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Pose Challenge to
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Credit: Rached Ghannouchi Facebook page

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rached Ghannouchi—co-founder and longtime president of Tunisia’s Islamist Ennahda party and, since 2019, speaker of parliament—has attained a degree of fame and influence outstripping that of any other Tunisian politician. As Ennahda’s key figure, he has received the most credit for the party’s success since the 2011 revolution and for its contributions to Tunisia’s democratic transformation. Recently, however, Ghannouchi’s image as a democratic pioneer has come under threat from within Ennahda’s own ranks, an unprecedented development in a party long known for cohesion and discipline.

A growing number of Ennahda followers now accuse Ghannouchi of patriarchal if not outright authoritarian handling of party affairs, claiming that he is seeking to change Ennahda’s internal rules to extend his tenure as president and tighten his control. Recent years have been marked by members’ open criticism of the party’s policies and by high-level resignations as well as by falling electoral support. Some supporters charge that Ennahda has become a personal project for Ghannouchi, who succeeded in placing it at the heart of Tunisian politics but increasingly lacks ideological vision and even popular appeal. Internal frictions are mounting to such an extent that they risk tearing Ennahda apart, and no solution to the quandary is in sight.

So far, Ghannouchi—who has led Ennahda through many challenges over the past decades—seems oblivious to the fact that his own actions are behind the crisis. The long-haired “democrat within Islamism” has become the true test of Ennahda’s commitment to internal party democracy. If the party survives, it will only be because its own institutional foundations prevail over Ghannouchi’s personal ambitions.



Rached Ghannouchi campaigns for Ennahda candidate (and co-founder) Abdelfattah Mourou in Sbeitla during the 2019 presidential election. Mourou placed third, with only 12.9 percent of the vote. Photo: Rached Ghannouchi Facebook page

I. INTRODUCTION

Ranked by *Foreign Policy* as among the “Top 100 Global Thinkers” and by *TIME* as one of the “100 Most Influential People in the World,”¹ Rached Ghannouchi—co-founder and current president of Tunisia’s Islamist Ennahda party and, since November 2019, speaker of parliament—has attained a degree of fame and influence outstripping that of any other Tunisian politician. Through his use of compromise and skilled negotiation, he has helped overcome key moments of political deadlock and crisis that have jeopardized the country’s democratic transition since its 2011 revolution. In 2012, Ghannouchi received the prestigious Chatham House Prize (jointly with then-president Moncef Marzouki) in recognition of his efforts at “bridge-building across the political spectrum” and his “contribution to promoting the idea of compatibility between Islam and democracy and modernity,” which, the prize-givers stressed, “led people across the world to view Tunisia as a model in the region.”²

Ghannouchi has often stated that practicing multiparty politics—including in coalition with secular forces—comes naturally to Ennahda, because the party is itself a model of democratic governance. Indeed, Ennahda has institutionalized power-sharing, and supporters are keen to highlight that its 150-member Shura Council, the party’s highest governing body, acts as

a sort of internal parliament. Furthermore, in an attempt to preempt the personalization of power within the party, Ennahda’s charter does not allow anyone to serve as president for more than two consecutive four-year terms.³ As Ennahda’s key figure, Ghannouchi has received the most credit for the party’s political success since the 2011 revolution and for its contributions to Tunisia’s democratic transformation. Recently, however, his image as a democratic pioneer has come under threat from within Ennahda’s own ranks, a development never seen before within the party.

While some of Ennahda’s adversaries have long argued that Ghannouchi seeks to accumulate vast power, party members themselves had previously vehemently rejected these allegations, which typically emerged from a markedly anti-Islamist and sometimes a counterrevolutionary agenda.⁴ But a growing number of Ennahda followers now accuse Ghannouchi of patriarchal if not outright authoritarian handling of internal party affairs. Some leading Ennahda figures have even called him a “despot.”⁵ They claim that Ghannouchi is seeking to change internal party rules to extend his tenure as president and to reinforce his grip over the party. Internal frictions are mounting to such an extent that they risk tearing Ennahda apart, and no solution to the crisis is in sight.

1. Kedar Pavgi, “The FP Top 100 Global Thinkers,” *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/28/the-fp-top-100-global-thinkers-4/>; and “The World’s 100 Most Influential People: 2012,” *TIME*, accessed June 25, 2021, <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,2111975,00.html>

2. Cameron Doley, “Rashid Ghannouchi wins Chatham House Prize,” Carter-Ruck, accessed June 25, 2021, <https://www.carter-ruck.com/blog/rashid-ghannouchi-wins-chatham-house-prize/>; and Tim Marshall, “Tunisia’s Long, Slow Road to Democracy,” Sky News, November 29, 2012, <https://news.sky.com/story/tunisia-long-slow-road-to-democracy-10462367>

3. See Chapter 31, Ennahda Movement Charter, after revision at the Tenth Conference, May 22, 2016, available in Arabic at <http://www.ennahdha.tn>

4. See, for example, Anne Wolf, “The Counterrevolution Gains Momentum in Tunisia: The Rise of Abir Moussi,” Project on Middle East Democracy, November 18, 2020, <https://pomed.org/snapshot-the-counterrevolution-gains-momentum-in-tunisia-the-rise-of-abir-moussi/>

5. I.B., “Abdellatif Mekki ne supporte plus Ghannouchi et le qualifie de despote,” Kapitalis, December 19, 2019, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2019/12/19/abdellatif-mekki-ne-supporte-plus-ghannouchi-et-le-qualifie-de-despote/>

II. GHANNOUCHI'S RISE TO FAME

At age 80, Ghannouchi has attained such prominence that his name is sometimes used as a synonym for Ennahda; historically, however, he has not always been the party's key leader. Nor is he its sole founder, as is often assumed.⁶ It was with two other Tunisians, Abdelfattah Mourou and Hmida Ennaifer, that he in fact launched the clandestine Islamic Group in the 1960s. The Group's members, devout Muslims, opposed the modernizing reforms of Tunisia's first president Habib Bourguiba but lacked any specific ideological doctrine. In 1979, the Islamic Group evolved into the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) as its members—many of them university students inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—began to pursue a more overtly political project. Two years later MTI leaders applied, albeit unsuccessfully, for a license to operate legally as a political party. In 1989, during the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime, the MTI was renamed Ennahda (Renaissance).

Notably, Ghannouchi's two co-founders have long been more liberally minded than he. In the 1970s, Ennaifer sought to orient the movement more explicitly around Tunisia's Islamic heritage—rather than around the more conservative ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood—but left when faced with internal resistance, including from Ghannouchi. For his part, Mourou resigned in 1991 when key Ennahda leaders, again including Ghannouchi, hesitated to unconditionally condemn a violent attack against the Ben Ali regime by a small subset of grassroots members. Mourou re-joined Ennahda only after the revolution.⁷

Within Tunisia, Ghannouchi emerged into the limelight in the mid-1980s, especially after

Bourguiba cracked down violently on the MTI and imprisoned its key leaders. In September 1987, Ghannouchi was even sentenced to death alongside other party figures in a widely publicized trial. Although the sentence was overturned when Ben Ali took power a few months later, the events of this period bestowed upon Ghannouchi a quasi-martyr status among Islamist sections of society, and he became a key symbol of resistance towards the regime. Yet Ben Ali's tenure by no means spelled a new dawn for Ghannouchi and Ennahda: The new president Ben Ali, determined to discredit what was now his most significant political opposition, branded Ennahda a dangerous terrorist group that sought to impose Islam throughout society. For many non-Islamists, Ghannouchi became the face of this alarming spectre, a perception that for some Tunisians has persisted even to this day.

“The events of this period bestowed upon Ghannouchi a quasi-martyr status among Islamist sections of society, and he became a key symbol of resistance towards the regime.”

When Ghannouchi sought exile in London—after yet another violent crackdown on Ennahda forced him to flee Tunisia in 1989—he also began to draw increasing international

6. See, for example, Tom Heneghan, “Ennahda's reformist Tunisian Islamism has strong roots,” Reuters, November 7, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-tunisia-islamism-reform-20111107-idAFJJOE7A60L220111107>; and Iman Zayat, “Ennahda's Ghannouchi makes big power play ahead of leadership transition,” *Arab Weekly*, May 12, 2020, <https://theArabweekly.com/ennahdas-ghannouchi-makes-big-power-play-ahead-leadership-transition>

7. See, for details, Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 76–77.

attention. In appearances with Western media outlets and at conferences abroad, Ghannouchi pressed the message that Ennahda followers were not radical Islamists but persecuted victims of a brutal authoritarian regime. He also built networks with political figures in the West and throughout the Arab world, both Islamists and secularists, and he vowed to build bridges between them. Many of these connections persist until today. Importantly, Ghannouchi published several works on public freedoms and democratic politics in Islam that became highly influential within Islamist circles as well as among scholars and policymakers worldwide.⁸ The 2001 biography *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, published by Oxford University Press, further burnished his image as “the leader of a school in modern Islamic political thought that advocates democracy and pluralism,” proclaiming that Ghannouchi believes “that Islam is compatible with Western thought in matters concerning the system of government, human rights, and civil liberties.”⁹ Thus, within ten years, Ghannouchi had succeeded in establishing himself in the West as a progressive thinker and as a democratically minded moderate Islamist.¹⁰



Ghannouchi addresses an Islamist rally circa 1980. Photo: Unknown/Wikimedia

8. In his most influential work, *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, Ghannouchi calls upon Muslims to embrace the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See *Al-Hurriyyat al-‘amma fi’l-dawla al-Islamiyya* [*Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*] (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-Arabiyya, 1993), in Arabic; updated edition published in 2015 (Tunis: Dar al-Mujtahid li’l-nashr wa’Itawzi, 2015). An English translation by David L. Johnston is forthcoming from Yale University Press in 2021; see <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300211528/public-freedoms-islamic-state>

9. See, for details, Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi, A Democrat within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); quotes are from the blurb of the book.

10. See, for details, Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi*.

III. REVOLUTIONARY CONSERVATISM

Despite the democratic values he had come to defend, Ghannouchi did not emerge as a leader of the December 2010–January 2011 protest movement that toppled the Ben Ali regime, not even from exile. Indeed, by that time, after two decades of Ben Ali’s rule, few Ennahda figures, whether exiled or still active underground in Tunisia, believed that the regime could be challenged, let alone toppled by mass protests. “The people who started the protests [in the interior] were more convinced than us of the possibility of [political change],” acknowledged one Ennahda representative in Tunisia a few years after the revolution.¹¹ The Ennahda leadership’s policy toward the Ben Ali regime had even shifted from one of confrontation in the 1980s and early 1990s to one of tentative reconciliation in the 2000s. Many exiles longed to end the suffering of their associates who were living under severe repression in Tunisia and wanted to return home themselves; to achieve these goals, they were prepared to reach an agreement with the authoritarian regime. “We simply wanted to find a compromise,” affirmed one previously exiled Ennahda figure.¹²

Beginning in the early 2000s, Ghannouchi chose to call, rather than for a new regime, for a limited political opening that would keep Ben Ali in power.¹³ His vision was inspired by Morocco’s political trajectory at the time, which saw modest reforms and the easing of some repression but maintained the King as the head of the political system. In the mid 2000s Ghannouchi allegedly even met with Ben Ali regime representatives in an attempt to strike a deal.¹⁴ As a

result, when the anti-regime protests erupted in Tunisia in December 2010, Ghannouchi was hesitant to jeopardize these ongoing negotiations by siding publicly with the revolutionaries.¹⁵ It was only in the second week of January 2011, in the final days of the regime—when Ben Ali’s vulnerability had become unmistakable—that well-known Ennahda figures in Tunisia decided to participate in the uprising. By then, of course, the demonstrations had already spread throughout the country and had gained a momentum of their own.

“It was only in the second week of January 2011, in the final days of the regime—when Ben Ali’s vulnerability had become unmistakable—that well-known Ennahda figures in Tunisia decided to participate in the uprising.”

Since Ben Ali’s ouster, though, Ennahda leaders have been keen to bolster their revolutionary legitimacy by stressing that they had led the fight against the regime since the late 1980s. This narrative initially was quite influential in post-revolution Tunisia. “Ennahda suffered most under Ben Ali,” religiously conservative Tunisians often stated in the immediate aftermath of

11. Ennahda leader, interview with author, Tunis, May 2015; quoted in Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, 130.

12. Previous Ennahda exile, interview with author, London, March 2015.

13. Rachid Ghannouchi, “Comment expliquer la supériorité de l’expérience marocaine sur celle de la Tunisie?” article published via www.ezzeitouna.com, October 2002 and quoted in Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire: politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003).

14. These meetings allegedly took place in London. See, for details, *Al-Maoukif*, January 19, 2007, quoted in Vincent Geisser and Éric Gobe, “Un si long règne ... le régime de Ben Ali vingt ans après,” in *L’Année du Maghreb* 5, CNRS Éditions (2008): 358, <https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.464>

15. See, for details, Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*.



Protestors take part in anti-government demonstrations in Tunis, January 2011. Photo: M.Rais/Wikimedia Commons

the revolution.¹⁶ When Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia on January 30, 2011, he was welcomed by a cheering crowd of some 10,000 supporters at the Tunis-Carthage airport,¹⁷ many of whom hoped that their “Sheikh” would lead the post-revolution period. At the time, however, Ghannouchi vowed that he was “not going to run for president of Tunisia, nor as a minister nor as a

parliamentarian,”¹⁸ likely in an effort to reassure those many non-Islamists who were highly suspicious of his intentions and did not want Ennahda to play a key role in the new political system. To this day some still believe it is a terrorist organization, echoing Ben Ali’s rejection of the party.

Over the past ten years Ennahda has become a pivotal part of the political landscape, shaping the post-revolutionary period more than any other party. It secured a landslide victory in the October 2011 Constituent Assembly elections, the first free elections to be held in Tunisia, and took a leading role in drafting the new democratic constitution adopted in January 2014. After placing second in the 2014 legislative elections, Ennahda prevailed in the 2019 parliamentary race, receiving the largest share of votes of any party. To the frustration of some of its more conservative members, Ennahda officials have often refrained from using their political sway to pursue narrow Islamist goals. For instance, in March 2012 a majority of Ennahda members followed Ghannouchi’s lead and rejected a proposal from conservative members to advocate for including a reference to Sharia (Islamic law) in the constitution. Naturally, this does not mean that religion was absent from Ennahda’s politics. The Shura Council, for example, rejected an initiative by President Beji Caid Essebsi to establish full equality between men and women in inheritance, on the basis that it would “contradict religious teachings,” and its MPs introduced legislation to restrict freedom of expression on “religious” grounds.¹⁹

Yet far from centering their politics on religious goals, Ennahda officials have pursued a striking politics of compromise with a range of political actors, including non-Islamist forc-

16. Ennahda members and supporters, interviews and personal communication with author, Tunisia, 2011 and 2012.

17. “Tunisian Islamist leader Rachid Ghannouchi returns home,” BBC, January 30, 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12318824>

18. “Islamist leader Ghannouchi returns to Tunisia after 22 years in exile,” France24, January 30, 2011, <https://www.france24.com/en/20110130-tunisia-rached-ghannouchi-islamist-leader-returns-exile-ennahda-party-london>

19. See, for details, “Tunisia: Ennahda Rejects Inheritance Equality: Parties Should Back Moves to End Gender Discrimination,” Human Rights Watch, September 6, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/06/tunisia-ennahda-rejects-inheritance-equality>; and Rory McCarthy, “Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia’s Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the Challenge of Free Speech,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2015).



From left to right: Ghannouchi, President Essebsi, and Abdelfattah Mourou gesture to attendees during Ennahda's tenth National Congress in 2016. Photo: Rached Ghannouchi Facebook page

es.²⁰ Specifically, Ennahda leaders formed governing coalitions with leading secular parties, such as Nidaa Tounes and Qalb Tounes, that include prominent figures from the former Ben Ali regime. Joining such coalitions has led Ennahda leaders often to err on the conservative side of post-revolution politics. Among other examples, Ennahda lawmakers supported legislation, introduced by Nidaa Tounes and pushed

by its founder, the late president Beji Caid Essebsi, that granted impunity to certain corrupt civil servants of the former regime as long as they returned the money they had stolen. The 2017 “economic reconciliation”²¹ law was highly controversial among revolutionary activists, both Islamist and secular-leaning, who wanted to take much stronger action against corruption by the Ben Ali regime.²²

20. See, for details, Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*.

21. The legislation is officially termed Law No. 2017/62 concerning the reconciliation in the administrative domain.

22. Amna Guellali, “La loi sur la réconciliation administrative, dangereuse pour l’avenir de la démocratie tunisienne,” Middle East Eye, September 21, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/opinion-fr/la-loi-sur-la-reconciliation-administrative-dangereuse-pour-lavenir-de-la-democratie>

IV. ENNAHDA'S GHANNOUCHI... GHANNOUCHI'S ENNAHDA

It was Ghannouchi who personally advocated for and led these efforts of compromise and rapprochement with ex-Ben Ali officials. In 2015, he stated his support for the political rehabilitation of figures from the dictatorship, affirming that while the details of the project were yet to be discussed, it “will pass” through parliament.²³ It is notable that he pursued this strategy largely in the interest of self-protection: Ghannouchi did not want Ben Ali-era figures to become enemies of Ennahda, especially given these figures’ rising political sway and persistent financial muscle. Ghannouchi wanted the party to survive and flourish in a democratic Tunisia.

One of his key strategies to achieve this was to build alliances of convenience with some political forces led by former regime officials and to accede to some of their priorities (such as the economic reconciliation bill). In late 2020, in his role as speaker of parliament, Ghannouchi even chose Mohamed Ghariani, the secretary general of Ben Ali’s ruling party at the time of the revolution, as an adviser and charged him with managing the dossier for “national reconciliation.”²⁴ Such rapprochement with figures from the dictatorship is, not surprisingly, highly controversial within Ennahda, among the grassroots, mid-level membership, and leadership ranks. Many activists fail to understand why they should work with former officials of a regime that viciously repressed their movement for decades and imprisoned and tortured them as well as their family members and friends.

Along with their hesitancy about his politics of reconciliation, many Ennahda members came to disapprove of Ghannouchi’s new strategic priorities for Ennahda as a party. In particular, they opposed his attempt to distance the party

from political Islam, for decades Ennahda’s main ideological reference. In May 2016, at the party’s tenth National Congress, Ghannouchi even went so far as to announce that Ennahda was officially leaving political Islam behind and would become instead a party of “Muslim Democrats,” separating politics from preaching.

“ Along with their hesitancy about his politics of reconciliation, many Ennahda members came to disapprove of Ghannouchi’s new strategic priorities for Ennahda as a party. ”

Again, Ghannouchi’s moves emerged at least partially out of an interest in self-preservation rather than ideological conviction. In 2013, the Egyptian military had ousted President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood—like Ennahda, brought to power in free elections following the 2011 Arab Spring—and subjected the Brotherhood to a massive and bloody crackdown. The post-coup Egyptian government, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, banned the group and designated it a terrorist organization. As political Islam became anathema in many Arab regimes and in some Western countries, Ghannouchi sought to protect Ennahda from the disastrous fate that had befallen the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

23. Maryline Dumas, “Hamma Hammami : « Nidaa Tounes et Ennahdha ne veulent pas d’élections libres »,” Middle East Eye, August 18, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/entretiens/hamma-hammami-nidaa-tounes-et-ennahdha-ne-veulent-pas-delections-libres>

24. See, for details, C.L., “Officiel: Mohamed Ghariani nouveau conseiller de Rached Ghannouchi,” Webdo, December 2, 2020, <https://www.webdo.tn/2020/12/02/officiel-mohamed-ghariani-nouveau-conseiller-de-rached-ghannouchi/>

by clearly distancing his party from that group and its more hard-line image.

Some Western governments deliberated following suit in designating the Brotherhood a terrorist organization,²⁵ and Western officials applauded Ennahda's transformation into a "post-Islamist" party. But within the party, the 2016 reforms—alongside Ghannouchi's politics of reconciliation with ex-Ben Ali officials—came to trigger an identity crisis. Under authoritarianism, Ennahda had been a beacon for Tunisians marginalized for their religious beliefs. Today, under democracy, a growing number of Ennahda supporters affirm that they no longer know what the party stands for. They charge that Ennahda has become a personal project for Ghannouchi, who succeeded in placing it at the heart of Tunisian politics but who increasingly lacks ideological vision and even popular appeal.²⁶

That Ghannouchi has managed to pursue his chosen policies and prerogatives despite the emergence of substantial internal opposition illustrates the huge influence he has come to yield over Ennahda. Ghannouchi draws his strength from multiple sources. He controls much of the party's finances and its international relations, often via decades-long networks forged while in exile.²⁷ He nominates all 28 members of the Executive Bureau, a powerful body reporting to him that decides upon the party's annual priorities and the budget for specific initiatives.²⁸ He also personally determines many party appointments and dismissals, especially for national-level positions.²⁹ Among other examples, Ghannouchi proposed Zied Ladhari as Ennahda's Secretary General in July 2016 after he liked a

speech that Ladhari delivered at a party event. Lacking an independent power base within the party, Ladhari ultimately resigned in frustration in November 2019. At times Ghannouchi even promoted trusted family members to leading positions. Most famously, he made Rafik Abdesslem, his son-in-law and back then a largely unknown figure, foreign minister in 2011. One of Ghannouchi's daughters, Yusra, served as Ennahda's international spokesperson, and his son Mouadh has had a key role in his presidential cabinet for years. Many more distant relatives hold important party posts.

“Ennahda's long tradition of internal unity and discipline, a practice developed under dictatorship to keep the movement together and protect it from regime manipulation and repression, has reinforced Ghannouchi's power.”

Crucially, however, Ghannouchi draws power from his paramount role within Ennahda. Indeed, many members refer to him simply as “the Sheikh,” which connotes a supreme leadership status. The widespread use of this honorific shows that, despite Ennahda's formally democratic structure and ideological underpinnings and its premise of equality among members, in-

25. For example, in 2014 the UK government launched an official inquiry into the Muslim Brotherhood, and in 2019 the Trump administration reportedly considered designating the group as a terrorist entity, but did not follow through. See Nicholas Watt, “David Cameron orders inquiry into activities of Muslim Brotherhood,” *The Guardian*, March 31, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/01/cameron-muslim-brotherhood-orders-inquiry-extremism>; and Steve Holland and Arshad Mohammed, “Trump weighs labeling Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group,” Reuters, April 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-muslimbrotherhood/trump-weighs-labeling-muslim-brotherhood-a-terrorist-group-idUSKCN1S6159>

26. Ennahda members, phone interviews with author, February 2020.

27. Ennahda members, interviews with author, Tunisia, between 2011 and 2016; see, for more details, Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*.

28. Note that the Shura Council has to formally approve the Executive Bureau.

29. Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*.



Foreign Minister Rafik Abdesslem, Ghannouchi's son-in-law, attends an Arab League meeting in Cairo in 2012. Photo: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Tunisie/Flickr

formal norms of authority and standing remain very important—including to Ghannouchi. In fact, Ghannouchi himself asks followers to call him *ustedh* (professor or teacher), which is a common way for Tunisians to address people respectfully, especially those with higher education qualifications (Ghannouchi has a degree in philosophy). To be sure, informal hierarchical relations feature prominently within other Tunisian political parties, whose leaders often enjoy great leverage to the extent that some manage internal affairs effectively unchecked.³⁰

However, Ennahda's long tradition of internal unity and discipline, a practice developed under the dictatorship to keep the movement together and protect it from regime manipulation and repression, has reinforced Ghannouchi's power. Indeed, this tradition of hierarchy and unity typically prompts members to follow Ghannouchi's lead, even if they disapprove of his policies, and to limit any criticism strictly within party ranks to avoid dissent from spilling into public view. At least, that had been the case until recently.

30. See, for details, Anne Wolf, "Can Secular Parties Lead the New Tunisia?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 30, 2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/04/30/can-secular-parties-lead-new-tunisia-pub-55438>

V. MOUNTING FRICTIONS

Since the 2016 Congress at which Ghannouchi famously announced the new policy of distancing Ennahda from political Islam, tensions within the party have become more pronounced. Though Ghannouchi succeeded in asserting his prerogatives at the event, some Ennahda members took the opportunity to signal their disapproval with his leadership and to attempt to curb his power. In particular, several senior figures, including Abdelhamid Jelassi and Abdellatif Mekki, suggested that Ghannouchi henceforth nominate only half of the Executive Bureau, with the Shura Council selecting the rest through direct elections.

It is notable that although a majority of the 1,200 members of the General Assembly—Ennahda's largest body, composed of national and regional representatives who convene at the party's quadrennial National Congress—reportedly voted in favor of this proposal, Ghannouchi rejected the vote on the basis that not all of the 1,200 members had taken part, a requirement never imposed previously. Ghannouchi reportedly threatened to resign over this initiative, a stark illustration of his resistance to any attempts at limiting his influence. “He did not wait for our legal committee to evaluate the matter,” objected one member of the General Assembly.³¹ This person elaborated that “few people expected the proposal to pass” but that many General Assembly figures had supported it all the same, aiming to signal to Ghannouchi their growing discontent with his policies and hegemonic status within the party. “We wanted him to know that there is an internal opposition,” this person said.³²

Though the Executive Bureau proposal was dropped, frictions continued to mount, finally bursting into the open in the run-up to the October 2019 legislative elections. In July 2019, the

Executive Bureau, acting at Ghannouchi's behest, decided to dismiss the heads of 30 of the party's 33 electoral lists, chosen by Ennahda's regional chapters, replacing them with candidates of their own choosing. As part of this change, for the first time, Ghannouchi himself announced he would run for parliament, replacing the original head of the Tunis 1 list. Given Ennahda's persistently strong performance in this district, the move virtually guaranteed him a seat in parliament. Once elected, Ghannouchi became speaker of parliament, arguably the third most important political post in the country after the president and the prime minister. The rising political ambition Ghannouchi evidenced here runs directly counter to his claims immediately after the revolution that he would not seek public office.

Ghannouchi's associates sought to justify the unprecedented “reshuffle” of the electoral lists by suggesting that the replaced figures were inadequate and not up to the job. However, they included prominent senior Ennahda figures and experienced politicians such as Samir Dilou, Mohamed Ben Salem, Abdelhamid Jelassi, and Abdellatif Mekki. These men are among the party's so-called great leaders, who devoted much of their lives to party activism and were imprisoned and tortured under the dictatorship. All have independent support bases and profess their unstinting devotion to Ennahda, however difficult the circumstances, and note that unlike Ghannouchi, many never sought exile. Their supporters maintain that Ghannouchi moved aside rival figures because he feared their influence and that he instead promoted loyalists dedicated to the “Sheikh” who would henceforth support his political aspirations.³³

After being replaced, Dilou—who spent ten years in prison under Ben Ali—declared on

31. Member of the Shura Council, phone interview with author, March 2021.

32. Member of the Shura Council, phone interview with author, March 2021.

33. Frida Dahmani, “Tunisie: Pourquoi Rached Ghannouchi a remanié les listes d'Ennahda pour les législatives,” *Jeune Afrique*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/804661/politique/tunisie-pourquoi-rached-ghannouchi-a-remanie-les-listes-dennahda-pour-les-legislatives/>



Samir Dilou participates in a meeting of the parliamentary finance committee in 2019. Photo: Samir Dilou Facebook page

Facebook that he was “considering leaving” Ennahda.³⁴ Other sidelined candidates published similar statements, underlining their stark disillusionment with the party leadership.³⁵ While resignations have been a common phenomenon within other Tunisian political parties, they had previously been rare within Ennahda.³⁶ The mere possibility that some key figures might leave sent shock waves through the party, whose members have developed deep personal bonds

through their shared experiences of imprisonment, exile, and underground activism.

Some Ennahda members contend that the Executive Bureau’s reshuffling of the electoral lists violated the party’s internal rules.³⁷ Certainly, for Ghannouchi to hold public office constitutes an infringement of the charter, according to which Ennahda’s president should not assume any state duty, so as to dedicate his efforts fully to the party and to prevent the accumulation of excessive power. Most Ennahda members take great pride in the party’s charter and other internal rules and principles that stipulate power-sharing and democratic decision-making, structures that most other parties in Tunisia are lacking. Some members also evoke Ghannouchi’s own writings to highlight the party’s democratic underpinnings. These followers have observed Ghannouchi’s blatant violation of the party charter—their internal constitution, as they commonly call it—with great uneasiness and distress.

If the mere threat of resignations like Samir Dilou’s had been unsettling for Ennahda, the actual resignations over the past year of a series of long-time Ennahda figures, protesting what they say is Ghannouchi’s increasingly autocratic leadership, signified a seismic shift. Most prominent was Abdelfattah Mourou, Ennahda’s co-founder and its presidential candidate in the 2019 elections, who left the party in May 2020, explaining in a statement that he sought to make space for “younger leaders” and that “politicians should not stay forever”³⁸—an upfront criticism of Ghannouchi.

34. See, for details, Samir Dilou’s statement published on his Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/samir.dilou.503/posts/2340501649532565>

35. See, for example, “Législatives: Rached Ghannouchi, tête de liste d’Ennahdha à Tunis 1,” Espace Manager, July 16, 2019, <https://www.espacemanager.com/legislatives-rached-ghannouchi-tete-de-liste-dennahdha-tunis-1.html>

36. See, for details, Wolf, “Can Secular Parties Lead?”

37. Dahmani, “Tunisie: Pourquoi Rached Ghannouchi.”

38. Iman Zayat, “Ghannouchi’s silence, Mourou’s exit mean trouble for Ennahda party,” *Arab Weekly*, May 29, 2020, <https://theArabweekly.com/ghannouchis-silence-mourous-exit-mean-trouble-ennahda-party>

VI. SPLITS AND DEMOBILIZATION

As international media coverage of Ennahda figures typically extends little beyond Ghannouchi, the dozens of senior leaders who have quit Ennahda in the past year have attracted limited attention outside Tunisia. But inside the country these leaders enjoy a substantial support base, especially in their regions of origin, where they are key to recruiting members and potential voters. One popular leader who left Ennahda in March 2020, Abdelhamid Jelassi, accused the party leadership in his resignation letter³⁹ of purposely postponing the eleventh National Congress (originally scheduled for May 2020) in order to build up yet more power, later placing the blame on Ghannouchi personally.⁴⁰ (It would have been difficult, though, to convene the gathering during the coronavirus pandemic, which was the stated reason for the delay.)

Even more notably, some of Ghannouchi's longtime loyalists have recently distanced themselves from him. In November, Lotfi Zitoun, a longstanding ally who was exiled with him in London, resigned from the Shura Council, also in protest at Ghannouchi's domination of internal party affairs. In an interview, Zitoun affirmed that his decision was "irrevocable" and that he had advised Ghannouchi "to take all necessary measures so that he does not find himself in the same situation as the former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali,"⁴¹ alluding to the latter's forced exile after opposition to his authoritarian rule mounted, including from within his own ranks. Zitoun further revealed that, although in 2016

Ennahda had formally separated politics and preaching, Ghannouchi allies were now using Islamic precepts to justify their attempt at prolonging his mandate.⁴²

“Notably, some of Ghannouchi's longtime loyalists have recently distanced themselves from him.”

Even more mid-level and grassroots figures have sought to distance themselves from Ennahda, sometimes officially by renouncing their membership cards, sometimes informally by retreating from party activism. Naturally, some internal dissatisfaction might be expected after a difficult decade during which, despite Ennahda's broad dominance, economic and political challenges for Tunisia and for the party have mounted, especially during the coronavirus pandemic: A May 2020 study found one in three Tunisians to be severely or very severely socioeconomically vulnerable, and their plight has likely only increased since then.⁴³ But Ghannouchi's domination of party affairs has clearly amplified such discontent. Many Ennahda members blame the party's challenges, at least in part, on the marginalization of figures who propose alternative party visions and policy prerogatives. They also denounce Ghannouchi's assumption of the par-

39. Balkis [pseud.], "Tunisie : Lettre de démission d'Abdelhamid Jelassi," Tunisie Numerique, March 5, 2020, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-lettre-de-demission-dabdelhamid-jelassi>

40. Amel al-Hilali, "Ennahda threatened with more resignations," Al-Monitor, March 17, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/03/tunisia-annahda-movement-leader-resignation-divisions.html>

41. Béchir Lakani, "Lotfi Zitoun dit craindre « un sort à la Ben Ali » pour Ghannouchi," L'Economiste Maghrebin, January 14, 2021, <https://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2021/01/14/lotfi-zitoun-dit-craindre-un-sort-a-la-ben-ali-pour-ghannouchi/>

42. "Resignation of key Ennahda leader reflects deep rift within the party," *Arab Weekly*, November 3, 2020, <https://thearabweekly.com/resignation-key-annahda-leader-reflects-deep-rift-within-party>

43. Azzam Mahjoub, "Pandémie COVID 19 en Tunisie: Les inégalités, les vulnérabilités à la pauvreté et au chômage," Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, May 13, 2020, <https://ftdes.net/pandemie-covid-19-en-tunisie-les-inegalites-les-vulnerabilites-a-la-pauvrete-et-au-chomage/>



Ghannouchi and Ennahda's then-presidential candidate Abdelfattah Mourou wave to supporters during a campaign rally in Tunis in September 2019. Mourou placed third, with only 12.9 percent of the vote. Photo: Abdelfattah Mourou Facebook page

liamentary speaker role, a position that limits the time he can devote to internal Ennahda affairs, charging him with putting his personal ambitions ahead of the party's interests. It is for these reasons that an increasing number of members hold Ghannouchi primarily responsible for the party's malaise.

Naturally, Ennahda's internal crisis, amid wider political and economic challenges, has affected its popular appeal. While it remains the strongest force in parliament, over the past decade Ennahda has shed a significant portion of its electoral base. In the 2019 elections, the party won one million fewer votes than it had in 2011, a significant drop in a country of 11.9 million people. Moreover, in a humiliating showing during the 2019 presidential elections, Ennahda's candidate Abdelfattah Mourou placed third, with just 12.9 percent of the vote; an independent figure, Kais Saïed, beat the second-place finisher, secular

candidate Nabil Karoui, in the run-off. Similarly, during the 2018 municipal elections, independent candidates polled ahead of Ennahda, securing 32.3 percent of the vote compared to Ennahda's 28.6 percent share. More recently and most troublingly for the party, a January 2021 poll showed Ennahda receiving the support of only 15.4 percent of likely voters; by contrast, 41 percent backed its main political rival, the Free Destourian Party,⁴⁴ a counterrevolutionary force that seeks to outlaw Ennahda and declare it a terrorist organization.

Paralleling the party's internal disarray, Ennahda—and particularly Ghannouchi—faces mounting pressure from other parties. Unlike Mourou, who is respected even among some secular circles, Ghannouchi remains a deeply controversial and divisive figure in Tunisia. His parliamentary role has subjected him more than ever to public scrutiny and left him increas-

44. "Sondage d'opinion: la grande percée du Parti destourien," Espace Manager, January 20, 2021, <https://www.espacemanager.com/sondage-dopinions-la-grande-percee-du-parti-destourien.html>



Officials begin counting ballots for Ghannouchi's parliamentary vote of confidence in 2020, which he narrowly survived. Photo: Assembly of the Representatives of the People Facebook page

ingly vulnerable to attacks from anti-Islamist and counterrevolutionary lawmakers, who now challenge him on a daily basis. They see his political ascent as confirmation of what they allege is Ghannouchi's double discourse and their long-held suspicions that he is pursuing a secret project to Islamicize Tunisia, and they devote all their attention to countering him. In July 2020 he only narrowly survived a parliamentary vote of confidence, with 45 percent of MPs voting against him. Some opposition parties are seeking again to signal the withdrawal of their confidence in him.⁴⁵

Within the broader public Ghannouchi has also increasingly shed popularity in recent years. In

a February 2021 opinion survey, 77 percent of respondents stated that they had no confidence in him,⁴⁶ making him the most widely mistrusted politician in Tunisia. This contrasts with the hope that many conservative Tunisians placed in Ghannouchi immediately after the revolution. Indeed, in a public opinion poll conducted only four months after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, 44 percent of respondents affirmed that they approved of Ghannouchi, compared to 37 percent who did not.⁴⁷ This means that Ghannouchi has lost a significant portion of his early support. But far from taking a backseat in the face of mounting internal and external criticism—or responding to some of it, for that matter—Ghannouchi is pursuing efforts to bolster his power base.

45. See, for more details, Wolf, "The Counterrevolution Gains Momentum."

46. Yasmine Arabi, "L'ère Ghannouchi: Le début de la fin," *Réalités*, February 20, 2021, <https://www.realites.com.tn/2021/02/lere-ghannouchi-le-debut-de-la-fin/>

47. International Republican Institute (IRI) and ELKA Consulting, "Survey of Tunisian Public Opinion, May 14-27, 2011," published on July 12, 2011, [https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2011%20July%2012%20Survey%20of%20Tunisian%20Public%20Opinion,%20May%2014-27,%202011\(1\).pdf](https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2011%20July%2012%20Survey%20of%20Tunisian%20Public%20Opinion,%20May%2014-27,%202011(1).pdf)

VII. THE GROUP OF 100

Most controversially among such efforts, over the past two years Ghannouchi associates have suggested prolonging his mandate as party president. According to Ennahda's charter, the president is elected by the General Assembly and his tenure is limited to two terms, a stipulation that was introduced during the eighth National Congress, in 2007, to prevent any leader from accumulating too much power. In fact, Ghannouchi—who has been Ennahda's consecutive president since 1992, is already serving his third term under the new stipulation—not his second, as his supporters commonly suggest. Indeed, his second term should have ended at the 2016 Congress, when party members should have elected a new leader. Following the revolution, however, Ennahda members decided to start recounting his terms beginning from the 2012 Congress, with the result that his presidency should have ended at the Congress that was supposed to take place in 2020.⁴⁸

In 2012, many supporters argued that they needed a fresh start and that Tunisia's new politics warranted this practice of recounting mandates—which, however, has never been officially approved by the party's legal committee. In the past, because of the party's different circumstances after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, Ennahda members evinced some flexibility when it came to the prolongation of Ghannouchi's presidency, even when this may have violated the charter. By 2020, Ghannouchi's close allies were proposing that the charter could be revised to enable him to run for a third term because "the movement still needs him."⁴⁹ (In reality, Ghannouchi would be running for his fourth consecutive mandate.) This proposal to extend

his tenure and re-do the charter does not sit well with some key Ennahda figures. "Ghannouchi's time is over," said one leading Ennahda member in an author interview⁵⁰—an illustration of the extent to which the tide has turned within the party. Other long-time allies such as Lotfi Zitoun have publicly distanced themselves from him.⁵¹ Such critiques—let alone their expression to party outsiders—would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

Ghannouchi—who has been Ennahda's consecutive president since 1992, is already serving his third term under the new stipulation—not his second, as his supporters commonly suggest.

Though internal opposition is mounting, it is important to note that Ghannouchi still enjoys the support of a close circle of loyalists who would do anything for their "Sheikh." Ghannouchi's long-time hegemonic position explains, at least to some extent, why some party followers believe that his remaining as president is essential to Ennahda and that the party "needs him." By dominating key party resources such as finance and external relations, Ghannouchi has undermined the rise of rival figures. Arguably, he kept them deliberately weak so as to thwart any challengers to his leadership and to foster

48. As mentioned, this meeting originally was supposed to be held in May 2020 but was postponed due to the pandemic; as of this writing, it is expected to be held in December 2021.

49. Zayat, "Ghannouchi's Silence."

50. Member of the Shura Council, phone interview with author, March 2021.

51. See, for details, Frida Dahmani, "Tunisie: pourquoi Lotfi Zitoun a claqué la porte d'Ennahda," *Jeune Afrique*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1070570/politique/tunisie-pourquoi-lotfi-zitoun-a-claque-la-porte-dennahda/>

the perception that no one but him is capable of running the movement.

The debate around Ennahda's leadership and Ghannouchi's role within the party was supposed to be settled during the National Congress that was to have taken place in 2020. Some of Ghannouchi's rivals have claimed that his allies took advantage of the pandemic to postpone any serious discussion about the party's leadership succession, potentially indefinitely.⁵² These rivals' growing anxiety about this prospect led a group of Ennahda figures to challenge Ghannouchi upfront. In September 2020, one hundred senior members signed a letter, leaked to the media, demanding that he not run again for the highest party post. The letter charged that "changing constitutions and laws to enable presidents and rulers to continue to remain in power is an act associated with tyrannies and single-person rule."⁵³ The signatories went on to argue that Ghannouchi remaining as party leader beyond his two-term mandate would "erode the movement's credibility" and return Tunisia to a "presidency for life" situation, which is "associated with the pre-revolutionary regime."⁵⁴ They also called upon Ghannouchi to make himself a "living model in the exercise of democracy," which they deemed necessary for the "revival of ideas and programs" within Ennahda.⁵⁵

Crucially, the Group of 100 consists of well-known Ennahda officials, including many of the party's so-called great leaders who have significant followings. Among the signatories are members of parliament and the Shura Council, Ennahda's founding members, and regional leaders. Remarkably, several officials in Ghannouchi's own Executive Bureau even signed the



Group of 100 member Nouredine Arbaoui casts his vote in the 2019 election for parliamentary speaker, won by Ghannouchi. Photo: Nouredine Arbaoui Facebook page

letter, among them the president of its Political Bureau, Nouredine Arbaoui.⁵⁶ This underlines the fact that Ghannouchi is gradually losing the support of some figures within his own circle—though it must be noted that not all of his associates who disapprove of his hegemonic position dare to say so publicly, let alone sign a letter demanding he not run again for the presidency.

52. Ennahda members, phone interviews with author, November 2020 and March 2021.

53. Author copy of the letter, which is entitled "The Democracy of al-Nahda: Between the Risks of Extension and the Opportunities of Rotation of Power" and dated September 15, 2020.

54. Author copy of letter, "The Democracy of al-Nahda."

55. Author copy of letter, "The Democracy of al-Nahda."

56. For a complete list of the signatories, see Mayara, "Tunisie: La liste des 100 dirigeants d'Ennahdha ayant appelé Ghannouchi à ne pas se présenter pour un nouveau mandat," Tunisie Numerique, September 16, 2020, <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-la-liste-des-100-dirigeants-dennahdha-ayant-appelle-ghannouchi-a-ne-pas-se-prenter-pour-un-nouveau-mandat/>

VIII. A PRESIDENT FOR LIFE?

Immediately following the Group of 100 statement, Ghannouchi seemingly wrote (but did not sign) a response letter, with a confrontational tone that contrasted with his typically conciliatory outward demeanor.⁵⁷ In his letter, Ghannouchi likened the party dissidents to coup plotters,⁵⁸ a stark attempt to undermine and discredit his internal challengers. Ghannouchi went on to argue that leadership rotation is not, in fact, a prerequisite for internal party democracy, contending that some “rare leaders” who enjoy “radiance both inside and outside of countries” have remained at the helm of parties for decades, including in the West. Ghannouchi suggested that most “parties search for these rare leaders,” among whose ranks he counts himself. He further argued that the Group of 100 was wrong to draw a parallel between presidents-for-life in dictatorships and these “great leaders” of parties in democratic contexts.⁵⁹

In reality, however, changing the rules to prolong a party presidency—in violation of term limits and despite internal opposition—is a deeply authoritarian practice. It is particularly damaging to Ennahda, whose democratic institutional foundations, ideological outlook, and participation in multiparty politics have led many observers to view the party as a model in a region home to many of the world’s most brutal and long-lasting dictatorships.

Following Ghannouchi’s response letter, members of the Group of 100 charged that they were

“insulted and slandered” by his supporters, including on social media.⁶⁰ But instead of backtracking, they published another joint letter the following month reiterating their demands.⁶¹

“Ghannouchi likened the party dissidents to coup plotters, a stark attempt to undermine and discredit his internal challengers.”

Ghannouchi then changed his strategy. He now suggests that the current party frictions are evidence that Ennahda is in fact demonstrating internal democracy, in that dissenting figures are free to express their opinions, though of course, respect for democratic practices would also imply that he takes the concerns of his adversaries seriously and, crucially, that he respects the party charter. Moreover, in the new Executive Bureau that Ghannouchi nominated in January 2021, he included yet again certain members of the Group of 100,⁶² though this outwardly reconciliatory gesture may, in fact, be a divide-and-rule strategy aimed ultimately at shoring up his power base.

Ghannouchi has since stated in televised interviews that he will respect Ennahda’s internal

57. Larbi Sadiki, “Intra-Party Democracy in Tunisia’s Ennahda: Ghannouchi and the Pitfalls of ‘Charismatic’ Leadership,” Middle East Institute, November 25, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/intra-party-democracy-tunisia-ennahda-ghannouchi-and-pitfalls-charismatic-leadership>

58. Author copy of Ghannouchi’s response letter.

59. Author copy of Ghannouchi’s response letter.

60. Author copy of the Group of 100’s second letter, dated October 10, 2020.

61. Author copy of the Group of 100’s second letter, dated October 10, 2020.

62. See also, for details, Camille Lafrance, “Tunisie: qui sont les nouveaux cadres d’Ennahdha ?” *Jeune Afrique*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1109700/politique/tunisie-qui-sont-les-nouveaux-cadres-dennahdha/>



A screenshot from Ghannouchi's November 2020 Al Jazeera interview with Lotfi Hajji, during which he claimed that he would not run for Ennahda's presidency again while also suggesting that all other leadership positions in the party should have term limits.

laws.⁶³ Importantly, in a November 2020 interview with Al Jazeera, he affirmed, “I have no intention. . . to run again for [the party’s presidency], in respect for the law and in respect for the will of my brothers.”⁶⁴ But in the same interview, Ghannouchi proposed that if the presidency is limited to two consecutive mandates, then all other leadership positions in the party should also have term limits⁶⁵—although no other officials enjoy nearly as much power as he does. Some Ennahda members interpreted this proposal as

a threat that they might lose their positions if they opposed another Ghannouchi presidential term. They saw it as a confirmation of their long-held suspicions that Ghannouchi will not cede his leadership position voluntarily. Some worry that he may still try to change the party rules to extend his tenure or refuse to recognize a vote challenging his powerbase. They cite as a precedent the 2016 National Congress, when Ghannouchi declined to accept the attendees’ vote that half of his Executive Bureau be elected.⁶⁶

63. See, for example, Ghannouchi’s interview on Al Jazeera, November 11, 2020, published on the Ennahda Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Nahda.Tunisia/videos/207403374220550>

64. Ghannouchi Al Jazeera interview.

65. Ghannouchi Al Jazeera interview.

66. Member of the Shura Council, phone interview with author, March 2021.

IX. CONCLUSION

There are four main scenarios for Ennahda's future. In the first scenario, Ghannouchi would remain party president, either by changing the internal charter or by blatantly violating it. This scenario—plausible as it is in light of Ghannouchi's attempts to remain at the helm of the party—would certainly trigger mass resignations, with rival leaders likely to establish a competing party. A second scenario would see Ghannouchi stepping down, accepting an honorary position in Ennahda, and supporting the candidacy of a trusted ally as his successor. So far, however, he has refused to consider such a compromise outcome. Third, Ghannouchi would agree to cede the party presidency in exchange for running as Ennahda's candidate in the 2024 presidential elections. Ghannouchi has, indeed, reportedly already voiced such presidential ambitions.⁶⁷

Lastly, Ennahda may still see a complete leadership change and renewal. While this scenario is unlikely in the short term, it is clear that Ghannouchi, at age 79, will not be able to hold onto power forever. The question is whether, in the meantime, the party will manage to put an end to its internal predicaments or risk increasing

“Ghannouchi—who has led Ennahda through so many challenges over the past decades—seems oblivious to the fact that his own actions are behind the most severe crisis the party has ever seen.”

fracturing and political decline. So far, Ghannouchi—who has led Ennahda through so many challenges over the past decades—seems oblivious to the fact that his own actions are behind the most severe crisis the party has ever seen. In fact, Ghannouchi, the long-haired “democrat within Islamism,” has himself become the true test of Ennahda's commitment to internal party democracy. If the party survives, it will only be because its own institutional foundations prevail over Ghannouchi's personal ambitions.

67. Author copy of the Group of 100's second letter, dated October 10, 2020.

