Local Political Priorities during Tunisia's First Democratic Municipal Elections

Alexandra Domike Blackman, Julia Clark,
and Aytuğ Şaşmaz

UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Local Political Priorities during Tunisia's First Democratic Municipal Elections

Alexandra Domike Blackman, Julia Clark, and Aytug Sasmaz[1]
May 2021

Front Cover: Municipal Elections in Tunisia by The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Flickr)

Acknowledgements

Abstract

In May 2018, Tunisia held the country's first democratic local elections to elect representatives to the country's 350 municipal councils. Democratic consolidation depends, in part, on the development of municipal councils that can aggregate and process diverse societal interests at the local level, as well as on the ability of political candidates and politicians to represent and respond to citizens' priorities. In this paper, we examine the local development priorities of candidates and citizens. We find that, overall, the municipal election candidates' local priorities for governance do broadly correspond to those of citizens. For both candidates and citizens, the top four local issues are local roads, waste and the environment, local jobs, and security. Given the use of gender and age electoral quotas, we also examine how individual-level characteristics, such as gender and age, are correlated with the local development priorities of candidates and citizens. We find that women and youth do hold different priorities than their older and male counterparts, both at the citizen and candidate level. Accordingly, the quotas may improve substantive as well as descriptive representation. Finally, we examine the congruence of candidate and citizen priorities. We find a notable gap in local political priorities between candidates and citizens, particularly over employment and local security issues: citizens place a greater emphasis on employment than candidates and candidates place a greater emphasis on security. Drawing on interviews with municipal council candidates and surveys of both candidates and citizens, we argue that these differences result from the patterns of selection into political candidacy and confusion over the mandate of local councillors.

Word Count: ~9500 words

1. Introduction

Political regimes in the Middle East have long suffered from an absence of inclusive political institutions to channel citizens' demands to policy-makers. Decentralization reforms and local democratic institutions have been championed as an avenue for improving local development (Donaghy, 2011; Harb and Atallah, 2015). The May 2018 municipal elections in Tunisia—the first truly competitive and nationwide *local* elections in the country's history—were an unprecedented opportunity to bring the government closer to Tunisian citizens by re-establishing the municipal councils tasked with local development, selecting the councils' members through elections rather than appointment, and, importantly, connecting service delivery directly to democratic practice. Moreover, decentralization and the expansion of municipal governance were proposed to remedy the central government's neglect of certain regions (Kherigi, 2021). The success of Tunisia's democracy depends, in part, on the representation of citizens' interests within municipal councils and the establishment of local governance practices that can meet citizens' demands.

Although Tunisia has a long history of municipal governance, historically local government has not been democratic due to (a) non-competitive elections under colonial rule and post-colonial dictatorships, (b) the exclusion of about one-third of the population (and more, historically) who lived outside areas governed by elected municipal councils, and (c) the dominance of local government by older male politicians with links to the hegemonic parties of the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. As a result, representation at the local level has been unaccountable, unevenly distributed, and unrepresentative.

For this reason, decentralization and local governance have been a focus since the revolution, and the country has adopted a set of reforms aimed at improving representation on these municipal councils and has extended elected representation across the country. Ahead of the 2018 elections, the Tunisian government expanded the municipality system, which had previously only governed areas designated as urban (*communal*), to cover the entire country, incorporating all rural localities into new or existing municipalities. Additionally, the government imposed strict gender and youth quotas on all electoral lists.[2] As a result of these electoral laws adopted in 2017, half of the over 45,000 candidates running

---

[2] For these underrepresented groups, there was some drop between the proportion of candidates and the proportion of elected officials. Roughly 47 percent of elected councillors were women and roughly 37 percent of elected councillors were 35 or younger.

were women and half were under 36 years old (*BabNet*, 2018; *Results From Tunisia's 2018 Municipal Elections*, 2018; Clark, Blackman and Sasmaz, 2021). Over 2000 electoral lists competed in the 350 municipalities; of these 860 were independent lists and 1214 were party lists from over twenty different political parties. Moreover, the municipalities in which these candidates competed vary significantly; some were newly-created rural municipalities, while others are highly urbanized and have had forms of municipal government going back to the 19th century.

In this paper, we examine two questions that have important implications for local governance in Tunisia. First, we look at how individual- and municipal-level characteristics affect local development priorities. In particular, we examine the impact of the quota reforms aimed at increasing women and youth representation in local government. Specifically, we look at whether the women and youth candidates—the targets of the electoral quotas—express different local development priorities than older, male candidates and whether these differences between candidates correspond to differences in local development priorities among the Tunisian population.

Second, we examine the overall congruence between citizens' and candidates' local priorities. How well do candidate priorities align with citizen priorities? To examine these two questions, we draw on three main sources of data: a survey of nearly 2,000 municipal election candidates and a survey of over 6,500 Tunisians, both fielded around the 2018 municipal elections, and 16 semi-structured interviews with municipal council presidents conducted in October 2019. We find that, while there is some variation in local priorities based on individual- and municipal-level characteristics, more notable gaps in local priorities exist between citizens and candidates, particularly around the issues of jobs and security. Finally, we explore some of the possible explanations for the candidate-citizen gap.

2. Municipalities and Local Governance in Tunisia

In 1858, Tunis (*Tunis Ville*) was the first of Tunisia's cities to be incorporated as a municipality (Turki and Verdeil, 2015). During the French colonial period, several other urban Tunisian cities were designated as municipalities, including suburbs of Tunis, such as La Goulette, and urban centers in other regions of the country, such as Kef and Sousse. At the time of its independence in 1956, Tunisia had sixty municipalities that generally coincided with its urbanized towns and areas of high French settlement.

Though the Tunisian government has remained highly centralized since independence in 1956, it nominally pursued decentralization reforms during several periods, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, which included the creation of new municipalities throughout the country (Khellaf, 1992). In 1975, there were 158 municipalities; by the early 1990s, there were over 240. Even with the expansion of municipal governments, municipalities remained concentrated in urbanized areas or politically favored regions.[3] According to Khellaf (1992), 41 percent of the Tunisian population in 1989 lived outside of the municipality system and had services administered through appointed rural councils. As of the 2014 census, about one-third of Tunisia's residents lived outside the municipality system (Ministry of Local Affairs, 2016; Kherigi, 2021).

During the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras, these municipal councils were typically elected in authoritarian elections dominated by the hegemonic party.[4] After the 2010 Uprising, there was a push for greater decentralization of political power and public services. As part of this effort, the Tunisian government pledged to hold new local elections, which were held in May 2018 after multiple delays. These elections displayed greater democratic contestation than those prior to the revolution; under the current laws, all political parties can contest the elections, and independent candidates can form non-partisan electoral lists. All of the members of the council are elected. The municipal council president is then chosen from among the members through a member vote.[5]

In addition to holding new municipal elections, the Tunisian government took several additional steps to extend access to municipal governance throughout the country and diversify the country's municipal council members. Decentralization reforms were passed to extend municipal council governments throughout the country's entire territory and empower councils to play a larger role in service delivery. In 2011, Tunisia had 264 municipalities. This number was increased to 350 ahead of the 2018 elections, after a process of municipal boundary generalization to cover the entire territory (Turki and Verdeil, 2015). In practice this meant the expansion of existing municipalities to include

---

[3] Though the municipalities were in more urbanized areas, the municipalities varied significantly in terms of size. Khellaf (1992) reports that, in 1984, only 12 percent of the municipalities had over 50,000 inhabitants, while over 40 percent had fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. For more on the politics of municipal boundaries under Tunisian Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali, see Kherigi (2021).

[4] The head of municipal council is sometimes also referred to as the mayor. Prior to the 2010 Revolution, Article 48 of Law no. 3 of 1975 stipulated that, unlike other municipalities, the mayor of Tunis was appointed rather than elected from among the fellow councilors.

[5] Only heads of the electoral list can compete for president initially. If the president resigns, however, all council members are eligible to compete.

the surrounding rural areas, as well as the creation of new municipalities in some outlying areas.[6] The unaltered municipalities tend to be older, urban areas, while the expansion and new municipalities typically include more rural areas. Figure 1 displays a map of the country's old, expanded, and new municipalities.

Figure 1. Map of municipalities and type following the municipality generalization process
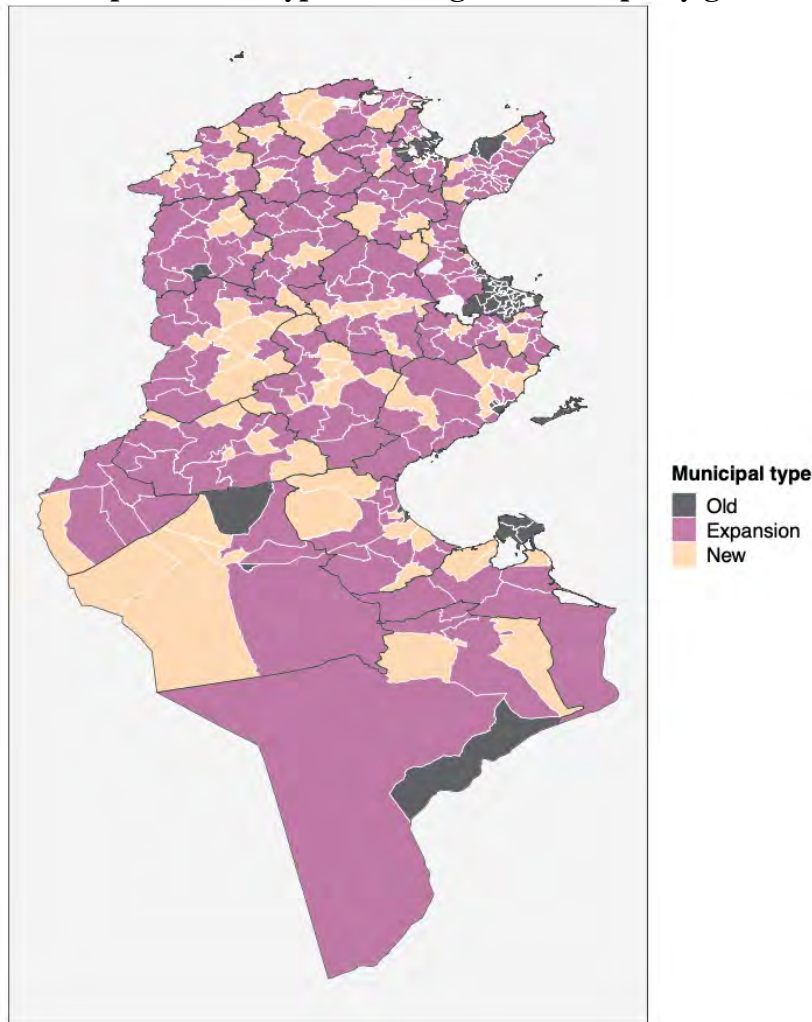
Note: This map is based on shapefiles and data created by Clark (2021).

In addition to expanding municipal governance, the Tunisian government took steps to increase the representation of marginalized groups in local politics. The electoral law for the municipal elections included legislated candidate quotas for women and youth—defined as those under 36 years old. The gender quota required all electoral lists to include 50 percent women and that the order of the list

---

[6] The expansion municipalities are previously existing municipalities that were expanded to incorporate rural populations or sectors prior to the 2018 election (Clark, 2021; Kherigi, 2021).

alternate between men and women (*vertical parity* with the "zipper" system). It also required that all parties that ran lists in more than one municipality adhere to *horizontal parity*—parity between male- and female-headed lists. For the youth quota, a candidate 35 or younger had to be in one of the top three spots on the list and included every six candidates after that. Lists that did not comply with the gender and youth quotas were disqualified.[7] In addition to these quotas, the elections could be contested by political parties and independent candidates.

Overall, decentralization and municipal council reforms have proven difficult. Delays in passing the municipal council electoral law led the elections to be postponed several times, from 2016 to 2017 to 2018 (*Business News*, 2016). Elections for new regional councils, which were also supposed to have taken place in the years following the revolution, have still not occurred. The Code of Local Authorities (CLA or *Code des Collectivités Locales*, CCL), which governs the municipal councils and sets the councils' mandate, was only passed on April 26, 2018, just ten days before the May 6, 2018 elections.[8] In our interviews, some council members expressed frustration with the remaining lack of clarity around the rules and responsibilities of municipal councils.

Some of the councils' work is clear. The primary mandate of the municipal councils remains local service provision. This includes the construction and maintenance of roads; waste and environmental management; maintenance of public spaces, like parks or stadiums; the construction and maintenance of public lighting; civil registration; and the development of a health and hygiene plan (Turki and Verdeil, 2015; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2018).[9] Municipal councils are also responsible for approving the municipal budget, including organizing the municipality's service provision priorities and allocating funds accordingly.

---

[7] In the previous national constituent assembly and parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2014 respectively, there was a mandated gender quota requiring all lists to adopt vertical gender parity. Lists that did not comply were disqualified. In 2011, lists were also encouraged to include one candidate under 30, but there was no enforcement mechanism. In 2014, the law required one candidate under 36 in one of the top four spots of each list. However, the sanction for non-compliance was the loss of 50 percent of public campaign financing rather than disqualification. A quota for people with disabilities was first introduced for the 2018 municipal elections. It requires one candidate with a disability to be included in the top ten spots of each list. The sanction for non-compliance is no reimbursement of campaign finances rather than disqualification (European Union, 2018; Belschner, 2021).

[8] The Tunisian Parliament adopted the Code of Local Authorities on April 26, but it was not officially issued as a law in the *Journal Officiel de La République Tunisienne* (JORT) until after the election.

[9] These responsibilities are outlined in the Loi organique n° 2018-29 du 9 mai 2018, relative au code des collectivités locales.

This does not mean that municipalities have exclusive control of municipal service provision. As Turki and Verdeil (2015) describe, there are three types of municipal service provision: (a) services provided by national companies (e.g., water supply and wastewater management, electricity, and gas); (b) services provided on a local level by private companies (e.g. transportation); (c) services supported by municipalities (e.g., trash collection). There are also cases where mandates overlap. For example, while municipalities are largely responsible for road construction and maintenance, the national government maintains certain major routes. This type of overlapping mandates is common in partly decentralized contexts (Harb and Atallah, 2015).

Despite some ambiguity in the municipal (versus central) government mandate, in interviews with council presidents many emphasized the same local issues: cleanliness and waste disposal; roads and infrastructure; lighting; illegal construction and land issues; and water. Overall, cleanliness and waste disposal (النظافة وتصرف النفايات) were the top issues discussed by the municipal council presidents.[10] Several mayors stated they viewed cleanliness as the primary responsibility of any municipality. Boubaker Souid of the Tataouine municipality stressed that cleanliness and waste management is the main task of the local government and that municipal councils need to show success on that issue first.[11] Souad Abderrahem, the first female mayor of Tunis Ville, stated that the absence of a municipal council for nearly eight years before the 2018 election led to the decline of cleanliness and waste management in many municipalities, increasing its importance following the election.[12]

While there is broad agreement among the council heads about the main issues facing municipalities, we are interested in how politicians and citizens choose and organize these local priorities. Specifically, how well do politicians represent citizens' interests? And how are reforms aimed at improving descriptive representation on these councils (i.e., in the form of age and gender quotas) shaping substantive representation? These questions can shed light on representation—whose interests are best represented—and where gaps or congruence on issue priorities emerge. In the next section, we examine the individual- and municipal-level correlates of prioritizing certain local issues.

---

[10] Ten of the 16 council presidents mentioned waste management as a top issue in our interviews. The selection of interviewees is discussed in more detail below.
[11] Author interview 13, October 24, 2019.
[12] Author interview 16, October 25, 2019.

3. Understanding Local Priorities: Individual- and Municipal-Level Correlates

Previous research has identified several individual-level factors associated with local development priorities: age (Rhodebeck, 1993; Peterson, Smith and Hibbing, 2019), gender (Clayton *et al.*, 2018; Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson, 2018), socio-economic status or economic interests (Ballard-Rosa, Martin and Scheve, 2016; Hankinson, 2018), and partisanship (Warshaw, 2019) have all been linked to differences in local policy and public goods preferences. Some differences in policy preferences—such as those based on gender—have been well-documented (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Poggione, 2004). For others, such as partisan differences in local government, the evidence is mixed. For instance, in the United States, local politics have not been partisan historically, but there is some evidence that they are becoming increasingly so.[13]

In Tunisia, candidate characteristics like gender, age, social status, and partisanship received significant attention ahead of the 2018 municipal elections. This was largely because these were the first democratically contested local elections, and the quota laws were a significant effort to bring historically underrepresented groups into municipal government. In addition to improving descriptive representation, the quotas were intended to improve substantive representation for these groups. Regarding the gender gap in priorities in Tunisia, for example, Benstead (2019) finds that men are more likely to make requests related to roads, while women are more likely to focus on education.

For these reasons, we focus on four individual-level variables in our analysis that may be correlated with local preferences: gender, youth status, socio-economic status, and partisanship. We measure youth status as a binary variable for being 35 or younger at the time of the election. We measure socio-economic status through measures of education (university education or above), unemployment (in the labor force and looking for work), and monthly household income level (measured in six levels ranging from under 500 TND each month to over 2500 TND each month). Finally, partisanship is measured as the partisan affiliation of the list a candidate ran on or the vote choice of a citizen respondent in the municipal elections.

In line with existing work, we expect to find differences related to these individual-level characteristics. For example, in line with Benstead (2019) we expect women to prioritize roads less than men. Given

---

[13] There is other research which finds that, despite trends in polarization, there are still fewer partisan differences in local politics than national politics (Warshaw, 2019; Anzia, 2021; Jensen *et al.*, 2021).

high levels of youth unemployment, we expect youth candidates and citizens to prioritize employment more than older candidates. We also expect that those experiencing unemployment themselves will be more likely to prioritize jobs. Given the non-partisan nature of the councils' work, however, we do not expect partisanship to be significantly correlated with local priorities.

At the municipal-level, factors like district magnitude, level of local development or urbanization (Distelhorst and Hou, 2017), electoral competitiveness (Malesky and Schuler, 2010), level of formal and informal civic organization (Tsai, 2007; Donaghy, 2011), and historical legacy (Clark, 2018; Berman and Nugent, 2020) may shape local development priorities and public goods provision. Variation in the strength of local actors and their ability to exert influence over the local political process has already been documented in Tunisia. Clark, Dalmasso and Lust (2019) find that local actors in the country's municipalities exercised varying degrees of influence over the appointment of special delegations during the transitional period following President Ben Ali's departure in 2011.

In Tunisia, we focus on three municipal-level variables that are likely to be correlated with citizens' and candidates' local development priorities: population size, urbanization rate, and unemployment rate. The first is the municipal population size (logged)—a proxy measure of council magnitude. Tunisia's largest municipalities in terms of population size and council size are large cities like Tunis (population over 600,000; 60-seat council), Sfax (population over 250,000; 42-seat council), and Sousse (population over 200,000; 42-seat council). These factors are also related to the historical legacies of municipal politics; as Kherigi (2021) describes, in certain cases, municipal population size is correlated with the strength of local notables' ties to the central government.

The second municipal-level variable is the level of urbanization. As a result of the recent expansion of the municipality system to rural areas, the level of urbanization is highly correlated with whether the municipality is new (rural municipalities), old (urban municipalities), or an expansion municipality (mix of urban and rural). Though many of the local issues were shared among the municipal council presidents we interviewed, the local challenges identified by some presidents highlight the variation in levels of municipal institutionalization and urbanization. For example, council presidents from newly-created municipalities reported having very few buildings and properties that the municipality owned

and could use.[14] In municipalities with rural areas, interviewees often emphasized issues with reaching constituents in more outlying areas.

The final municipal-level variable we examine is the local level of unemployment.[15] This is a key measure of local economic development that varies drastically by the level of urbanization and region (African Development Bank Group, 2012; Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014). Moreover, urbanization and unemployment rates are also correlated with local legacies of marginalization.

We expect that local priorities are likely to be shaped by these municipal characteristics. For instance, we expect that citizens and candidates will be more likely to prioritize employment in places with higher unemployment rates. Similarly, we expect that issues like trash are more likely to be prioritized in more urban areas. In contrast, citizens and candidates are more likely to prioritize roads in more rural areas with less developed road infrastructure.

Survey Data.

To examine individual- and municipal-level correlates of local priorities of both citizens and candidates, we draw on two surveys conducted in 2018 around the first democratic municipal elections in Tunisia. First, we conducted a survey of over 1,900 candidates for Tunisia's first democratic municipal elections in 100 municipalities between April 13, 2018 and May 13, 2018.[16] This survey is representative of top candidates for the two major parties, the Ennahda Movement and Nidaa Tounes and also includes highly ranked candidates from third party and independent lists.[17] Second, we draw on a nationally representative survey of over 6,500 Tunisian citizens completed directly following the election in May 2018. This survey was conducted by *Democracy International* and included some of the same questions from the candidate survey.[18]

---

[14] They also reported having insufficient municipal resources, including trucks and other equipment for waste management, and human resources, such as an experienced administrative staff of engineers or planners.

[15] The unemployment data comes from government statistics reported at the delegation level. These delegations do not always correspond perfectly to the municipalities. In the cases in which the delegation consists of multiple municipalities, we assign all municipalities the same unemployment rates since the more localized rates cannot be determined; in cases where a municipality includes multiple delegations, we average their unemployment levels.

[16] The election was held on May 6, 2018.

[17] The respondents include 370 respondents from small- and medium-sized political parties, such as Afek Tounes and the Popular Front, 499 respondents from Ennahda, 466 respondents from Nidaa Tounes, and 572 candidates that ran on closed lists of Independent candidates. For more on the sampling and selection of candidates, see Blackman, Clark and Sasmaz (2018).

[18] Democracy International generously provided funding for the candidate survey and agreed to include some questions from our instrument in the citizen survey.

In both surveys, candidates and citizens were asked about the most important local priorities facing their municipality from among the following options: (1) Improving local roads; (2) Collecting waste and maintaining the environment; (3) Stopping illegal construction; (4) Enhancing local security; (5) Creating jobs for locals; (6) Enhancing local cultural life; (7) Installing more lights in public spaces.[19] We selected these local priorities based on the municipal councils' mandate (e.g., roads and waste management) and local issues from our pre-election interviews and received significant support in national polls (e.g., jobs and security). The political candidates were asked to rank all of the priorities for their local area, and the citizens were asked to imagine they were a municipal council member and select their top priority. As a result, we are able to directly compare the top local priority of both political candidates and citizens. A respondent is coded as prioritizing a specific local issue if they select the issue as the top issue facing the municipality. Figure 2 displays the candidates' and citizens' top priority.

Figure 2. Top local priorities of candidates and citizens

---
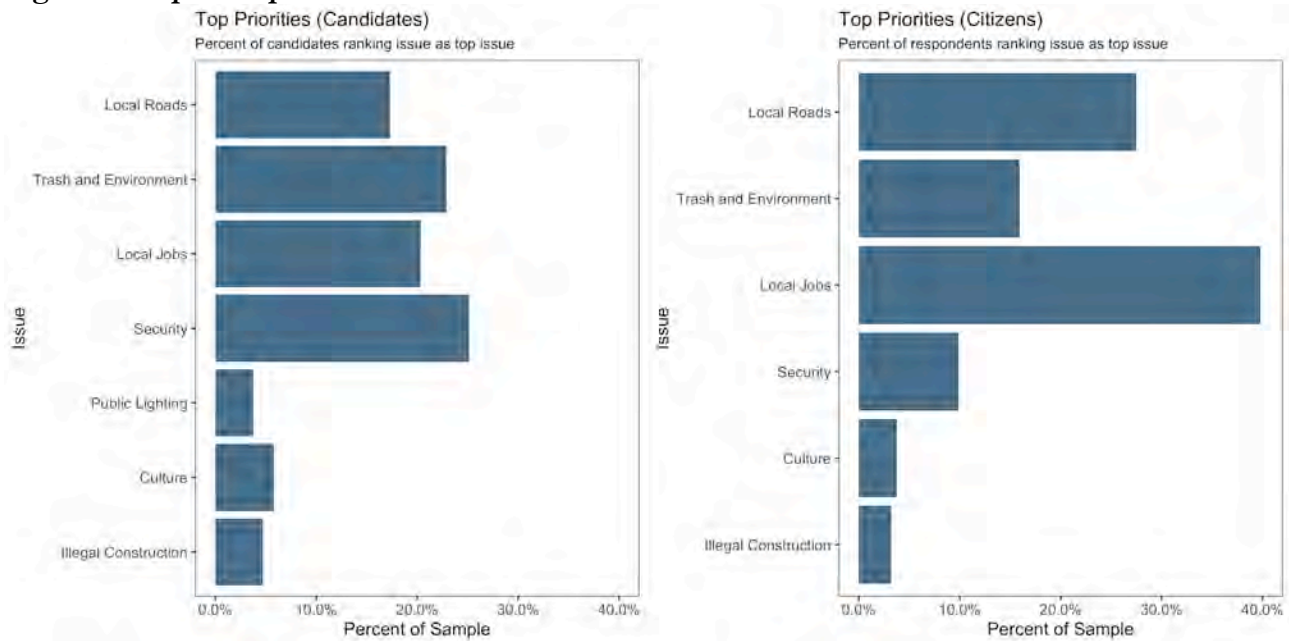
[19] For the candidate survey we ask the candidates to rank all of the possible priorities, we only ask the citizens to give their top two priorities. The possible response options are nearly identical; on the citizen survey, however, respondents were not given the "Public lighting" option or the "Other" option. Additionally, in the citizen survey, collecting waste and maintaining the environment are separate options, but in the analysis, we combine them to correspond to the candidate survey option, "collecting waste and maintaining the environment." Our results hold if we look at whether an issue was listed in the top two issues rather than just as the top issue.

Interview Data.

In October 2019, we also conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with municipal council heads from diverse backgrounds. To ensure a diverse interviewee pool while holding governorate-level characteristics constant (e.g., governor, level of regional development, relationships among local councils), we selected council heads elected on the Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda, and independent lists from three governorates: Tunis, Monastir, and Tataouine. To increase partisan diversity, we also interviewed council heads elected on the Democratic Current and People's Movement lists in other governorates.[20] For each party, both male and female interviewees were selected.[21] In each of the interviews, we asked the same battery of questions on local governance, including the main challenges they face in their municipality, what services citizens have requested, what resources would be useful, and what projects they have undertaken since becoming mayor. All but four interviews took place in the respective municipality headquarters.[22]

Results.

We examine whether a respondent selected a given issue as the top issue for their municipality using seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) to model respondents' preferences regarding local development priorities. The outcomes included: improving roads, maintaining waste management and the environment, creating jobs, improving security, stopping illegal construction, and enhancing local culture. Following Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson (2018) and Clayton *et al.* (2018), we use SUR since our outcome variables are measured using the same survey question and are not independent of each other.[23] We include the same set of independent variables for each outcome.[24] The coefficients are the same as linear probability estimates from an ordinary least squares (OLS) model. We run the analysis for candidates and citizens separately.

---

[20] Candidates from these parties were not elected as council heads in Tunis, Monastir, and Tataouine, so we selected council heads from these parties who were in Manouba, Beja, and Bizerte.

[21] No women from independent lists were elected as the council head, so, of the independent council heads, we only interviewed men.

[22] The four that did not take place at the municipality were conducted over the phone (two interviews), in a local cafe (one interview), or in a hotel lobby (one interview). All of the interviewees consented to being recorded. Interviews were typically about one hour in length.

[23] For more on using SUR to estimate local priorities see Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson (2018).

[24] We also include region fixed effects to control for underlying regional differences in priorities. The results remain the same with or without these regional fixed effects. The results are also robust to governorate fixed effects.

Table 1: Citizen Priorities: SUR OLS Regression Results

	Dependent variable – Issue is the top priority:					
	Roads	Trash	Jobs	Security	Illegal Construction	Culture
(Intercept)	0.33***	0.18***	0.30***	0.13***	0.04**	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Female	−0.06***	0.03**	0.03**	−0.00	−0.01	0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
35 & Under	−0.02	−0.06***	0.10***	−0.03***	−0.02**	0.02***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Ennahda	0.03	0.01	−0.02	−0.02	0.00	−0.00
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Nidaa	0.00	0.03	−0.03	−0.00	−0.02	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Independent	0.06	0.02	−0.04	−0.04	−0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Non-Voter	0.01	−0.00	0.01	−0.01	−0.01	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
University+	−0.07***	0.01	0.07**	−0.02	0.00	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Unemployed	−0.02	−0.03*	0.06***	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Income Level	−0.01	0.03***	−0.03***	−0.00	0.01*	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Urbanization Rate (standardized)	−0.02**	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	−0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Unemployment rate (standardized)	−0.02**	−0.00	0.02*	0.00	−0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
LN(Pop) (standardized)	0.02*	0.01	−0.01	−0.01*	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Regional Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01
Num. obs.	6595	6595	6595	6595	6595	6595

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Omitted (reference) category for partisanship is Third Parties.

Table 2: Candidate Priorities: SUR OLS Regression Results

|	Dependent variable – Issue is the top priority:					
	Roads	Trash	Jobs	Security	Illegal Construction	Culture
(Intercept)	0.22***	0.16***	0.20***	0.26***	0.10***	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Female	−0.02	0.05*	−0.02	0.04	−0.04***	−0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
35 & Under	0.00	−0.08***	0.05*	−0.00	−0.02	0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ennahdha	0.03	0.03	−0.06*	−0.00	−0.02	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Nidaa	−0.05	−0.02	0.01	0.07*	−0.02	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Independent	−0.03	0.04	−0.04	0.01	−0.03	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)
University+	0.03	−0.00	0.00	−0.03	−0.02	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Unemployed	−0.03	−0.01	0.05	0.05	0.00	−0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Income Level	−0.00	0.01	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Urbanization Rate (standardized)	−0.03**	0.01	−0.03*	0.06***	0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Unemployment rate (standardized)	0.01	0.02	0.01	−0.01	−0.02*	−0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
LN(Pop) (standardized)	−0.02	0.05***	−0.02*	−0.01	0.00	−0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Regional Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R²	0.02	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.02
Num. obs.	1907	1907	1907	1907	1907	1907

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Omitted (reference) category for partisanship is Third Parties.

We first examine the local priorities of men and women, among both citizens and candidates. Previous research shows that men and women often have different preferences for public goods and service provision (Clayton *et al.*, 2018), and Tunisia's gender quota—which required fifty percent female candidates for all lists—facilitated the entry of many women into the political process (Clark, Blackman and Sasmaz, 2021). Tables 1 and 2 display the SUR results and Figure 3 displays the predicted probabilities of selecting each issue (illegal construction, culture, jobs, roads, security, and trash/environment) as the top priority by gender. There are some gendered patterns. Among citizens, women are more likely to prioritize jobs, while men are 6 percentage points more likely to prioritize roads. These findings support earlier research that indicates that men are more concerned with roads

(Benstead, 2019) and that unemployment in Tunisia is higher among women, particularly female graduates (African Development Bank Group, 2012, p. 52). However, we do not find the same patterns for candidates. The only result that is consistent among both candidates and citizens is that women are more likely to prioritize trash and the environment.

Figure 3. Probability of listing an issue as top issue by gender among candidates and citizens
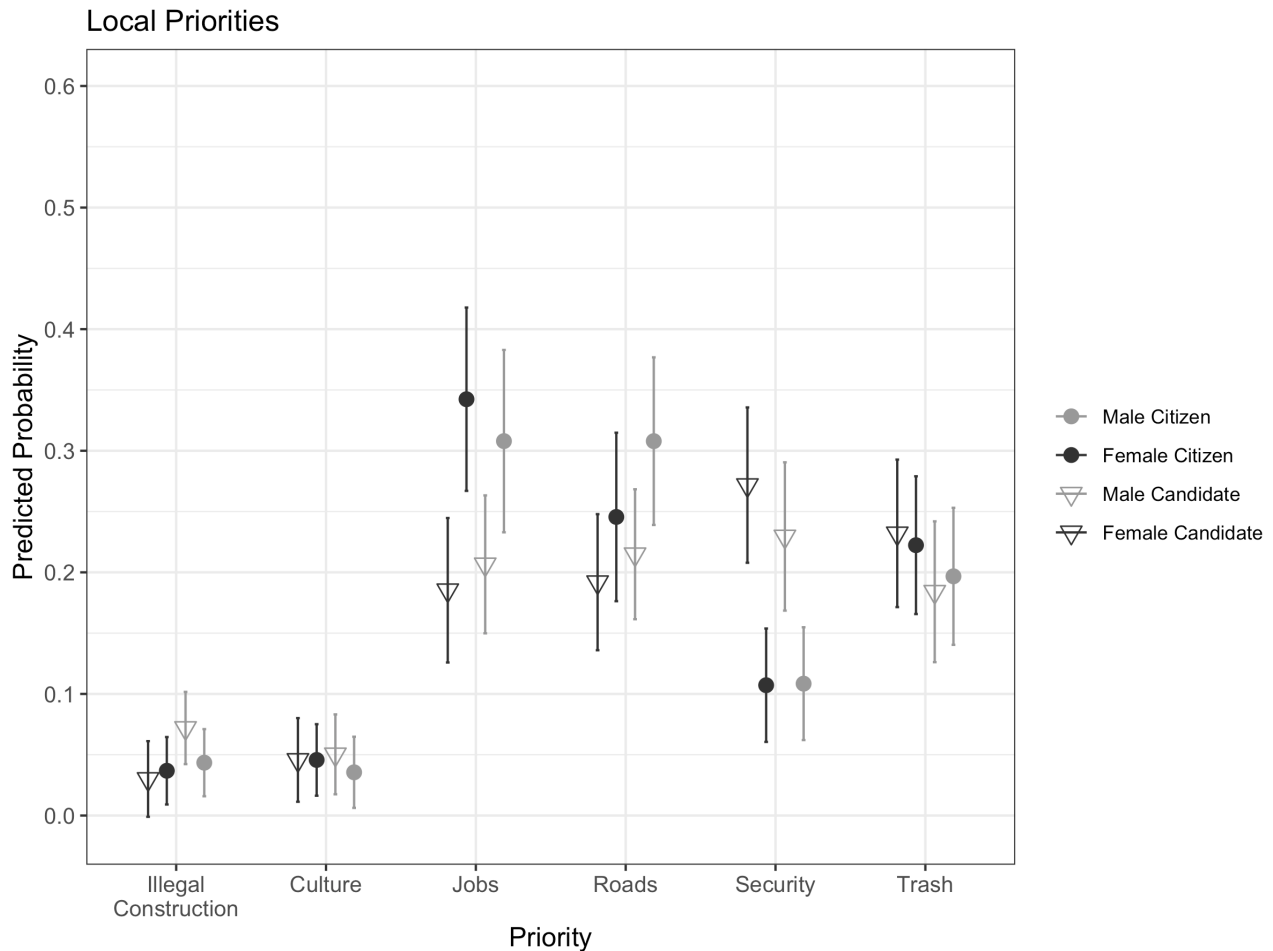
Note: These predicted probabilities are estimated using SUR and include respondent gender, age cohort, partisanship, education level, unemployment status, income level, municipal urbanization level, municipal unemployment rate, municipal population (logged), and region fixed effects. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed.

Next, we examine differences by age group. Again, the new quota law for the municipal election helped promote youth voices (35 and under) as candidates and members of municipal councils.[25] Among both citizens and candidates, we find that youth are less likely to prioritize trash and more likely to prioritize enhancing local cultural life. Additionally, both youth candidates and citizens prioritize jobs, though citizens are 10 percentage points more likely to list employment as the top priority, while youth candidates are only 5 percentage points more likely to list it as the top priority. These results suggest that youth have different priorities than older respondents and that youth candidates are more focused on the substantive interests of youth than their older counterparts. This demonstrates the importance of institutional reforms such as youth quotas (Sundström and Stockemer, 2021).

The third individual-level attribute we examine is partisanship. For candidates, we measure this as the type of list on which they competed in the election.[26] For citizens, we measure this as the party they voted for in 2018. Citizen respondents who did not vote are coded as "Non-Voter." We find no notable and consistent partisan differences among candidates or citizens.[27] This builds on existing work by Shalaby and Aydogan (2020) that shows that, in Morocco, the two main parties' priorities are more correlated with mass priorities than with the priorities of their parties' supporters.

The absence of partisan differences is also reflected in our interviews with local politicians. Many emphasized that, though the electoral campaign and internal vote for the council president were infused with partisan politics, the municipal councils' work has been non-partisan. Interviewees stressed that priorities differed little between council members from different political parties or independent lists.

The final set of individual-level correlates that we examine measure respondents' socio-economic status. Among citizens, education and income are correlated with local priorities. Specifically, respondents with higher education are more likely to prioritize local jobs and less likely to prioritize

---

[25] For the 2018 municipal elections, a candidate 35 or younger had to be in one of the top three spots on the list and included every six candidates after that. Lists that did not comply were disqualified.

[26] Some independents ran on party lists, and some party members formed independent lists. We use the list type with which they ran in the election to be consistent across all respondents.

[27] There are a few partisan differences among candidates; relative to third party candidates, Ennahda candidates are less likely to prioritize jobs and Nidaa candidates are more likely to prioritize security. However, these differences are not statistically significant when compared to all other parties. Moreover, there are no significant results for partisanship among citizens.

roads. Those with higher incomes are less likely to prioritize local jobs and more likely to prioritize waste management. For citizens, being unemployed is also strongly correlated with prioritizing local jobs. However, education, income, and employment status are not correlated with differences in local priorities among candidates. This is, in part, because there is less variation among candidates in terms of measures like education (most candidates have a university education, while most citizens do not) and because most candidates are higher on the income scale than the average Tunisian. This selection into political candidacy is discussed further in the following section.

At the municipal level, respondents—both candidates and citizens—in more urbanized municipalities are less likely to prioritize roads. The lower emphasis on roads in the urbanized municipalities largely reflects the different levels of development between the old, highly urban municipalities concentrated along the coast and the more rural municipalities in the country's interior. Concerns about roads were also expressed in our interviews. In many of the more rural municipalities, including those whose municipal borders have been expanded, municipal council heads expressed concerns about access to the municipalities' more outlying areas and expanding municipal services to the rural areas recently transferred to their jurisdiction.[28]

One interesting finding is related to security. The municipal council heads we interviewed rarely mentioned security as an issue; only the municipal council president in Le Kram cited the high crime rates in part of the municipality under his jurisdiction.[29] None mentioned it as a key part of their day-to-day work. However, in the survey, we find that candidates are more likely to list security as a top priority than citizens and are as likely to prioritize security as issues like local roads and jobs (Figure 3). We also find that candidates in more urbanized areas are more likely to cite security as the top priority. This may be because candidates are concerned about any security or crime issues that could be disruptive to their overall work even if they do not focus on security issues day-to-day. However, the survey results may also result from social desirability bias; politicians may want to demonstrate that they are pro-security even if they know it is not the top issue for their municipality.[30]

---

[28] Expansion municipalities are supposed to have access to additional funds to extend their services, but some council presidents reported that these funds were insufficient for the task.

[29] Author interview 15, October 25, 2019.

[30] This may result from the connection of security issues with stereotypes of political leadership (Blackman and Jackson, 2019).

The data on the individual- and municipal-level correlates of local priorities indicate that there are some important patterns in local priorities by respondent gender and age. These differences suggest that the electoral quotas may have improved substantive representation of women and youth interests, in addition to increasing these groups' descriptive representation. Figure 3 also indicates that, overall, candidate priorities are broadly aligned with citizen priorities. However, Figure 3 also shows that one of the most significant correlates of local priorities is whether an individual is a political candidate or citizen. While citizens and candidates have similar likelihoods of listing roads and waste management as local priorities, candidates are far more likely than citizens to say that they prioritize security, and citizens are far more likely than candidates to prioritize employment. In the next section, we examine the possible explanations for this gap.

4. Mind the Gap: Exploring Differences between Citizens and Candidates

Tunisian municipal council candidates and their constituents broadly share priorities for their municipalities; for both, waste management, roads, and employment issues are among the most commonly cited local priorities. Moreover, candidates and citizens display a comparable likelihood of naming waste management and roads as the top priority. However, in addition these topline findings, our survey data reveal some notable gaps between municipal candidates and citizens. Specifically, we argue that gaps between citizens and candidates remain over two key issues: employment and security. Candidates recognize the importance of local job creation, but they do not emphasize it as much as citizens. Additionally, candidates are far more likely to list security as a top local priority than citizens.

In this section, we examine the potential explanations for this gap. First, we examine the correlation between candidate and citizen priorities within municipalities. While there is a positive correlation between the percent of citizens that prioritize employment and the percent of candidates, there is no correlation for security. Second, we explore whether political candidates are more accountable to organized local interests, like business associations and unions, than citizens. We use a conjoint experiment to evaluate who candidates are most responsive to when selecting from among potential development projects. The experimental results indicate that Tunisian politicians prefer supporting the priorities identified and endorsed by the local community rather than business associations and unions. Third, we look at selection into political candidacy. We find that, on average, candidates come from high socio-economic backgrounds relative to the overall population. The relatively elite background of many local politicians is one potential explanation for the reduced emphasis on jobs

among candidates. Finally, we discuss whether some of the differences between candidates and citizens are driven by confusion over the mandate of municipal councils. Drawing on our interviews, we find some support for this explanation.

Table 3: Summary of findings on non-congruence between candidate and citizen priorities

Explanation	Evidence
Correlation at the municipal level	**Mixed**. Positive correlation for jobs but none for security
Low accountability to citizen interests	**No**. Candidates are more interested in selecting projects that correspond to citizens' demands than other organized groups like unions, parties, and business leaders
Selection into candidacy	**Yes**. Candidates differ from citizens on socio-economic measures
Confusion over mandate	**Yes**. Political upheaval of the past decade has led many citizens to make new demands of municipal councils

Correlation of candidate and citizen priorities at the municipal level.

While there is a general gap between citizen and candidates' level of prioritization of employment and security issues, it may be the case that the correlation of priorities is higher when we look within municipalities. For instance, perhaps while citizens place a lower emphasis on security overall, both candidates and citizens recognize security as a top priority in certain municipalities. We examine this by looking at the correlation between the proportion of candidates prioritizing an issue and the proportion of citizens prioritizing an issue measured at the municipal level. After matching the municipalities, we have data on both citizens and candidates in 75 municipalities.[31] These municipal level correlations are displayed in Figure 4.

---

[31] We only include municipalities in which there are 5 or more candidate or citizen respondents. The mean number of responses per municipality is 19 for the candidate survey and 22 for the citizen survey.

Figure 4. Correlation of proportion of candidates and proportion of citizen listing jobs or security as top priority in a given municipality
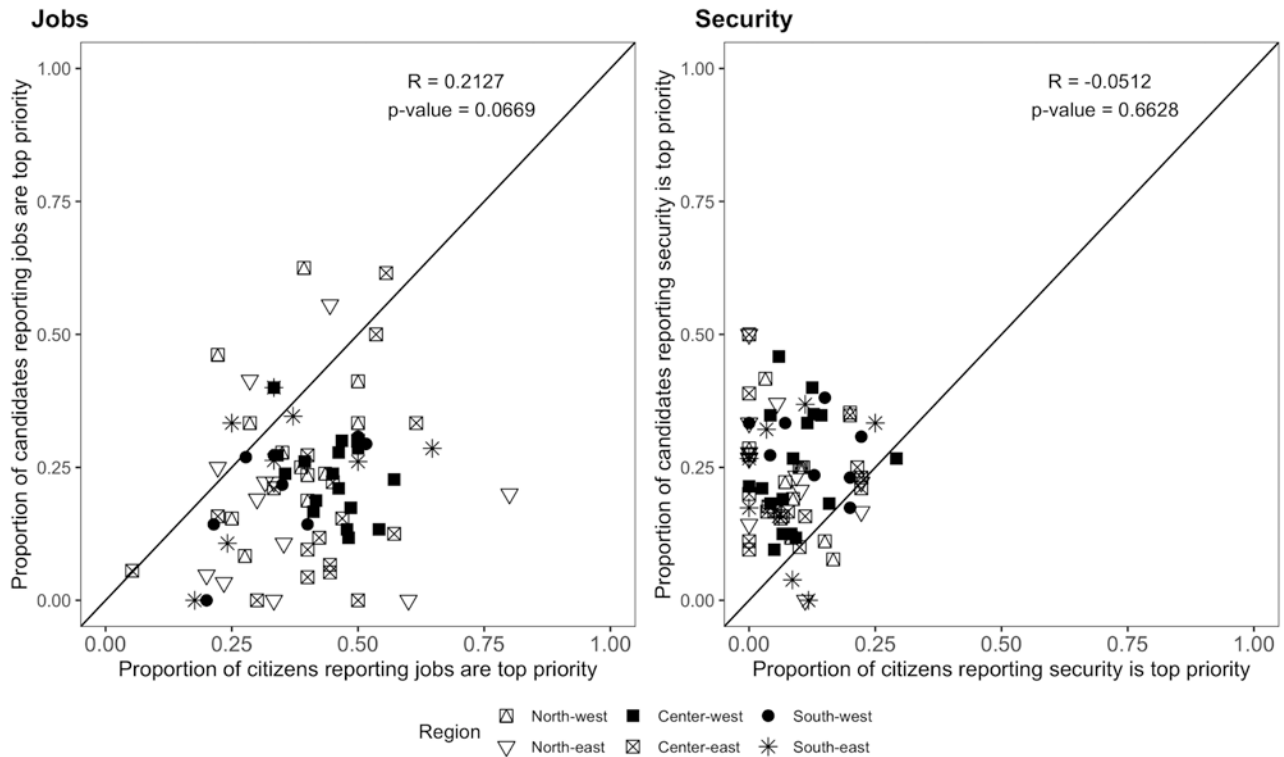
As Figure 4 indicates, there is weak evidence that the congruence of priorities is higher when we look within municipalities. While there is a positive correlation between the proportion of citizens prioritizing jobs in a given municipality and the proportion of candidates prioritizing jobs in the same municipality, the bivariate plot shows that, in the vast majority of municipalities surveyed, more citizens list employment as a top priority than candidates. The correlation is close to zero for security. In the majority of municipalities, more candidates list security than citizens. This evidence suggests that the gap in citizen and candidate priorities persists even within the same municipality.

Candidates' accountability to citizens.

Another potential explanation for the differences between candidates and citizens is whether candidates are motivated to be accountable to special interests, such as business leaders rather than voters. In each local area, various organized political actors may influence candidates' local priorities, including unions, local party organizations, and business associations. To examine this, in the candidate survey, we included a conjoint experiment to measure the candidates' local priorities experimentally. We use this survey to gain further insights into **what** the candidates view as the primary

local priorities and to see if varying **who** proposes a local issue shapes candidates' prioritization of the project. Previous research has used conjoint experiments to study policy preferences given the multi-dimensional nature of many policy proposals (Bechtel and Scheve, 2013; Ballard-Rosa, Martin and Scheve, 2016).

We asked candidates to review two different local development proposals, varying attributes of the project, including the type of project, who supports it, the cost to the municipality, and the development partner. The types of development projects include: a cultural center, jobs for graduates, jobs for non-graduates, lighting in the city center, lighting in a poor neighborhood, roads in the city center, and roads in a poor neighborhood. The different potential supporters are: a business association, a community petition, leaders of the party or electoral list, union leaders, and local youth and activists. The candidates were then asked to choose the project that they prefer.[32] Figure 5 displays the average marginal component effects (AMCE) and marginal means (MM).[33] While the AMCE and the MM have different interpretations (e.g., the AMCE has a causal interpretation while the MM does not), both convey the favorability of a certain attribute level. We display both for completeness.

We find that candidates prefer projects that are supported by citizens rather than organized interests like business associations, political parties, and unions. Candidates are 10 percentage points more likely to select a local development project that has been endorsed by a community petition or by local youth and activists relative to a development project endorsed by the local business association, union leaders, or the leaders of the local party or electoral list.
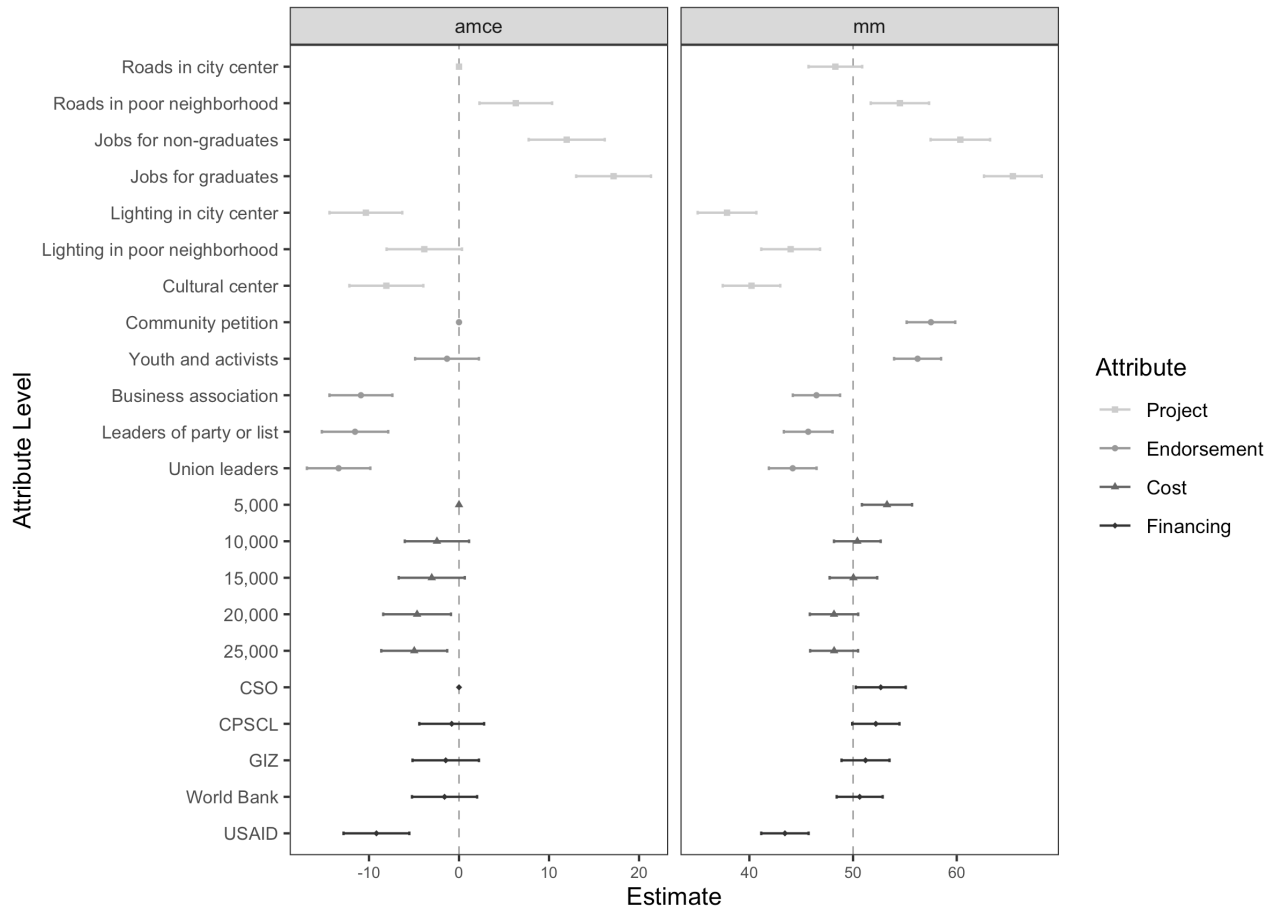
These results indicate that candidates are more interested in selecting projects that are popular with a broad swath of constituents and mobilized voters than in selecting projects that reflect the interests of a particular local organization. The fact that candidates are more responsive to citizens than local political leaders further highlights the non-partisan nature of much of the councils' work. These findings suggest that candidates are motivated to understand and reflect constituent preferences once

---

[32] The candidates are asked to choose between two project proposals. The attributes are the proposals are fully randomized. The candidates complete this exercise four times. For more on conjoint experiments, see Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014).

[33] The AMCE is the marginal effect of a given attribute level on the probability that profile is selected, averaging over the other attribute levels, and is calculated relative to a reference category. By contrast, the MM "describes the level of favorability toward profiles that have a particular attribute level, ignoring all other features" and is calculated for all attribute levels rather than relative to a reference category (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2020, p. 210).

in office. Thus, the gaps in candidate and citizen preferences over issues like jobs and security should not be understood as the result of greater accountability to organized groups like businesses and parties.

Figure 5. AMCE and MM estimates for candidates' selection of local development project

In terms of the type of local project pursued, the conjoint results are largely in line with candidates' stated local priorities. The results indicate that candidates are more likely to prioritize roads and jobs than a local cultural center. When we ask about overall priorities, candidates have the same likelihood of prioritizing jobs and roads. Using the conjoint, we find that candidates are 10 to 15 percentage points more likely to select a development project aimed at jobs than roads. This greater interest in employment projects in the conjoint could be because these hypothetical development projects come with the support of an outside donor. Accordingly, the candidates may feel more empowered to pursue employment projects that traditionally fall outside their mandate.

Selection into political candidacy.

The gender and age quotas discussed above led to significant progress in incorporating new voices on municipal councils. Women and youth have distinct policy preferences at the candidate and mass levels, suggesting that these quotas are important in terms of substantive and descriptive representation. However, this is not to suggest that the political class in Tunisia is representative of the broader population. This section compares elected officials, losing candidates, and the broader population on two dimensions that could play a key role in determining policy preferences: income and education.

Education level and income are often proxies for social class (Dal Bó *et al.*, 2017) and may shape the types of neighborhood one lives in (e.g. paved or unpaved roads) or the types of challenges one faces day-to-day. As Gulzar (2021) summarizes, a significant literature finds that politicians tend to have higher class and education status relative to the general population in both developed and developing countries. In Sweden, for instance, Dal Bó *et al.* (2017) find that politicians are under-represented at the bottom levels of the education and income distributions and over-represented at the higher levels. Thompson *et al.* (2019) find similar patterns in the United States.

In order to examine selection into politics in Tunisia, we draw on the LECS and DI surveys once again.[34] We asked respondents in both surveys about their monthly household income and their highest completed education level. We display the proportion of citizen, losing candidate, and winning candidate respondents in each category (Figure 6). Methodologically, the candidate survey is representative of likely winning candidates rather than all candidates because it over samples from the top of the lists and from the major party lists (i.e., Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes).[35] Thus, the LECS results are not representative of all candidates but rather of highly ranked winning and losing candidates.[36]

---

[34] We use the Democracy International measures of education and income for several reasons. First, detailed income data is not available from the National Institute of Statistics (*Institut National de la Statistique*, INS). Second, while education data is available from the National Institute of Statistics, it is reported for all individuals 10 years or older. Since the relevant comparison for the politicians is individuals age 18 or over, we wanted estimates that exclude younger individuals. As a result of the rapid expansion of public education in Tunisia in the past sixty years, younger cohorts are significantly more educated than older age cohorts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). Finally, the questions asked in the Democracy International survey precisely match those we asked in the LECS.

[35] For more on the sampling and selection of candidates, see Blackman, Clark and Sasmaz (2018).

[36] In the *Democracy International* survey, we also ask whether a respondent was a municipal election candidate in 2018. Just over 2.2 percent of our sample (n=148 of 6595) reported running as a candidate in the 2018 election, though we cannot verify that they ran. When we compare these candidates to the overall population, they are much closer to the

Figure 6. Distribution of income and education measures in the population and among highly ranked winning and losing political candidates
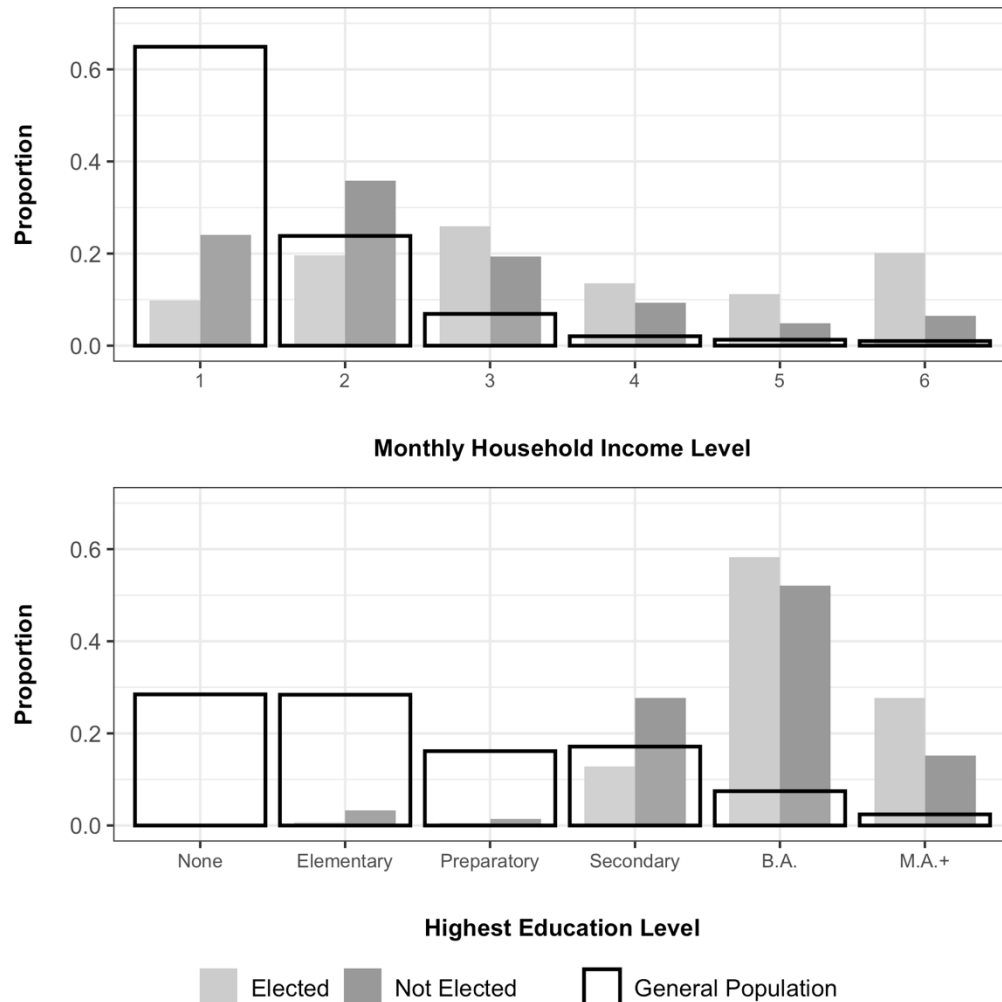
Note: The income categories are: (1) Under 500 TND; (2) 500-999 TND; (3) 1000-1499 TND; (4) 1500-1999 TND; (5) 2000-2499 TND; and (6) Above 2500 TND. The "Elected" category includes only those LECS respondents who won a seat (N=790), and "Not Elected" includes those who did not win a seat (N=1117).

The results in Tunisia indicate a pattern of selection into politics among those of a higher social class, both in terms of income and education. The gaps in Tunisia between elected political representatives on the one hand and the general public on the other are quite dramatic; over 20 percent of elected municipal politicians in our survey are in the highest income bracket (i.e. a monthly household income of above 2500 TND), while only 1 percent of citizens are. Conversely, nearly 65 percent of citizens

---

population than our highly ranked winning and losing candidates in the candidate survey. However, the candidates still report higher incomes and education. For instance, 23.8 percent of the candidates in the DI survey report a university or higher education compared to 9.6 percent of the general population. Similarly, 2.1 percent of candidates report being in the highest income bracket compared to under one percent of non-candidate respondents.

report being in the lowest income bracket, while less than 10 percent of elected politicians report the same. There are also gaps between the highly ranked, but losing candidates and those elected; among elected politicians, only 9.8 percent report being in the lowest income bracket, compared to over 24 percent of highly ranked, but losing candidates. Similarly, in terms of education, approximately 10 percent of citizens report having a university education or higher, while 67 percent of highly ranked, but losing candidates and 86 percent of the elected candidates report the same.[37]

The political class's overall homogeneity and relatively high socio-economic status may explain why these social class measures are not significant correlates of candidate priorities. These patterns may also explain the gaps between candidates' and citizens' top priorities. With the existing data, we cannot distinguish between two potential explanations for this pattern: (a) candidates come from comparable backgrounds as the general population but over-perform in terms of education and income prior to running for office[38] or (b) candidates come from higher socio-economic backgrounds relative to the general population.[39] However, the fact that higher income and higher education citizens are not more likely to prioritize security suggests that citizens and political candidates may come from significantly different socio-economic backgrounds. Future work should examine this further.

Confusion over the mandate of local councillors.

As a result of the long history of failed decentralization efforts, including before and after the revolution, and the different levels of government tasked with different public services, the mandate of municipal councils remains a source of debate and confusion for many. This debate about the role of municipalities is also related to continued uncertainty surrounding regional council elections and the limited budgets of many municipalities, particularly in the face of citizens' demands. Some of this confusion over the powers and mandate of municipal governments is compounded in new municipalities that often suffer from new or non-existent administrative staff. One council president

---

[37] These education estimates roughly align with official education statistics in the country. In the 2014 census data, just 12.1 percent of the Tunisian population reported having a university education or higher compared to 10 percent in the *Democracy International* survey. The 2014 census finds that 19.3 percent of the population reported having no formal education, while in our citizen sample 28.5 percent of the citizen population reported having no formal education (*Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie*, 2014). This difference is likely attributable to the fact that the 2014 census data includes all citizens aged 10 and over, while the survey only includes those 18 and over. As previously noted, educational attainment has expanded rapidly in Tunisia. Accordingly, the older population of the survey will have lower overall educational attainment.

[38] This is the pattern that Dal Bó *et al.* (2017) find in Sweden (i.e., inclusive meritocracy).

[39] This is the pattern that Thompson *et al.* (2019) find in the U.S. (i.e., exclusive meritocracy).

reported that the main challenge in a new municipality is the lack of a clear mandate combined with a limited budget.[40]

So how should we make sense of the differences between citizens' overwhelming focus on local jobs and candidates' more mixed local priorities especially in light of evidence that politicians want to be responsive to community-led demands? This discrepancy highlights the tension between how candidates understand their mandate as local councillors and how they respond to what voters want. The candidates recognize a significant demand for better employment opportunities, but they often must balance this interest against their other municipal work and the specific mandate they are given.

The Code of Local Authorities (CLA) is clear that the management and budgetary decisions related to local services like waste, roads, and lighting fall under the control of the municipal government. There remains, however, significant confusion over the mandate of municipal councils. Nowhere is this more evident than with the issue of employment. In the view of most municipal councilors, issues related to employment and job creation fall outside of the council's purview. Nearly unanimously, the council presidents we spoke with stressed that job creation is not one of their central responsibilities.

Conversely, from the perspective of the citizen, employment issues remain paramount. Of the respondents to the citizen survey, nearly 40 percent stated that jobs were the number one priority in their municipality and nearly 20 percent said that it was the second most important priority. Moreover, as Salman and Baird-Zars (2019) describe, municipalities became an important place for citizens to make demands in the aftermath of the revolution. They argue that, in the post-Uprising era, municipalities have taken on more prominent political roles and adopted new regulatory and enforcement roles in the absence of the central state. In practice, this means that citizens often make demands of the municipal councils that do not fall squarely within their mandate.

Despite the demands from citizens, several elected councillors we interviewed maintained that they do not have any plans to address job creation. Others, however, highlighted that they have done some work to improve unemployment. For example, the head of the El-Bassatine municipality reported that his municipality gets lots of requests for assistance with employment. He collects these requests and

---

[40] Author interview 11, October 23, 2019.

tries to address them in an organized fashion. One main factory in the municipality is the major employer, so the municipal council head maintains a list of job-seekers and shares it with the factory administrators. He also has ambitions to develop a training program for his constituents in the future.[41]

Even politicians that want to focus on employment issues, however, face major financial constraints. In our interviews, politicians expressed frustration with their municipalities' limited budgets, stating that the budget would often not cover the projects clearly under their control, such as cleaning and environmental tasks and improvements to roads, let alone any sort of employment project. In the newly created municipality of El-Bassatine in Manouba, the municipal council head expressed a need to increase the municipality's monetary and administrative support in order to build the municipality's limited infrastructure and cleaning equipment.[42] Several other municipal council presidents we spoke with from old and new municipalities around Tunisia expressed similar challenges meeting the demands on the municipality for waste management and infrastructure with the allocated financial resources.[43] Thus, facing confusion over the mandate of local councils and limited funds, politicians may be limited in their ability to tackle issues like employment that fall outside their official mandate.

5. Conclusion

The 2018 municipal elections in Tunisia were historic. As the country's first democratic local elections, the elections aimed to increase accountability and representation of citizens' interests in municipal governance. We find that, overall, the municipal election candidates' local priorities do broadly correspond to those of citizens. For both candidates and citizens, the top four local issues are local roads, waste and the environment, employment, and security. The quota requirements also supported the entry of more women and youth into the political class. We find that women and youth hold different priorities than their older and male counterparts, at both the citizen and candidate levels. Accordingly, the quotas seem to have improved substantive representation and descriptive representation.

The overall successful representation of citizens' interests is a positive sign. However, we also find some gaps in local priorities between candidates and citizens, particularly over the issues of

---

[41] Author interview 3, October 17, 2019.
[42] Author interview 3, October 17, 2019.
[43] Author interview 4, October 17, 2019; Author interview 7, October 19, 2019; Author interview 9, October 23, 2019.

employment and local security. Citizens place a much greater emphasis on employment than candidates, and candidates are more likely to prioritize security than citizens. Drawing on interviews with municipal council candidates and surveys of both voters and candidates, we examine the extent to which these differences result from candidates being accountable to other organized interests, selection into political candidacy, or confusion over the mandate of local councillors. We find that candidates are motivated to select projects that will be popular among a broad swath of constituents rather than projects that reflect the interests of local organizations, like party or union elites. Instead, the gap in candidate and citizen priorities seems to be driven by selection into political candidacy and confusion over local council mandates, particularly in the aftermath of the revolution. Further research is necessary to fully test these potential mechanisms.

While the overall representation of and accountability to citizen interests are reasons for optimism, more work is required to ensure that local councils continue to understand and represent the interests of all Tunisians, even those from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, the Tunisian government should continue to empower local councils to develop local development plans that reflect local demands and facilitate cooperation between the different levels of government involved in public goods provision.

References

African Development Bank Group (2012) *Tunisia - Economic and social challenges beyond the revolution*. Tunis, Tunisia: African Development Bank.

Anzia, S. F. (2021) 'Party and ideology in American local government: An appraisal,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1). doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102131.

نسبة النساء رئيسات البلديات بتونس تبلغ 19.5 بالمائة من جملة رؤساء البلديات وتبقى دون المأمول ' (2018) *BabNet* (وزيرة المرأة).' Available at: https://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-166398.asp.

Ballard-Rosa, C., Martin, L. and Scheve, K. F. (2016) 'The structure of American income tax policy preferences,' *The Journal of Politics*, 79(1), pp. 1–16. doi: 10.1086/687324.

Bechtel, M. M. and Scheve, K. F. (2013) 'Mass support for global climate agreements depends on institutional design,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(34), pp. 13763–13768. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1306374110.

Belschner, J. (2021) 'The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings,' *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 9(1), pp. 151–169. doi: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163.

Benstead, L. J. (2019) 'Do female local councilors improve women's representation?' *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 10(2), pp. 95–119. doi: 10.1080/21520844.2019.1580085.

Berman, C. E. and Nugent, E. R. (2020) 'Regionalism in new democracies: The authoritarian origins of voter–party linkages,' *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(4), pp. 908–922. doi: 10.1177/1065912919862363.

Blackman, A. D., Clark, J. and Sasmaz, A. (2018) *Introducing the Tunisian Local Candidate Election Survey (LECS)*. Democracy International. Available at: http://democracyinternational.com/media/lecs_brief_survey_final.pdf (Accessed: 9 March 2021).

Blackman, A. D. and Jackson, M. (2019) 'Gender Stereotypes, political leadership, and voting behavior in Tunisia,' *Political Behavior*. doi: 10.1007/s11109-019-09582-5.

Boughzala, M. and Hamdi, M. T. (2014) 'Promoting Inclusive growth in arab countries: Rural and Regional development and inequality in Tunisia,' *Brookings Global Working Paper Series*, 71.

Business News (2016) 'Chafik Sarsar : Les élections municipales prévues pour le 26 mars prochain ont été annulées.' Available at: https://www.businessnews.com.tn/chafik-sarsar--les-elections-municipales-prevues-pour-le-26-mars-proain-ont-ete-annulees,520,66253,3 (Accessed: 9 March 2021).

Chattopadhyay, R. and Duflo, E. (2004) 'Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India,' *Econometrica*, 72(5), pp. 1409–1443.

Clark, J. (2021) 'Mapping municipal change in Tunisia,' *APSA MENA Politics Newsletter*, 4(1).

Clark, J. A. (2018) *Local politics in Jordan and Morocco: Strategies of centralization and decentralization*. New York: Columbia University Press. doi: 10.7312/clar18358.

Clark, J. A., Dalmasso, E. and Lust, E. (2019) 'Not the only game in towns: Explaining changes in municipal councils in post-revolutionary Tunisia,' *Democratization*, 26(8), pp. 1362–1381. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2019.1641087.

Clark, J., Blackman, A. D. and Sasmaz, A. (2021) 'What men want: Politicians' strategic response to gender quotas,' *Working Paper*.

Clayton, A., Josefsson, C., Mattes, R. and Mozaffar, S. (2018) 'In whose interest? Gender and mass–elite priority congruence in Sub-Saharan Africa,' *Comparative Political Studies*, 52(1), pp. 69-101. doi: 10.1177/0010414018758767.

Dal Bó, E., Finan, F., Folke, O., Persson, T. and Rickne, J. (2017) 'Who becomes a politician?' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 132(4), pp. 1877–1914. doi: 10.1093/qje/qjx016.

Distelhorst, G. and Hou, Y. (2017) 'Constituency service under nondemocratic rule: Evidence from China,' *The Journal of Politics*, 79(3), pp. 1024–1040. doi: 10.1086/690948.

Donaghy, M. M. (2011) 'Do participatory governance institutions matter? Municipal councils and social housing programs in Brazil,' *Comparative Politics*, 44(1), pp. 83–102.

European Union (2018) *Rapport final: Elections municipales Tunisie (2018)*. Union européenne - Mission d'observation électorale. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/moe_ue_tunisie_2018_rapport_final_french.pdf (Accessed: 9 March 2021).

Gottlieb, J., Grossman, G. and Robinson, A. L. (2018) 'Do Men and women have different policy preferences in Africa? Determinants and Implications of gender gaps in policy prioritization,' *British Journal of Political Science*, 48(3), pp. 611–636. doi: 10.1017/S0007123416000053.

Gulzar, S. (2021) 'Who enters politics and why?,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(1). doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-051418-051214.

Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D. J. and Yamamoto, T. (2014) 'Causal inference in conjoint analysis: understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments,' *Political Analysis*, 22(1), pp. 1–30. doi: 10.1093/pan/mpt024.

Hankinson, M. (2018) 'When do renters behave like homeowners? High rent, price anxiety, and NIMBYism,' *American Political Science Review*, 112(3), pp. 473–493. doi: 10.1017/S0003055418000035.

Harb, M. and Atallah, S. (2015) 'A new framework for assessing decentralization in the Arab World,' in Harb, M. and Atallah, S. (eds) *Local governments and public goods: Assessing decentralization in the Arab World*. Beirut: The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie (2014) *BEJA: A travers le Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2014*. Tunis, Tunisia: Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie. Available at: http://census.ins.tn/sites/default/files/8_beja-1_0.pdf.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2018) *Elections in Tunisia: 2018 municipal elections*. Arlington, VA: International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Available at: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_ifes_tunisia_municipal_elections_faqs_english_final.pdf.

Jensen, A., Marble, W., Scheve, K. F. and Slaughter, M. J. (2021) 'City limits to partisan polarization in the American public,' *Political Science Research and Methods*, 9(2), pp. 223–241. doi: 10.1017/psrm.2020.56.

Khellaf, A. (1992) *Decentralization and centralization of local public services in Tunisia*. Dissertation. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Kherigi, I. (2021) 'Tunisia's municipal reforms: Bordering and the politics of space,' *Program on Governance and Local Development at the University of Gothenburg Working Paper Series*, No. 38.

Leeper, T. J., Hobolt, S. B. and Tilley, J. (2020) 'Measuring subgroup preferences in conjoint experiments,' *Political Analysis*, 28(2), pp. 207–221. doi: 10.1017/pan.2019.30.

Malesky, E. and Schuler, P. (2010) 'Nodding or needling: Analyzing delegate responsiveness in an authoritarian parliament,' *American Political Science Review*, 104(3), pp. 482–502. doi: 10.1017/S0003055410000250.

Ministry of Local Affairs (2016) *Report on the Proposed Generalization of the Municipal System*. Government of Tunisia.

Peterson, J. C., Smith, K. B. and Hibbing, J. R. (2019) 'Do People really become more conservative as they age?' *The Journal of Politics*, 82(2), pp. 600–611. doi: 10.1086/706889.

Poggione, S. (2004) 'Exploring gender differences in state legislators' policy preferences,' *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(2), pp. 305–314. doi: 10.2307/3219873.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (2018) 'Results from Tunisia's 2018 municipal elections.' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/15/results-from-tunisia-s-2018-municipal-elections-pub-77044 (Accessed: 9 March 2021).

Rhodebeck, L. A. (1993) 'The politics of greed? Political preferences among the elderly,' *The Journal of Politics*, 55(2), pp. 342–364. doi: 10.2307/2132269.

Salman, L. and Baird-Zars, B. (2019) 'From the fragments up: Municipal margins of maneuver in Syria and Tunisia,' *Middle East Law and Governance*, 11(2), pp. 244–282. doi: 10.1163/18763375-01102006.

Shalaby, M. and Aydogan, A. (2020) 'Elite-citizen linkages and issue congruency under competitive authoritarianism,' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 73(1), pp. 66–88. doi: 10.1093/pa/gsy036.

Sundström, A. and Stockemer, D. (2021) 'Conceptualizing, measuring, and explaining youths' relative absence in legislatures,' *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54(2), pp. 195–201. doi: 10.1017/S1049096520000906.

Thompson, D. M., Feigenbaum, J. J., Hall, A. B. and Yoder, J. (2019) *Who becomes a member of congress? Evidence from de-anonymized census data*. w26156. National Bureau of Economic Research. doi: 10.3386/w26156.

Tsai, L. L. (2007) 'Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China,' *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), pp. 355–372. doi: 10.1017/S0003055407070153.

Turki, S. Y. and Verdeil, E. (2015) 'Tunisie: la Constitution (du Printemps) Ouvre le Débat sur la Décentralisation,' in Harb, M. and Atallah, S. (eds) *Local Governments and Public Goods: Assessing Decentralization in the Arab World*. Beirut: The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2021) *Tunisia*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/tn.

Warshaw, C. (2019) 'Local elections and representation in the United States,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), pp. 461–479. doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-071108.