

Elitist solutions for revolutionary contexts: Tunisian structural contradiction

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In a revolutionary context, elite approaches to politics get naturally involved in normative, methodological and substantive controversies with newly liberated forces, calling for a more inclusive and participatory politics. These forces would typically claim that traditional elites are unrepresentative of, and even hostile to, society and its general interests. Though such claims are usually legitimized on negative grounds epitomized by the rejection of the ousted regime and its cronies, the need of reconstruction, and therefore of positive political dimensions in revolutionary claims, raises many questions about the relationship between old and new elites.

The Tunisian case clearly shows that to move from deconstruction to reconstruction, exclusion must be substituted for cooperation. Since such a move can only succeed at the sacrifice of basic revolutionary aims, this outcome is the origin of widespread popular resentment expressed through deep pessimism with convictions of an ongoing conspiracy among the different elites. Consociationalism, as defined by authors like Arend Lijphart, provides a more promising intellectual framework to understand complex relations between post-revolutionary competing elites. Though usually ignored by political analysts, consociational democracy offers a rational evaluation of the shared structural objectives that allow seemingly irreconcilable and incompatible forces to coordinate their actions.