

Co-Partisanship with Mayors, Institutional Performance and Citizen Trust in Local Governance Institutions: Evidence from Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

Does co-partisanship with mayors influence citizen trust in local governance institutions in new democracies? I answer this question through conducting a case study in Tunisia. I evaluate Arab Barometer (2018) survey data on trust in local governance institutions, and interview data with mayors, council members and civil society organizations. The results indicate that Tunisians who support the same political party as their mayors tend to develop greater levels of trust in local governance institutions. Both quantitative evidence through a mediation model and qualitative evidence link a substantive portion of this relationship to the perceptions of institutional performance, such as their degrees of corruption, clientelism, inclusivity and efficiency. The findings identify the role and mechanism of co-partisanship in shaping trust in local governance institutions among the emerging democracies.

Keywords: local governance, partisanship, trust, Tunisia, mayors

1 Introduction

“After each revolution comes a phase of corruption, which is a rebounding phase¹.”

Does co-partisanship with mayor influence citizen trust in local governance institutions?

I refer to the case study of Tunisia to answer this question, which went through a revolution in 2011, wrote a new Constitution in 2014, and a new Local Code (*the Code of Local Authorities*) in 2018. Among Tunisians, distrust in institutions limits participation in local governance bodies ².

Increased levels of trust can contribute to democratization and effective local governance by reducing collective action transaction costs, improving perceptions of government legitimacy (Levi and Stoker 2000), increasing participation (Lewis and Weigert 1985), strengthening feedback mechanisms and bureaucratic efficiency (Boix and Posner 1998; Coleman 1994; Inglehart 1997; Letki and Evans 2005; Levi and Stoker 2000; Lühiste 2006; Leonardi, Nanetti, and Putnam 2001). While high-trust societies are more prone to growth and development, low-trust societies are inward oriented and rely on intra-group relations (Fukuyama 1995; Fukuyama 2000). Declines in institutional trust can lead to popular discontent (Foa and Mounk 2016), increase the support for authoritarianism (Howe 2017) and lead to backsliding (Foa and Mounk 2016). According to McCarthy (2021), high levels of distrust in political institutions contributed to the current political stalemate in Tunisia.

New democracies are not particularly suitable for co-partisanship to influence trust in institutions, as parties tend to lack clear or easily differentiable policy-based platforms (Bornschiefer 2009; Zielinski 2002), rather focus on catch-all issues that appeal to the greatest number of citizens, and have volatile electoral shifts (Bielasiak 2005; Innes 2002). However, Krönke, Lockwood, and Mattes (2020) challenge this wisdom by demonstrating widespread public engagement in local party organizations among African countries, including new democracies.

¹A Local Activist Interviewed in Gabes, 7/11/19b

²Interviews in Gabes, 07/16/19,07/17/19, 07/15/19; Kairouan, 05/21/19, 05/22/19, 06/22/19b, Kef, 08/10/19, Monastir, 07/22/19, 07/28/19, Sfax, 06/25/19, 06/28/19, 06/29/19, 06/30/19, 07/03/19, Tunis, 06/20/19.

Local governance institutions under authoritarian rule are often fit for a distributive and clientele approach to reward regime loyalists (Wang 1994; Berenschot and Mulder 2019). In transition settings, mayors can build upon the hierarchical nature of these institutions to make their co-partisans the primary beneficiaries of service delivery (Teehankee 2012). I propose that individuals' trust in local governance institutions is a function of mayoral co-partisanship. Co-partisanship can exert a direct effect on trust in institutions based on partisan-labeling effects, and differences in institutional performance evaluations.

I utilize the Arab Barometer Data (Wave V, 2018), data on municipal properties, and interviews with local officials to evaluate the link between co-partisanship and trust in institutions. I focus on institutional performance, including the manners of governance and distributive effects, as mediating factors. The survey analysis indicates that among municipalities led by the nationally-represented political parties, Tunisians co-partisan with their mayors tend to develop higher levels of trust in local governance institutions. The perceptions of corruption mediate a portion of this relationship. Co-partisan Tunisians tend to view local governance institutions as less corrupt, increasing their trust in these institutions. Interviews with local stakeholders indicate that oftentimes citizens outside mayoral political networks have less access to *wasta* (favorable treatment), and face greater challenges engaging with local governance institutions and benefiting from municipal services.

The findings make multiple contributions to the literature on democratization and institutional performance. First, co-partisanship matters for trust in local governance institutions, including in new democracies and under alternative institutional settings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Clark 2018; C. Barnett and Shalaby 2021). Second, the influence of institutional performance on trust can be conditional upon partisanship. Third, Islamist parties may have an electoral advantage not because of their reputation in "good governance" (Cammett and Luong 2014), but because of their local networks and flexibility in responding to the demands of key constituents.

2 Partisanship and Trust in Institutions among the New Democracies

While citizens generally distrust governance institutions under authoritarian regimes (Keenan 1986; Jowitt 1992), their opinions vary substantially in democratizing settings (Mishler and Rose 2001). The three main factors influencing institutional trust are: interpersonal trust, institutional performance, and partisanship or the “Home Team” effect. The interpersonal trust paradigm emphasizes that the extent of individuals trusting each other influences trust for democratic institutions (Leonardi, Nanetti, and Putnam 2001; Verba and Almond 1963; Lühiste 2006).

Institutional performance-based trust is the “perceived legitimacy, technical competence, and ability to perform assigned duties efficiently (Khodyakov 2007, p. 123)”, including operating effectively to the benefit of the public (Coleman 1994; March 1989; North et al. 1990; Cheibub et al. 1996), reducing corruption, and providing security (Stoyan et al. 2016).

The partisanship or “The Home Team” paradigm argues that co-partisanship with office-holders influences trust in institutions (Bianco 1994; Newton and Norris 1999; Pippa Norris 1999), a phenomenon prevalent among both industrialized (Pippa Norris 1999; Holmberg 1999; Banducci and Karp 2003) and developing countries (Lambert et al. 1986; Kornberg and Clarke 1994; Stoyan et al. 2016).

Co-partisanship is also linked to institutional performance (Wu and Huang 2007) as it can provide a greater sense of inclusion (Lambert et al. 1986; Kornberg and Clarke 1994). Citizens are skeptical of office-holders that they do not support (Jacob and Schenke 2020), and evaluate local projects based on officeholders’ identities (Touchton 2019). Co-partisanship shapes citizen expectations on distributive and clientele politics (Schneider 2020; Dasgupta 2016), and makes patronage networks more efficient (Cho and Bratton 2006; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Dasgupta 2016).

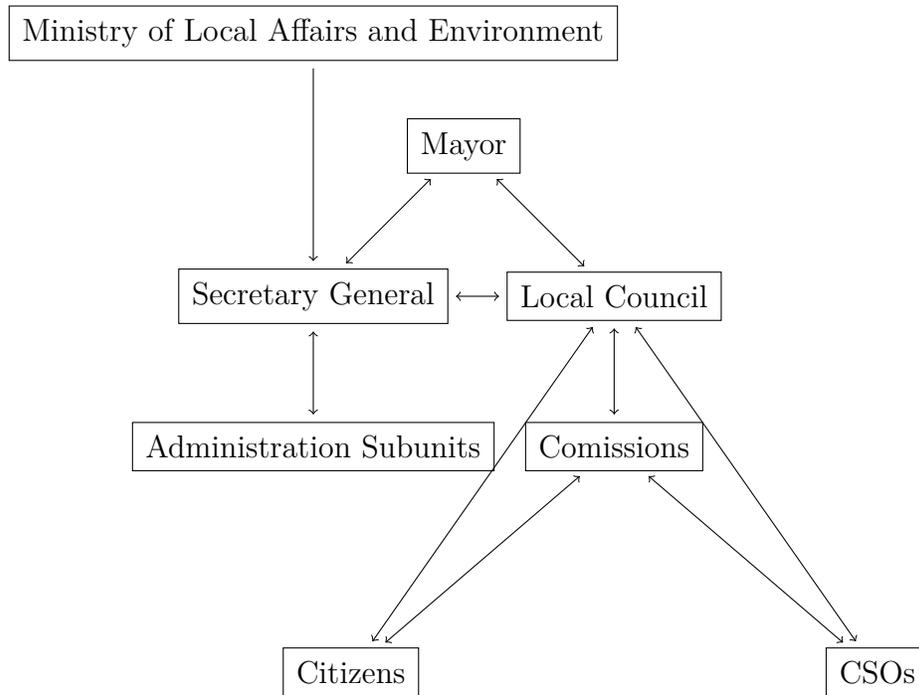
The influences of interpersonal trust, institutional performance and co-partisanship on institutional trust are interactive and conditional upon each other. In particular, co-partisanship can influence institutional trust through the perceptions of institutional performance. Yet, the literature has not devoted substantive attention to analyzing this multi-layered dynamic, yet alone co-partisanship's effect on trust in local governance institutions³. In the next section, I present the Tunisian case study, which informs my hypotheses.

3 Local Governance in Tunisia

Prior to the 2011 Revolution, local governance served to distribute clientelistic benefits to regime supporters (Clark, Dalmasso, and Lust 2019; Volpi, Merone, and Loschi 2016). The administrative officials, particularly the secretary-general, managed the municipal tasks (Clark, Dalmasso, and Lust 2019). The revolution, 2014 Constitution and the 2018 Local Government Code altered the local governance dynamics. Figure 1 captures the formal framework of municipality relations based on the author's interpretation of the 2018 Code:

³With the exception of Lambert et al. (1986), which focuses on trust in provisional level in Canada

Figure 1: **The Structure of Relations within Municipalities**



The mayor, elected from among the council members, serves as the municipal head (Figure 1). The secretary general, appointed by the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment, directs various administrative sub-units and reports to the mayor. The local council legislates municipal affairs through council sessions where council members evaluate and approve projects (Clause 218).

Citizens and civil society members can engage through the local council and commission meetings, making suggestions, and engaging in deliberative participation for certain projects (Clauses 235-239). However, in 2019 only about 8% of Tunisians have participated in any of the municipal sessions (Al-Bawsala 2019).

Council members are elected based on a 3% threshold of the proportional representation Hare quota system ⁴. Mayors are elected from among the council members through a secret ballot through an absolute majority (>50%), and if not attained, a majority in the second round. ⁵.

⁴The Article 117 for Organic Law no 7 for year 2017 dated 14 February 2017.

⁵Clause 49 of the 2018 Code.

Council members maintain an account of the council's activities and resources (Clause, 184), and chair commissions on specific issues (Clause 210). They share citizens' concerns and suggestions, shape the agenda of the council, present, evaluate, and approve proposals⁶, hold jurisprudence over administrative circles (Clause 228) and participate in formal hearings. If a majority of council members resign, the municipality holds a new election (Clause 205). Council members can also withdraw their confidence and elect a new mayor through a 3/4 vote at any time (Clause 255).

The mayor supervises the municipal budget (Clause, 168), maintains coordination with the central authorities, makes hiring decisions (Clause, 257), appoints council members to circles (Clause 227), manages municipal property, real estate use, roads, permits, court appeals and engages in public contracts (Clauses 257 and 258). To maintain public health and safety (Clause 267), the mayor oversees violation reports, including illegal buildings (Clauses 257 and 258), and manages the environmental police (Clause 262). Through an absolute majority approval, mayors can expand their formal powers to include exercising municipal rights and changing the use of municipal property (Clause 263).

In Tunisia, the *wasta* relations are prevalent (A. Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal 2013), and the quality of service delivery influences citizen trust in governance institutions (Brixi, Lust, and Woolcock 2015). Furthermore, many council members lack formal training on the Code (Kherigi 2020). Given these factors and the broad-reaching mayoral powers, mayoral co-partisanship can impact citizens' abilities to access municipal bodies and services. I propose two hypotheses related to this concern:

Hypothesis 1: Tunisians who lack mayoral co-partisanship are less likely to trust local governance institutions than Tunisians who are co-partisan with their mayors.

The perceptions of institutional performance, such as those related to corruption, can mediate the relationship between co-partisanship and trust in local governance institutions. Incumbent supporters perceive lower levels of corruption (Blais, Gidengil,

⁶An absolute majority seeks to be attained for the approval of projects. Mayor's vote counts twice in case of a tie (Clause 221).

and Kilibarda 2017), and individuals who perceive institutions to be corrupt develop lower levels of institutional trust (Morris and Klesner 2010).

Tunisians who are not co-partisan with mayors may perceive local governance bodies to be more corrupt, given the substantive distributive powers of mayors. For instance, mayors may prefer to build roads in areas with strong constituencies, purchase items from specific vendors, allocate permits to co-partisans, disregard certain violations, and hire co-partisans. Although these acts may not be illegal, they may nevertheless be perceived as corruption by citizens outside the distribution networks ⁷. My second hypothesis involves a causal pathway leading from co-partisanship to the perceptions of corruption and finally to local governance institutional trust:

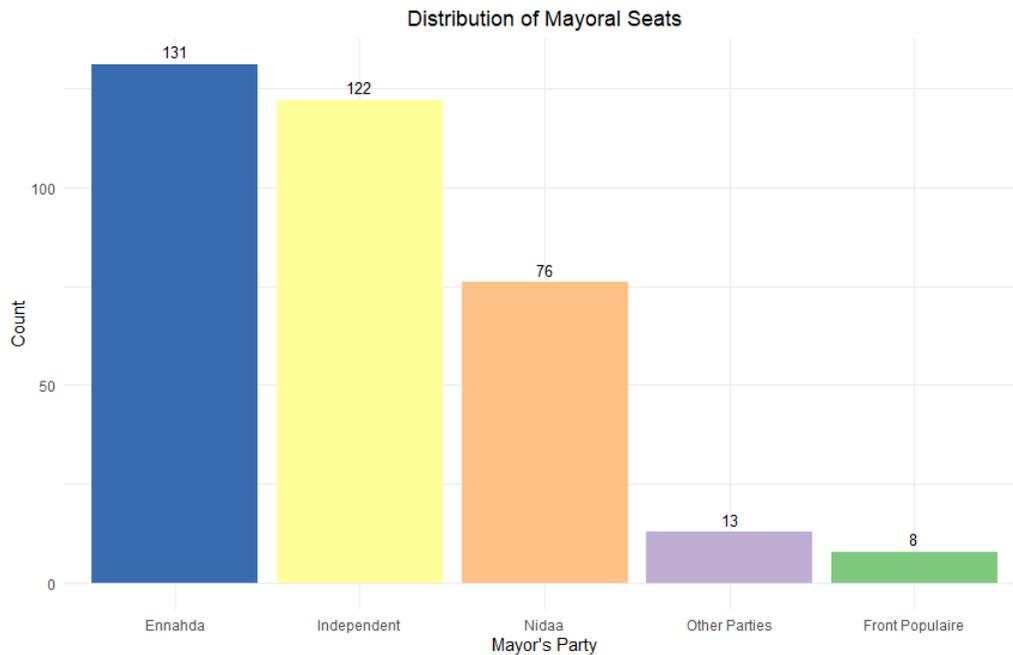
Hypothesis 2: Tunisians who are not co-partisan with their mayors are more likely to perceive local governance institutions as corrupt, and are, therefore, less likely to trust in local governance institutions than Tunisians who are co-partisan with their mayors.

3.1 Parties during the 2018 Municipal Elections

The Figure 2 displays the distribution of mayoral seats by parties for the 2018 Local Election:

⁷The main difference between clientelism and corruption is the legality of act, with corruption referring to illegal transactions that enable private individuals to acquire goods that they may not be entitled to (Benstead, Atkeson, and Shahid 2019; Manzetti and Wilson 2007; Lackner 2016).

Figure 2: **The Distribution of Mayoral Seats for the First Mayoral Elections (2018)**



Ennahda won 131 mayoral seats, the Independents 122, Nidaa 76, the Popular Front 8, and other parties 13 (Figure 2). At the time of the study Ennahda and Nidaa were the most prominent parties with distinct ideologies and extensive network structures (Storm and Cavatorta 2018; Wolf 2017; Wolf 2018; Zederman 2015). Nidaa is an authoritarian-successor party with a Bourguibist ideology⁸, attracting many bureaucrats of the Ben Ali regime (Loxton 2015; Gelvin 2015, p. 158).

Ennahda is a conservative party with an Islamist background that was precluded from competition and suppressed under the authoritarian rule, yet maintained an underground party organization (Wolf 2017). Under repressive institutions, covert organizations depend upon strong social ties to generate mutual trust and serve as a basis for mobilization (Alhamad 2008, p. 43).

Nidaa established a coalition government with Ennahda following the 2014 Legislative Elections, which ended in 2018. Nidaa has since split into smaller Bourguibist parties, including Machrou Tounes, Tahya Tounes, Qalb Tounes, and the Free Destourian

⁸An ideology shared among the members of the regime successor parties in Tunisia with tenets such as independence, modernity, reformation and advancing the rights of women (Zederman 2016).

Party, but when this survey was conducted, the divisions were still in their very early stages.

4 Data and Method

4.1 Survey Data: Procedures for Matching Delegations with Municipalities

I refer to Arab Barometer Wave V, fielded between 29 October and 4 December 2018, five to seven months after the 2018 local elections. Through stratified area probability sampling, the survey produced a sample size of 2400, and a total of 2270 respondents answered the questions on trust in local governance and preferred political parties.

The samples were selected at the sector level (*'imada*), the lowest administrative unit (N=2073). Each municipality (N=350) contains at least a single sector. Due to an institutional IRB decision from the Arab Barometer, I am unable to access the respondent sectors, whereas the lowest administrative division I have access to is the delegation level (n=196 from N=264). Each delegation contains at least a single sector.

I refer to the 2016 Ministry of Interior report (*al-tanziym al-baladiy*) to identify the sectors within the municipalities. Then I utilize the latest census (2014) to determine the delegations within which the sectors are located. In some delegations all sectors belong to the same municipality. In some other delegations, sectors belong to multiple municipalities, but the mayors of all municipalities were elected from the same party. For instance, within the delegation of Carthage, mayors of both Carthage and Sidi Bousaid were elected from Nidaa Tounes. For those municipalities I identify the mayoral party. Through this process I obtain 1690 observations, covering 74.4% of the available data. However, in some cases the observations came from delegations where mayors were elected from different parties, leading to apply an additional step

to identify mayoral affiliation.

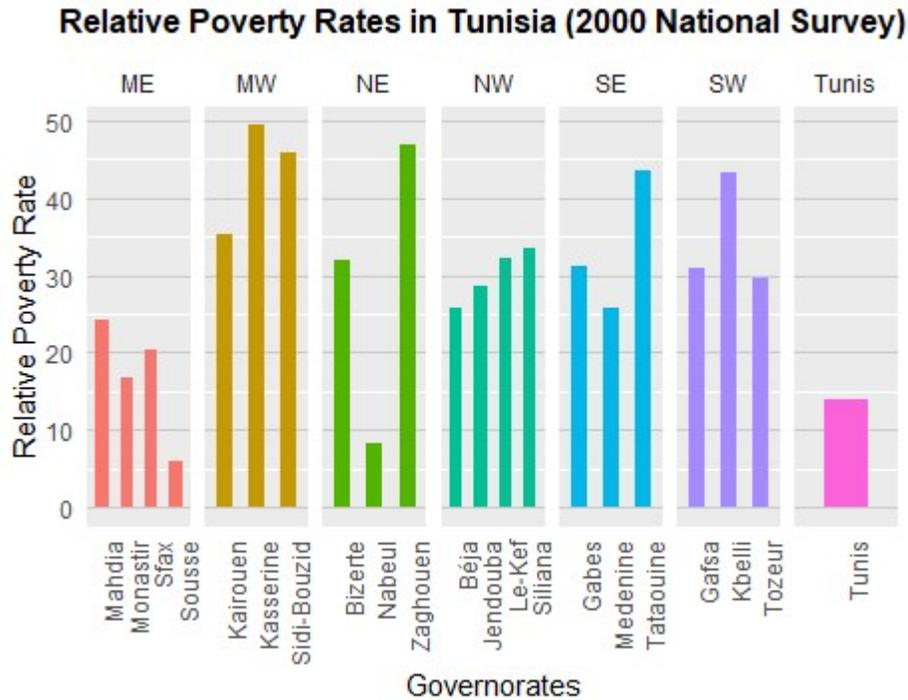
The sectors were classified and assigned a PSU (primary sampling unit) ID based on their Rural and Urban status. I refer to the 2014 census to check the sectors' official urban and rural distribution. I identify the survey respondents' municipalities by determining whether the respondents are all urban or rural based (100%), and whether the only urban or rural sector(s) for a delegation are located within a single municipality. Following this process, I bring the total number of observations to 1809, covering 79.7% of the available data. I exclude observations if I am not able to identify their municipalities through the steps outlined above. This occurs when multiple municipalities within a delegation contain both rural and urban sectors, or the whole delegation of multiple municipalities is rural or urban.

As mayors were elected from Ennahda in some of the most crowded municipalities, 1016 respondents are located within Ennahda-led municipalities, 375 respondents are within Nidaa-led municipalities, 379 are within Independent-led municipalities, and finally 39 are within municipalities led by other parties.

4.2 Interview Data

I conducted interviews with mayors, civil society and council members between May and August 2019 through a three-stage sampling process. In the first stage, I included regions with as diverse levels of socio-economic development as possible to nullify the effects of omitted variable bias. At the second stage, I use the relative poverty rates among governorate based on the 2000 National Survey as a proxy for the development(See Figure 3):

Figure 3: Relative Poverty Rate among Tunisian Governorate



I chose Tunis, Gabes, Sfax, Kef, Ariana and Monastir. At the third stage, I diversified municipalities based on the political backgrounds of mayors, administrative status (old vs. new), and distance to capital. I employed both direct outreach and snowball sampling, asking officials if they would like to participate and interviewing those who agreed. I recorded responses in a notebook with the permission of interviewees then transcribed them to a computer. To protect the identity of the participants, I present interview locations at the governorate.

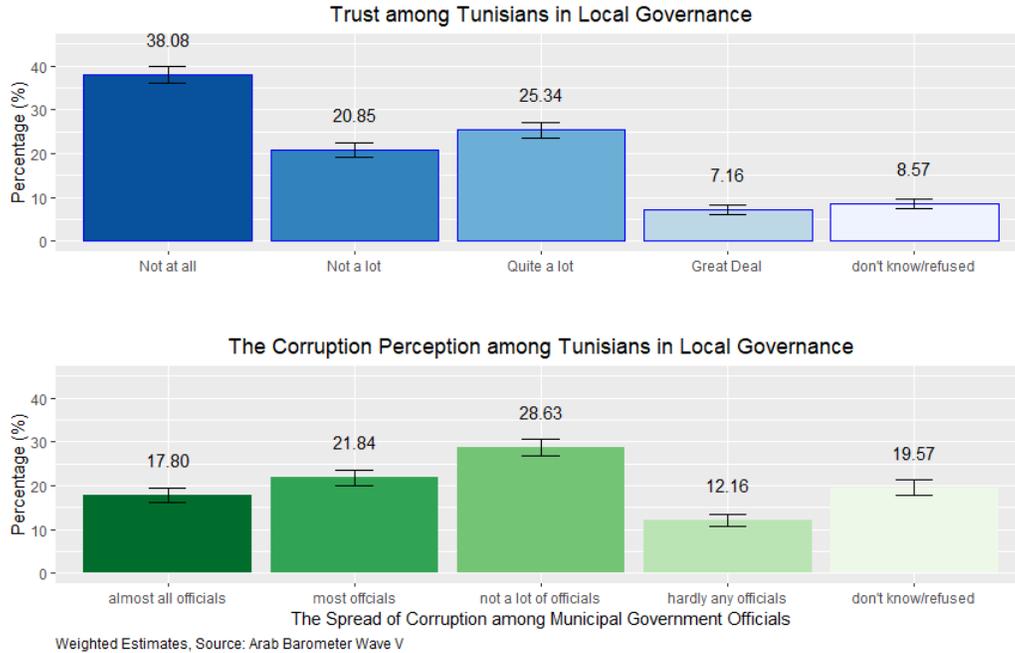
4.3 Descriptive Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, the dependent variable consists of individual responses on the question of trust in local governance. The value 1 stands for “No trust at all”, 2 for “Not a lot of trust”, 3 for “Quite a lot of trust”, and 4 for “A great deal of trust”.

Regarding corruption, The interviewers asked the question “How widespread do you think corruption is in your local / municipal government. Would you say...?” with

the options of “Almost everyone is corrupt” (1), “Most officials are corrupt” (2), “Not a lot of officials are corrupt” (3), “Hardly anyone is involved” (4). Figure 4 presents the resultant percentage of trust in local governance institutions and perceptions in corruption:

Figure 4: **Trust and Perceptions of Corruption in Local Governance**



The weighted estimates in Figure 4 indicate that 38.1% of Tunisians do not have any trust at all in local governance institutions, 20.9% not a lot of trust, 25.3% quite a lot of trust, and 7.2% a great deal of trust. 17.8% of Tunisians think that almost all municipal government officials are corrupt, 21.8% most are corrupt, 28.63% not a lot are corrupt, and 12.16% think that hardly any of them are corrupt.

Figure 5 presents a breakdown of the levels of trust and perceptions of corruption based on respondents’ party affiliation ⁹. I present the percentage of respondents who have “Quite a lot of trust” and “A lot of trust” in local governance, and the percentage that believe either most officials or almost everyone involved in local governance is corrupt:

⁹The following open-ended question was asked to identify the party affiliation: “Which party if any do you feel closest to?” I include the parties that received at least 2.5% support within the survey. Those that received less than 2.5%, and “other party” responses are included in “Other” category.

Figure 5: **Trust of Tunisians in Local Governance by Party Affiliation**

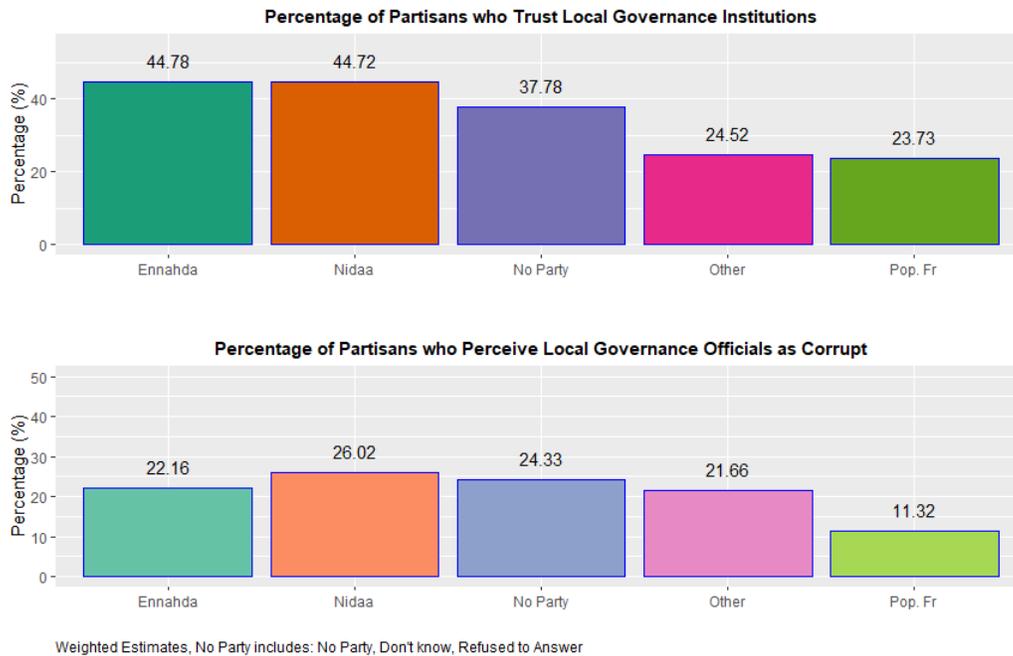
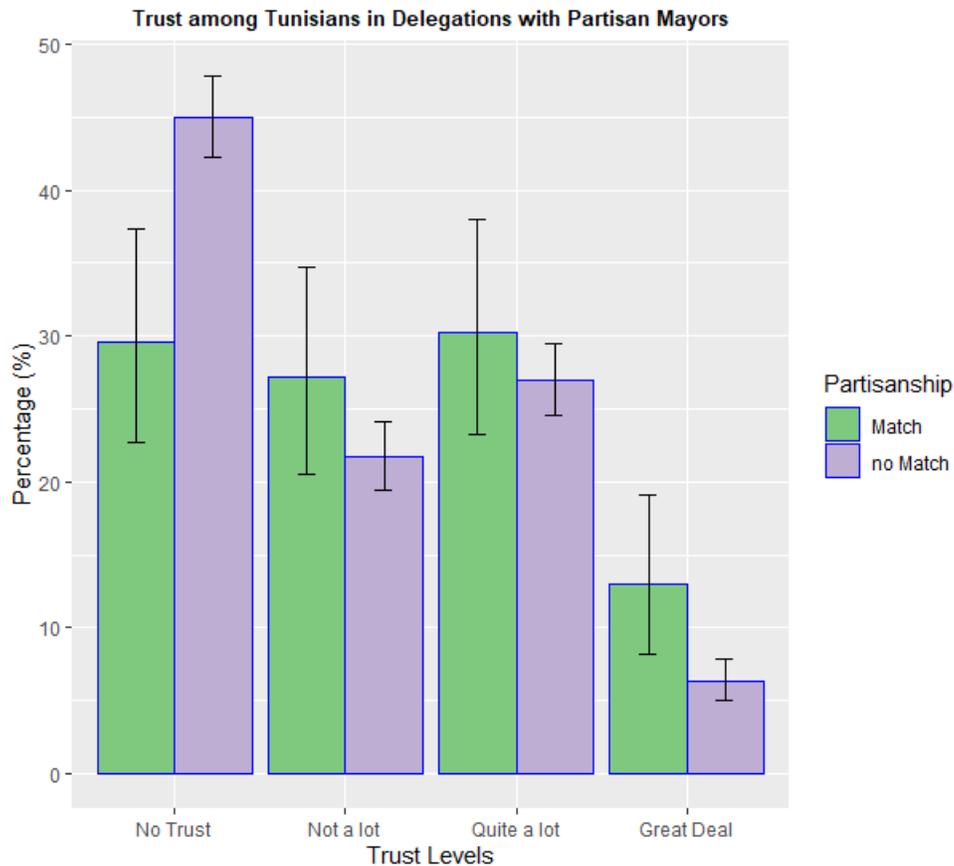


Figure 5 indicates that there is not much partisanship-based variation on trust or perceptions of corruption, especially for the supporters of major two parties. 44.5% of Ennahda and 44.7% of Nidaa supporters trust in local governance, while 22.2% of Ennahda and 26% of Nidaa supporters think that either almost all or most of the officials are corrupt at the local level.

The main independent variable is a match, or convergence, between the political affiliation of the elected mayor and the respondents: “1” if the party of respondents is the same as mayor’s party, and “0” if otherwise. As it is not possible to identify positive partisanship convergence of respondents with independent mayors, I exclude observations within the independent-led municipalities. I end up with 1049 observations in non-convergence, and 130 observations in convergence category. Figure 6 presents the weighted estimates:

Figure 6: Perception of Corruption among Tunisians in Local Governance by Partisanship



The percentage of co-partisans without any trust in local governance institutions is 29.8% for co-partisans, increasing to 45% for respondents who are not co-partisan (Figure 6). The percentage of co-partisans with a great deal of trust is 13%, which declines to 6.4% for the respondents who are not co-partisan. The differences within these groups are statistically significant at the 95% Confidence Level.

5 Analysis

The dependent variable ranges from 1 to 4, with 1 standing for “No trust at all” and 4 standing for “A great deal of trust”. I conduct both ordinal and OLS regression analysis with random effects at the level of delegation, as some observations are excluded based on mismatches at the level of delegations.

I control for the interpersonal trust explanations, participation in the 2018 Local Elections (Yes,No), perceptions on state of well-being in Tunisia, urban vs rural status, gender, age, income and location, municipal performance indicators for 2018, such as transparency score for municipalities [0,100], obtained from the *Al-Bawsala* organization, and the municipal budget (per capita). The online appendix provides a detailed description of these variables.

The first model includes the variables from the survey only. The second model is based on the best fit of first model (AIC). The third model includes control variables for municipal performance, and the fourth model performs an ordinal regression. For aesthetic purposes I do not present the coefficients for governorate and delegations.

Table 1: **The Main Regression Results (Original Weights)**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	DV (Trust) 1:4			DV (Trust) 1:4
	<i>Linear</i>			<i>Ordinal Regression</i>
	<i>Gov: Fixed, Delegation: Random</i>			<i>Gov: Fixed, Del: Random</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Party Match	0.320*** (0.092)	0.330*** (0.091)	0.256** (0.102)	0.660*** (0.178)
Budget Per Cap			-0.001 (0.001)	
Transparency			0.007*** (0.002)	
Rural	0.075 (0.082)		0.017 (0.097)	0.091 (0.155)
General Trust	0.524*** (0.105)	0.532*** (0.103)	0.526*** (0.117)	1.056*** (0.207)
Age	-0.001 (0.002)		-0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.004)
Female	0.174*** (0.058)	0.177*** (0.056)	0.168*** (0.065)	0.309*** (0.114)
Things Heading	0.133* (0.080)	0.131 (0.080)	0.211** (0.090)	0.260* (0.155)
Education	-0.011 (0.036)		-0.039 (0.041)	-0.001 (0.072)
Vote Local Elections	0.165** (0.069)	0.156** (0.066)	0.179** (0.079)	0.315** (0.135)
Income	-0.036** (0.018)	-0.039** (0.016)	-0.043** (0.020)	-0.039 (0.036)
Constant	1.701*** (0.187)	1.678*** (0.149)	1.406*** (0.274)	
Observations	1,152	1,158	920	1,152
Log Likelihood	-1,658.819	-1,658.755	-1,325.216	-1,360.819
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,385.639	3,379.511	2,720.431	
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	3,557.313	3,536.199	2,889.284	

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Controlling for both individual level factors and municipal performance, mayoral co-partisanship is positively and statistically significantly associated with greater levels of trust in local governance in all four models (p<0.05). Figure 7 plots the marginal

effects for Model 2 in Table 1:

Figure 7: **Average Marginal Effects Plot (Model 2)**

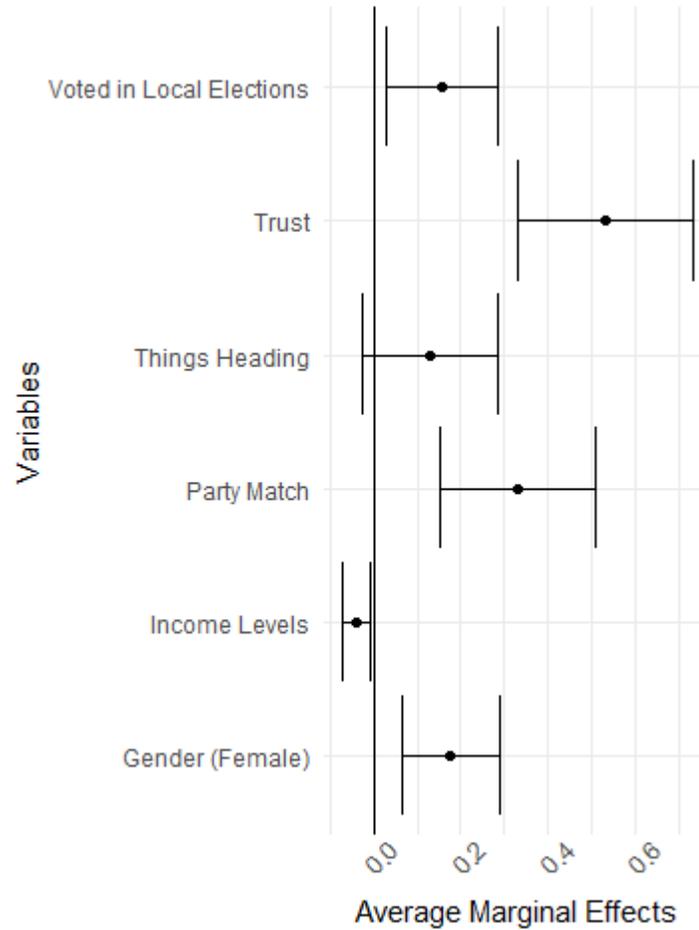
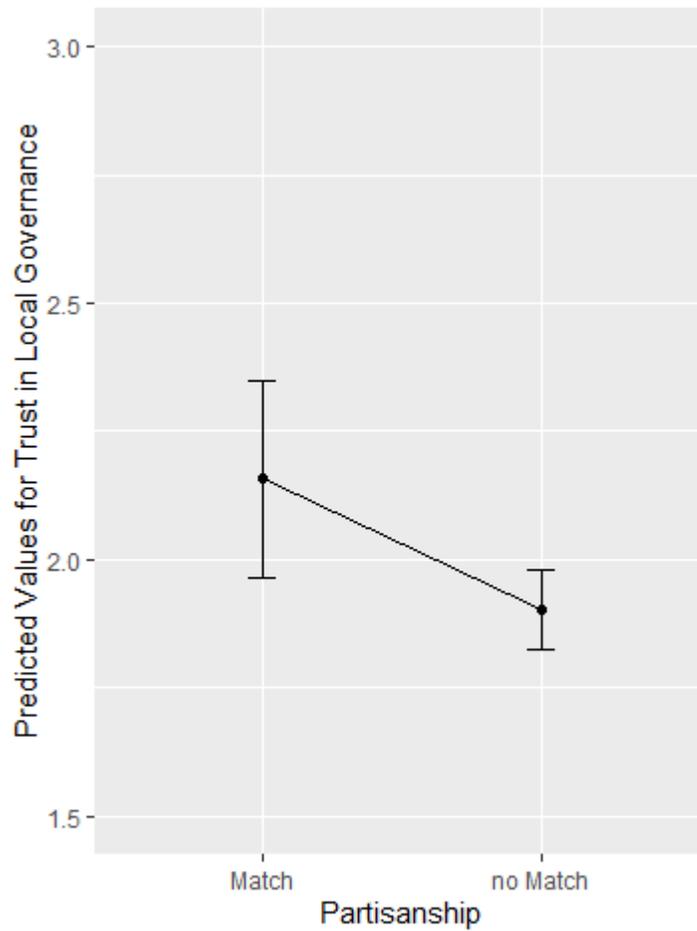


Figure 7 indicates that in addition to mayoral co-partisanship, general disposition of trust towards others, voting in local elections and the respondents' gender are positively and statistically significantly associated with trust in local governance institutions ($p < 0.05$). Figure 8 presents the predicted values for trust in local governance institutions based on partisanship (Model 2):

Figure 8: Predicted Values for Co-Partisanship on Trust in Local Governance (Model 2)

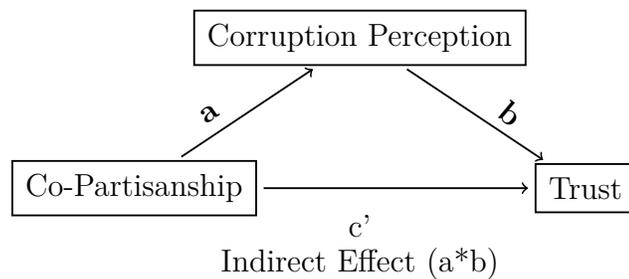


The predicted value for co-partisan respondents is 2.16, which declines to 1.9 for respondents who are not co-partisan (Figure 8). The error bars barely overlap at the 95% Confidence Level. In the appendix I present the estimates obtained through the Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) Method, which produces some covariate balance between the treatment and control groups through pruning the data by confounding factors (Ho et al. 2007; Iacus, King, and Porro 2012) and support the current findings.

According to Hypothesis 2, corruption perception functions as a mediator between partisanship status and trust in institutions. Four conditions motivate a mediation model (Baron and Kenny 1986; De Miguel, Jamal, and Tessler 2015, p. 1176). The first, the key independent variable is correlated with the outcome variable. Second,

“the variations in levels of the key independent variable significantly accounts for variations in the presumed mediator (Baron and Kenny 1986, p. 1176)”. Third, “variations in the mediator significantly account for variations in the dependent variable (ibid., p. 1176)”. Fourth, when the mediator is controlled, either a previously significant relation between the independent and dependent variables is no longer significant, or there is a substantive decline in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (ibid., pp. 1176–1177). The Figure 9 visually represents the mediation relationship:

Figure 9: **The Mediation Model adjusted from Miguel et al. (2015, p: 20).**



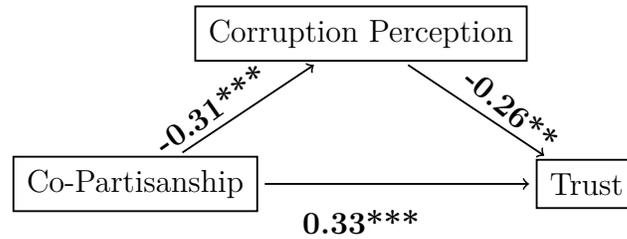
Direct Effect (c')

Total Effect $[(a*b)+(c')]$

% Total Effect Mediated = Indirect Effect / Total Effect

Co-partisanship exerts both a direct influence on Trust in Local Governance (c'), and indirect influence through Corruption Perception ($a*b$) as Co-Partisanship first influences Corruption Perception (a), and then Corruption Perception influences Trust (b). The total effect is the sum of direct effect and indirect effect ($a*b$)+ c' , whereas the percentage of total mediated effect is calculated by dividing the total effect by the indirect effect. Mediation function from the Mediate package in R Studio estimates both direct and indirect treatment effects (Partisan Match) and mediator (Corruption Perception) variables (Tingley et al. 2014). I present its estimates at Figure 10, and in the Appendix, I present the full Kenny-Baron model:

Figure 10: **The Mediation Model with Values**



The Percentage of Total Effect Mediated: 19.3

Figure 10 suggests that Corruption Perception mediates a portion of the relationship between Co-Partisanship and Trust ($p < 0.01$). The percentage of total effect mediated through corruption perception is about 19.28%, obtained through dividing the indirect effect $(a*b) = .08$ with the total effect $[(a*b) + (c')] = .42$. The next sub-section provides an in-depth description of the role of partisanship in municipal governance.

5.1 Interview Evidence

Partisanship dynamics derive from differences in ideology and service provision¹⁰. Each party tries to maximize its interests¹¹, described as “the mentality of selfishness¹²” which can hamper cooperation¹³.

Political conflict at the national level can influence local dynamics Interview in Gabes, 07/11/19. For instance, Ennahda and leftist council members often have ideological conflicts¹⁴. However, conflict can also develop among other council members, as they may lack trust,¹⁵ defend the interests of their sub-regions¹⁶ or tribes¹⁷. As a council member indicates “[Following the 2018 elections] the partisan interests became more important than the interests of the municipality... [leading to] the absence of a common working¹⁸.”

¹⁰Interview in Gabes, 07/16/19, 07/16/19b; Kef, 08/06/19

¹¹Interview in Gabes 07/08/19b

¹²Interview in Monastir, 07/29/19

¹³Interview in Kef, 08/08/19

¹⁴Interview in Gabes, 07/17/19

¹⁵Interview in Gabes, 07/08/19

¹⁶Interview in Gabes, 07/06/19

¹⁷Interview in Kairouan, 05/21/2019

¹⁸Interview in Sousse, 08/02/19

The mayor may act in a more partisan manner in municipalities where their party holds a majority ¹⁹. However, in 290 out of 350 municipalities (83%), the mayors were elected to their posts without majority support in the council (Yasun 2021), leading to competition among different parties for mayoral posts. Mayors may refrain from relieving the duties of non-participatory council members (Clause 206) that are from their own list ²⁰. Some council members may not accept the leadership of the mayor ²¹. The election of mayoral assistants, often from the same party or coalition, can further polarize the council ²². Parties often value some commissions, such as the financial and economic affairs, above others. The competition for such commissions can also lead to conflict, as a council member describes:

“Ennahda followers attempt to dominate everything... the commissions were divided based on voting rather than in a participatory and inclusive manner. As a result, Ennahda took the important commissions... Some council members refrained from participating in council activities to protest, which led to the deterioration of municipality services (Interview in Gabes, 07/16/19).”

The opinions of civil society groups or citizens, taken during the introductory council sessions, may not be followed in the ordinary sessions ²³. Municipal sessions may be held frequently closed to the public, and when open, the power of citizens vis-a vis the council remains may remain limited ²⁴. Participatory budgeting may exist only as a formality ²⁵.”

Instead, mayors can follow their own plans or the plans of their political units to protect and consolidate their own interests ²⁶. In order to consolidate their power, mayors can employ the formally delegated powers of the council, as outlined in the

¹⁹Interview in Monastir, 07/30/19

²⁰Interview in Sfax, 6/27/19

²¹Interview in Gabes, 07/08/19b

²²Interview in Tunis, 8/21/19

²³Interview in Sfax, 06/27/19

²⁴Interview in Kairouan 05/21/19

²⁵Interview in Sousse, 08/02/19

²⁶Interviews in Sfax, 06/29/19, Gabes, 07/08/19, 07/09/19, Monastir, 07/30/19, Sousse 08/02/19

Clause 263 of the 2018 Code ²⁷. The absence of decrees pertaining to the Code can also help informal governance structures prevail ²⁸. Mayors can force a “yes” or “no” vote on projects early on, depriving them of changes stemming from nuanced debate ²⁹. The majority rule can lead mayors to expand “rewards” for council members to approve projects ³⁰.

As mayors consolidate their power, the party networks might be used for resource allocation ³¹, construction projects, or public space allocation ³². Mayoral connections could further extend to expediting permits ³³, building authorizations ³⁴, finding jobs for constituents ³⁵, providing services or infrastructure to supporters ³⁶, disregarding commission or expert opinions to grant building authorizations ³⁷.

Mayoral power consolidation may also impact other duties. For instance, municipal service rights may be provided to council members’ families in exchange for support ³⁸, and road locations may be changed without warning to appease supporters ³⁹. Additionally, municipalities may fail to respond to information requests ⁴⁰, refrain from publishing detailed budgets ⁴¹, and civil society organizations (CSOs) may face extensive obstructions when seeking information or reforms ⁴². It is also important to note the precedent relationship of distributive politics, as a council member indicates: “[Currently there is] no distribution on the basis of partisanship, yet it was the case during the TROIKA [2011-2014] when the governor hired many Ennahda supporters

²⁷Interview in Sfax, 6/29/19

²⁸As of July 19th 2021, only 11 of the 38 decrees have been implemented.

²⁹Interview in Sfax, 6/29/19

³⁰Interviews in Monastir, 7/29/19; Sousse, 08/02/19

³¹Interview in Sfax, 7/13/19

³²Interview in Sfax, 7/3/19

³³Interviews in Gabes, 07/09/19, Monastir, 07/30/19

³⁴Interview in Sfax, 6/27/19

³⁵Interview in Sfax, 6/28/19

³⁶Interview in Gabes, 07/15/19

³⁷Interview in Sfax, 06/29/19

³⁸Interview in Sfax, 06/27/19

³⁹Interview in Monastir, 08/07/19

⁴⁰Interview in Gabes, 07/15/19

⁴¹Interview in Sfax, 06/28/19

⁴²Interview in Gabes, 07/09/19

43.” Citizens can gain awareness of such practices through social media ⁴⁴, as some council members publish their claims of corruption on their Facebook pages ⁴⁵.

CSOs can be referred as “political⁴⁶” or “ideological ⁴⁷”, sometimes accused of creating challenges to the decision-making process ⁴⁸. Conversely, CSOs with ties to governing parties can become the primary beneficiaries of projects:

“We hold the same distance to each party, yet the mayor provides more resources to [the civil societies] closer to him. There is a civil society here, that is Bourguibist, and it receives more resources ⁴⁹.”

Conflict in councils can make it even more difficult to approve projects and enable municipalities to find resources ⁵⁰, sometimes leading to mass resignations of council members ⁵¹ (Yasun 2021). These factors can limit the scope of municipal activities to its basic elements, such as building roads, providing electricity, or assigning permits, where it is easier to discriminate based on partisanship.

Citizens left out of the process can feel frustrated⁵². As a civil society activist indicates: “It is all lies. Citizens do not see that their problems are solved . . . only Ennahda supporters participate in local governance ⁵³.” Yet, the performance-based partisanship paradigm has limitations for explaining trust. Not all mayors prioritize the interests of their parties, and the support for parties can be weak, especially in municipalities far from the governorate capital, or *chief lieu* ⁵⁴. Party relations could be less binding in smaller and new municipalities (formed after 2016), where council members support one another ⁵⁵.

⁴³Interview in Kef, 8/6/19

⁴⁴Interview in Tunis, 8/21/19

⁴⁵Interview in Gabes 07/06/19

⁴⁶Interview in Kef, 8/6/2019

⁴⁷Interview in Gabes, 07/08/19b

⁴⁸Interview in Sfax, 06/30/19

⁴⁹Interview in Monastir, 07/30/19)

⁵⁰Interview in Kef, 8/6/19

⁵¹Interview in Tunis, 8/20/19

⁵²Interviews in Gabes, 07/16/19, Kef, 8/6/19, and Sfax, 6/29/19

⁵³Interview in Gabes, 07/09/2019

⁵⁴Interview in Gabes, 07/09/19

⁵⁵Interviews in Monastir, 07/22/19 and 07/29/2019; Gabes, 07/17/19; Sfax, 7/3/19

In certain contexts, civil society groups can prevent partisanship from exerting an overarching influence ⁵⁶." As a council member indicates: "There is no distribution of resources based on partisanship here, because the civil society is strong ⁵⁷." Finally, being elected from independent lists can have some advantages for mayors, as they can stay above the bitter partisan politics ⁵⁸.

6 Conclusion

This paper uses Tunisia to examine the influence of partisanship relations between citizens and mayors on citizen trust in local governance institutions in emerging democracies. An analysis of Arab Barometer (2018) data indicates that co-partisanship with mayors increases citizen trust in local governance institutions (Hypothesis 1). A mediation model indicates that perceptions of corruption operate as a mediating factor between partisanship and trust in local governance institutions. Citizens who are not co-partisan with their mayors tend to perceive local governance institutions as more corrupt, thereby reducing their trust. The interview evidence indicates that exclusion from clientele networks and governance procedures could influence individual predispositions towards institutions (Hypothesis 2).

The overarching role of co-partisanship for influencing trust can be considered as both good and bad news for the institutionalization of democracy. On the one hand, party relations have an impact on citizen engagement with local governance institutions. A major goal of the decentralization program is to open these institutions for political competition, and in the MENA region the prevalence of clientele practices does not necessarily decrease support for democracy (Benstead, Atkeson, and Shahid 2019). On the other hand, partisanship dynamics can decrease trust, and party networks may exclude certain stakeholders from the decision-making and distribution process. These outcomes can contribute to polarization (Grewal and Hamid 2020), increase dissatisfaction with democracy (Teti, Abbott, and Cavatorta 2019), and even hamper the establishment

⁵⁶Interview in Sfax, 6/28/19 and Kef, 8/10/19

⁵⁷Interview in Monastir, 07/28/19

⁵⁸Interviews in Gabes, 07/18/19, Sfax, 6/25/19; Monastir, 07/28/19

of cooperative relations within society (Fukuyama 2000).

A limitation of the quantitative part of this study is that most respondents resided within Ennahda-led municipalities. However, the interview evidence indicates that non-inclusive governance mechanisms can operate among both Ennahda-led and Nidaa-led municipalities, and to a lesser extent, among the independents. It should also be noted that some forms of corruption and clientele exchange may not have been captured through interview evidence.

International donors, politicians, civil society groups and state institutions all have a role in making local governance institutions more inclusive. Politicians can work on reducing polarization. Donors can support local stakeholders, including independent local press and civil society groups, to increase awareness and accountability. CSOs can employ their relationships with various stakeholders to make local governance more accessible. Finally, the feedback mechanisms within national organizations, such as the National Institute to Fight Against Corruption *INLUCC* and the Administrative Court can be improved to be more accessible and effective.

7 Appendix

7.1 Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) Method Results

First I present the distribution of data (Table 1 from the main text, Model 2) prior to pruning it. The mean values are for the treatment (Party Match) and control (no Match) groups.

Table 2: **The Mean Values prior to Pruning the Data**

	Means (Party Match)	Means (No match)	Std. Mean Diff.	Var. Ratio	eCDF Mean	eCDF Max
Female [1,0]	0.523	0.506	0.034		0.017	0.017
Things Heading	1.092	1.025	0.154	1.540	0.025	0.071
Voted Local	0.385	0.263	0.250		0.122	0.122
Income	4.292	4.337	-0.026	0.978	0.018	0.049

As Table 2 indicates, there is some imbalance between the treatment and control groups. I employ the automated coarsening in the “MatchIt” package in R Studio, which prunes the data through removing unmatched units and assigning matching weights:

Table 3: **Sample obtained after pruning data**

	No Partisan Convergence	Convergence
All	1049	130
Matched	924	127
Unmatched	125	3

924 of 1049 observations were matched in the control, and 127 of 130 observations were matched in the treatment group with weights, producing a total sample of 1051 (Table 3). Figures 11 and 12 visually displays the matched and discarded data:

Figure 11: QQ Plot 1 (Matched Data)

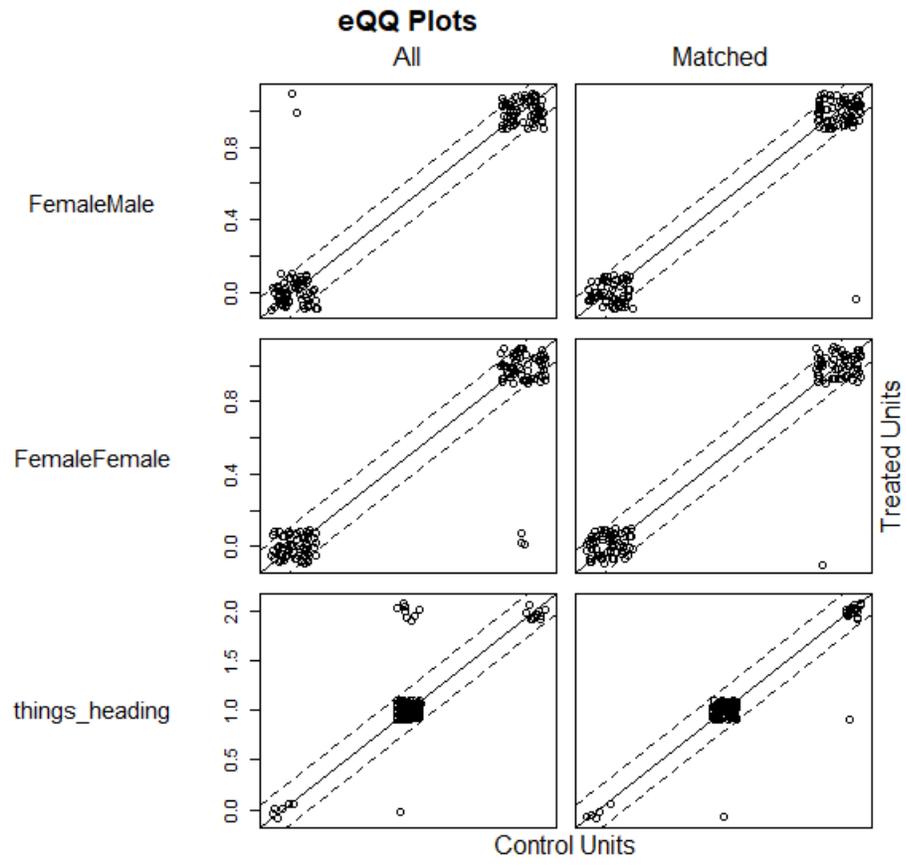
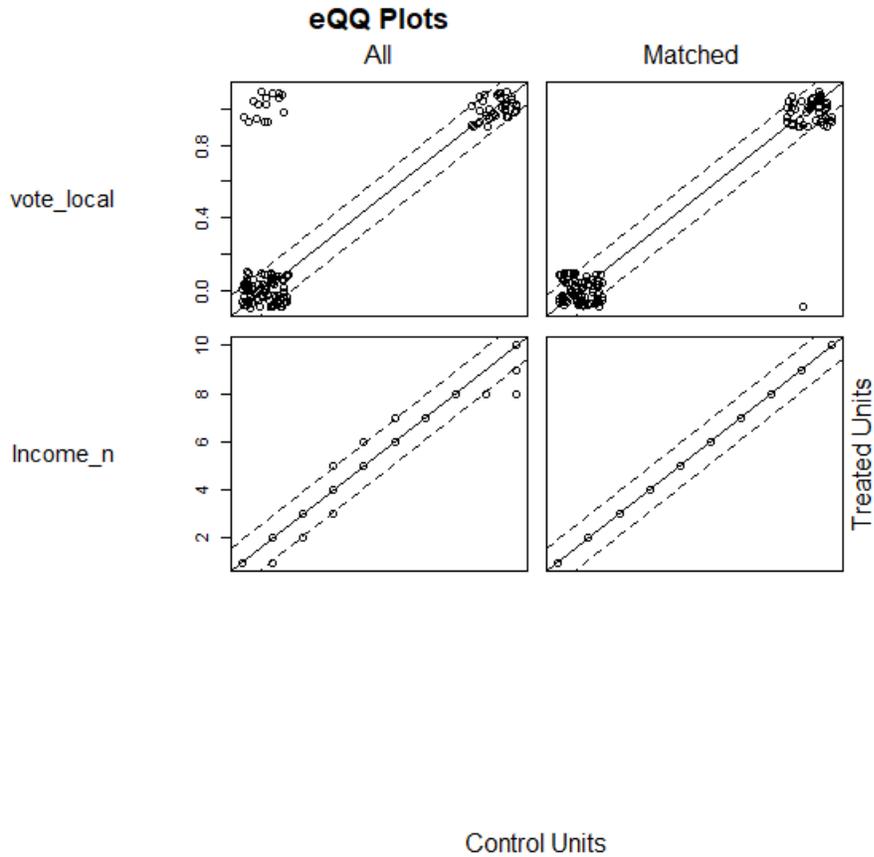


Figure 12: QQ Plot 1 (Matched Data)



I present below the balance of data after pruning it through CEM method:

Table 4: **Balance of Data after Pruning it**

	Variable	Partisan Match (Treatment)	no Match (Control)	Std. Mean Diff.	Var. Ratio
1	Female [1,0]	0.520	0.520	0	
3	Things Heading	1.087	1.087	0	1.006
4	Voted in Local El.	0.378	0.378	0	
5	Income	4.291	4.291	0	1.006

Table 4 indicates that pruning the data produced a substantive balance between the treatment (Partisan Match) and control (no Match) groups, I present the linear regression estimates below, with fixed effects at the governorate level and random effects at the delegation level (coef not included). I employ matching weights rather than weights initially included in the survey:

Table 5: **Regression Estimates on Pruned Data**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Trust in Local Governance [1,4]
Party Match	0.285*** (0.091)
Female	0.039 (0.060)
Things Heading	0.233*** (0.075)
Vote Local	0.153** (0.065)
Income	-0.033* (0.019)
Constant	1.749*** (0.167)
Observations	1,051
Log Likelihood	-1,562.882
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,185.764
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	3,334.489

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The linear regression results on the matched data suggests that the partisan match remains statistically significantly associated with trust in local governance institutions at p=0.01.

7.2 Barron and Kenny Mediation Model

The initial regression results of Table 1 indicates that “Party Match” accounts for the trust in local governance, fulfilling the first condition. I test the mediation model below:

Table 6: **Barron and Kenny Model**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Trust	Corruption	Trust	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Party Match	0.330*** (0.091)	-0.314*** (0.103)		0.332*** (0.099)
Corruption			-0.277*** (0.028)	-0.259*** (0.032)
Trust	0.532*** (0.103)	-0.098 (0.120)	0.416*** (0.101)	0.531*** (0.116)
Female	0.177*** (0.056)	-0.115* (0.062)	0.172*** (0.054)	0.220*** (0.061)
Things Heading	0.131 (0.080)	0.155 (0.095)	0.099 (0.080)	0.130 (0.092)
Vote in Local Elections	0.156** (0.066)	-0.295*** (0.074)	0.055 (0.062)	0.071 (0.072)
Income	-0.039** (0.016)	-0.012 (0.018)	-0.041*** (0.015)	-0.023 (0.018)
Constant	1.678*** (0.149)	2.907*** (0.171)	2.501*** (0.165)	2.261*** (0.181)
Observations	928	928	928	928
Log Likelihood	-1,302.295	-1,308.989	-1,278.510	-1,274.524
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,666.589	2,679.978	2,619.021	2,613.048
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2,816.413	2,829.802	2,768.845	2,767.705

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6 suggests that a partial mediation exists between a match in partisan affiliation, corruption perception, and trust. The variations in the key independent variable (partisan match) accounts for variations in the independent variable, trust, and the mediator, corruption perception (p<0.01, Models 1 and 2). Furthermore, the mediator variable corruption perception significantly accounts for the variation in local governance trust (p<0.01, Model 3). Finally, when partisan match and corruption

perception are included in the same model (Model 4), the coefficient estimate for corruption perception decreases. However, it remains statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

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