this difference means that Islamists and secularists are always more than 1 standard deviation apart, and the total extent of depolarization, from 2014 to 2016, resulted in a drop of only a modest 0.2 on this scale. In other words, the difference between Islamists and secularists in the parliament dropped by approximately 13 percent if counting from the apex of polarization to its nadir. Furthermore, polarization towards the end of the second parliament was returning to pre-2014 levels. As of August 2018 (the time of data collection), polarization was only 5 percent off its peak.

Figure 3 shows the same cleavage-level ideal points, but in a stationary model, which will allow the inclusion of the dummy variables for statistical tests. This model does not allow for long-term changes within parliamentary sessions in order to see if we can detect movement as a result of the national unity government. To do so, a covariate is included that allows for a discontinuous jump in the ideal points at the moment that the new parliament came into session in February 2015. It is clear from this plot, as in Figure 1, that polarization decreased *prior* to the NUG, and that there appears to be renewed divergence towards the end of the second session. It is important to note that our covariate represents the entire process of de-polarization, not only the formal agreement itself that was a culmination of this process.

The effect of the dummy variable for the 2015 national unity government is shown in Figure 4. We see strong and statistically significant effects: on average, the second parliament was less polarized than the first (but again, much of the movement happened before the second parliament/NUG even began). These coefficients have credible high-density posterior (HPD) intervals showing uncertainty, but these intervals are so small given the size of the data that they are not visible on the plot. The coefficient on `change:blocIslamists` represents the constituent term for Islamists and shows that they became more secular in the second parliament (i.e., moved towards the other side). To know the total effect on the Islamists, we need to add the coefficients for `change:blocIslamists` and `change`, which equals -0.40 (HPD -0.42,-0.38). By comparison the coefficient on `change` is equivalent to the movement of the other group, the secularists, who also moved towards the Islamists, although less so than the Islamists, with a

Figure 3: Stationary Cleavage-level Ideal Points for Combined 1st and 2nd Tunisian parliaments

Figure 4: Effect of Second Parliament on Cleavage Ideal Points

Effect of 2014 Election on Party-level Ideal Points

Based on Rollcall Vote Data from 1st and 2nd Sessions of Tunisian Parliament

value of 0.29 (HPD 0.28,0.30). These coefficient values are somewhat larger than those shown in the random walk model, which is likely due to the fact that the stationary model allows for discontinuous change only at the point of

the formation of the NUG.

To understand how well the model fits the data, we also performed a wide variety of predictive validity checks that provide insight as to how well our cleavage model fit the underlying data. These checks are shown in Appendix A, and generally they reveal that estimating cleavages improved the accuracy of predicting legislator's votes most strongly for no and abstention votes compared to yes votes and absences.

In summary, our empirical analysis of the cleavage-level ideal points from the first and second parliaments shows that de-polarization did occur between the first and second parliament. However, the random walk model reveals that the inflection point in de-polarization in fact happened before the second parliament, some time during the negotiations over a transfer of power between Islamists and secularists. Given the large number of events that occurred in that period of time, including widespread protests against the Islamist-led government, it is difficult to point to the power-sharing agreement as the sole factor that led to de-polarization. By the time that power-sharing was formally institutionalized in early 2015 with the formation of a coalition between the secular Nidaa Tounes and the Islamist Nahda, de-polarization had already occurred.

Given this difficulty in identifying the effect of formal power-sharing independent of external pressure, we turn next to hypothesis 2. As described above, the governing coalition orchestrated a formal agreement of power-sharing in July 2016, the Carthage Agreement, to expand the coalition and identify clear priorities. This agreement represents a strong test of the power-sharing thesis because it was explicitly designed by the governing coalition to share power and reduce polarization. Figures 5, 6 and 7 show random-walk and stationary models for the party-level ideal points for the members of the ARP (the second session) from February 2015 to August 2018. Because there are almost a dozen independent parties in the parliament, only Figure 5 shows all of the party-level ideal points for the random walk model on the same plot. Figures 6 and 7 show the party-level ideal points in separate plots to facilitate visual comparison. As can be seen, the high variance in the stationary model in Figure 7 makes this model difficult to use for any kind of descriptive inference.

Because we constrained Nahda and Front Populaire to identify the scale, more positive values indicate a more Islamist orientation and more negative values indicate a more secular/opposition position, which is the convention we also followed with our cleavage-level model. The dotted line in the center of the figures shows the timing of the Carthage Agreement in July of 2016. Descriptively, it is important to note that Front Populaire and Nahda, the parties we used to identify the latent scale, represent competing poles in the legislature, with Nahda at the high positive values of the ideal point scale and Front Populaire at low negative values of the scale. As such, we labeled the scale as representing more secular versus more Islamist given that Front Populaire are doctrinaire leftists with an avowed

dislike of Islamism. That said, of course there are secularists who are reasonably close to Nahda, especially Nidaa Tounes, who have been in a coalition with the Islamists since the parliament began.

Figure 5: Random Walk Party-level Ideal Points for the Second Session of the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People

The random-walk model results in Figures 5 and 6 show a clear story concerning how parties' ideal points have changed during the ARP's session. Nahda has steadily moved away from the other secular parties. Nahda's coalition parties, including Nidaa Tounes, Afek Tounes and Union Patriotique Libre, have stayed roughly in the middle of the distribution. Some groups have moved clearly towards the secularist position, including Independents and the break-away faction of Nidaa Tounes, Horra.

These model results allow us to visually discern if the Carthage Agreement and the NUG in general appear to have dampened polarization and encouraged inter-party cooperation for the common good. As can be seen, the Carthage Agreement appeared to have no effect on the ideal point locations of either Nahda's coalition partner Nidaa Tounes or the leftist Front Populaire. It does appear to have had a short-term effect on the breakaway faction Horra, which is substantively interesting. The members of Horra formed their new party in January of 2016, which fractured Nidaa Tounes' lead as the largest party in the legislature. This break may have provided the impetus for President Essebsi to push for a new power-sharing agreement. It appears that the Carthage Agreement managed to push Horra's voting pattern back to that of the coalition government Nidaa Tounes and Nahda, albeit for a rather short period. By 2017,

Figure 6: Faceted Random Walk Party-level Ideal Points for the Second Session of the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People

Figure 7: Faceted Stationary Party-level Ideal Points for the Second Session of the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People

Horra had returned to negative values on the ideal point scale, moving away from Nahda and Nidaa Tounes. This movement towards secularism is unsurprising as part of the reason that Horra broke from Nidaa Tounes was due to the former's proximity to the Islamists. For Nahda, the Carthage Agreement if anything led to greater, not lesser, polarization.

This data suggest that the Carthage Agreement, and the NUG more generally, failed to bring ideal point distributions together and promote unity in parliamentary votes. Ideal point distributions remained largely unchanged, and in some cases, diverged further. Without being able to change those underlying ideal points, Carthage proved to be simply another piece of paper rather than a transformative influence on the parliament.

We can formally test this proposition by looking at the results of the covariates included for the Carthage Agreement in Figure 8. The variable `change` is a dummy variable that is equal to 0 before the Carthage Agreement and 1 thereafter. The interactions between `change` and each bloc in the parliament measure the total movement in party-level ideal points following the Agreement. As can be seen, for virtually all the parties in the parliament, the estimates are very imprecise even though there is plenty of data in the model. The only party that has a precise effect is the break-away faction Horra. The model shows Horra moving in an Islamist direction, which provides strong evidence that the Carthage Agreement was far more about salvaging Nidaa Tounes' parliamentary plurality than it was about dampening polarization. Furthermore, we know from the random walk model that Horra's movement towards Nahda did not last the entire duration of the parliament as it drifted back in a secular direction. For all the other parties in office, the model can find little if any effect of the Carthage Agreement in either an Islamist or secularist direction. The Agreement simply appeared to not have much role in determining party trajectories in voting behavior.

In short, power-sharing in Tunisia, both in the form of the 2015 National Unity Government and the 2016 Carthage agreement, appeared not to lead to a convergence of ideal points. However, perhaps power-sharing did succeed in changing the issues of disagreement, moving the debate away from the secular-religious issues that plagued the transition in 2013 and towards the pressing economic and security concerns that the NUG was intended to address. To examine which issues were polarizing both the NCA and the ARP, we calculate the discrimination score for each vote, which is a latent variable indicating how polarizing the vote was. The discrimination score communicates two pieces of information about a particular vote. First, the sign of the score indicates whether a yes vote predicts that someone is more Islamist (negative) or more secularist (positive). Second, the absolute value of the discrimination score communicates the overall level that a piece of legislation discriminates among legislators. A higher absolute value indicates more discrimination, while as the discrimination parameter approaches zero, voting on the piece of legislation indicates little if any polarization around the latent Islamist-secularist cleavage.

Figure 8: Effect of Carthage Agreement on Party Ideal Points in the ARP

Tables 1 and 2 present the top 15 most polarizing bills in the NCA and ARP, respectively. In both sessions, we see highly polarizing secular-Islamist issues, as well as non-religious issues that similarly divided Nahda and the rest of the parliament. In the NCA, for instance, we see (failed) amendments to the Constitution to remove freedom of conscience (amendment 62 to article 6) as well as to make the Quran and the Sunna the basis of legislation (amendment 42 to article 1). We also see important pro-revolution/old regime cleavages, such as whether to remove the Central Bank governor in 2012 and whether to ban remnants of the former regime from running in future elections (“political immunization”).

Contrary to the hopes of the NUG, the ARP was divided by similar religious and revolutionary issues. A (failed) amendment to regulate Islamic financial institutions was the 4th most polarizing vote in the ARP. The counterterrorism bill, especially regarding definitions, was also divisive. Two amendments to the electoral law to attempt to grant military and security forces the right to vote were similarly polarizing along secular-Islamist lines, as Islamists had informally been barred from these institutions under autocracy and accordingly had little to gain electorally.¹⁹ Pro-revolution issues also continued to paralyze the parliament, including votes on the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD)’s budget and whether to investigate its president.

In sum, despite much fanfare of bringing together Islamists and secularists, as well as revolutionaries and the old

19. See, e.g., <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68021>.

Table 1: Top 15 most polarizing votes in the National Constituent Assembly

	Vote	Date	Discrimination Score
1	Internal Regulations, Amend. 5 to Art. 91	Mar 11, 2013	3.60
2	Law of the Provisional Court of Justice, Art. 2	Apr 10, 2013	-3.52
3	Budget, Ministry of Youth and Sports	Dec 24, 2012	3.33
4	Removal of Central Bank governor	Jul 18, 2012	3.30
5	Approval of Central Bank governor	Jul 24, 2012	3.28
6	Constitution, Amend. 101 to Art. 92	Jan 13, 2014	-3.24
7	Constitution, fourth paragraph of preamble	Jan 3, 2014	3.22
8	Political immunization of the revolution	Jun 28, 2013	3.16
9	Constitution, fifth paragraph of preamble	Jan 3, 2014	3.08
10	Budget, Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training	Dec 24, 2012	3.08
11	Internal Regulations, Amend. 1 to Art. 91	Mar 11, 2013	-3.04
12	Motion of censure, Minister for Women and the Family	Apr 16, 2013	-2.99
13	Setting dates of the 2014 elections	Jun 25, 2014	-2.89
14	Constitution, Amend. 62 to Art. 6	Jan 4, 2014	-2.68
15	Constitution, Amend. 42 to Art. 1	Jan 4, 2014	-2.60

Table 2: Top 15 most polarizing votes in the Assembly of People's Representatives

	Vote	Date	Discrimination Score
1	Postpone review of IVD Budget	Dec 5, 2016	-4.26
2	2018 Finance Act, Art. 59	Dec 9, 2017	4.05
3	2018 Finance Act, Art. 58	Dec 9, 2017	3.90
4	Banks & financial institutions, Amend. to Art. 54	June 8, 2016	-3.87
5	2018 Finance Act, Amend. 4 to Art. 16	Dec 7, 2017	3.83
6	Electoral law, Amend. to Art. 3, 6, and 7	June 15, 2016	-3.77
7	2018 Finance Act, Art. 60	Dec 9, 2017	3.67
8	2018 Finance Act, Art. 57	Dec 9, 2017	3.55
9	2017 Budget, Proposal 48	Dec 10, 2016	3.52
10	Electoral law, Amend. 3 on Art. 3 and 6	June 15, 2016	-3.47
11	Anti-corruption Instance, Amend. 8 to Art. 19	July 19, 2017	3.35
12	Counterterrorism and money laundering, Art. 3	July 22, 2015	3.35
13	2018 Finance Act, Art. 35	Dec 7, 2017	-3.34
14	Commission to investigate IVD president	Jan 1, 2017	-3.23
15	Constitutional Court, Amend. 1 to Art. 36	Nov 19, 2015	-3.21

regime, the national unity government continued to be plagued by these issues. Both in terms of levels of polarization and the issues of debate, power-sharing in Tunisia appears to have had little effect. In Appendix B we plot discrimination scores of votes over time, which also shows minimal changes in response to national unity governments.

4.2 Government Effectiveness

How about the second stated goal of the national unity government: was it successful in improving government effectiveness? To examine this question, we first present the raw number of legislative roll-call votes in the Tunisian

parliament over time, as a measure of a legislative activity. Figure 9 shows that the NCA had few votes in its first years, prior to the 2014 Constitution and subsequently activity that year. The national unity government then saw an initial flurry of activity in 2015 and early 2016, but then a remarkable slowdown after the Carthage Agreement. Despite explicitly agreeing on priorities for the NUG, the Carthage Agreement failed to actually deliver.

Figure 9: Distribution of Roll Call Votes over Time in the Tunisian Parliament

This clear drop-off in votes after the Carthage Agreement suggests that the NUG was not truly a “government,” as it failed to implement the kind of policy change or consensus that such an Agreement was supposedly designed to provide. Instead, the promotion of (rhetorical) unity has come at the expense of policy implementation, despite Tunisia’s many needed regulatory changes in grappling with widespread unemployment, corruption and hostile bureaucracies.

One reason for the initial increase and then decrease in parliamentary activity during the NUG was that it postponed the most polarizing issues in the name of consensus. Some of the most divisive issues, like the aforementioned electoral law for the municipal elections, were delayed for years. The municipal elections were originally scheduled for 2016, but a lack of consensus on the electoral law led the NUG to kick the can down the road, finally holding those elections in May 2018. Similarly, the NUG has still not approved the members of the Constitutional Court, despite the 2014 constitution mandating they be chosen within one year.²⁰ In short, the NUG was able to achieve modest successes in

20. See <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/11/20/tunisia-needs-a-constitutional->

its first year only by postponing important but controversial topics.

In fact, the boost in productivity following the initiation of the new parliamentary coalition in 2015 centered around relatively uncontroversial legislation. Figure 10 shows that many of the bills in the first two years were authorizations of aid projects with sovereign governments. The popularity of Tunisia with international development banks and official development organizations²¹ and the need to separately ink legislation to secure deals may have helped create a false sense of progress in early stages of the second parliament.

Votes determined as relating to development finance by matching bill titles with "accord" and "financement du projet" as these words were used as a template in these pieces of legislation.

Evidence for the delay on important legislation can also be seen in the existing votes. Table 2 in Appendix C shows the proportion of yes, no, abstain, and absent records for each party. Interestingly, the proportion of no votes is incredibly small: only the short-lived Bloc National cast more than 15 percent of its votes against a bill. The highest proportion of no votes comes from Front Populaire (8), the successor to the Bloc National and a group of leftist opposition politicians. Nonetheless, we might be surprised that the proportion of no votes is not higher for the largest opposition bloc in the Tunisian parliament, especially considering that Nahda and the breakaway faction Horra cast

court/.

21. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/19/how-foreign-assistance-can-hurt-not-help-tunisias-democratic-transition/?utm_term=.7c2b20f4fdb8.

almost the same number of no votes. This lack of no votes suggests that some of the most polarizing votes may not have come to the floor for a vote at all.

With the Carthage Agreement, parliamentary activity has crawled to a standstill. As the parliament has become increasingly trivial, parliamentarians are beginning to skip votes entirely. Figure 11 plots a linear trend over the proportion of absences on votes in the Tunisian parliament over time, demonstrating a sharp increase from roughly 35% at the start of the NCA to almost 50% today. In other words, today, nearly half of the parliament will be absent on any given vote.²²

Figure 11: Proportion of Absences from Votes in Tunisian Parliament over Time

Black dots represent rate of absence for each vote, red line shows average per month, and the blue line is a linear regression fit with a predictive confidence interval. The dotted line represents fifty percent.

This astonishingly high absence rate is further evidence of the deadening effect of the national unity government and the intra and inter-party conflicts it is attempting to paper over. The best proof that the NUG has disabled the legislature can be captured by the behavior of legislators themselves, a near majority of whom are absent on any given vote. Rather than registering their disagreement by taking concrete policy positions, they choose to either abstain or be absent, a sign that they are disengaging from the process as much as they are trying to push for policy change.

These dismal results of the NUG and Carthage Agreement show that power-sharing proved to be a loss-loss propo-

22. There is important variation in absences by party. Nahda has the lowest absence rate at 32%, while most secular parties have absence rates over 50%.

sition for the Tunisian people. It abjectly failed not only to reduce polarization, but also cost the Assembly by delaying votes on important legislation and lowering the overall effectiveness of the legislature.

5 Discussion

The data we present in this paper pokes holes in the commonly-held assumption that NUGs represent a potential solution to deadlocked parliaments and political polarization. By contrast, we argue, based on data from Tunisia — which should be an easy case for successful power-sharing — that formal power-sharing agreements do not appear to be able to contain polarization. Moreover, the most significant change that we can identify is a slow loss of performance in the legislature, which we measure by the number of votes that the legislature is able to hold and by the rate of absences.

It is important to emphasize, as we described in our case study earlier, that the original de-polarization that occurred in 2014 was caused by societal pressure as much as it was a result of elite negotiations. As we argued, it is the Carthage Agreement that represents the cleanest test of the power-sharing hypothesis, and this Agreement abjectly failed to depolarize the parliament or improve parliamentary activity. In other words, while we found modest support for H1 that polarization decreased in the second parliament as a whole relative to the first parliament, this de-polarization appears to be more related to widespread social demand for de-polarization than for the effect of elite power-sharing agreements.

While power-sharing has largely failed to achieve its intended goals, it appears to have also undermined democratic institutions. First, without a strong opposition, the NUG was able to pass a series of problematic laws. The 2015 counterterrorism law, for instance, has facilitated police abuse by permitting the detention of terrorism suspects without charge and without a lawyer for 15 days.²³ Police officers have raided homes without a warrant, committed torture, and most recently imposed arbitrary travel restrictions on broadly-defined terrorism suspects.²⁴ Meanwhile, the 2017 economic reconciliation law, which provided a blanket amnesty to individuals suspected of corruption under the former regime, has contributed to a considerable increase in perceptions of corruption.²⁵

Beyond problematic legislation, the NUG has also undermined notions of representation. With Nahda — a supposedly Islamist, pro-revolution party — eventually agreeing to these counterterrorism and reconciliation laws in the

23. See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/31/tunisia-counterterror-law-endangers-rights>.

24. See <https://pomed.org/snapshot-time-to-rein-in-tunisias-police-unions/> and <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/10/they-never-tell-me-why-arbitrary-restrictions-on-movement-in-tunisia/>.

25. See <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/25/tunisia-s-corruption-contagion-transition-at-risk-pub-73522>.

name of consensus, Tunisians are no longer seeing a difference between their political parties. Representative survey data confirm these impressions. According to the Afrobarometer, by 2018, 79% of Tunisians either would not vote or would not know who to vote for if elections were held tomorrow (Figure 12). This disillusionment with parties was reflected in the 2018 municipal elections, in which independents emerged as the largest vote-getter while overall turnout was only 34%. Levels of trust in the ruling and opposition parties have similarly fallen back to 2013-crisis levels.

Figure 12: Tunisian Disenchantment with Political Parties Increased Since National Unity Government

Finally, as a result of the NUG, most of the important decisions are being made behind closed doors in personal meetings between President Beji Caid Essebsi, the head of Nidaa Tounes, and Rached Ghannouchi, the head of Nahda. The meetings of these two old men – dubbed the “two sheikhs” – has contributed to a popular perception that the parliament is increasingly irrelevant. Figure 13 find that trust and approval in the parliament has dropped considerably since the creation of the NUG, while perceptions that the parliament is ignored and corrupt have increased.

Finally, with problematic legislation, an ineffective and corrupt parliament, and parties no longer providing representation, Tunisians have become increasingly disillusioned with democracy. Figure 14 shows that the percent of respondents rating democracy as preferable to other forms of government has fallen from 70% in 2013 to just 46% in 2018. Meanwhile, support for democracy’s alternatives – including military rule, one-party rule, and one-man

Figure 13: Tunisian Disenchantment with Parliament Increased Since National Unity Government

rule – have grown under the NUG to 47, 41, and 35%, respectively. Power-sharing has clearly not contributed to a strengthening of democracy, and instead probably undermined public faith in it.

The underlying question, of course, is why would Tunisian political actors engage in these kinds of power-sharing agreements if they do not yield the kind of benefits they were designed for. We believe the answer to this question centers on the elites in power and their interests in the democratic transition. On the one hand, the Islamist Nahda retains a massive political organization that dwarfs any competing centers of power in the Tunisian political landscape and has also shown itself to be remarkably durable over time. For Nahda, a power-sharing agreement has the ability to defend its interests as an organization while avoiding the appearance that it is dominating the parliament. Without much to risk, Nahda has contented itself with becoming a veto player in the parliament, more likely to object to legislation that could threaten its base rather than taking the initiative and providing potential solutions to the country’s ongoing economic crisis. With a loyal cache of followers and relatively disorganized opponents, Nahda does not need to win; it only needs to avoid losing, and power-sharing can help it to achieve these aims without taking on the blame of being an obstructionist party.

For Nidaa Tounes and other secular elites involved in this NUG, the Islamist-secularist divide is more of an opportunity than a real and pressing concern. Nidaa Tounes, Nahda’s coalition partner, represents a group of political

Figure 14: Tunisian Disenchantment with Parliament Increased Since National Unity Government

actors with ties to the former autocratic (Ben Ali) regime who lack clear political goals aside from a desire to undercut Tunisia’s transitional justice program and obstruct corruption investigations of businesspeople. For this group, a power-sharing agreement is an acceptable outcome because it protects the status quo from more revolutionary demands. For Nidaa, the ability to exclude groups like the Bloc Social-Democrate, which advocates for political reform, and the Front Populaire, which advocates for economic reform, is a happy consequence of their supposed moderation and open-mindedness to Islamists. For these reasons, Tunisia’s NUG appears to fall more in the category of the “politics of collusion” (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010) than of moderation and tolerance (Stepan 2012).

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have provided data and evidence revealing that power-sharing in Tunisia, as embodied in the 2015 national unity government and the 2016 Carthage Agreement, has resulted in legislative stasis while having only mild impacts on political polarization. To support this thesis, we employ time-varying ideal point models that aggregate roll-call data from Tunisia’s first and second parliaments and enable us to directly test for polarization before and after power-sharing agreement were reached by major parties. We show that while power-sharing may have enjoyed modest

success in 2015, it has since 2016 been unable to rein in polarization and has instead contributed to a marked decline in parliamentary activity.

For these reasons, we believe that we have supported the thesis we set out with: the national unity government is largely a misnomer as some groups are always excluded, it is not unified as polarization endures, and it is not much of a government as legislative output has notably fallen. There appears to be little to recommend a NUG as a policy solution to political polarization, at least when democratic institutions exist that should be able to lead to actual policy change.

Contrary to those who continue to advocate for national unity governments as a path to resolve the “governmental crisis” (*Restoring Public Confidence in Tunisia’s Political System* 2018), we argue that the best path forward is democratic competition and contestation. Nahda and Nidaa Tounes moving back to their voter bases and developing competing economic and political agendas ahead of the 2019 elections will help voters once again differentiate their political parties, improving feelings of representation. Post-elections, forming a *minimum* winning coalition among like-minded parties will help to maintain a strong opposition, who can channel Tunisians’ grievances into the parliament rather than into the street.

Finally, our research opens the door to more systematic analysis of legislative politics in transitional democracies. While ideal point models have been successfully applied to established democracies, paucities of data have prevented them from being able to address important questions in transitional democracies, such as the effectiveness of power-sharing. We hope that this paper spurs further research into the nature of legislative activity in transitional democracies and also the actual ramifications of power-sharing agreements like national unity governments on policy outcomes.

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