Despite implementing comprehensive decentralization laws, emerging democracies often achieve limited success in improving the inclusiveness of local governance. A potential factor limiting the inclusiveness is the lack of cooperation. What factors determine the inclination of mayors to cooperate, and what are their implications for transparency? I answer these questions through applying E. Ostrom’s “rules in use” vs “rules in form” framework on a case study of Tunisia, where mass resignations paralyze the local governance following the implementation of the 2018 Municipal Law. I evaluate on the mechanisms that produce divergent inclinations to cooperate among mayors based on a set of interview data recently collected among 39 municipalities in socio-economically divergent regions. I examine their implications for transparency based on a Transparency Index developed by an independent organization for all 350 municipalities. The findings from interviews suggest that partisanship ties constitute the most substantive factor perpetuating hierarchical relations among the elected officials and the appointed bureaucrats, as they can enable mayors to focus on large scale projects at the expense of cooperative modes of governance. A mixed effect analysis on the Transparency Index of municipalities within governorates with identified partisanship ties (n=174) indicates that the transparency score is lower in instances where an ideological overlap exists among the partisan affiliations of mayors and governors.

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