

1 Current Research

I work at the intersection of institutional analysis and political behavior. My regional focus is on the Middle East and Africa (MENA) and I engage with both qualitative and quantitative methods, including fieldwork research. I have conducted extensive interviews in Tunisia and Turkey on local governance and refugee education. I am a native speaker of Turkish and fluent in Arabic (Modern Standard). As a PhD Candidate at the Department of Political Science, I also hold a Master's Degree in Applied Statistics from Indiana University at Bloomington. Currently I am a fellow at the Ostrom Workshop.

The overarching theme connecting my work relates to the impact of institutional change on political behavior. With this general theme, my dissertation centers on the critical opportunities and challenges for participatory local governance in Tunisia. Despite their widely acknowledged merits, the decentralization reforms among emerging democracies often fail to bring inclusive local governance as citizens become disengaged from the political process.¹ My dissertation examines why certain problems such as hierarchical governance, lack of trust in institutions, and resignations endure in transitioning settings with decentralization programs. Could the institutional performance be linked to the party structure in emerging democracies? Answering this question requires studying institutional structure and local party organizations.

The conventional wisdom views parties in emerging democracies as “catch-all” organizations² that lack a clear ideology and organizational base to mobilise a steady base of support.³ My findings indicate that the partisanship networks at the local level and extending to the national level can influence the mechanisms of participatory governance through enabling hierarchical and distributive governance settings. The findings challenge the conventional wisdom and also relate to the local sources of polarization and democratic discontent in Tunisia, as mass discontent with the political class led President Saied to freeze the parliament and dismiss the cabinet on the July 25th.

I theorize that the party structure in Tunisia resembles “cartel party” rather than mass or catch-all party structures, as parties mediate between civil society and bureaucrats to provide material rewards and favorable policy positions under power-sharing arrangements.⁴ However, Tunisia differs from the theoretical cartel party model⁵ as the electoral competition between parties is rooted in ideological differences, mainly between Bourguibism and Islamism, which provides the organizational and distributive capabilities. Thus, “competitive clientelism”⁶ constitutes a major source of political competition at the local level.

1. Simon PJ Batterbury and Jude L Fernando, “Rescaling Governance and the Impacts of Political and Environmental Decentralization: An Introduction,” *World Development* 34, no. 11 (2006): 1851–1863; Mona Harb, Sami Attalah, et al., *Local Governments and Public Goods: Assessing Decentralization in the Arab World*. (Beirut, Lebanon, 2015); Dennis A Rondinelli, John R Nellis, and G Shabbir Cheema, “Decentralization in Developing Countries,” *World Bank Staff Working Paper* 581 (1983).

2. Abby Innes, “Party Competition in Postcommunist Europe: The Great Electoral Lottery,” *Comparative Politics*, 2002, 85–104.

3. Steven B Wolinetz, “Party system change: The catch-all thesis revisited,” *West European Politics* 14, no. 1 (1991): 113–128.

4. Richard S Katz and Peter Mair, “Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: the Emergence of the Cartel Party,” *Party Politics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 10.

5. Katz and Mair, 20.

6. Ellen Lust, “Democratization by Elections? Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2009): 122–135.

Building upon Elinor Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Design (IAD) Framework,⁷ each empirical chapter of my dissertation, to be published as separate articles, engages with different action arenas of local governance and makes unique contributions to the different strands of literature. Chapter 3 (attached as a writing sample) examines how politically motivated appointments of bureaucrats influences the openness and transparency of local governance institutions. The implications of governors' politically-motivated appointments for leadership at the grassroots level remains an unexplored area.⁸ Rather than a "Weberian/Wilsonian" model that assumes a complete separation of politics and administration, or a principal-agent model that assumes distinct goals and objectives,⁹ I assume that bureaucrats and politicians have similar interest-seeking behavior as they attempt to maximize their survival in office, particularly when bureaucrats are appointed to their posts due to their political connections instead of meritocracy.¹⁰ Interview evidence and quantitative analysis of municipality transparency scores suggest that partisanship appointment of governors can limit the inclusiveness of local governance through perpetuating hierarchical relations with mayors at the expense of inclusive local engagement mechanisms. Municipal governance becomes less inclusive when a governor shares a political background similar to the ideological position of the mayor's party.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the implications of local partisan networks for citizen trust in local governance institutions. While existing studies treat institutional performance and partisanship as separate conditions influencing institutional trust, I argue that individual evaluations of institutional performance are conditional on their partisan ties with the local office-holders. Drawing on Arab Barometer (2018) survey data, I find that Tunisians who support the same political party as their mayors tend to develop greater levels of trust in local governance institutions. Both quantitative and interview evidence with local participants link a substantive portion of this relationship to the perceptions of institutional performance, such as their degrees of corruption, clientelism, inclusivity and efficiency.

Aside from my dissertation work, two of my published articles focus on issues on women's inheritance rights in Turkey and Tunisia. Women's equal inheritance rights is often a heavily contested subject among Muslim-majority societies, as according to the *Qur'an* the inheritance rules are not equitable between men and women. The reformist regimes that attempted to revise the inheritance code or other clauses of conservative family laws have often faced strong resistance from Islamist movements, generating potential electoral cleavages in transitioning settings. In an article published at the *Middle East Law and Governance Journal* I theorize women's equal inheritance rights as an issue-based electoral cleavage in MENA countries between the regime-successor and Islamist parties. Conducting an analysis on the voting behavior between the regime-successor party *Nidaa* and the main Islamist party *Ennahda* in Tunisia (Afrobarometer, 2013), I find that inheritance rights is a salient and substantive predictor of

7. Michael D McGinnis, "An Introduction to IAD and the Language of the Ostrom Workshop: a Simple Guide to a Complex Framework," *Policy Studies Journal* 39, no. 1 (2011): 169–183; Elinor Ostrom, *Understanding Institutional Diversity* (Princeton university press, 2009).

8. Emmanuel Debrah, "Decentralization, District Chief Executives, and District Assemblies in Ghana's Fourth Republic," *Politics & Policy* 44, no. 1 (2016): 135–164; James H Svara, "The Myth of the Dichotomy: Complementarity of Politics and Administration in the Past and Future of Public Administration," *Public Administration Review* 61, no. 2 (2001): 176–183.

9. Richard W Waterman and Kenneth J Meier, "Principal-Agent Models: An Expansion?," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 8, no. 2 (1998): 173–202.

10. Eric Alston et al., *Institutional and Organizational Analysis: Concepts and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 159; James M Buchanan, "A Sketch of Positive Public Choice Theory and Its Normative Implications," *The Theory of Public Choice-II*, 1984, 48–50; James M Buchanan, "The Constitution of Economic Policy," *The American Economic Review* 77, no. 3 (1987): 243–250; William A Niskanen, "Bureaucrats and Politicians," *The Journal of Law and Economics* 18, no. 3 (1975): 617–643.

voting behavior. Tunisians who favored gender equality in inheritance rights were more likely to vote for Nidaa Tounes, and Tunisians who did not favor gender equality in inheritance were more likely to vote for Ennahda.

Yet in another article published at the *Women's Studies International Forum* I examine the role of education for women's access to equal inheritance rights. A quantitative analysis on an original survey item from the disadvantaged neighborhoods of Diyarbakir, Turkey indicates that women's access to basic education enables them to pursue their legally defined equal inheritance rights. Furthermore, I have co-authored a policy brief in 2016 on challenges and opportunities for Syrian refugees in Turkey, analyzing the current legal framework in light of the interviews that I conducted with principals at Syrian schools along with Turkish bureaucrats. As one of the earliest studies on Syrian refugee education in Turkey, according to Google Scholar the project has already received 84 citations.

2 Future Research Trajectory

I am excited to continue with two novel projects. The first project relates to the role of mayoral control for increasing the support for political parties. Employing Tunisia as a case study, I am interested in understanding whether controlling a municipality's mayoral position substantively increases the support for a political party in the next legislative elections. In Tunisia mayors hold substantive distributive powers¹¹ and are elected to their mayoral posts through internal elections within the councils. Parties with even a single seat may win the mayoral position, adding a dimension of exogeneity to the mechanism. I will compare the changes in the vote share of parties between 2014 and 2019 elections at the municipal level, with mayoral control constituting the key independent variable.

The other project is about the negative effect of "accidental voting" deriving from the ballot design for the independent candidates in Turkey. A niche party entitled "*Bagimsiz Turkiye Partisi*" (Independent Turkey Party or BTP) has competed in each local election since 2004 with a vote-share ranging between %.2 and %.5. Curiously, the party has performed the best in districts with strong performance from the independent candidates. In ballots the independent candidates are located at the end, and unlike candidates from parties, they have smaller circles and no image identifiers. Due to both ballot confusion and the electoral campaign for independents (ex: "Vote for the independent!") I argue that a substantive portion of voters accidentally vote for the Independent Turkey Party considering that they vote for the independent candidates.

The initial regression confirm this proposition, indicating that in certain districts the predicted accidental vote share for BTP is large enough to tilt the results against independents. Thus, in addition to other well-studied institutional and structural factors, "accidental voting" is another factor that can limit the electoral success of independent candidates. At the next step of the project, I will interview some of the independent candidates to understand their communication strategies regarding their "independent" status and ballot-positioning with the voters.

To conclude, my research focuses on the interaction between institutional change and political behavior through the case studies of Tunisia and Turkey. My dissertation provides a

11. See the writing sample

detailed account of internal dynamics in Tunisia and it is my hope that it will provide a point of reference for future studies examining political and bureaucratic institutions within transition settings, including from within the MENA region.