FROM ISLAMISM TO DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF RACHED GHANNOUCHI AND ENNAHDA OF TUNISIA

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Abstract: This article examines the shift of Rached Ghannouchi and Ennahda party from Islamism to democracy. This article analyzes Ghannouchi's early Islamist ideology and confrontational approach to politics, as well as his exposure to democratic systems, which led to a reevaluation of his views on democracy, following the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s, which prompted Ghannouchi to reconsider his approach to politics and Islamism. This led to a shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics, culminating in Ennahda's participation in Tunisia's democratic transition after the 2011 revolution. This article highlights the theoretical implications of his shift from Islamism to democracy for the study of political Islam and democratization. This article argues that Islamist actors and movements can evolve and adapt to changing political circumstances, as well as undergo gradual moderation in promoting democratic reform.
Keywords: Ghannouchi; Ennahda; Islamism; democracy; moderation.

Introduction

Rached Ghannouchi, a Tunisian politician, and Ennahda party which he founded, have undergone a significant evolution over the

course of history, from an early emphasis on revolutionary Islamism to a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics. This shift has been shaped by a range of factors, including Ghannouchi's experiences in exile in Europe, his exposure to democratic systems, and the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] This article provides an overview of Ghannouchi's political activism and its evolution, with a particular focus on his shift towards democracy.

Ghannouchi's shift from Islamism to democracy is of interest, as the evolution of Ghannouchi's political thought and activism offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of democratic reform in the Muslim world. As such, studying Ghannouchi's political activism can help scholars and policymakers better understand the complex interplay between religion, politics, and democracy in Muslim-majority countries. Ghannouchi is one of the most prominent and influential Islamist thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries. With his Ennahda as an Islamist party, Ghannouchi is regarded as an exemplary representation of political Islam.[2] His ideas and writings have had a significant impact on political debates in Tunisia and beyond, making his political thought an important subject of study for scholars of Islamism, political Islam, and Middle Eastern politics.[3] Ghannouchi's shift towards democracy represents a significant and nuanced development in the history of Islamist politics. As such, studying his political thought and activism can provide valuable insights into the potential for Islamist movements to evolve and adapt to changing political contexts, and can help scholars better

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[1] See Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Alaya Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation: 1980-2008," *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 14, No. 2 (June 2009), 260.

[2] Aini Linjakumpu, *Political Islam in the Global World* (London: Ithaca Press, 2008); See also Mohammed Ayoob and Danielle N. Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in Muslim Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

[3] Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

understand the range of ideological positions and strategies within the Islamist movement.[4]

This article employs the theory of moderation as a useful lens for analyzing the political activism of Ghannouchi, particularly in light of his evolution from Islamism to democracy. The theory of moderation places special emphasis on the institutional and organizational aspects that shape the conduct of radical political parties. It suggests that a shift towards moderate behavior is expected to occur before any ideological moderation takes place.[5] Although this emphasis makes the theory adaptable to different historical and cultural situations that share similar institutional structures, its exclusive concentration on elite interests as the primary driver might not fully account for party behavior in certain scenarios. Political elites may react differently to comparable institutional limitations and possibilities. The theory of moderation posits that successful democratic transitions are most likely to occur in contexts where political actors adopt a moderate approach that emphasizes compromise, inclusion, and tolerance.[6]

Ghannouchi's evolution from a confrontational and exclusionary form of Islamism to a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics aligns with the theory of moderation, although such a scholar as Schwedler questions the possibility of Islamists to become moderate.[7] As Ghannouchi began to advocate for a more inclusive form of political Islam, he began to emphasize the importance of pluralism, democracy, and human rights. This shift in his political thought was influenced by his exposure to

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[4] John L. Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim, and Naser Ghobadzadeh (eds.), *The Politics of Islamism: Diverging Visions and Trajectories* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[5] Although Tezcür does not focus his studies on Tunisia, his works on political Islam using the theory of moderation can be taken into account to help understand the dynamics of Islamism and democracy as represented in Ghannouchi and Ennahda political activism. See Güneş Murat Tezcür, "The Moderation Theory Revisited: The Case of Islamic Political Actors," *Party Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2010), 72; see also Güneş Murat Tezcür, *The Paradox of Moderation: Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

[6] Tezcür, "The Moderation Theory Revisited," 72.

[7] Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (2011), 347-376.

democratic systems in Europe and his recognition of the need for a more pragmatic approach to politics.

By adopting a more moderate approach, Ghannouchi and his party, Ennahda, were able to participate in Tunisia's democratic transition and play a constructive role in drafting the country's new constitution. This approach allowed them to build broad-based coalitions and appeal to a wide range of Tunisians, including secularists and liberals. The theory of moderation provides a useful framework for analyzing Ghannouchi's shift towards democracy and his contributions to Tunisia's democratic transition. It highlights the importance of moderation and inclusivity in promoting democratic reform, and underscores the potential for Islamist movements to evolve and adapt to changing political contexts.

Drawing on Ghannouchi's works,[8] as well as scholarly analyses, this article examines the factors that have influenced Ghannouchi's views on democracy and the role of Islam in society, and explores the implications of his political thought for the broader debate on Islam and democracy. This article argues that Ghannouchi's gradual shift from Islamism to democracy represents a significant and nuanced development that offers valuable insights into the challenges and possibilities of democratic reform in the Muslim world. In other words, Ghannouchi's political thought and activism have reflected an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the compatibility of Islam and democracy, as it offers a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, and advocates for a democratic system that respects the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their religious background.

As this article focuses on the political thought and activism of Ghannouchi and his Ennahda party, with a specific emphasis on

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[8] Rached Ghannouchi, *Al-Ḥurriyyāt al-'Āmmah fī al-Dawlah al-Islāmīyah*, third edition (Damascus: Markaz al-Naqid al-Thaqafī, Mu'assassah Thaqafīyah Fannīyah Mustaqbilah, 2008); Rached Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, translated by David L. Johnston from *Al-Ḥurriyyat al-'Āmmah fī al-Dawlah al-Islāmīyah* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2022); Rached Ghannouchi, "The State and Religion in the Fundamentals of Islam and Contemporary Interpretation," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), 164-171; Noureddine Jebnoun, *Tunisia at the Crossroads: An Interview with Sheikh Rachid al-Ghannouchi* (ACMCU Occasional Papers, April 2014).

their evolution from Islamism to democracy, it traces the development of Ghannouchi's ideas over time, examining the factors that led him to reconsider his earlier confrontational approach to politics and embrace a more moderate and inclusive approach. The article begins with an overview of Ghannouchi's early political thought and his early Islamist ideology, examining his writings on political Islam and the role of religion in society. It then discusses the influence of Ghannouchi's exile in Europe and his exposure to Western political ideas, which began to shape his evolving views on democracy. The article then analyzes Ghannouchi's shift towards a more moderate approach to politics, and then highlights the key factors that contributed to Ghannouchi's evolution from Islamism to democracy, and the opportunity provided by the Arab Spring to participate in a democratic process. Finally, the article concludes with a reflection on the implications of Ghannouchi's political thought for the broader debate on Islam and democracy.

Ghannouchi's Place in Tunisian Politics

Ghannouchi is a Tunisian political figure and a leading intellectual of the Islamist movement in the Arab world. He was born on 22 June 1941 in the city of Siliana, Tunisia. Ghannouchi studied philosophy in Tunisia and later in France, where he received his PhD from the Sorbonne University in Paris. He returned to Tunisia in the early 1980s and became a prominent political activist and the co-founder of the Islamist party, Ennahda. In 1991, Ghannouchi was arrested and placed under house arrest for several years due to his political activism.[9]

Ghannouchi grew up in a Tunisian traditional Islamic yet politically charged milieu of anticolonialist Arab Nationalism. The journey of his life passes through stations, the first is his country's capital, Tunis, where he studies at the supposedly Islamic institution, Az-Zaytouna, only to come out of it more confused and almost completely severed from his Islamic roots.[10] He escapes to Cairo and then to Damascus where he studies

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[9] For discussion on the early life of Ghannouchi up to his moderation and shift to democracy, see Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

[10] Ibid., 4.

philosophy, divorces Nassirism, encounters Islamic groups, such as the Salafis, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and the Muslim Brotherhood, and nationalists groups, such as the Ba'th Party and the Arab Socialist Union, and "reembraces" Islam. In 1981, Ghannouchi founded the Ennahda Movement (also known as the Islamic Movement of Tunisia), which is a moderate Islamist political party that seeks to promote Islamic values within a democratic framework. Ennahda was banned by the Tunisian government in 1992, and Ghannouchi was forced into exile in the United Kingdom, where he lived for over 20 years. A tour of Europe and then a one-year study in Paris serve only to consolidate his conversion, and terminate his exile. On his way back home, he meets what hence becomes his main source of inspiration, Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi.[11] The latter has particularly shaped Ghannouchi's view on the relation between Islam and democracy.

After the fall of the authoritarian regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in the 2011 Tunisian revolution, Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia and resumed his role as the leader of Ennahda. In the subsequent elections, Ennahda won a plurality of seats in the Constituent Assembly and played a key role in the drafting of Tunisia's new constitution. Ghannouchi is widely regarded as a leading intellectual in the Islamist movement and is respected for his commitment to democratic values and his moderate approach to political Islam. He continues to play an important role in Tunisian politics as the leader of Ennahda and as a member of the Tunisian parliament.

Ghannouchi's Islamism and Confrontational Approach to Politics

Ghannouchi's early Islamist ideology was characterized by his belief in the primacy of Islamic law, his opposition to secularism and his confrontational approach to politics. He was strongly influenced by the works of Muslim Brotherhood founder Ḥasan al-Bannā and the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Quṭb. Ghannouchi argued that Islam was not only a religious faith but also a comprehensive social and political system that should be implemented in its entirety. He believed that Islamic law should be

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[11] Ibid., 5-33.

the basis for all legislation and that Muslims had a duty to resist Western influence and defend Islamic values.[12]

Ghannouchi's Islamism was reflected in his involvement in the Islamic Tendency Movement, which was established in the 1970s and sought to promote Islamic governance in Tunisia.[13] The group was involved in a number of violent incidents, including an attack on a police station in 1987 that resulted in the deaths of four officers. Despite his confrontational approach, Ghannouchi also advocated for the inclusion of Islamists in the political process and argued that democracy and Islam were not mutually exclusive. However, he believed that a democratic system should not be based on Western models but rather on Islamic principles, and that secularism was incompatible with Islamic governance.

Ghannouchi's writings on political Islam and the role of religion in society reflect his evolving political thought over the years. In his early writings, Ghannouchi was strongly influenced by the works of Ḥasan al-Bannā and Sayyid Quṭb, and his views were characterized by an emphasis on the primacy of Islamic law and a confrontational approach to politics.[14] One of Ghannouchi's key arguments is that Islam is a comprehensive system that encompasses all aspects of life, including politics, economics, and social relations. He believes that Islamic law should be the basis for all legislation, but also acknowledges that the implementation of Islamic principles should be based on a process of consensus-building and consultation. Ghannouchi also views the important role of religion in society. He argues that religion should play a central role in shaping public life, and that the separation of religion and politics is a Western construct that is not compatible with Islamic principles.

However, over time, Ghannouchi's views began to shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics. In his later writings, he emphasized the importance of dialogue, compromise, and political participation, and argued that democracy and Islam were not mutually exclusive. Ghannouchi then argues that democracy is compatible with Islam, as long as it

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[12] Ibid., 34.
[13] Ayoob and Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, 105.
[14] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation," 260.

respects the fundamental principles of Islamic governance, such as justice, equality, and accountability. He believes that a democratic system should be based on the principles of *shūrā* (consultation) and *ijmāʿ* (consensus), and that the participation of all citizens, regardless of their religious background, is essential for the realization of Islamic values. He also emphasizes the importance of respecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their religious background, and advocates for a pluralistic society that accommodates a diversity of beliefs and practices.

Confrontational Approach to Politics

Particularly in his earlier years, Ghannouchi's confrontational approach to politics has been a significant aspect of his political activism. He saw himself as a part of a broader movement to challenge the secular and authoritarian governments that existed in many Muslim-majority countries, including Tunisia. His approach was rooted in the belief that Islamic principles were being marginalized and suppressed by these regimes, and that resistance was necessary in order to defend Islamic values. Ghannouchi's confrontational approach included advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state, and he was a co-founder of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in Tunisia in the 1970s. The MTI was involved in a number of confrontations with the Tunisian government, including a series of bombings and attacks on security forces in the 1980s. The movement was banned in 1991 after a military coup, and Ghannouchi was forced to flee Tunisia and seek asylum in the UK.[15]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Ennahda, the Islamist political party led by Ghannouchi, was involved in revolutionary Islamism and confrontational politics with the Tunisian government. The party's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism ultimately failed, leading to Ghannouchi's exile in Europe and the banning of Ennahda in Tunisia.[16] One of the key factors contributing to the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism was the Tunisian government's harsh crackdown on the Islamist movement. The government viewed Ennahda as a threat to its

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[15] Ayoob and Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, 106.
[16] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation," 257-272.

secular authority and responded with repression, arresting and imprisoning members of the movement and banning the party altogether in 1991. This repression made it difficult for Ennahda to build a broad-based political movement and led to a climate of fear and distrust that undermined the party's legitimacy.[17]

Another factor contributing to the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism was the party's lack of popular support. While Ennahda was able to mobilize significant support among young people and other disaffected Tunisians who were dissatisfied with the country's economic stagnation and political corruption, the party was unable to build a broad-based coalition capable of challenging the Tunisian government.[18] This lack of popular support made it difficult for Ennahda to achieve its political goals and undermined the party's legitimacy. Finally, Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism were hindered by the party's own internal divisions and ideological contradictions. While Ghannouchi and other leaders of the party sought to balance their commitment to Islamic principles with a desire for political reform, other members of the party were more radical in their views and advocated for a more confrontational approach to politics. These internal divisions undermined the party's ability to present a unified front and contributed to its eventual failure.

However, over time, Ghannouchi's views on confrontational politics began to shift. He began to emphasize the importance of political participation and compromise, and recognized the need to work within existing political systems to achieve change. He argued that Islam and democracy were not mutually exclusive, and that it was possible to establish a democratic system that respected Islamic principles. Ghannouchi's shift away from confrontational politics can be seen in his support for the Ennahda Party, which he co-founded in 1981 after the MTI was banned. Ennahda initially embraced a more moderate approach to politics, and Ghannouchi

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[17] Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[18] Hayat Alvi, *The Political Economy and Islam of the Middle East: The Case of Tunisia* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

played a key role in transforming the party into a more mainstream political force.[19]

Exile and Exposure to Democratic Systems

Ghannouchi's exile in Europe played a significant role in his political evolution, as he was exposed to democratic systems that differed significantly from the authoritarian regimes that he had grown up with in Tunisia. He first went into exile in France in 1988, after being sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia by the Tunisian government for his involvement in the Islamic Tendency Movement. During his time in exile, Ghannouchi was able to engage with a wide range of political ideas and movements, and he began to question some of his earlier views on confrontational politics and the establishment of an Islamic state. He was particularly influenced by the experiences of Islamist movements in other countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which had been involved in political participation and had advocated for democratic reform.

In the early 1990s, Ghannouchi moved to the UK, where he was granted asylum. He continued to engage with a wide range of political ideas and movements, and began to advocate for a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics. He argued that it was possible to establish a democratic system that respected Islamic principles, and that this was the best way to achieve meaningful change in Muslim-majority countries. Ghannouchi's exposure to democratic systems in Europe also had a significant impact on his views on the role of religion in politics. He began to question some of his earlier views on the establishment of an Islamic state, and instead argued that it was possible to create a pluralistic society that accommodated a diversity of beliefs and practices. He emphasized the importance of respecting the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their religious background, and advocated for a more inclusive political system that allowed for political participation by all citizens.

While emphasizing that these intellectuals draw inspiration from the positive aspects of Western achievements, Ghannouchi

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[19] Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*; See Michael J. Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164-168.

maintained that socio-economic and political reforms are best pursued within the framework of an Islamic state. He criticized Western democracy for what he saw as a separation between the body and soul, neglecting and suppressing the spiritual aspect. He argued that Western democracy waged war against God and vehemently fought to replace the divine with human authority. Consequently, Ghannouchi concluded that values such as secularism, nationalism, and consumerism are not fundamental to democracy according to his perspective.[20]

During his exile in Europe, Ghannouchi's views on democracy began to evolve significantly. Prior to his exile, Ghannouchi had been a prominent figure in the Tunisian Islamist movement, which had advocated for the establishment of an Islamic state and had been involved in confrontational politics with the Tunisian government.[21] However, his exposure to democratic systems in Europe challenged some of his earlier views and helped him to develop a more nuanced and inclusive approach to politics.

During his time in London, Ghannouchi gradually developed and refined his ideology, culminating in the creation of a distinctive Islamic school of thought, as evidenced in his work titled "Public Freedom in the Islamic state" (*al-Ḥurrīyah al-'Āmmah fī al-Dawlah al-Islāmīyah*). In this work, he argued that the Western world failed to recognize that the current changes and challenges faced by the Arab world are a response to decades of oppression and injustice. Ghannouchi believed that a new generation of intellectuals, including Ennahda's leadership, was actively seeking to take on the responsibility of societal reform by promoting "modernity," which he defined as the achievement of freedom, dignity, and effective power-sharing.[22]

Ghannouchi's years in exile provided him with the space to see and reflect, to refine his understanding of secularism and democracy, to study their diverse potential applications in the Arab world and Tunisia in particular, and finally to return home in 2011 with a sense of the direction the country needed to go. Though he vowed not to participate in the presidential elections, his presence

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[20] Ibid., 97.
[21] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation," 257-272.
[22] Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda*, 95-96.

represented for Tunisians a prominent reformer and opposition leader who had stood up and suffered for his opposition to Bourghiba and Ben Ali and an Islamic movement markedly different from the images and fear-mongering deployed by Ben Ali and others. It was one that advocated political reforms and a democratic message of political inclusion, pluralism, and freedom.[23]

One of the key factors that contributed to Ghannouchi's evolving views on democracy was his exposure to Islamist movements in other countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. These movements had been involved in political participation and had advocated for democratic reform, which challenged Ghannouchi's earlier views on confrontational politics and the establishment of an Islamic state. He began to see that it was possible to achieve meaningful change through democratic means, and that this was the best way to create a society that respected Islamic principles and accommodated a diversity of beliefs and practices. Another factor that contributed to Ghannouchi's evolving views on democracy was his exposure to the pluralistic and inclusive societies of Europe. He saw that it was possible to create a society that respected the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their religious background, and began to advocate for a more inclusive political system that allowed for political participation by all citizens.[24] He emphasized the importance of compromise and political participation as a means to achieve meaningful change, rather than confrontation and violence.

As such, it can be argued that Ghannouchi in his political career has been a strong advocate for the compatibility of Islam and democracy. He believes that Islam and democracy can complement each other and that the principles of democracy, such as the rule of law, individual freedoms, and respect for human rights, are consistent with Islamic values.[25] Ghannouchi argues that

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[23] John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 189-190.

[24] See Rached Ghannouchi, *Al-Ḥurrīyah al-ʿĀmmah fī al-Dawlah al-Islāmīyah*, third edition (Damascus: Markaz al-Naqid al-Thaqafī; Muʾassassah Thaqafīyah Fannīyah Mustaqbilah, 2008).

[25] For Ghannouchi's view of Islamic perspective on freedom and human rights, see his *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, 43-89.

the Islamic tradition emphasizes consultation (*shura*) and the participation of the community in decision-making processes, which are fundamental principles of democracy. He also emphasizes the importance of religious and cultural pluralism, which he believes is necessary for a democratic society to thrive. In his writings and speeches, Ghannouchi has emphasized that Islam should not be seen as a threat to democracy, but rather as a source of inspiration for building democratic societies. He has also spoken out against authoritarian and extremist interpretations of Islam and has argued that these interpretations are incompatible with both the teachings of Islam and the principles of democracy, and political freedom.[26]

Ghannouchi and Ennahda in the Tunisian Revolution

Tunisia experiences a particularly intense form of polarization compared to other Arab countries, mainly characterized by the widening gap between secular liberals and ultraconservative Salafi Islamists. The polarization between Islamism and secularism in Tunisia is evident in various aspects, including the divisions between the Islamist Ennahda party and several secular left-wing parties. However, what amplifies this polarization and poses a significant threat to Tunisia's transition process is the involvement of Salafists who escalate the conflict to a new level, resorting to violence. Additionally, there is another layer of polarization within the Islamist camp itself, specifically between the ultraconservative Salafists and the more moderate Ennahda party.[27]

Ghannouchi and Ennahda played a significant role in the Tunisian revolution, which began in December 2010 and led to the ousting of long-time dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. During the early days of the revolution, Ennahda, which had been banned for many years under Ben Ali's regime, played a relatively low-key role.[28] However, as the revolution gathered momentum, the party began to emerge as a key player in the country's political landscape. Ghannouchi and other Ennahda

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[26] Ibid., 97-115.

[27] Ibrahim Fraihat, *Unfinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 61.

[28] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia Between Confrontation and Participation," 257-272; Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, 96.

leaders recognized the opportunity presented by the revolution to advocate for a more pluralistic and democratic political system. They also recognized the need to work closely with other opposition groups and civil society organizations in order to achieve their goals.

In the aftermath of Ben Ali's ouster, Ennahda emerged as one of the most popular and well-organized political parties in Tunisia. The party won a plurality of seats in the Constituent Assembly elections held in October 2011, which were the first free and fair elections held in Tunisia in decades.[29] As the leading party in the Constituent Assembly, Ennahda played a key role in drafting a new constitution for Tunisia, which was adopted in January 2014. The constitution enshrined many of the principles that Ennahda had been advocating for, including the separation of powers, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the promotion of democratic governance. It cannot be denied that Ghannouchi and Ennahda played a crucial role in the Tunisian revolution and the country's transition to democracy. Their commitment to pluralism, democracy, and human rights helped to pave the way for a more inclusive and representative political system in Tunisia, and their efforts continue to shape the country's political landscape to this day.

The Arab Spring and Democratic Transition

The Arab Spring provided Ennahda with a unique opportunity to participate in a democratic process in Tunisia after decades of being excluded from mainstream politics under the authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The party had been banned and its leaders, including Ghannouchi, had been forced into exile for many years. When the revolution erupted in December 2010, Ennahda initially kept a low profile, in part because it did not want to be seen as a direct threat to the protest movement or to the army, which had taken over the reins of power in Tunisia following Ben Ali's ouster.[30] However, as the revolution gained momentum and the possibility of democratic elections loomed on

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[29] James Dennison and Jonas Draege, "The Dynamics of Electoral Politics After the Arab Spring: Evidence From Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2020), 756-780.
[30] Esposito, Sonn, and Voll, *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring*, 188.

the horizon, Ennahda began to emerge as a key player in the country's politics. The party's leaders recognized that the Arab Spring represented a historic opportunity to reshape the political landscape of Tunisia and to bring about a more pluralistic and democratic society. They also realized that the party needed to change its image and adopt a more moderate approach in order to win broad-based support from Tunisian voters.[31]

In the years leading up to the revolution, Ennahda had been associated with a more hardline Islamist agenda, which focused on the establishment of an Islamic state and the imposition of sharia law. However, Ghannouchi and other party leaders began to shift away from this position, and instead advocated for a more inclusive and democratic vision of political Islam. This shift in Ennahda's political stance was partly driven by the experiences of Islamist movements in other countries, such as Algeria and Egypt, where attempts to establish Islamist states through violent means had failed. Ghannouchi and other Ennahda leaders also recognized the need to build alliances with secular and left-wing groups in order to achieve their goals. The Arab Spring provided Ennahda with a historic opportunity to participate in a democratic process and to shape the future of Tunisia. The party's shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics played a key role in its success, and helped to pave the way for a more democratic and pluralistic society in Tunisia.[32]

Ghannouchi and the Drafting of Tunisia's New Constitution

Ghannouchi played a central role in the drafting of Tunisia's new constitution, which was adopted in 2014 after a long and often contentious process. As the leader of Ennahda, which was the largest party in the Tunisian parliament at the time, Ghannouchi was one of the most influential figures in the constitution-making process.[33] Ghannouchi's commitment to democratic values was evident throughout the process. He emphasized the importance of protecting individual rights and

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[31] See Chuchu Zhang, *Islamist Party Mobilization: Tunisia's Ennahda and Algeria's HMS Compared, 1989-2014* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[32] Sharan Grewal, "From Islamists to Muslim Democrats: The Case of Tunisia's Ennahda," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (May 2020), 519-535.

[33] Ayoob and Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam,* 171.

liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and religion.[34] He also called for a system of government that would be based on checks and balances, with an independent judiciary, a free press, and a strong civil society

One of the most significant contributions that Ghannouchi made to the constitution-making process was his insistence on the inclusion of a strong bill of rights. He argued that a democratic constitution must provide guarantees for individual freedoms and protections against abuses of state power. His advocacy helped to ensure that the final document included robust protections for human rights, including equal rights for women and minorities. Ghannouchi also played a key role in negotiating compromises between different political factions and interest groups during the constitution-making process. His ability to work across party lines and to find common ground with other stakeholders was crucial to the success of the process.

Moderation and Gradual Shift from Islamism to Democracy

The failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism had a significant impact on Ghannouchi and his political thought, ultimately leading him to reconsider his approach to politics and Islamism. Ghannouchi's exile in Europe allowed him to reflect on the shortcomings of Ennahda's previous strategy and exposed him to a range of new ideas and political movements that would influence his thinking.

During his exile, Ghannouchi began to question the confrontational approach to politics that he had previously advocated, recognizing that it had failed to achieve the party's goals and had led to the repression of its members. Instead, he began to explore the possibility of a more inclusive and democratic approach to politics, one that would allow for greater participation and representation of all Tunisians, regardless of their political or religious affiliations. At the same time, Ghannouchi also began to rethink his approach to Islamism, recognizing that the party's previous emphasis on Islamic revolution had failed to resonate with many Tunisians and had undermined its legitimacy. Instead,

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[34] Rory McCarthy, "Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia's Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the Challenge of Free Speech," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2015), 447-464.

he began to advocate for a more nuanced and flexible approach to Islamism, one that would emphasize the compatibility of Islam and democracy and would seek to engage with a broader range of Tunisians, including secularists and non-Muslims. The failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism forced Ghannouchi to reconsider his approach to politics and Islamism, leading him to adopt a more inclusive and democratic approach that would ultimately pave the way for the party's re-emergence as a legitimate political force in Tunisia.

Ghannouchi's evolution from Islamism to democracy was marked by a shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics. This shift was influenced by his exposure to democratic systems during his exile in Europe and the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism. Ghannouchi recognized that the confrontational approach to politics that he had previously advocated had failed to achieve the party's goals and had led to the repression of its members. As a result, he began to explore the possibility of a more inclusive and democratic approach to politics, one that would allow for greater participation and representation of all Tunisians, regardless of their political or religious affiliations.

This shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach was reflected in Ennahda's 2011 election manifesto, which emphasized the party's commitment to pluralism, democracy, and human rights. The manifesto also recognized the importance of civil society and the role that it could play in promoting political reform and social justice. Ghannouchi's shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach was also reflected in his evolving views on Islamism. He began to advocate for a more nuanced and flexible approach to Islamism, one that would emphasize the compatibility of Islam and democracy and would seek to engage with a broader range of Tunisians, including secularists and non-Muslims.[35] Gerges refers to this development as a "generational shift," pointing out that there is increasing evidence indicating a change in the balance of power within Islamist groups towards more pragmatic individuals. This shift favors professionals and technocrats such as engineers, dentists, doctors, lawyers, and

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[35] See Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, "Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party," *Democratization*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (2013), 857-875.

teachers who possess open-minded and reformist attitudes. They are less preoccupied with strict doctrines, identity, and cultural conflicts, and are more inclined to form governing coalitions with ideological adversaries, whether they are non-Muslim, liberal, or secular. As an example, Ennahda in Tunisia chooses to align itself with liberals and leftists rather than the ultraconservative Salafis.[36]

Ghannouchi's shift towards a more moderate and inclusive approach to politics and Islamism played a key role in the party's re-emergence as a legitimate political force in Tunisia. It also helped to pave the way for the country's transition to democracy and the establishment of a more pluralistic and inclusive political system. Ghannouchi's shift from Islamist to democrat can be best understood through the model of "gradualism" or "evolutionary moderation." Gradualism refers to a political strategy that advocates for incremental reforms and a gradual transition to democracy, rather than sudden or revolutionary change. Ghannouchi's early Islamist ideology was confrontational and exclusionary, but over time he began to embrace a more moderate and inclusive approach. This shift was gradual and evolutionary, rather than abrupt or revolutionary. Ghannouchi recognized the need for a more pragmatic approach to politics, which emphasized pluralism, democracy, and human rights.[37] Ghannouchi and other party elites asserted that Ennahda needed to prioritize immediate challenges, such as the country's precarious security and economic conditions, and set aside identity politics in order to transform into a mainstream political party. This position faced strong opposition from the more rigid factions within the movement's support base. In this case, Wolf even assumes that Ghannouchi and Ennahda marked the shift to what is called "post-Islamism" or as representing "muslim democracies."[38]

This gradualist approach is evident in Ghannouchi's thought, where he advocates for a "middle way" or "third path" between secularism and fundamentalism. Rather than rejecting democracy outright, Ghannouchi argued for a more inclusive form of political Islam that could coexist with democratic institutions. Ghan-

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[36] Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Islamist Moment: From Islamic State to Civil Islam?," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 128, No. 3 (2013), 392.

[37] Grewal, "From Islamists to Muslim Democrats," 519-535.

[38] Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, 158-159.

nouchi's gradualist approach was also reflected in the political strategy of his party, Ennahda. Rather than seeking to impose their agenda through force or revolution, Ennahda participated in Tunisia's democratic transition and worked within the framework of the new constitution.[39] Ghannouchi's shift from Islamist to democrat can be best understood through the model of gradualism or evolutionary moderation. This approach highlights the importance of incremental change and compromise in promoting democratic reform, and underscores the potential for Islamist movements to adapt and evolve over time.[40]

Therefore, it can be said that Ghannouchi is both an Islamist and a democrat because he believes that Islam and democracy are compatible and that the principles of democracy are consistent with Islamic values.[41] He has argued that Islam, with its emphasis on consultation and participation, can serve as a source of inspiration for building democratic societies. Ghannouci asserts: "In the case where Muslims need a new law, modern democratic mechanisms are the best manifestation of *shūrā* in Islam, whereby interpretation is no longer an individual act but a collective one performed by the people's representatives."[42] Ghannouchi's approach to Islam and democracy represents a moderate and inclusive form of political Islam that seeks to reconcile religious and political values.[43] He has spoken out against authoritarian and extremist interpretations of Islam and has emphasized the importance of religious and cultural pluralism for a democratic society to thrive. As Grewal maintains, quoting Stepan, an important facet of democracy in religious contexts is what Stepan called the "twin tolerations."[44] From one perspective, a democratic

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[39] A. Kadir Yildirim, *Muslim Democratic Parties in the Middle East: Economy and Politics of Islamist Moderation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016).

[40] Grewal, "From Islamists to Muslim Democrats," 519-535.

[41] Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*.

[42] Rached Ghannouchi, "The State and Religion in the Fundamentals of Islam and Contemporary Interpretation," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), 168.

[43] Shaul Bartal, "Rached Ghannouci's Test: Political Islam and Democracy in Tunisia," *African Studies*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (2020), 110-124.

[44] Grewal, "From Islamists to Muslim Democrats," 520; see Alfred Stepan, "Democracy, Religion, and the 'Twin Tolerations'," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2000), 39-40.

society should accept the involvement of religious figures in politics, granting them the ability to rally support based on religious beliefs and present religious viewpoints in discussions about policies. Conversely, religious groups should also embrace democracy by refraining from actions that infringe upon the rights of other citizens or undermine democratic principles and legal frameworks."[45]

In his view, democracy is not only a political system but also a way of life that is based on freedom, justice, equality, and the rule of law. He believes that these values are consistent with the teachings of Islam and that they can be used to build a just and equitable society that is based on the principles of democratic governance.[46] In short, Ghannouchi's combination of Islamism and democracy reflects his belief that the two can coexist and complement each other in a way that advances both religious and political values. He is widely seen as a leading intellectual in the Islamist movement and is respected for his commitment to democratic values and his moderate approach to political Islam.

Conclusion

The discussion above leads to conclusion that Ghannouchi's evolutionary shift from Islamism to democracy can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. One important factor was his experience in exile in Europe, where he was exposed to Western political ideas and democratic systems. While living in exile, Ghannouchi developed a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Islam and democracy and began to explore the possibility of a more democratic form of political Islam. Another important factor was the failure of Ennahda's early attempts at revolutionary Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s, which led Ghannouchi to reconsider his approach to politics. After spending time in prison and in exile, Ghannouchi began to question the usefulness of a confrontational approach to politics and instead advocated for a more moderate and inclusive approach that emphasized dialogue, compromise, and coalition-building. Finally, the Arab Spring of 2011 played a significant role in

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Azzam Tamimi, "Islam and Democracy from Tahtawi to Ghannouchi," *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2007), 54.

Ghannouchi's moderate view and gradual shift towards democracy. The Tunisian revolution provided an opportunity for Ennahda to participate in a democratic process and to demonstrate its commitment to democratic values. Ghannouchi and Ennahda played a key role in the drafting of Tunisia's new constitution, which is widely regarded as one of the most progressive in the Arab world.

The discoveries regarding Ghannouchi's transformation from an Islamist to a democrat have significant theoretical implications for the study of political Islam and democratization. Firstly, Ghannouchi's gradual approach demonstrates that Islamist movements have the capacity to evolve and adjust to changing political landscapes. This challenges the belief that political Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy and suggests that Islamist groups can gradually adopt democratic principles and institutions. Secondly, Ghannouchi's shift towards a more moderate and inclusive political stance emphasizes the importance of moderation in facilitating democratic reforms. This highlights the potential for moderate Islamist movements to play a constructive role in democratic transitions and contribute to the consolidation of democratic systems. Thirdly, Ghannouchi's commitment to democratic values and institutions highlights the possibility of convergence between Islamic and democratic values. This challenges the notion that Islam and democracy are fundamentally at odds and suggests that there is room for dialogue and cooperation between Islamist movements and democratic actors.

Ghannouchi's evolution from an Islamist ideologue to a democratic pragmatist has important implications for the broader debate on Islam and democracy. His transformation forms a clear example that Islamic movements can evolve and embrace democratic values, and that they can play a constructive role in the development of democratic institutions. Ghannouchi's embrace of democracy shows that Islamic movements can balance their religious principles with democratic principles and can be compatible with liberal democracy. This challenges the common belief that Islam and democracy are incompatible, and offers a counter-narrative to the idea that Islamists are inherently hostile to democratic values and institutions. Furthermore, Ghannouchi's political thought highlights the importance of a gradual and

incremental approach to democratization. He recognized that the path to democracy is not straightforward, and that societies need to develop the necessary democratic institutions and civic culture before a full-fledged democracy can take hold. This pragmatic approach emphasizes the importance of building democratic institutions from the ground up, starting with local governance and civil society.

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