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Tunisia:  
Understanding Conflict 2012  
Conflict Management Program  
Student Field Trip to Tunisia

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## List of Acronyms

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi / Justice and Development Party
ASSF	Applied Social Sciences Forum
ATED	Association Tunisienne pour le Développement et l'Education / Tunisian Association for Development and Education
ATFD	Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates / Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
ATI	Agence Tunisienne d'Internet / Tunisian Internet Agency
CEMAT	Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis / Centre for Maghreb Studies in Tunis
CPR	Congrès Pour la République / Congress for the Republic
CPS	Code of Personal Status
FDTL	Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés / Democratic Forum for Work and Liberties – Ettakatol Party
FSB	Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti / Federal Security Service
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ISIE	Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Elections / High Independent Authority for Elections
LTDH	Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme / Tunisian League for Human Rights
MCC	Millenium Challenge Corporation
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MERC	Middle East Research Competition Program
MTI	Mouvement de Tendence Islamique / Islamic Tendency Movement
NCA	National Constituent Assembly
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OTI	Office of Transition Initiative
PDM	Pôle Démocratique Moderniste / Modernist Democratic Pole
POMED	Project on Middle East Democracy

PDP	Parti Démocrate Progressiste / Progressist Democratic Party
PSD	Parti Socialiste Destourien / Destourian Socialist Party
RCD	Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique / Democratic Constitutional Rally
SAVAK	Sāzemān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar / National Intelligence and Security Organization
UGTT	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail / General Union of Tunisian Workers
UNFT	Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes / National Union of Tunisian Women
UPL	Union Patriotique Libre / Free Patriotic Union
UTICA	Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat / Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts
UTT	Union des Travailleurs Tunisiens / Union of Tunisian Workers





# Introduction: Tunisia Report

## I. William Zartman

The world of 2011 was shaken by an extraordinary series of events in the Arab World, a domino effect of socially integrated and secular mass uprisings against characteristically corrupt, arrogant and inefficient governments. In a region marked by a disillusioned populace longing for ideology, these *intifadat* are neither class conflicts nor religious revolts, but popular spontaneous disorderly “democratistic” outbursts. Each country has its own evolution of events, both in the development of the *intifada* itself and in the play out of its consequences. But the wave of events that swept the Arab World and has left neighboring country carefully watching began in Tunisia.

For this reason, the seventh SAIS Conflict Management Program’s Annual Fieldtrip<sup>1</sup> to a Conflict Area chose Tunisia for its visit, on 22-29 January 2012, not long after Tunisia’s first free and fair competitive elections and in the midst of the new Constituent Assembly’s opening debates on a new constitution. The group of 17 students and two faculty members interviewed close to 50 Tunisians through 27 meetings, from the Deputy Prime Minister for relations with the Constituent Assembly to youth leaders, and including sessions with four students groups, including a Nahdha Youth group, and a group of young workers and professionals, and spent a day of interviews in Kairouan in addition to the longer stay in Tunis<sup>2</sup>.

The collective event of the Arab Spring is of monumental significance. For long the Arab populations gave irrefutable evidence to support their critics’ contentions that “Arabs cannot be democrats,” and that the typical authoritarian Arab ruler could only be removed by another typically authoritarian Arab ruler. The Arab Spring has the potential to reverse both judgments. Even if some of the individual cases do not arrive at the

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<sup>1</sup> Mindanao, January 2011; Kosovo, January 2010; Cyprus, January 2009; Northern Ireland, January 2008; Haiti, January 2006 and January 2007.

Reports from previous Field Trips are available at <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/academics/functional-studies/conflict-management/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> A list of interviewees is appended.

proposed goal (as in the previous event of similar significance, the post-1993 Sovereign National Conference in 12 African states), a few Arab states' finishing the race would sustain its validity. Here too Tunisia stands out, at the (current) end as well as at the beginning of the race: Its progress to date has been exemplary, even assuming all the vagaries of normal politics.

Nothing in the statistics indicates that the *intifadat* would begin in Tunisia. Tunisia has its recently declining economic figures, its predatory privatization, its youth bulge, its aging and constitution-tampering dictator, its corrupt and arrogant government, and its precursor strikes and demonstrations, but none of this in a quantity that would single it out from its neighbors. It seems that in the midst of this common situation, the Tunisians simply had enough—*ras le bol*—as they say in the French idiom, and the well publicized self-immolation of a typical underemployed, insulted youth on 17 December 2010 made the bowl overflow.

Tunisia had its experience of popular explosions—in the mid-1950s leading to independence in 1956, in 1978 over government attempts to control the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), in 1984 over structural adjustment bread price rises and conspicuous consumption—and its Islamist-associated violence crushed by the regimes of founding Leader Habib Bourguiba and his successor who ousted him in 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The resulting quarter-century of repressive corruption may not have been the worst of the Arab World, but it was enough to set off a popular reaction that swept the country from the rural interior to the urban coast and gave an inspiration to similar populations in Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and, better contained, in Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait.

In its *intifada*, however, Tunisia has other characteristics that set it on its exemplary path. First was a tradition of constitutionalism as the first Arab country to have its own constitution, in 1861. Second, was a group of politicians who were willing to negotiate themselves out of power after the autocrat had left, providing gradual, constitutional steps to a new order. Third, was a small, apolitical army dedicated to external security alone and refusing orders to shoot on its own populace. And fourth was

a moderate Islamist movement, the Renaissance (Nahdha), whose leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, underwent a learning experience during two decades of exile in England.

The result was a gradual replacement of the Old Order figures, an interim regime that prepared elections for a Constituent Assembly on 23 October 2011. Barely half of the population voted and the contest swung primarily on a reaffirmation of Tunisian identity as a Muslim Arab nation, as the constitutions have stated. The ensuing government based on the elections was an ungainly coalition of Nahdha, the leader, and the second and fourth largest, secular parties who agreed to work with the religious movement. Work proceeds on governance and the constitution, at the same time, heading toward a new election a year from the first, when the work of the interval and the government parties will be judged.

The process is democratic, despite the small voter turnout, and the progress is regular, despite the political squabbles along the way. Nonetheless, deeper questions remain for Tunisia. The deepest concerns the nature of Tunisian identity, which the October 2011 vote has only opened, not closed. Tunisians know they are Tunisians, and as Tunisians are Arab and Muslim, but they are divided on whether this means that they have the right to be Arab and Muslim (and anything else) or that they must tailor their modernity to an Arabo-Muslim version. Their heritage is one of educated modernity, not of limiting traditionalism (as distinguished from many specific traditions that make them Tunisian), but they are divided on whether modernity relegates religion to social custom or whether it is subject to a religious interpretation.

Their liberation from authoritarian rule is fringed with extremes on either side, which pull away from a middle ground synthesis of the competing natures. Ennahdha is insistently moderate in the words of its spokesmen, but its moderation covers many strains within its membership and even leadership, and those strains feed the fears of its opponents. The next testing ground of Tunisian democracy comes with the 2012 elections for a parliament under a new constitution, elements all of which contain further strains. But that is democracy, and Tunisia has moved further along the path of its promise than any of its companions in the Arab Spring. In the end and along the way,

democracy is a continual testing process. May Tunisia continue to show the way for the rest of the Arab World, and the watching world outside.



## **Part I: Revolution and Identity**



# **What's in a Revolution? The timing of the Tunisian Revolution**

**Gary Decker**

On 17 December 2010 a young man selling produce from a cart in Sidi Bouzid was harassed by a police officer for not having the proper government permit to sell in public. With his produce confiscated and no audience given when he went to the government to seek redress, this young man made a decision that still echoes across the Arab World and is widely considered the spark of what would later come to be known as the “Arab Spring.” Mohamed Bouazizi with his final act of protest and defiance, self-immolation, gave a face to the unacceptable situation in Tunisia; something needed to change.

The period between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011, the day Dictator-President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled the country, was a time of systematic repression of peaceful protests and fleeting efforts of an oppressive regime to cling to power. The security apparatus in the country, in this case the extensive police network of Ben Ali, violently stifled the voice of the Tunisian people and set up a broader clash between security forces and the crescendo of calls of “enough!” and “dégage!” translating from the French roughly to “get out.” As the voices of the Tunisian people grew louder and the will to make a change galvanized, first in the interior of the country and then spreading to the youth and middle class of the capital of Tunis, this pervasive security apparatus was simply no match for this groundswell. What is known as the Tunisian Revolution or “Jasmine Revolution” did in 28 days what many have tried to do for a generation, namely topple a dictatorship with over two decades in power. However, as the world continues to celebrate this triumph of the people over the power of repression and watches in anticipation as the Tunisian people remake their country in their own image, it is appropriate to pause and to reflect upon this successful revolution and ask the question: What's in a revolution? Why did the Tunisian Revolution take place when it did? What was special about December 2010 and January 2011 that made this historic event possible?

These are the questions to be explored in this paper. It will be evident that many of the factors leading to the revolution were not new problems. Many of the issues

existed for years prior to December 2010, and the following exploration will use the words and ideas of the Tunisian people themselves to explore these questions and the timing of the revolution. The following information is taken from discussions and interviews conducted in Tunisia in January 2012 on the SAIS fieldtrip.

### **Information**

In this mostly peaceful revolution, information was the weapon that brought down a long-standing and oppressive regime. One of the words uttered most frequently was “Facebook.” The same social media site that is considered one of the biggest time-wasters in the West became an irreplaceable tool for the youth of Tunisia to begin to orchestrate the revolution. As events unfolded and the oppression by the police intensified, youth in Tunisia took to Facebook to talk about the government crackdown, but, more importantly, pictures and video were posted that brought the struggle to life. The design of Facebook allows for users to share information with their social network, and this function allowed those closest to the action to distribute compelling information to let others know what was happening.

One of the most powerful levers for an authoritarian government to keep control of the people is to stifle the exchange of information. Indeed, the Ben Ali regime had done a thorough job of slowing or eliminating the exchange of information in the past when there had been civil unrest or violence by the police against Tunisian citizens. Over time, the Ben Ali regime disabled websites like Twitter, YouTube, Mega Upload, and other sites designed to share videos, pictures and information. However, with the sole exception of a few days, the Ben Ali regime never disabled access to Facebook. The decision was made that shutting down Facebook would only serve to foment more opposition from young people and create further instability. As the numbers of Tunisians on Facebook swelled from 2008 onwards, the power of this tool grew with every new account. The sharing of information on sites like Facebook accelerated as more people joined, and there are links between an increasing number of Tunisians who are now able to see other people’s posted content as well as pass that content, pictures and videos, on to others within their own social network. In addition, since Facebook is certainly not

limited to Tunisia, these vivid depictions of the crackdown in Tunisia were available for the world to see and for the world to take notice, and they did.

Another important factor in the flow of information surrounding the revolution was the access to satellite television throughout Tunisia. The aforementioned flow of information beyond the borders of Tunisia created a feed-back loop where information from Facebook—pictures, video, and stories from bloggers, activists, and ordinary citizens—was picked up by international news outlets, like Al Jazeera and TV24 broadcasting out of France. As these news outlets collected information from social media and began to broadcast this content, not only did an increasing number of people around the world take notice of what was happening but also did the people within Tunisia, from Sidi Bouzid to Sidi Bou Said, who, with access to satellite television in their homes or in cafes saw the crackdown in vivid detail. The uprising was now garnering internal and external attention and the crumbling regime was powerless to arrest the spread of this damning information. The powerful combination of Facebook and satellite television broadcasts allowed a freer flow of information, both within Tunisia and to the broader international public, and created the aforementioned feed-back loop that allowed for the revolution to gain the critical mass necessary to overthrow the Ben Ali regime.

### **Unemployment and Poverty**

Unemployment and poverty are common issues in the developing world and Tunisia is no different. However, the nature of unemployment within Tunisia grew into one of the acute factors that led to the start of the revolution. Unanimously considered a revolution finding its genesis in the youth of Tunisia, unemployment amongst the youth became a major fuel for the fire of revolution. Hampered by the broader international financial crisis as well as structural issues, the Tunisian economy was hurting. In 2010 unemployment continued to climb and one of the hardest hit portions of the work force was the youth. Eight hundred thousand unemployed out of a population of 10 million, with what is considered a highly educated workforce, simply became unacceptable. Furthermore, approximately 200,000 of these unemployed were youth holding university

degrees. With such a large number of unemployed yet educated youth, having dim prospects for future employment as the global economy was recovering from a massive financial crisis, was a recipe for change. In fact, as the employment situation worsened for these youth it became clear that the social contract in Tunisia was fraying rapidly. The appetite for centralized control of government, indeed dictatorship, waned as the promise of jobs and an egalitarian society diminished. The country of Bourguiba became the country of Ben Ali and this leader had failed to deliver on promises that kept the system intact and the people willing to surrender political freedoms. The implosion of this social contract was spurred on in no small part by the dissatisfaction of these youth who had known no other ruler than Ben Ali but knew that his time needed to be over if they were going to take their future back.

Part and parcel of any discussion of unemployment in Tunisia is the issue of poverty. Pervasive in the language of the Tunisians interviewed was the term the “Two Tunisias.” This term is meant to signify the economic and social divide between those in the interior and those on the long coast of this North African nation. Poverty is widespread in the interior of Tunisia, hampered by lack of access to infrastructure and education and the geographic restrictions that often exist with the coastal region of nations built on trade and tourism. One of the main contributors to the revolution, to Bouazizi’s act of rebellion, was the poverty and inequality experienced by many in the interior of Tunisia and the dignity lost as their way of life fell further and further away from being able to provide for self and family. In fact, nine out of every ten jobs created in Tunisia was created on the coast, representing an ever-widening gulf between interior and coast: the revolution began in the interior and spread to the coast. The seeds of revolution in the interior were characterized by the idea that the way of living in many parts of Tunisia had come to resemble not really living at all. Indeed, there were those that thought death was preferable to the pre-revolution situation and when death becomes a viable alternative, the fear of that fate begins to dissolve. This phenomenon was experienced in Tunisia. “Political change comes before social change,” was how Mr. Rachid Ghannouchi characterized the situation and the feeling of the people around the time of the revolution (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). It was time to cast off the

political system before any of the social and economic changes that needed to take place could occur and a corrupt and violent regime was the target.

### **Corruption and Political Violence**

It goes without saying that centralized power corrupts, indeed “absolute power corrupts absolutely,” and the Ben Ali regime was no different. Aside from the usual yet pervasive corruption within the government, there was a bigger source of corruption and public discontent than is usually considered standard practice in a dictatorship: the actions of the family of Ben Ali’s wife, Leila Ben Ali and the Trabelsi family. The corruption of Mrs. Ben Ali and her family came to characterize the bankruptcy of the regime and the loss of any and all legitimacy for Ben Ali to continue to reign. In what is widely considered an egalitarian society, the blatant corruption of the first family—including massive accumulation of wealth, business seizures and extortion of the highest order—could not be reconciled with the tough conditions faced by those in the rest of the country. The actions of the Trabelsi family hindered economic growth and job creation in Tunisia and sent a clear message to businesses around the world, “If you are going to invest or do business in Tunisia, our cut comes first.” The aforementioned destructive behavior of the first family, which only accelerated and became more brazen over time, simply could not stand, and again the social contract of Tunisia crumbled further. The image of the Trabelsi’s plundering the businesses of Tunisia and scaring away foreign investment could not be united with the narrative of Bouazizi and his produce cart. This narrative, a man that was driven to self-immolate in the name of dignity, juxtaposed with a regime and family guilty of wanton corruption was unacceptable.

In addition to this corruption, there was corruption of a different sort: political violence. This corruption—of the security forces against the people of Tunisia—finds no stronger example than the story of Gafsa in 2008. This city in the interior of Tunisia experienced a major incident in 2008 which saw a brutal police crackdown and fatalities as the people protested the unfair handling they were shown by receiving unfair wages and treatment. Gafsa, known singularly for its phosphate industry, was mentioned several times in Tunis as the “real” genesis of the revolution. It was the brutal police

crackdown in Gafsa on peaceful protesters that lit the fuse of hatred by the people toward the police and the Ben Ali regime as their commander. This rage was stifled, for a time, by the regime through the thorough suppression of information and a noticeably increased security presence. However, this rage could and would only be stymied temporarily. Incidents like those in Gafsa were repeated as the Ben Ali regime came to a close and the story of Gafsa gained wider attention during the major moments late in the revolution as a caricature of what needed to change.

### **Conclusion**

Whenever there is turmoil, conflict, and in rare cases a revolution, it is important to understand the conflict and speak with people on the ground that have experienced these changes. The unique opportunity to visit Tunisia, a nation undergoing a historic transition, provides a platform to explore the causes of the revolution in hopes that lessons learned can help the people of Tunisia as they transition, but also that these lessons can be applied to other conflict scenarios. However, Tunisia is a unique case in the Arab World—known for being moderate—and in discussions before and after the experience on the ground, there was a familiar refrain: “If it works in Tunisia it can be a model for the Arab World. If it doesn’t work in Tunisia it will not work anywhere else.” This transition to democracy will include epic conversations pertinent to the whole of the Arab World including those about: the compatibility of Islam and democracy; the definition of terms like moderate and secular; the construction of a plural society with minority protections, capacity and institution building; and several other watershed conversations. Lastly, it must be clearly understood that a revolution is not a moment but a process, and for the Tunisian people this process has only just begun.

### **The Future**

Given the above mosaic provided by political officials, party leaders, academics, civil society members, youth, and even a former high-ranking member of the Ben Ali regime, what can be learned from the Tunisian experience? What can the leadership of a budding democracy in Tunisia do to address some of the causes of the desperate plight and



discontent of so many in Tunisia which led to the revolution? How can the Tunisian and egalitarian social contract be rebuilt to reflect the popular will?

Forthcoming democratically elected governments in Tunisia will have formidable challenges to address and the patience of the people is short. These challenges include addressing: a new constitution, youth unemployment, regional imbalances leading to poverty, weak institutions to fight corruption, definitions of modernity, secularism, and what it means to be a moderate society, and lastly, reintegration of members of the former regime and the police state apparatus. Very recently we have seen an important development toward a promising future in Tunisia, namely the decision by the Constituent Assembly to retain the provision from the previous constitution that makes Islam the official religion of the state, but the new constitution will stop short of naming *Shari'a* the force behind Tunisian law. This type of development is a glimmer of hope as Tunisia remakes the state through a new constitution and keeps the identity of the nation intact while beginning to define what it means to be a Muslim and democratic state. This strong step forward by the Constituent Assembly shows resolve and a glimpse of the promise of the revolution. However, the Assembly is in charge of making the rules by which the new Tunisia will be governed; it is up to the people of Tunisia to elect those willing and able to address the aforementioned challenges and access the incredible power of the Tunisian people.



# Defining the Uprising

Malikat Rufai

The uprising in Tunisia surprised the international community, sparking similar occurrences in other Arab nations in a domino-effect that became known as the “Arab Spring.” The events were called “revolutions” by most, but scholars and citizens alike have questioned the use of the word and its implications. This chapter will analyze that debate and conclude that the designation of revolution is a noun used to describe revolutionary civil disobedience in Tunisia. Having made that distinction, we will discuss the causes of the movement and the various concerns that have followed during the period of transition. Our concluding question is whether or not the new government is addressing those concerns, and if not, what are some solutions it might employ to avoid stagnation and continue on the path towards complete revolution.

## Tunisia, a Revolution?

The question of whether the events that led to the ousting of Ben Ali qualify as a revolution is certainly a debatable topic. Revolution is defined as “a fundamental change in political organization; especially the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed.” (*Dictionary.com Unabridged*) Tunisian scholars and leaders were somewhat divided on this question. Ben Ezzine Mustapha, Founder and Treasurer of “I Watch” believes “you can’t call something a revolution when you only remove the head of state but don’t change the structure” (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). He believes revolution is ongoing, and thus far there has been no significant change in the political system or style of government, but that in Tunisia it began January 14, 2011.

Daniel Foss and Ralph Larkin (1986), social movement theorists, argue that “social movements disrupt the form of social reproduction, even if temporarily; that they entail, for their adherents, a reinterpretation of social reality; and that they almost always propose a transformation of social relations and of ‘human nature.’” When examining the events in Tunisia, this interpretation is appropriate because it addresses the “social

reality,” signified by Tunisian perception. Interviews in Tunisia revealed that most people considered the most significant post-January 14, 2011 change to be the manner in which people interacted with others and saw themselves. Khadijah Arfaoui of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women believes “revolution” is not a misnomer. She says that the real revolution was sociological because people’s behavior changed. They talk to each other, speak out and are unafraid. “Havoc has occurred. People are speaking where they’ve never spoken before. The first revolution was from colonialism...this is the second.” (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012).

Ultimately, the existence of a revolution cannot be determined before the events have reached a conclusion, which has not yet occurred in Tunisia as critical steps like the writing of the new constitution are incomplete. In this context, one can conduct a prospective analysis of events and take into consideration the internal, psychological changes in the people which have reportedly already taken place and the perception that this is a revolution by Arfaoui and other Tunisians. The perception that this is a revolution can be attributed to the idea that the *ancien regime* was a democracy only in name, and that Tunisia is now making a political transition to real democracy. For the Tunisian people, it seems that a revolution exists merely because the majority agrees that it does, and they are qualitatively changed by the events.

There are implications associated with designating the events as a revolution. The implicit understanding of revolution is that a total and lasting change has occurred, which may lead to the premature perception that there is no more work to be done. This would be detrimental to Tunisia because, though progress has been made, many of the root issues which began the movement have yet to be resolved.

For the purposes of this work, therefore, because the dust has yet to settle, it would be premature to make a claim for or against the designation of “revolution” without making assumptions about how the events will conclude. Therefore a more accurate classification would be civil disobedience, and for the purposes of consistency, this paper will refer to the events as “the movement.”

## **Civil Disobedience**

*“Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”* (Thoreau, 1849)

The concept of civil disobedience was first explored by Henry David Thoreau in his acclaimed 1849 essay. Wherever unjust government encroaches upon the rights of its population and fails to fulfill its social contract, proponents of civil disobedience believe it necessary to object through generally non-violent means of protest.

Tunisians, after 23 years of dictatorship, could more than identify the broken threads of the social contract. “Justice is the foundation of social development...injustice drives disorder...There is no leader without force [exemplified by] the National Guard, the army, etc. There is no force without finance, and no finance without a population. There is no population without justice, and no justice without the leader” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). Here Retired Colonel Mohamed Salah Hedri discussed what he understood to be the circle of a functional society with a valid social contract. His statements validate Thoreau’s argument that a country’s government can be rendered impotent without the cooperation of its citizens (1849).

Civil disobedience relies on the realization of power on the part of the citizens, and Tunisians harnessed that power *en masse* in order to bring about change. Harry Prosch goes further in his 1967 study of civil disobedience, by drawing a distinction between revolutionary and non-revolutionary civil disobedience, invoking the work of John Locke. According to Prosch, non-revolutionary civil disobedience is a simple, morally-driven disobedience of laws aimed towards changing those which are seen as unjust. Revolutionary civil disobedience however, is an active attempt to overthrow a government, as seen in Tunisia, which takes place when the government loses legitimacy in the eyes of the people (Prosch, 1967, 176-92).

Locke regards revolution as a last resort following a series of abuses, but makes it clear that when leaders forfeit their right to rule, “supreme power reverts to the society” (Locke and Carpenter, 1924). The loss of legitimacy of the government in this case was obvious because even after Ben Ali fled, the Tunisian mentality was “we got rid of the dictator, let’s get rid of the dictatorship” (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). This

mantra sparked the Kasbah sit-ins rejecting the government and calling for the turning over of a new leaf—the writing of a new constitution.

### **The Broken Social Contract**

Following independence from the French, Tunisia focused on investment in education. Former President Habib Bourguiba saw education as the best way to improve the quality of life for Tunisians, coupled with economic liberalization.<sup>3</sup> These were the tenants of the social contract in his view. Former President Ben Ali adopted these same goals in public, but as Tunisians know, his actual commitment to education and economic prosperity for citizens was less than genuine.

The Tunisian policy of free education to all citizens became a liability, as the influx of high school students into universities yielded graduates in numbers outweighing their demand. In 1994 the percentage of Tunisians with university degrees was 3.8%, rising to 23.3% in 2010 (SAIS Group Meeting with a former Ben Ali Minister, 25 January 2012). In a country which formerly produced highly demanded skilled professionals exported world-wide, the educational system became a burden. Additionally, because university schooling was reduced from four years to three, most Tunisian diplomas were not recognized by many international schools, limiting their opportunities for further education and advancement (Personal Interview with Siwar Aouadi, 28 January 2012). According to this former government official, of 18% officially unemployed Tunisians, 33% are university graduates.

Business suffered as well, as entrepreneurial activities were limited by a web of complex pay offs to the Ben Ali family and seizing of company ownership. The extent of the economic despair and lack of opportunity was pervasive, but the effects were exacerbated in the interior region of the country, which was consistently cramped by a lack of infrastructure and underdevelopment. In a country where 90% of citizens living on the coast own ovens compared to 18% of those in the interior, as a former government official notes, it is as if there are two Tunisias: one rich and one poor. Very little was

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<sup>3</sup> “Reflections on Bouazizi and Tunisia’s Social Contract.” Web log post. *Kefteji, A Delicious Mix of Tunisian Politics, Media and Culture*. Word Press, 16 December 2011. Accessed 28 January 2012.

being done under Ben Ali to alleviate the abject poverty specific to the interior, as for every ten jobs created, nine were created along the coast, and one in the interior. Based on these circumstances, it is not surprising that the movement began in the poorest areas of the interior region and was driven by the youth (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

Most spectators to the movement will cite the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi as the cause of the uprising. Bouazizi, a 26 year old street vendor, was humiliated by local officials and had his produce confiscated, the only means by which he could support his family. Laryssa Chommiak explains that frustrated by the injustice and his lack of options, he set himself aflame in front of the mayor's office in Sidi Bouzid. Bouazizi represented the desperation of the Tunisian people, while emphasizing Ben Ali's lack of concern for the human condition and the broken social contract of his twenty-three year dictatorship. His stunning act of protest served as a catalyst for others to take up his cause, but it was not the only source of the movement. Others had done the same in towns just as poor, but little notice was taken. Why was Bouazizi the straw that broke the camel's back? (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012)

### **Elements of Success in Civil Disobedience**

The movement began after Bouazizi because of the discovery of counter-propaganda as a tool for rebellion and the pervasive involvement of Tunisian citizens. Abdesslem Trimech in Monastir immolated himself on 3 March 2010 after circumstances similar to those of Bouazizi, and there were conflicts between citizens and police in Ben Guerdane in August of the same year that never extended to other towns. The difference with Bouazizi was that news of the event actually spread (SAIS Group Meeting with Laryssa Chomiak, 26 January 2012).

Despite a glaring lack of news coverage in Tunisian media, citizens managed to spread the story. The term "Facebook revolution" has been used frequently in reference to the Arab Spring, but Kamel Ben Younes of BBC World Services believes Facebook played a role, but it was just a machine—a mechanism used to counter the media blackout (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). If you were watching Tunisian news

in early January of 2011, you would believe that the protestors were just vandals and looters, and that the shining image of Ben Ali visiting the dying Bouazizi in the hospital was genuine. In reality, citizens were more oppressed than ever. Two Tunisian men from AFP and Reuters were able to capture this oppression in photos. They were candid, spontaneous, and unlicensed, and as they circulated online people began to realize the power of the images. A snowball effect was created. No one had thought to do counter-propaganda before, but all of a sudden the images of protest and oppression were everywhere—everywhere but the eerily quiet Tunisian news sources (SAIS Group Meeting with Hatem Bourial, 25 January 2012).

A former minister under the Ben Ali regime believes that the other distinctive factor which contributed to the success of the movement was the level of involvement by citizens from a variety of demographics. Generally speaking, movements that lack the support of the middle or higher classes do not succeed. Evidence of this can be found in intellectual middle class support for the French Revolution or the Civil Rights movement in the United States. The poor citizens of Sidi Bouzid, Kesserine and Gafsa in the interior were protesting, but surprisingly, so were the middle class citizens (SAIS Group Meeting 25 January 2012). Moncef Barouni adds that when all citizens feel the effects of oppression and a decline in their purchasing power, this is the point at which society as a whole unites in realization of their collective power. Within two days, Tunisia had ousted three main state officials (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

### **Obstacles on Revolutionary Road**

Tunisia, in the words of Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, is seeking to become “a genuine democracy that combines dignity, human rights, justice, and Arabo-Islamic values.”<sup>4</sup> People like Latifa Lakhdar think this goal is definitely possible (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). In the achievement of this outcome, the country must merge the needs and narratives of all its citizens. I will now address the prospects for bridging their desires into the national framework for a more unified and stable future in Tunisia.

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<sup>4</sup> Ghannouchi, Rachid, and Radwan Masmoudi (introduction). “Secularism and Relation between Religion and the State from the Perspective of the Nahdha Party.” Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID). 9 March 2012. Speech.



Interviews with Professor Hafaiedh of the University of Tunis and Mr. Kamel Ben Younes of the International Studies Institute and BBC World Services (SAIS Group Meetings, 23 and 25 January 2012) reveal that in general people are optimistic and have high expectations, which are positive but must also be realistic. Hatem Bourial believes that there is a sense that the government alone is responsible for the immediate amelioration of the problems against which Tunisians fought, in part because a dictatorship tells citizens they have no self-responsibility. This is a psychological issue that Tunisia is recovering from, according to Laryssa Chomiak, evidenced by their zealous post-movement involvement in civil society.

Despite the promise, there are legitimate concerns that Tunisia must address. First, there are structural issues within the interim government. Tunisians are concerned about the lack of experience of the new leaders. Professor Arfaoui indicates that people must be trained to lead, and they have not been (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). One solution, according to Hatem Bourial would be to draw on the experience of the older, previously powerful parties, but the question remains how to accomplish this without presenting an image to the public that the *ancien regime* is driving the government (SAIS Group Meeting 25 January 2012).

On the other hand, even those seen as contradictory to Ben Ali are facing criticism. The Ennahdha party, which gained the most votes for the Constituent Assembly, must work on its public image because this image is tied to the government as a whole. Professor Arfaoui added that despite the reassurances of Rachid Ghannouchi, head of the party, some groups, particularly women, are fearful of the possibility of an Islamist dictatorship, particularly because some people are unable to disassociate Ennahdha from the militant Islamists who have been disrupting Tunisia with recent violence (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). In a historically moderate Tunisian society however, many, like Kamal Ben Younes think that it is hard to believe that the extremists will gain much support unless economic conditions do not improve (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

In seeking to undermine extremism, it is important to understand the historical context within which the Islamist movement is framed in Tunisia. Following

independence from the Ottoman Empire, Tunisia drafted its first constitution, and concurrently faced its first clash of ideologies. Some promoted secular institutions, while others touted the phrase “the Quran is our constitution” (Hatem Bourial, SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). This battle continued into the fight for independence from France, pitting Bourguiba, at the time a member of the Neo-Destour party against Salah Ben Yousef’s traditional Muslim and Arabist “Fellagha Group”, a faction of the same party (Mezran 2007, Ch.4).

Bourguiba sought a secular modernist republic, modeling Western government and educational structures, and envisioned himself “as a modernist reformer of Islam” (Mezran 2007, 114). Ben Yousef, on the other hand, supported traditional Islam and the Arabic language, calling for a pan-Maghrebi war for independence, and was supported by religious conservatives, the land-owning class and those wary of the radical modernization of the Neo-Destour. Ben Yousef was as equally popular with Tunisians as Bourguiba and was the Secretary-General of the Neo-Destour, but Bourguiba had many friends in high places, for example the bourgeoisie. Most significant perhaps, was his alliance with the new and influential Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), that pushed Bourguiba’s socialist ideals in key regions (Mezran 2007).

Undermining the foundation of Ben Yousef’s vision and having him kicked out of the party was the key to gaining supporters. Bourguiba did so by distancing Tunisia from the Arabo-Islamic history, referring often to the Phoenician settlers of Tunisia in order to emphasize that influence in contrast to the Arabs. He also praised the French influence on Tunisia, saying “We are indebted to France for a great part of our personality and culture” (Mezran 2007, 114).

Ben Yousef countered, rallying the support of a resistance group which resorted to terrorist tactics following his loss in the Neo-Destour Congress. Ben Yousef fled Tunisia but was killed in Germany in 1961 by Tunisian agents (Mezran 2007). Bourguiba had successfully eliminated the competition, but in the process had politicized Islam and made it a critical element of identity to be protected, rather than the generally unquestioned fact of life most Tunisians understand it to be (Personal Interview with Siwar Aouadi, 28 January 2012).

Ben Ali continued in this vein, and under his rule, all mosques were owned, financed and heavily policed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and private group prayers were illegal. Under this level of scrutiny, it is no wonder that Islamism has resurged. Ideologies do not disappear when one elite group wins over another; they are simply repressed, but eventually return. Moderate Tunisians understand Islam to be a fact of life, and this is why parties that touted themselves as secular did not do well in the Constituent Assembly elections. Radwan Masmoudi believes that for most Tunisians, “secular” has an uncomfortable connotation of “anti-religious” (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Disputes reminiscent of Bourguiba and Ben Yousef are resurfacing in today’s political realm, hindering progress.

Moncef Barouni also added that questions of ideology are important, but the government must sideline them to assuage the fears that leaders are prioritizing partisanship over addressing the challenges facing Tunisia (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). As Al-Jazeera noted during the elections, “perhaps the major problem with the electoral campaign so far, though, is that it has allowed questions of cultural identity, religion and secularism to override all the other important and thorny issues to do with the economy, unemployment, justice and political reconciliation” (Ryan, *Al Jazeera English*, 26 January 2011). If religion can be de-politicized and freedom of religious expression emphasized, it will take the wind out of the salafists’ sails, who believe that Islam is under attack, by showing them a Tunisia where ideologies can coexist. The goal, as stated by Mohamed Sayah who belonged to the Destourian party of former President Bouguiba, must be to create synergy and an image of unity to inspire confidence in the government; otherwise they will be incapable of guaranteeing any progress (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

Progress can also be achieved by infusing new ideas into the government. Barouni expressed concerns that the average parliament member is 55 years of age or older, which may contribute to rigidity in their practices (SAIS Group, 24 January 2012). A former Ben Ali government official mentioned that an aging government was a factor in the “regime fatigue” that precipitated Ben Ali’s fall, citing the use of policies that went

back to the 1970s (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). The new government must take care to avoid this perception or actuality, and uphold the social contract.

The youth are the cure. The youth were represented “virtually” in the movement but not in reality during elections and the proceeding events, as explained by Dr. Hafaiedh, in part because they feel marginalized (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). A meeting with youth representatives of the Ennahdha party revealed that politics is not a place for the youth, so they’ve been told (SAIS Group meeting, 27 January 2012), and the lack of confidence in them fuels their distrust for the government. It has been argued that the youth are inexperienced, but a good way to express confidence in the future leaders of Tunisia while also employing them productively is to give them civic education and other training such as lobbying or grant-writing skills. According to a Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) representative from the U.S. State Department, this is already occurring, as the number of grant proposals for civic education and voter participation have increased over the last year (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012).

Another danger is ignoring key groups of society, namely women and the middle class. As was mentioned earlier in our meeting with Hatem Bourial, the middle class played a role in the movement as well as the poor, but no one is really speaking on their behalf, despite the fact that a significant amount of economic stimulation will come from their pockets as major consumers (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). Women’s issues are being shelved because most feel that they were already addressed under Bourguiba’s presidency, and that no new government would dare take them away. While this is valid, Arfaoui expresses concerns regarding issues like inheritance rights that have yet to be addressed (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Additionally, taking women for granted can drive regression and result in women feeling unrepresented in this new Tunisia.

The future of Tunisian democracy relies on its ability to come out of this transition economically stable. One problem, according to Ambassador Gray, is that people equate democracy with jobs, which is both inaccurate and also somewhat dangerous (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). If people try democracy and it doesn’t yield results, it may boost support for the minority of religious extremists added

Radwan Masmoudi (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Tunisia is still in recession, and it must begin tackling development of the drastically poor interior region. Laryssa Chomiak mentioned that there are plans to leverage phosphates or build cement factories, which are ideal projects because they are doable plans targeted at the interior (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012), but Moncef Barouni counters that little can be done without improving transportation and infrastructure which attracts investment (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

Despite these challenges, promise remains. Radwan Masmoudi sums up that Tunisians are fervent for real democracy and believe in its pillars: free and fair elections, separation of powers, human rights and minority rights (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). As one young woman voiced, “Never again are we going to hang a picture of the president of the republic in our shops because the president works for us!”<sup>5</sup> A fire has been lit, and people are no longer willing to settle for less, which bodes well for the future of democracy in Tunisia.

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<sup>5</sup> State Department (Woman quoted by Political-Economic Representative George Aldridge).



# **Two Tunisias: How A Revolution Which Brought The Country Together Also Highlighted A Deep Divide**

**Jennifer Pogue-Geile**

When Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a desperate act of frustration and anguish on 17 December 2010, he sparked off a string of protests which spread throughout Tunisia, eventually culminating in the resignation of the country's 23-year leader. The month-long Jasmine Revolution brought together Tunisians from across the society. Members of different ages, genders, social classes, and regions, all participated in the large-scale protests to air their grievances against the regime. They marched for liberty, economic opportunity, and personal dignity.

To this day, a year later, Tunisians across the society are extremely proud of their revolution and gush about their role in the Arab Spring. However, the revolution and subsequent elections for a Constituent Assembly in some ways highlighted the stark differences between the coastal region and the interior of the country. Probably the most glaring divide at the time of the revolution was the regional economic differences; however, since the election, it's becoming clear that there also important emerging socio-political differences between the regions when it comes down to issues of identity and views on the role of religion in society. There also seem to be different levels of optimism for the future between the coastal areas and the interior, which are partially reflected in voter turnout numbers. The following chapter will describe the sharp economic divide between the coast and the interior, analyze political differences between the regions that rose to the surface during the elections, and offer recommendations that could help lessen the economic and political divide between coastal Tunisia and the interior.

## **The Revolution and Regional Economic Inequality**

One of the main complaints during the revolution was the extreme arrogance of President Ben Ali, his family, and his government. According to a former government official, the

regime, and Ben Ali himself started to become increasingly out of touch, beginning as early as 2005. The president became more closed-minded as he aged, and became increasingly hostile to criticism. His hostility created a poisonous environment among his cabinet members, zapping any incentive for creative leadership among government officials. These officials also became afraid of delivering any bad news on the economy or pressing Ben Ali on the out-of-control spending and rapacious business activities of his wife and family members. As a result, Ben Ali became more and more isolated, and any dissent that had existed within the government up to that point dwindled to nothing.

According to a former government official, as Ben Ali withdrew from the problems in the country, he also began overreaching his authority within the government. All political decisions were made by Ben Ali himself. The over-centralization of power meant that government productivity slowed considerably. At the same time, the Ben Ali family, particularly Leila Ben Ali, the president's wife, extended their reach into legitimate and illegitimate business activity. The greed of the family became so obvious that it ruined the very idea that Tunisia was a meritocracy. As well as discouraging the everyday Tunisian, the wide reach of the presidential family ruined capitalism in the country, making Tunisia an unattractive place for investment by foreigners, as well as discouraging any sort of entrepreneurial spirit domestically.

Meanwhile, the global economic crisis was coming into full swing beginning in 2008, and the Tunisian regime continued its rhetoric that Tunisia would not be affected by the global financial meltdown. Of course, this was not remotely true. Real GDP, which had been growing on average five to six percent, fell after 2008 to a measly three percent growth in 2009 and 2010 (African Economic Outlook, 2011). The Euro-zone crisis continued to get worse throughout 2009 and 2010, and demand for Tunisian exports in Europe fell sharply. Tourism revenues declined, and both foreign and domestic business closed down as the international credit crunch continued. The bad economy was especially felt in the interior regions of Tunisia, where investment from abroad has always been smaller than along the coast. The more intrepid tourists that had gone further inland on their vacations practically stopped coming altogether. In Sidi Bouzid, a central province where Mohammed Bouazizi immolated himself, the government



continued to cite statistics claiming that unemployment in the region was just above eight percent. In reality, that number was easily three or four times that. This clear disconnect between the phony narrative of the government and the day-to-day reality for the Tunisian citizens, particularly in the interior regions of the country, fueled the mass protests that spread across the country in December 2010 and January 2011.

Although the economic situation was certainly declining in Tunis, communities in the interior of the country, especially rural ones, were especially hard hit in the lead-up to the revolution. In 2008, the national unemployment rate was 14.2 % according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2011). However, this number does not reflect the gross inequality between the coastal regions and the interior, or the catastrophically high level of unemployment among the youth. The youth bulge, a demographic shift which came with the general improvement in health conditions and a declining infant mortality rate, exerted tremendous pressure on the labor market leading up to and after the revolution. Youth unemployment in 2011 was around 30%, and was most likely higher in some regions. These regions, like Sidi Bouzid, became the epicenter of the revolution. Going forward, there is a clear consensus among Tunisians—experts and regular citizens alike—that high unemployment, particularly among the youth and in the interior, is the greatest challenge to the nascent government.

### Private Enterprise

According to the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics, business activity in the north and east of the country (the coastal regions) not only dwarfs the amount of private business in the interior regions, it also grew at a faster rate between 2005 and 2010. As can be seen from the table below, the north-east region (which includes Tunis) has both the largest number of private businesses, as well as the highest level of growth with an increase in the private sector by 29%. The region with the next highest level of private sector activity was the center-east, which grew by 27%. The average growth in business in the center-west regions and the south-west regions was comparatively low at around 19.6%. The north-west region and south-east regions are a mix of coastal and interior provinces.

Number of Private Businesses by Region

Region	North East	North West	Center East	Center West	South East	South West	TOTAL
2005	226,637	43,850	112,274	38,732	35,420	20,747	477,660
2010	292,475	50,728	142,301	45,971	40,837	25,009	597,321
% Change	29.0%	15.7%	26.7%	18.7%	15.3%	20.5%	25.1%

*\*Source: Institut National de la Statistique, Répertoire National des Entreprises 2005, 2010*

Tunisia is considered an upper-middle income country; however, it is still developing. Before the revolution, the focus of economic studies by the government and international organizations was on macroeconomic statistics like the level of unemployment and the rate of absolute poverty. Since the consistent implementation of open market reforms beginning in the mid-eighties, the number of Tunisians living on less than a dollar per day has dropped dramatically. These liberalizing policies have improved standards of living in the country; however, inequality has grown. Historically the coastal regions have had more robust economies, and economic liberalization meant that capital more readily flowed to these regions than to the interior of the country, compounding the pre-existent regional divide. While growth in Tunisia during the 1990s and from 2000 to 2005 reduced the absolute poverty rate by about the same amount (both saw a 4.3% decline), there was an increase in Gini inequality between 2000 and 2005 (African Development Bank, 2011). This means that the reduction of absolute poverty could have been even higher, but the country's economic growth during this time period predominately favored the non-poor. Relative poverty rates in geographically disadvantaged regions show a tough reality. In Sidi Bouzid, the relative poverty rate grew from 39.8% in 1990 to 45.7% in 2000. In Kasserine, the province just west of Sidi Bouzid, this figure jumped from 30.3% to 49.3% over the same decade. It is no surprise that the revolution began in these provinces where the economic problems and levels of

inequality were most severe. Combating this inequality will be a significant challenge for the new Tunisian government.

### **Socio-Political Differences between the Interior and the Coast**

The divide between the coastal regions and the south-western regions of Tunisia is not only an economic one. Although Tunisia is a homogenous society, there are still cultural differences within the country that may become important political cleavages going forward. One question for Tunisians that needs to be answered in their new democracy is an issue of identity. It is clear that nearly all Tunisians regard themselves as Arab-Muslims. These two descriptors are not controversial; however, there are very clear differences in opinion about whether Tunisia should look to Europe or the Arab world for guidance economically and politically. Coastal Tunisians tend to see Tunisia as a very Mediterranean country, more similar to Italy or Spain than to Syria. This view seems to be particularly salient among liberal elites, and becomes less common farther away from the sea. Ennahdha, the Islamist party that currently holds the largest number of seats in parliament, sees Tunisia's relationship with Europe as one that should be more or less contained to the economic sphere.

Another controversial issue is the place of Islam in society and in government. Although almost every Tunisian considers him/herself to be a Muslim, whether they practice or not, the role of religion in government policy is a contentious issue. One of the main choices to make leading up to the election of the Constituent Assembly was whether to choose an Islamist party or a secular one. Leading up to the formation of the government, secular-liberals were deeply afraid that Ennahdha would use its victory as a mandate to roll back women's rights. This fear has so far been unfounded—the party has given no indication that it has any desire to pursue such a course of action, and in fact have clearly stated the contrary. Also, Ennahdha is constrained by its secular coalition partners, the Congrès pour la République (CPR) and Ettakatol. Ennahdha's views seem to have a greater appeal outside of the capital. According to a recent National Democratic Institute (NDI) poll, 45% of Sidi Bouzid residents polled said that Ennahdha was the party that most closely represented their views. In contrast, only 35% of respondents in

Tunis picked Ennahdha as their favorite. Ennahdha's popularity in the interior of the country can partially be explained by the fact that many other political parties did not have the historical reach that Ennahdha did leading up to the election, and therefore were disadvantaged during the campaign.

Though more than 90% of registered voters cast their ballots in the October elections for the Tunisian Constituent Assembly, only about 60% of those eligible were registered to vote in the first place (Carter Center). According to Hatem Bourial, a Tunisian journalist, incidence of registration in the interior of the country was less than half, and was much higher in Tunis and along the coast (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). This is partially a result of the fact that it is easier to register a high percentage of voters in urban areas than in rural ones, but it also shows a measure of skepticism of the government in the areas which have been the hardest hit by economic problems. In contrast, young Ennahdha party members in Tunis were bursting with optimism after the elections. Although there are doubts about the new parliament and politics in general, Tunisians are enjoying their newly won freedom. In Kairouan, in central-western Tunisia, Faysal Kaabi talked about how he would have to apply for a permit with the regime before meeting his parent-teacher group. "It's much better now," he said. "Now we can meet whenever we want" (SAIS Group Meeting, 28 January 2012, Kairouan).

Although there are clear economic divides between the different regions of Tunisia, as well as some social and political differences, so far attitudes toward the current government are more or less the same across the country. For example, 49% of Tunis residents and 47% of Sidi Bouzid residents expect the members of the Constituent Assembly to represent their interests. About the same amount in both places (17% in Tunis and 19% in Sidi Bouzid) think that assembly members will serve their own personal interests. This indicates a similar attitude toward governance and the role of parliamentarians in two quite different cities. If the government fails to address adequately the economic divide between the coast and the interior, these slight cultural differences between the regions could turn into political cleavages. Worse still, voter participation could drop even further in the southern and western regions, and confidence

in government could drop precipitously. Also, if it is perceived that the government is favoring the coastal regions and ignoring the interior, tensions could flare. Given these possibilities, it is important that there is a roadmap to maintain a united Tunisia. Recommendations for the short, medium, and long term will be enumerated below.

## **Conclusion**

Tunisia's revolution in January 2011 brought together Tunisians across their society. The revolution began in the economically disadvantaged interior regions and spread through the country to the capital, where after one month, the 23-year dictator resigned power. After a successful election for a Constituent Assembly in October 2011, things in Tunisia seem to be holding steady, though the economy is still in serious peril. The fall of the regime and the subsequent elections, although they brought the country together, also highlighted the great divide between the coastal and interior regions. This divide is primarily economic—unemployment is much higher farther from the Mediterranean. However, the elections also revealed some cultural differences between the regions, which could be seen by the high level of support of Ennahdha in the south and west. The interior and rural regions are more socially conservative than along the coast, and there is a tension between the Islamists and the *laiques* (seculars). In order to preserve Tunisian unity, politicians should make sure there is a regional consensus on constitutional issues, have a clear economic plan to develop the interior regions, and integrate politicians from the interior into the main political parties. By taking these steps, Tunisia can avoid exacerbating regional political cleavages that could be harmful to a smooth transition to a stable democracy.

## **Recommendations**

In the short term, **politicians in the Constituent Assembly must address the need for economic resurgence in all of Tunisia, particularly in the hardest hit areas in the interior of the country.** As they are writing the constitution, they must make sure that there is regional consensus on each item. Most of the constitution should be fairly uncontroversial—especially since Ennahdha is in a coalition with two secular parties.

Almost all Tunisians agree that the first article of the constitution must state that Tunisians are an Arab Muslim people. There is also consensus (aside from a fringe group of salafis) that women should retain the equal rights that were afforded them under Ben Ali and President Bourguiba before him. Thus, maintaining political unity between the different regions in Tunisia should not be difficult in the short term. The danger only comes over a longer period of time.

In the medium term, in the run up to parliamentary elections after the referendum on the constitution, **political leaders can minimize any fissures between the interior and the coast by creating economic plans for both parts of the country as a part of their platform.** To some extent, this was already done in the lead up to the Constituent Assembly elections in October. Ennahdha includes “regional imbalances and the spread of poverty” as one of the main economic challenges faced by Tunisia in their campaign booklet. One of the overall objectives of their social and economic model is to “address regional imbalances by improving infrastructure and collective services in the less developed regions...” Political parties should include in their platform ideas to strengthen the economy in the interior regions, through infrastructure projects and creating incentives for investment. The likelihood that this will happen is quite likely, since without such programs, political parties will lose votes in large swaths of the country. After the great success of Ennahdha, particularly in the interior and the rural areas, other political parties will try to reach out and appeal to these places. Political parties should also include candidates from around the country on their ballots to encourage participation in the next round of elections in regions where voter registration was low.

Long-term, **politicians need to make sure they carry out these promises and implement these projects.** This is a true challenge. After the revolution, Tunisia’s growing economy dropped to a pitiful 1.8% growth in GDP in 2011, barely keeping up with inflation. International investors are waiting to see how things shake out politically before they start any new projects in the country, and the newfound political freedom has led to persistent strikes across sectors. This is hardly an ideal climate for expensive infrastructure projects and increasing social welfare programs. However, this is a time

for bold political leadership in Tunisia. Tunisians are understandably wary of a disproportionately strong leader after their experience with Ben Ali, but the situation will not improve unless the parties in power rise above “politics as usual” and work together to solve Tunisia’s gravest problems. Though there is a lot to be skeptical of in Tunisia’s future, there is also a lot to celebrate. Tunisia has a good shot at developing and maintaining a democracy; it is a homogenous society; it has a well-educated work force; and it has a strong history of constitutionality.





## **Tunisia: The Role of Secularism**

**Jennifer Fishkin**

The objective of this study is to understand the place of secularism in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution. This chapter will address the feasibility of different models of secular democracy in post-revolution Tunisia. The feasibility will be based on two questions that will be explored in the chapter. The first is what does secularism mean in the Tunisian context? The second is whether the current type of secularism is sustainable in post-revolution Tunisia? In the nascent democracy of Tunisia, it is essential that these problems be addressed so that a viable, democratic system can emerge.

The main reason to address the issue of secularism is that it obfuscates the direst problems in post-revolution Tunisia. The most imminent challenges to the success of the regime are those of income disparity, economic stagnation, and overall lack of employment. While the causality of the revolution is complex and will not be addressed in its entirety in this section, a major catalyst was the large size of the college educated unemployed, as well as unemployment in general. While the nature of the statistics being regime-driven make them somewhat unreliable, it was reported at the time of our trip, that in some areas unemployment amongst the college educated soared as high as 60%. Furthermore, the large-scale income and development disparity between the north and coastal parts of the country with the interior presents a formidable challenge that is necessary to surmount in the medium-term. The discussion on secularism and religion, in particular as represented by the Manouba University *niqab* affair that occurred in January 2012, continuously brings up the question of secularism ahead of that of economic development. Focusing on secularism distracts the government and the society from concentrating on stability and development in the country, which are necessary for democracy to be taken seriously and to be viable in the long-term in Tunisia. If the democratic regime cannot create viable economic development, then the entire democratic experiment may fail, pushing Tunisia to another governmental model.

## **History of Secularism in Tunisia**

In addressing the debate surrounding secularism, it is necessary to understand the Tunisian protectorate experience as well as the experience under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. First, in Tunisia, secularism is expressed by the French *laïcité*. This idea was first introduced when Tunisia became a French protectorate in 1881 and became subject to French influence. *Laïcité* is the total separation of Church and State. In Tunisia, as in France, *laïcité* evolved to be the belief that there must be an absence of religious expression in public spaces and an absence of government intervention in religious affairs. Thus, *laïcité* is a form of secularism that rids the practice of religion or integration of religion from public or civil areas. Important to note is the simultaneous influence of the Turkish model of secularism. In the post-colonial context, the Tunisian rulers were looking for a “western” model to replicate that was separate from their colonial past. However, the Turkish model also incorporated the rejection of religion in public spaces. This further supplied legitimacy to the model of *laïcité*.

Under Habib Bourguiba there was a major movement to modernize Tunisia. Modernization was understood in some respects to be westernization and industrialization. Under this movement, Bourguiba and the Destour party, elected in 1957, implemented the Personal Status Code, by which equality was granted to men and women. Through this effort it seems that Bourguiba felt the need to promulgate the *laïque* ideology as a mechanism to complete modernization. This is because the assumption was common that to be “modern” one had to be like the West, which had achieved some higher level of modernity. The most well known symbol of this desire to change Tunisian public social relations took place on Ramadan when Bourguiba went on television to address the nation while simultaneously drinking a glass of orange juice. By doing this during the month of Muslim fasting, he signaled to the nation the absence of a place for religion in public life.

This ideology continued under the regime of Ben Ali. For example, the wearing of the *hijab* was not permitted in schools or places of work. Thus, secularism became not just the separation of religion and state, but was widely believed to be the rejection of religion. The Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique party, the inheritors of the

Destour party, was the party of Ben Ali. This party, tied to the wealthy, European-focused, Tunisian élite, personified secularism. Additionally, through control over the Ministry of Religion the party was able to control what occurred in the mosques. As a result, secularism in Tunisia became tied not just to elitism and economic success, something not experienced by the rest of the Tunisian people, but it became equated with religious rejection.

### **Theoretical Basis for the Study of Secularism**

Secularism can be understood in many forms. In particular, secularism is a phenomenon that emerged out of the history of the religious wars in Europe, in particular the 30 Years War and the Peace of Westphalia that ended it. While this paper will not delve into the fine details of the emergence of this socio-political phenomenon, it is necessary to understand that secularism evolved out of the historical process of a particular place and people. The divergence in secular systems across Western nations is fundamentally a result of the different historical experiences that they underwent. France rejected the place of religion in the public sphere based on their bloody experiences. In contrast, in the founding of the United States, there was a lack of bloodshed due to inter-religious conflict and a diversity of religious views, particularly of those who had been persecuted for religious reasons. These religious groups had to create a viable nation and, thus, there emerged a nation of co-existence and tolerance vis-à-vis religion that accepted the semi-coexistence in the public sphere of all religions. However, there was no official endorsement of any particular religion. In understanding the role of secularism in Tunisia going forward, it is necessary to understand the history of secularism as well as the theoretical basis for how secularism can coexist within a democracy.

### Institutional Necessities for Democracy

Alfred Stepan discusses in his work “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations’” the necessary conditions for democracy. He cites Robert Dahl’s institutional guarantees necessary for democracy,

1) Freedom to form and to join organizations; 2) freedom of expression; 3) the right to vote; 4) eligibility for public office; 5) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; 6) alternative sources of information; 7) free and fair elections; and 8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference. (Stepan, 2000, 39)

Essential here, Stepan argues, is that while these conditions are necessary, they are not sufficient. This is because a democratic state must necessarily also be governed by a democratic constitution and legally protected rights for minorities. From a perspective discussing religion, the highlighting of the minority viewpoints must also refer to those of different religious views. Important to note is that if religion is defined as a conglomeration of belief, behavior, and belonging surrounding a specific ideology, there is room for secularism to be considered a “religious” viewpoint.<sup>6</sup>

Within the Tunisian context, a broader ideological characterization of democracy reflecting liberal values was apparent through the conversations with those interviewed. Particularly when discussing the Tunisian revolution, it was broadly stated that the goal of the revolution was to restore dignity and liberty against an oppressive dictator. The goal of freedom clearly influences the desired construction of democratic institutions in post-revolution Tunisia. For example, Ben Ezzine Mustapha, the Vice-President of “I Watch,” stated that democracy is what provides a mechanism for liberty (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Furthermore, Radwan Masmoudi from the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy defined democracy as having four pillars: 1) Free and fair elections; 2) separation of powers; 3) human rights, freedom of religion and speech; and 4) protection of minorities (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Essential within this

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<sup>6</sup> This definition of religion as a conglomeration of belief, belonging, and behaving incorporates the multitude of religious experiences amongst all different members of a religion. Parties exhibit their faith differently depending on their personal convictions and different emphasis present in different religions or denominations. Additionally, depending on the modernization process that the society has undergone or the norms that exist within the society, common religious practices and interpretations will differ, including freedom not to espouse any religion. (Cesari, 2011)

discussion is that in Tunisia democracy has a strong ideological component that calls for a greater actualization of liberal, enlightenment-esque principles. In a process that could easily spread into one where democracy was seen only for its capacity for elections and separation of power, the adherence to the full ideological premise of democracy is important to recognize.

#### Secularism within the Democratic Goal

Stepan argues that a “twin toleration” needs to exist for religion and democracy to co-exist. This twin toleration entails a balance between democratic institutions and religious groups. Stepan has a chart, found below, that demonstrates all the possibilities for a twin-toleration between religion and democracy. Clear here is that there are three possibilities for democracy and secularism: secular, but friendly to religion; non-secular, but friendly to democracy; and sociologically spontaneous secularism. Each has its own merits and has manifested differently around the world. First, there is France with total separation of Church and State, probably closest to the spontaneous secularism. Second, there is the U.S. that has toleration for all religious groups, but without a state religion. The U.S. most likely follows the model of secular, but friendly to religion. Finally, there are European countries such as England, where there is an official state religion, but it is friendly to democracy. The viability of each of these options must be explored vis-à-vis the Tunisian people’s thoughts regarding secularism and democracy to understand the future place of secularism in Tunisia.

## VARIETIES OF DEMOCRATIC PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS-STATE RELATIONS

RELATIVELY STABLE PATTERNS			RELATIVELY UNSTABLE PATTERNS
SECULAR, BUT FRIENDLY TO RELIGION	NONSECULAR, BUT FRIENDLY TO DEMOCRACY	SOCIOLOGICALLY SPONTANEOUS SECULARISM	VERY UNFRIENDLY SECULARISM LEGISLATED BY MAJORITY, BUT REVERSIBLE BY MAJORITY
<p>No official religion. Full separation of church and state. No state monies for religious education or organizations.</p> <p>Private religious schools allowed if they conform to normal academic standards.</p> <p>Full private and public freedom for all religions as long as they do not violate individual liberties.</p> <p>Religious organizations allowed to minister to their followers inside state organizations (such as the military and state hospitals).</p> <p>Religious groups allowed full participation in civil society.</p> <p>Organizations and parties related to religious groups allowed to compete for power in political society.</p>	<p>Established church receives state subsidies, and some official religion taught in state schools (but nonreligious students do not have to take religious courses).</p> <p>Official religion accorded no constitutional or quasiconstitutional prerogatives to mandate significant policies.</p> <p>Citizens can elect to have "church tax" sent to a secular institution.</p> <p>Nonofficial religion allowed full freedom and can receive some state monies.</p> <p>All religious groups can participate in civil society.</p> <p>All religious groups can compete for power in political society.</p>	<p>Society largely "disenchanted" and religion not an important factor in political life.</p> <p>Democratically elected officials under no significant pressures to comply with religious dictates concerning their public policy decisions.</p> <p>All religious groups free to organize civil society and to compete for political power, but have little weight or salience.</p>	<p>Antireligious tone in most state regulations (for example, teaching of religion forbidden in state and non-state-supported schools; no chaplains of any religion allowed in military organizations or state hospitals).</p> <p>Significant percentage of believers "semiloyal" or disloyal to regime.</p>

*Source: Stepan, Alfred C. "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations.'" Journal of Democracy 11.4 (2000): 42. Print.*

### **Secular Parties in the Election**

During the elections, there were a large number of secular parties competing. While the secular parties are present within the new coalition government, the secular parties did not perform well in the elections. There are a plethora of reasons for the poor turnout. On the one hand, Ennahdha had a strong campaign; they were highly present throughout the nation before the elections and were a large provider of civil services, particularly where the government was not present. Additionally, Ennahdha was able to mobilize with the backing of the mosque infrastructure. In contrast, the secular parties did not

have an organizational mechanism with a platform that was well understood by the people. Furthermore, the splintering of the secularists into several factions made it difficult to discern the ideological differences between them and to secure a significant amount of seats for any one party. The secular parties also did not do a good job of campaigning on their own or engaging with Tunisians, particularly within the interior.

While the election outcome brings into question the popularity of secular ideology in post-revolution Tunisia, some of the people that we spoke with questioned this conclusion. Oussama Romdhani, the former Ben Ali Communications Minister, speculated that a large percentage of those who did not vote in the elections, of which there were many, would have voted for the secularists (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). This speculation is credible, as the religious parties had a major “get out the vote” campaign and only garnered 17.7% of the vote when considering votes received out of all those eligible to vote including those who did not. Nevertheless, this assertion is largely speculation and it is very difficult to hypothesize about why people did not vote as well as whom they would have voted for and why. It does give credibility to the idea that secularism is more predominant than one might expect based on voter turnout and the results of the elections. Mostly, this makes sense because, while the Ben Ali regime lost credibility toward its end, this loss was in large part due to corruption. Therefore, some secular principles must have been nascent within the population for Bourguiba and Ben Ali to remain in power for so long. Whether or not it started out that way, most likely the policies and education created by both regimes acted as a form of cultural hegemony to socialize the population to favor a particular form of secular ideology. While this will be explored later in this chapter, it is essential to understand the intricacies of politics, organizational mechanisms, complications in ideology and identity, bias as a result of the previous party, and a lack of voting culture to realize why it might appear that secularism is less popular than one might expect.

Currently, there is a large push among the secular parties to consolidate their platforms and thereby try to unite and streamline their points of view during the next elections. Furthermore, depending on the capacity of the coalition government to resolve the problems of economic reform as well as the lessons learned by the secular parties in

terms of campaigning, the political pendulum could swing toward the secularists. The large problem for the secularists in the political process is that their identity is inherently complex. Their ideas are not easily made into a slogan, quickly understood through something to which the population can relate, and do not easily resonate based on identity dynamics. Ideas need to have either an institutional mechanism, usually law, to explain them or include them within the public sphere. Alternatively or additionally, ideas need to resonate with identity. These are the two ways in which an idea can take on a particular resonance and power within society. The religious side has both aspects for the Arab-Muslim Tunisian. The secular side does not.

### **The Current Diversity of Opinions on Secularism in Tunisia**

While the organizational and practical electoral impediments are important to explore in Tunisia, the most important in the long term is the ideological divergence among secularists. There are two basic groups, the *laïque* secularists and those that for the purpose of this chapter will be called religious secularists. Interestingly, anyone with whom we spoke that declared him or herself as part of Ennahdha or more religiously inclined could actually be a part of this latter group. Also important to note is that many Ennahdha leaders discussed their desire to follow the AK Party model in Turkey. While there are many critiques of Turkish secularism, democracy, and the similarity between the AK Party and Ennahdha, the seeming desire of Ennahdha to exist within a framework of some separation between religion and state is important to the viability of the argument of this chapter. Rachid Ghannouchi sees himself as following the path of the AK Party as a moderate Islamic party trying to break the strict secularism of the past while remaining democratic. The secularists should join him in this desire to create a more viable framework for the relationship between religion and state. In an inchoate democracy, it is important to hammer out these ideological differences to form a system that in the long run has a capacity to function for the interests of the country.



### Laique Secularism

*Laique* secularism emerged out of a specific historical process within Tunisia. Latifa Lakhdhar best exemplified this type of secular belief structure through her discussion vis-à-vis the *niqab* affair that occurred at Manouba University. She felt that wearing a *niqab* was problematic in school for academic and security reasons. She stated that wearing the *niqab* in public places was not a sign of liberty, but rather it is imprisonment (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

The way that this idea was construed was not anti-religious, but rather that *laique* secularism seeks to maintain the established way of being Muslim in Tunisia. The *laique* secularists are against changing the separation of religion from state and seem to believe that this separation brings a more “enlightened” society. Additionally, the sentiment exists that a large part of the religious change occurring is imported from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. These countries fund salafists to come into Tunisia and create a movement toward salafist Islamic interpretation, creating tension within Tunisia. Thus, the shift away from secularism is not perceived as an innately Tunisian phenomenon. Both Professor Lakhdhar and Colonel Mohamed Salah Hedri, a leader in a religious Muslim party (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012), touted this belief in our meetings. Additionally, Hatem Bourial discussed the fact that there is money coming in to elementary education seeking to shift the ideology in Tunisia over the long-run (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). The principal difference between the two types of secularism is the interpretation of religion’s role in society and most basically what Tunisian society should be. Both Professor Lakhdhar and Colonel Mohamed Salah Hedri very much ascribed to the historical tradition of the Malikis. However, Professor Lakhdhar felt very strongly about the importance of women’s rights and the historical process that liberalized and secularized Tunisia. Important for these *laique* secularists is that secularism is not a rejection of religion, but a separation of religion from the public sphere. It is the idea that there is a separate civil code that has emerged, which should be the basis of law-making.

In this sense, there is a high importance of the Tunisian social contract whereby the rights of religious minorities are protected. The result of *laique* secularism, however, is

that in practice many people who espouse these views are interpreted by the rest of Tunisians as lacking religion and partaking in non-religious activities. For example, one man with whom we spoke discussed his religious adherence, but the belief that the government had no place in regulating it, knowing about it, or mandating it. He felt strong religious ties, but did not feel that this was appropriate in the public space. In Tunisia, the belief in secularism appears to be a desire that one's religious practices should not color the capacity to accomplish things within society. Thus, for these types of secularists, a lack of religion could be causal, but is not the foundation of the movement. Rather, it seems to be a combination between a specific historical process of separation religion and state combined with the desire to maintain Tunisian societal norms of equality and to protect Tunisians from the international Islamic fundamentalist movement.

### Religious Secularism

Religious secularism is the belief structure that the older forms of secularism are not viable given the changes in dynamics that occurred as a result of the shift to democracy since the revolution. It is not viable for a society that will most likely claim to be Arab-Muslim in its constitution to have a party that explicitly argues for Islam to be out of the public sphere. Furthermore, religious secularists would argue that the secular precedent in Tunisia is not one of complete separation of religion and state. In fact, Bourguiba did not codify anything that went against Islam. For example, he did not change the abortion law. Thus, for the secular parties to have a viable political platform, particularly going forward, a model of complete *laïcité* as in France is not possible. Additionally, based on widespread Tunisian interpretation of secularism, the historical experience of it under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and the French influences, following the process of *laïque* secularism will not yield the liberty and equality for all religions that the secularists desire.

The biggest proponent that we met with of this alternate secularist interpretation is Radwan Masmoudi. Mr. Masmoudi has started a separate religious secularist movement. Mr. Masmoudi ran as an independent in the elections, but hopes to garner support for this

movement, which would be similar to the Christian Democrat movement in Europe. However, it is currently difficult to proliferate this alternate secularist interpretation. His interpretation of secularism appears as a post-modern interpretation of the role between religion and the state. He argued for a new concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century secularism. Fundamentally, this means that Tunisia would not be an Islamic state, but rather in lieu of having a dictatorship of modernity, as the imposition of secularism under Bourguiba and Ben Ali was often described, it would be an alliance of liberals, Islamists, pan-Arabists, and socialists. This type of secularism would encompass a separation of religion from the functioning of the state, but not renounce religion. In a sense, this idea seems to be more in line with creating a toleration of multiple ideologies, while acknowledging that Islam is the religion of the majority. The extent to which this would simply exist or be codified is unclear and would lend itself to one of two different models postulated by Stepan. Essential here is that Islam would not be the dominant religion, leading to the Islamicization of society, but the role of Islam as the religion of the majority would be recognized. Interestingly, religious secularism is recognized by many who ascribe to the *laïque* variety of secularism as “Islamist,” rather than secular.

## **Conclusion**

Tunisia ignited the Arab Spring. The Tunisian democracy experiment could serve as an example to the rest of the Middle East and North Africa of how to create a viable, moderate, successful democracy that embraces Islam. Without room for Islam, Tunisia’s democracy will not be viable in the long term, nor would Tunisia be able to serve as a model within the Arab-Muslim world of a viable, moderate marriage of Islam and democracy. It is important to note the religious vision of Tunisians is moderate, like most Tunisian identity issues. As a result, this establishment of political Islam driven by the desire to see freedom of expression is an opportunity upon which to capitalize.

## **Recommendations**

To achieve a more viable form of secularism, the following recommendations should be considered.

### Short-term

- **Secular parties must further consolidate.** They must create a digestible platform and be more unified in a way that is easily understood.
- **The secular parties must start thinking more seriously about an alternate form of secularism other than *laïcité*.** An alternate form of secularism would bypass the importance of the religious issues that have been taking up too much of the media time. Once the religious issues are bypassed, the key issue of economic development will be dealt with more rigorously. A focus on economic development as the primary problem facing Tunisia is necessary for Tunisian democracy to have the legitimacy of functioning.
- **The shift in secular ideology should manifest either along the American model or the European.** The American is where each religious group is separate from the power structure and treated equally. The European is where there is an official religion and the official toleration of every other religion. While in some ways some combination of the French *laïcité* and the American model is what existed in Tunisia before the revolution, the secular parties have to redefine themselves if the relationship between religion and state will be protected within a democratic state framework. A shift in the model of religion and state could allow the institutionalization of tolerance rather than the granting of it by a leader. If the discussion was redefined, both religious and secular parties would feel more protected and, thus, more capable of working together. While historically and currently there is a desire to see the Turkish model as a viable option, it is not. While there is not the space to deal with this sufficiently, the Turkish model fosters intolerance between religious and secular groups and does not have foster trust in a system that will protect all citizens despite the party in power.

### Medium-term

- **The Secularists must moderate their political platform and create a digestible platform.** More moderate political platforms would yield a lack of polarization and the continued moderate nature of Tunisian society. This would be a powerful

counter-weight to possible incursions by extreme Islamism. To do this effectively, the consolidated party should hire an election strategist

- **Religious secularists must be strengthened through cooperation with the other secular leadership to come up with a viable political platform.** The secularists will need to come up with a salient platform for why the secularist way is better for Tunisia, while promoting this new less *laïque* interpretation. Likely, the answer will be that it would be better at creating economic opportunity and trade with the West due to a more stable political structure. The state structure that currently exists would push both groups to an extreme and have high volatility based on the fact that each group would seek to undo the work of the other group once they were in power. Trust in common liberal goals and the long-term stability of the regime is very important for foreign investment and foreign relationships.
- **The secularists need to find a way to enter the universities as well as to campaign in the interior of the country. To do so, the secularists need to start up public services and make themselves visible and helpful within communities.** Perhaps using television or some other media they can combat the mosque sponsorship upon which the religious parties capitalize.
- **The secularists should create partnerships with the United States.** While the United States is heavily criticized in some ways in Tunisia, American democracy is not. These partnerships would bring in outside influence, advice, and civil society mobilization that might be respected and would provide international credibility to the movement.



## Islamism and *Laïcité* in the Tunisian Constitution

Jennifer Nath

Islam—the freedom to publicly practice it, or the fear of too much of it—was discussed or alluded to by almost all the individuals and groups who shared their experiences, expertise and vision for their country’s future with our group from SAIS. While the emotional salience of religious freedom was a constant theme throughout the discussions, how such a demand would be practically implemented and the very definition of what it means to be “islamist,” “secular,” and “*laïque*” lacks consensus in today’s post-Ben Ali Tunisian society.

As of the writing of this chapter, Tunisia has voted for both a new government, tasked with running the basic bureaucracy of the country, and a Constituent Assembly, whose job is to write a new, democratic constitution. While three parties currently comprise a leadership coalition in the Constituent Assembly, the Islamist party, Ennahdha, has earned the largest number of votes. Their appeal to Tunisian voters lay not only in their promise of freedom for public religious expression for practicing Muslims, but from the fact that they were long-suffering victims of Ben Ali. Their survival as an underground movement gave them political legitimacy and emotional credibility in the eyes of many Tunisians. Furthermore, Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahdha, has promised to safeguard the rights of women enshrined in the Personal Status Code, promote tourism, end corruption and improve the economy, among other things. However, their mandate is only one year long—at the end of about a year, regardless of the state of the new constitution and country, elections will be held again to grant power to a new group of leaders within a more permanent political structure. With a mandate made heavy by high unemployment, 700,000 educated young people, and little aid, Ennahdha has a difficult job, and risks paying a high price for failure.

This chapter will explore and discuss the debate surrounding the place of Islam in the development of democracy in Tunisia, focusing on how it may be reflected in the new constitution. Because the project of “the marriage of Islam and democracy,” as

Ghannouchi defines his mission, is a facet of a broader debate occurring across the Muslim world, the success or failure of this project in Tunisia could have wide-ranging impacts on both Tunisia and its neighbors: the process by which Tunisia embarks on this project, and the constitutional structures in which it eventually enshrines the religion-related desires of its constituencies, will provide lessons for other societies attempting the same project. Furthermore, this debate continues to be a source of strife among Tunisians and encumbers social cohesion and progress in meeting the pressing economic and social crises of post-revolution Tunisia. The new national government cannot afford to ignore the spectrum of opinions on the place of Islam in Tunisia's developing democratic structures; doing so would squander an opportunity to enhance their credibility and legitimacy as well as open the public space to further influence from extremists.

The fall of Ben Ali created both a political vacuum and enormous potential political capital among his repressed citizens. The women and men who now can practice religion freely in public are eager to have these freedoms legally enshrined, while those who fear the encroachment of religious extremism want to see legal protections enforced. The debate is further complicated by the unique nature of the religious-secular divide in Tunisia, which is partly a legacy of its colonial history.

### **History of French Colonialism and Islam in Tunisia**

When the French colonized Tunisia, they introduced their system of *laïcité* into Tunisian political culture. After Tunisia gained independence in 1956, Habib Bourguiba continued this tradition of strict secularism, insisting on modernization and establishing the "Personal Status Code," which legally enshrines women's rights. He also suppressed his opponents, particularly Islamist groups including the political precursor to Ennahdha. When Ben Ali came to power and evolved into a dictator, his repression of his opponents sent the early Ennahdha party underground. Ultimately, life under Ben Ali involved a complete lack of freedom, an ubiquitous cult of personality, and the omnipresence of the secret police to the extent that one young woman recounted that before the revolution, she would not even consider discussing her views on Ben Ali with her parents. Another



girl, a high-achieving student at her high school, described how she used to sneak over the back wall of the school in order to enter undetected while wearing a *hijab*.

Ben Ali's repression of Ennahdha and others like it ultimately fed popular sympathy and support for Ennahdha; Tunisians voted for it as much because of its ability to survive Ben Ali as for religious reasons. However, identifying Ennahdha supporters as Islamists and its opponents as secular is not straightforward in the Tunisian context. The continuous repression of moderate Muslim alternatives to Ben Ali's secular party drove moderates away from the political playing field, and the legacy of French secularism planted the image of a black and white dichotomy between a radically religious and a radically secular society—a dichotomy that lacks salience in the gray area that is Islam in Tunisia. Many Tunisians to whom we spoke described their hope for the future as including religious freedom and personal choice in terms of practice. Such a description defies the logic of both Islamism and French *laïcité*. One important task therefore, according to Hatem Bourial, will be rhetorically to render palatable a “new way of being secular” and replace the “false dichotomy of *laïque* versus Islamist” (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). Additionally, despite being a nominally secular state, Tunisian law has always reflected some modicum of Islamic influence. For example, sons are still accorded twice as much inheritance as daughters by law, and intermarriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is illegal. Going forward, the Constituent Assembly will need to decide whether or not they intend to enshrine Islam in their legal framework, and if so, how.

### **The Optimistic Leaders**

A number of Tunisian political and cultural leaders are optimistic about the project of creating an Islamic democracy in Tunisia. Many of them take a deeply philosophical, intellectual approach to the idea of a modern, Islamic democracy.

Ennahdha's philosophical and political leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, has no trouble envisioning a democratic system that reflects Islamic values. According to his vision, Islam is based in freedom, and “there is no compulsion in Islam” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). On the subject of state control of the practice of Islam, he has

announced that he is opposed to state imposition of any practice on Tunisian society—including how one dresses, drinks or believes. He likens Ennahdha to the AKP of Turkey, noting their common historical backgrounds and goals of the “marriage of Islam and democracy.” He also attempts to explain the current rise of salafism as a consequence of the vacuum left by Ben Ali’s expulsion of Ennahdha, in which would-be Ennahdha adherents were instead exposed to the Wahhabi values coming from TV channels financed by Gulf states. He asserts that salafism is not rooted in the Tunisian heritage and was inspired instead by the experiences of torture in prison as well as the lack of a moderate alternative. Ghannouchi, although tending towards grand and philosophical descriptions, did define certain boundaries between Islamic and democratic principles. For example, he defended the Nessma television station’s right to broadcast *Persepolis*, a film that shows a cartoon image of the Prophet Mohammed, noting that Nessma was free to broadcast as it chose, and the prohibition against images of holy figures in Islam was not a principle to be embodied legally.

Mohammed Salah Hedri, leader of the Justice and Development Party,<sup>7</sup> described his vision of an Islamist Tunisia as based on the philosophy of the golden age of the Zeitouna University as well as the teachings of Ibn Khaldun (SAIS Group Meeting, January 24, 2012). He emphasizes the specificities of the Tunisian manifestation of Islam—Sunni and Maliki—and notes that they are, in fact, struggling against the influences of other Islamist countries, such as Iran. He declared that his listeners shouldn’t assume that his identity as an Islamist precludes his identity as a democrat. Like Ghannouchi, he believes that the two are not necessarily incompatible. His vision of Islamism involves legal support for what he terms “family values” and Islamic education. Practically speaking, this means including the teaching of Quran and religion in the public education system from primary school onwards, and supporting “family values” by offering women funds if they choose to stay at home, as well as financial support for families with children. Furthermore, he envisions a Tunisian Constitution in which all

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<sup>7</sup> Not to be confused with the AKP of Turkey. According to Hedri, the Turkish translation of their “Justice and Development Party” differs from the Arabic translation of his own “Justice and Development Party.”

laws are either supported directly by, or do not contradict, the Quran. On a more philosophical level, he notes that almost all Tunisians are Muslim, and he wants to preserve the Muslim-Arab consciousness.

While answering questions about fears of the potential role of Islam in a future Tunisia, a member of the American Tunisian Association explained that when Ghannouchi says “Tunisia’s religion is Islam,” he is describing a reality, not a vision to be imposed. The reality he describes is one in which *laïcité* is incompatible with Tunisian culture—instead, Tunisian secularism must incorporate and respect religion. As many Tunisians don’t necessarily see a contradiction between Islam and democracy, and would rather not choose between the two, Ennahdha argues that its movement provides them a practical way for them to avoid making that choice.

### **The Hopeful Followers**

The Nahdha youth, still obviously elated by their new found freedoms post-dictatorship, expressed pragmatic views regarding their support for Ennahdha and their vision of a Tunisian democracy incorporating some form of what they might call “Islamism.” While many voted for Ennahdha because their families had always supported the party, or because Ennahdha had been persecuted by Ben Ali, their vision of the role of Islam in a future Tunisian democracy was almost universally expressed in terms of religious freedom. The Nahdha youth seemed to define democracy as a set of political behaviors, or a certain political culture, and felt no inherent contradiction between democratic behavior and enshrining certain aspects of Islamic ideology into a Constitution. Thus, they inherently accepted the implications of the meaning of majority and opposition within a democratic framework. Similar to the Islamist leaders, the younger generation remarked on their desire for new legislation and institutions to have a “*référence islamique*” in all domains, such as in Islamic finance. Despite this, they also spoke passionately, especially among the women, of the importance of personal freedom of practice within Islam, and the personal choice they each had taken to wear the *hijab* despite the risks. Thus, it seems that members of the Islamist youth in Tunisia envision a genuinely democratic framework in which Islam is present and respected, but practice is

neither enforced nor forbidden. The emotional intensity with which they supported their opinions increased strongly when they discussed their abhorrence of the French-style secularism that had forbidden them from wearing their *hijabs* in the past. Their support of “Islamism” in its current iteration in Tunisia seems to stem as much from a reaction against *laïcité* as a preference for a government that actively acknowledges Islam and its influences (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012).

### **The Pessimists**

The spectre of an Islamic state has inspired many skeptics and proponents of a strict separation of church and state to make their voices heard. Khadija Arfaoui, a human rights activist, spoke about the importance of a truly strict separation between the authorities of religious institutions and the authority of the state. She noted her fears about the future of social issues such as the stigma of single motherhood in Islam and related rumors of a law that would make it harder for single mothers to adopt children. In addition, she fears that Ennahdha’s moderates may fall victim to the internal struggle within Ennahdha between extremists and moderates, thus bringing the whole country with them. According to Arfaoui, religion is personal, private, and cannot be imposed. She urges Ennahdha to clearly define its goals, and exercise its legal authority over the salafist extremists in order to assuage the fears of those in her political community (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012).

Latifa Lakhdar, of the former Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution et de la transition démocratique, acknowledges that adapting Islam to modernism is not impossible, even from a theological standpoint; however, she expresses a deep distrust in Ghannouchi and Ennahdha. She sees Ennahdha’s politics as overfriendly to the salafists and imprisoned by its “référentiel religieux,” and she argues against the idea that the *shari’a* could be the source of all Tunisian law. She is suspicious of the lack of legislation against the *niqab*, noting that perhaps this lack of official condemnation leaves room for its future legitimization in the constitution. Her distrust of Ghannouchi stems from his discourse regarding polygamy, adoption, and single mothers,

and she argues that he, like many scholars are currently doing, must permit a modern re-interpretation of Islamic texts (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

Ahmed Ibrahim, of the Pole Démocratique et Moderniste, further expands upon the skepticism of the idea of a true marriage of Islam and democracy. He states that the country should be founded on a basis of citizenship and questions the legitimacy of Ennahdha's victory, arguing that their success was due to the dispersal of secular interests among multiple parties, which have now succeeded in establishing a unified opposition. While Ennahdha itself- may not genuinely be supportive of the salafists, he fears that the state will hesitate to assert the rule of law on the street, and the extremists will be able to impose their way of life in a "politique du fait accompli." He sees the need for a consensus on how Tunisians describe themselves and their enduring identity: religious to varying degrees in their personal and public lives without over-emphasis on the barrier between the two, and without judging or defining themselves too strictly (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

### **Progressive Pragmatists**

In addition to those publicly active individuals who are supportive of the idea of institutionalizing Islam in the Tunisian democracy and those who are fiercely opposed, there is a group of people who approach this issue from a pragmatic perspective. While embracing the idea of a truly democratic Tunisia, these individuals acknowledge the deeply rooted place of Islam and Muslim identity play in Tunisian culture while arguing for a progressive evolution and re-interpretation (*ijtihad*) of what Islam and secularism mean in the Tunisian context. Hatem Bourial discusses the importance of retaining an authentic Tunisian identity, as opposed to defining oneself first as Arab and Muslim and thereby "dealing on a political scale" with the Arab and Muslim world. He notes that Tunisia has historically been a moderate country in terms of its practice of religion and its treatment of its previously significant minority populations, and this history of moderation should be preserved. Most importantly, instead of attacking secularism or Islamism as they are understood today, he argues for a new and specifically Tunisian way of being secular. He feels that the debate and lack of consensus over what it means to be

secular or Islamist in Tunisia today reveal the need to address a large segment of Tunisian society who have been forced to define themselves according to the false dichotomy of *laïque* versus Islamist, and to allow the moderate majority to define themselves without necessarily referring to those parameters (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

Radwan Masmoudi, of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), also described a pragmatic vision of Tunisia's future incorporating both democratic structures and an open acknowledgement of Islam as an inescapable presence in Tunisian individual identity and public life. He diagnoses the difficulties of the secular parties in the recent election as a result of their disregard for religion, but also warns of the dangers of a salafist takeover of Ennahdha, which he describes as one of the most moderate Islamic movements in the Arab world. He echoes the claim that the French style of strict secularism cannot work in Tunisia, and instead describes his vision of a "pious secularism" which is a secularism that takes religion seriously as one of the foundations of individual identity in Tunisia. Like Bourial, Masmoudi encourages a process of *ijtihad*, or reinterpretation of Islamic texts for use in the modern world. He argues that one cannot be fully modern while following the interpretations of medieval scholars, and if Islam truly is to be applicable in "all times and all places," its interpretations need to adapt to the current Tunisian situation (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

### **Dealing with Potential Spoilers**

With the passage of the Tunisian amnesty laws, salafists and other extremists were released from prison, and their activities now fuel a growing debate in Tunisian society about the extent to which tolerance should be extended to extremists. Their activities pose a conundrum for the underlying logic of the nascent Tunisian democracy: on the one hand, religious freedom should extend to all believers and practicing members, as long as specific laws are not broken. On the other hand, certain groups of salafists are attempting in some instances to impose their views regarding the practice of Islam on those who do not ascribe to them. The most publicized example is the case of the *niqab* at Manouba University, in which a relatively small group of students protested the ban of the *niqab*

during exams, preventing other students from going about their daily routines. When a professor asked a student why she was protesting, the student apparently replied, “Islam is under threat.”

While there is general consensus that the salafists are neither organic to Tunisia nor preferred by any of the Tunisian political leaderships, opinions differ as to how to respond to their activities and why they exist in the first place. Ghannouchi argues that the salafists are the fruit of the former regime, and the result of Ben Ali’s suppression of Ennahdha. When Ennahdha was expelled, Ghannouchi believes its expulsion created a cultural vacuum that was then filled by extremist influences from the Gulf states. He rejects accusations that he collaborates with the salafists, noting that the salafist protesters have also attacked Nahdha members. Khadija Arfaoui argues for a firm crackdown on salafist activity, and doubts that salafists can be democratic. Her suspicion that Ghannouchi doesn’t want to begin his term in government with the salafists as enemies, coupled with the slow reaction time on the part of Ennahdha against the activities at Manouba, enhances her distrust of Ennahdha (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Professor Alaya Allani, from Manouba University, is also suspicious that Ennahdha wants to avoid having its first public trial be against salafism for fear of losing legitimacy in the eyes of their base. He believes the government should have reacted immediately and strongly to the protests at Manouba and that ultimately, the salafists who he believes make up the Ennahdha base must undergo a “rationalization” in which they accept the separation of church and state (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). According to Abderrazak Kilani, the Minister for Coordination between the Constituent Assembly and the Tunisian government, given the economic and social crises, the potential dangers of extremism are not the most pressing issues on the official agenda. For him, the greatest threat extremist activity represents is the threat to tourism, and he explains the mostly passive police response against various salafist actions by the fact that in a transition period, the police are lacking confidence (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

## **A Warning for the Future**

Many of the individuals interviewed were optimistic about a future Tunisia in which Islam could be respected and “referenced” to a certain extent in the Constitution and political culture. Salah Bourjini expressed his confidence that Tunisia would remain moderate, tolerant and open (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington, DC, 29 November 2011). In addition, Kamel Ben Younes, of the International Studies Institute and the BBC, is skeptical that there would be room for “abuses” of Islam in the Constitution, because the writers would be subject to a high level of scrutiny, and would be moderated by the internal conflicts among them. Furthermore, he reiterates that the inherently moderate nature of Tunisian Islamic practice may prevent a drift towards extremism (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

However, there were a number of Tunisian intellectuals who saw warning signs in certain post-revolution activities. Khadija Arfaoui saw in the film *Persepolis* a warning from Iranian to Tunisian women (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). While there seems to be little danger of an Iranian-style radical Islamist coup in Tunisia at the moment, the hijacking of democratic revolutions by well-organized religious extremists is certainly not an unheard-of phenomenon in the Muslim world. Therefore, it is important that those who construct the legal frameworks in which religious provisions may be involved take note of the various ways the laws could be misinterpreted, taken advantage of, or abused, and incorporate as many safeguards as possible.

## **Recommendations**

- **Citizenship: Ennahdha should be clear about its plans to construct a civil state, and firmly apply the law accordingly.** They should clearly articulate that acknowledging Tunisia as an Arab and Muslim state does not require its citizens to universally practice Islam.
- **Religious freedom:** The principles of ‘no compulsion in Islam’ but freedom for all who want to practice within the bounds of democracy resonated throughout the interviews with the Nahdha youth in addition to the religious youth in Kairouan. **The**



**Constituent Assembly should keep this sentiment in mind as it constructs the Constitution.**

- **Religion and Identity:** A national conversation, in various forms, about the Tunisia-specific definitions of *laïcité*, secularism in general, and Islamism would be helpful in Tunisia's process of redefining its identity post-Ben Ali. Such a conversation could take place in fora of the swiftly growing Tunisian civil society—such as in think tanks, research centers, and online forums.
- **Societal understanding:** Formal and informal dialogue between religious moderates and the secular leftists should be encouraged to bridge the gap of understanding between the groups. Organizations such as CEMAT, or any of the newly flourishing NGOs can provide the forum for such dialogues.
- **Youth:** The youth should be integrated as much as possible into the planning of the new constitution. Not only were young Tunisians at the forefront of the revolution (many of the speakers admitted that as adults living their lives under Ben Ali, they only felt compelled to protest after seeing the fearlessness of the youth), but many espouse progressive and tolerant values and some appear to genuinely embody the combination of Islam and modernism of which Ghannouchi speaks.
- **Extremists:** The government should react swiftly and clearly to breaches of the law or displays of extremist ideology. The lack of such firmness and timeliness in responses to episodes such as the salafist protests at Manouba University influenced many of our interviewees' complaints against the current government. A human rights activist with whom we spoke argued that the salafists at Manouba as well as those who greeted Ismail Haniya at the Tunis airport with anti-Semitic chants constitute an important component of Ennahdha's political base, which it is loath to marginalize. Multiple times we heard pleas for fast government reaction and strong verbal condemnation of expressions of intolerance.
- **Safeguards against abuse:** When incorporating religious interests into any legal framework, the potential for future abuse should be kept in mind. **The legal structure should be tight enough to prevent any hijacking by extremists.** Appropriate checks can take the form of a **strong judiciary and rule of law** as well as various

**legal regulations against potential corruption or abuse** that could evolve into the kind of religious dictatorship many Tunisians fear. In the event of intolerance, Tunisian citizens must be able to trust that the courts and the constitution will act as a stronghold against attempts to abuse the freedoms allocated in the name of respecting religion.

## **Conclusion**

If the architects of the new Tunisian Constitution are able to integrate the desires of their constituencies seeking religious freedom in the public space, while assuaging the fears of those who are wary of an Islamic cultural dictatorship, Tunisia will move forward in the process of national reconciliation. A more organic and nuanced definition of what it means to be religious, secular and Tunisian—in a way that reflects the reality and fundamentals of Tunisian society—will also allow Tunisia to present the example of authentic governance for which the other Arab countries undergoing revolutions are searching. Given its history of Islamic scholarship, constitutionalism, moderate religious identity and the presence of significant minorities throughout its history, Tunisia may be one of the only Arab Spring states with the potential to create a legitimate democracy that incorporates aspects of Islam.

## **Women’s Rights in Tunisia: A “Non-Issue” at the Center of the Debate**

Sara O’Rourke

Many claim that the question of women’s rights in Tunisia is a non-issue. For years the country has been known as a beacon of hope for the Middle East in the realm of gender equality. Tunisian women make up 55% of university students and received the right to vote before their Swiss counterparts, while Tunisian law forbids polygamy and promotes adoption, even by single mothers. The leader of the largest business union, UTICA (Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie, du Commerce et de l’Artisanat), is a woman and there is a greater percentage of women in the Constituent Assembly than in the U.S. Congress.<sup>8</sup> As many of those we interviewed noted, Tunisian women are seen to have the same rights as women in Europe and North America. Especially given the country’s status as an Arab Muslim nation, and even in comparison to some of the most progressive countries in the world, Tunisia’s record on women’s rights is impressive. And as the argument goes, women’s rights have been so entrenched in the Tunisian mindset that even with the ousting of a secular dictator and new dominance of a moderate Islamist party, women’s rights will continue to be unquestioned and untouched.

However, historically, the “woman question” has played a crucial role in Tunisia in times of transition. During both Bourguiba’s and Ben Ali’s rise to power, the rights of women formed the center of the debate between the secularist<sup>9</sup> and Islamist movements. As a result, women have in the past received their rights through top-down, state-enforced legal reforms—beginning with Bourguiba’s revolutionary Code of Personal Status (CPS) and continuing with Ben Ali’s progressive updates to the law. Such reforms have provided a mechanism for these leaders to consolidate power and suppress the

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<sup>8</sup> Roughly 24% of the Constituent Assembly (49 out of 217) are women, compared to roughly 17% of U.S. Congress (17 out of 100 Senators and 73 out of 453 Representatives).

<sup>9</sup> I will use the term “secular” simply to denote those groups in favor of liberal laws promoting a separation of church and state. I will distinguish this from “*laicists*,” by which I mean those favoring a more militant secularism which is against religion in the public space, following the French doctrine of *laïcité*.

desires of the opposition. Tellingly, in her 1998 book *Women, the State and Political Liberalization: Middle Eastern and North African Experience*, Laurie Brand closes her analysis of Tunisia with these words:

Many women are unwilling to criticize the regime's approach. They have been profoundly affected by developments in Algeria and believe that their choice is between the current Tunisian government and the Islamists...Yet as long as the economy appears to perform well and the country is stable, many Tunisians, women and men, will be unwilling to risk the rise of Islamist influence and the losses they believe it would bring, by pushing for a greater opening of the system. (Brand 1998, 246)

It seems that such a time has come. Thus, one cannot consider the role of debates about women's rights in the revolution, not to mention the future of women's rights in the country, without first looking back to consider their establishment and evolution—and thus the framework within which women's rights has been defined.

Once one has considered the historical framework of women's rights, the current role of women's rights in the debate about the country's future becomes more comprehensible. For one, the debate about women is not front and center, but rather is taking place through conversations about other issues that have arisen since the revolution: debates about the right of women to wear the *niqab*<sup>10</sup> in universities, the right of an executive to show *Persepolis* on national television, the government's response to salafists' actions in rural areas like Sajnan, and the ambiguity of Ennahdha's position on certain aspects of the CPS. Moreover, because women's rights have been at the heart of the debate between Islamists and secularists for some time, many of the individuals we interviewed linked (either implicitly or explicitly) debates about secularism versus conservatism with questions about the role of women. In general, liberals argue that the conservatism at the root of Ennahdha threatens women's rights, and Ennahdha's "double speak" is proof of the imminence of the threat, while members and friends of Ennahdha

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<sup>10</sup> The "*niqab*" refers to the religious garment that covers a woman's hair and face. The garment that covers just a woman's hair will be referred to as the "*hijab*."

dismiss the question as a non-issue. Though both secularists and Islamists acknowledge that women's rights will not form a large part of the formal debate within institutional walls as the constitution is written and government is created, liberals express a fear that women's rights will be repealed through inaction in the face of conservative elements, who, they believe, aim to change society slowly but surely.

The questions, then, are: what is causing the discrepancy between the claims of liberals who insist that women's rights are at risk and those of conservatives that women's rights are solidified and will never be touched? What is causing such anxiety on the part of the left? In evaluating the historical underpinnings of the debate on women's rights and looking at the major issues in which women's rights play a role—notably, the debate about the *niqab* in universities—answers to such questions can be discerned and recommendations for improvement can be made.

### **The Importance of History**

In most countries' histories, the path towards greater freedom for women occurred through grassroots movements spear-headed by women themselves and rooted in the people as opposed to the state. In Tunisia, the opposite has been the case: forming the center of the struggle between secular dictators and an Islamist opposition party, women have relied on the unilateral power of the state to obtain incremental rights. Indeed,

[Bourguiba's] issuance of the CPS had less to do with feminism than with the president's desire to eliminate traditions and practices that he felt obstructed his modernizing program...At all times Bourguiba saw himself and himself alone as the liberator of Tunisian women, as the initiator of all projects in this domain. If women made any additional demands, they were viewed as ungrateful. (Brand 1998, 180)

Though Ben Ali instituted important legal reforms in the areas of divorce, custody rights, education and employment, his view was the same; he was famous for his position of “the code, but nothing but the code”—in other words, reform would not come without his

initiative (Brand 1998, 193). Both men saw any progress on the issue of women as the prerogative of the state and no one else.

Meanwhile, most women's groups have been part of the establishment or elite. One of the oldest and most powerful women's group, the Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes (UNFT), was owned and operated by the state, and its "monopoly on women's activity made it...difficult for independent women to organize anything but study groups (Brand 1998, 225). Even those women's groups that are independent, such as the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), consist mostly of the intellectual elite as opposed to a diverse array of women; thus, the average Tunisian woman lacks formal representation. The history of women's rights is a history of the struggle between elite Islamists and secularists for institutional control.

There are a couple of consequences to this history. For one, in times of transition—including the current revolution—women cannot help but become anxious about the future of their rights because, as they were quickly and unilaterally given, so they can be quickly and unilaterally taken away. Secular women and men are relatively vocal about their lack of trust of Ennahdha, and rumors of Ghannouchi's secret plans to repeal women's rights abound. Further, because women's rights have always played a central role in the debate between secular and Islamist parties, it can be expected that the issue will continue to be a means through which each side affirms its power and appeals to its base. In the past:

Islamic family law...is viewed as the last bastion of *shari'a* in the modern Arab state...As a result, in Tunisia, when Islamist elements began to flex their muscles, they aimed first at the CSP....[D]uring periods of liberalization, when the Islamists enjoyed...greater freedom of expression, issues related to women became the lightning rod in attacks against and defenses of laicism<sup>11</sup> in general. This has made women the first natural line of defense as well as the first likely victims in any challenge to the state by the Islamists. (Brand 1998, 180-81)

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<sup>11</sup> In this case, the use of the term "*laicism*" is the author's and I interpret it to mean a broader secularism.

In immediate post-revolutionary Tunisia, women started to form the heart of the struggle between secularists and Islamists, most notably through debates about the *niqab* in schools and Ennahdha's questionable stance on laws about polygamy and adoption by single mothers.

The unilateral actions of the state also created a façade of sorts: from the outside, it appears that the Tunisian population's conception of women's rights is uniform and supportive of liberal policies, but this is far from the truth. Not only are some aspects of Tunisia's formal stance on women's rights tenuous, but throughout history there has been a consistent attempt by Islamist groups to reform family law so that it is more in line with the *shari'a*. Extremist conservative elements have been stifled along with liberal voices, and with their new freedom of expression, have begun to assert their views through violent and disruptive mechanisms. Finally, because all women's rights have been given by the state, there have arisen no strong civil society organizations to counter any state action; women themselves are disorganized, lacking in cohesion, and unable to channel any unheard voices. All of this sets the tone for a post-revolutionary society that is divided to say the least.

At the same time, those who claim the story of women's rights is no story at all are correct in some ways. Khediya Arfaoui, a leading women's rights activist and member of the ATFD, admits that, aside from a couple of key reforms, women in Tunisia are the "most spoiled" of all women in the Arab World (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Even those people who expressed the deepest concerns about the future of women's rights noted that such concerns may not be justified in the short term. Because suspicion of Ennahdha is fresh and the appetite for revolution remains strong, most believe that despite questionable stances taken by members of Ennahdha, the group will not move to change the CPS for fear of alienating moderate elements of their base. The general feeling is that any steps back on the subject of women's rights will occur through inaction in the face of conservative elements, who are leading both visible short-term campaigns through active demonstrations and subtle long-term campaigns through reforms of mosques and schools. Any major changes, many concur, will occur somewhat

imperceptibly over time. In many ways this creates more anxiety for the average secularist.

### **A Creeping Conservatism? Or the Lessons of Democracy?**

The most frequent response I received regarding questions of women's rights involved a suspicion or anxiety over Ennahdha's true colors, and thus their future stance on women's rights when they are presumably in power after the governmental elections later in 2012. The interviewees expressed this fear in different ways. Some referenced the discrepancy between the beliefs of Ennahdha's leadership and those of its base—and thus the incongruity between the party's words and its actions. As Alaya Allani, professor of contemporary history at Manouba University and expert on political Islam, explained:

The political discourse of Ennahdha is much more developed than its ideology. They share many ideas with the salafists...This is where their ambiguity versus the salafists comes from...The base is close to the salafists, not the leaders...It is not their actions that are bad; it is the silence on the part of the government. They don't want to lose part of their base...Their political language is "enlightened" but their texts' doctrines are still inspired by the *shari'a*" (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012).<sup>12</sup>

While some, like Radwan Masmoudi (President of the Center of the Study of Islam and Democracy), see this as a consequence of the party's young age and the "learning curve" Tunisia will face in transitioning to a democracy (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012); others, such as Mohamed Salah Hedri (President of the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD)), believe it is because "the core of Ennahdha is not democratic; they want a centralized democracy" (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Ibrahim, of the Democratic Modernist Pole, echoed this sentiment (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).



Others express concern about the varying messages coming from different members of the leadership and the alleged “double speak” of the leader himself, Rachid Ghannouchi. Hatem Bourial, a mainstay of Tunisian civil society, put it this way: “Mr. A says, ‘We are against that,’ Mr. B says, ‘We are not against but not for it,’ and Mr. C says, ‘Well, these people are closer to us than whoever’...It has been like this since Ennahdha was still called MTP” (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). Such conflicting public statements from different leaders may or may not be due to the growing pains of a young and diverse party; the main fear lies in the seemingly blatant contradictions in Rachid Ghannouchi’s stance. At least four interviewees, including Mokhtar Trifi (member of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH)), Khedija Arfaoui and Latifa Lakhdar, pointed to comments Ghannouchi has allegedly made regarding the potential necessity to reinstate polygamy and repeal the law allowing single women to adopt. Zeina,<sup>13</sup> a young Tunisian woman who has spent time in the United States, explains, “Ghannouchi has said, ‘We have a lot of single women and we don’t have enough babies. Polygamy is a good solution to this.’ What does that mean?” (28 January 2012). Meanwhile, Laryssa Chomiak, Director of CEMAT, claims “Ghannouchi has never made a comment about polygamy. These are rumors created by the secularists. There is no double-speak” (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). Zeina credits this interpretation to the fact that most of Ghannouchi’s questionable comments occur during speeches made in Arabic and are thus inaccessible to most Western audiences. Regardless of the truth of the issue, the presence of such concerns speaks volumes about the population’s views about the relevance of women’s rights. The allegations of “double-speak” extend beyond comments that Ghannouchi has made and into the discrepancy between his words, the words of others in the party, and the party’s actions.

There are a number of recent occurrences that raise suspicion in the eyes of many secular Tunisians; events that point to the potentially deep trends of conservatism that may be steering the policies of the Ennahdha party—and thus call into question the group’s commitment to women’s rights. When asked about Ennahdha’s alleged “double-speak,” almost all of the interviewees pointed to the failure of its leadership to

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<sup>13</sup> Real name excluded to protect anonymity.

immediately and loudly condemn actions by conservative salafist groups, and when it finally did so, to act to limit such actions. Instead, the group seems intent on maintaining a vague position in order, as Mohamed Salah Hedri (member of the Justice and Development Party, an Islamist group) explains, “to please everyone because they are afraid someone will arrive to take their power” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). In its desire to remain as it was before—the party that meant something to everyone—Ennahdha is intentionally unclear about its position on issues that divide conservatives and liberals.

One topic that has revealed the differences in opinion that are surfacing regarding women’s rights is the recent debate about the wearing of the *niqab* on university campuses. From November 2011 thru January 2012, on the campus of Manouba University (Tunisia’s largest university by number of students and one of its most liberal), salafists staged sit-ins demanding that female students be permitted to wear the *niqab* during classes and exams. The university’s argument is that the wearing of the *niqab* not only poses a security risk, but also leads to separation in the classroom. As Latifa Lakhdar,<sup>14</sup> professor of contemporary history at the University of Tunis, has explained, “We cannot teach someone who is hidden because we cannot communicate [with her]. It is a pedagogical problem, not a question of human rights or expression”<sup>15</sup> (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Meanwhile, conservative Muslims, including the young women we interviewed from Ennahdha, argue that the ban goes against religious freedom; though they do not wear the veil themselves, they support those women who “are convinced it is necessary” (Ennahdha Female Youth<sup>16</sup>, 27 January 2012). Others like Mr. Moncef Barouni, leader of the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce, approach the issue as such: “I will tell you one thing about the *niqab*: it is

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<sup>14</sup> Ms. Lakhdar was also Vice President of the former “Haute Instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution et de la transition démocratique.”

<sup>15</sup> Ms. Lakhdar went on to say: “Those people who want to say they are free in wearing the *niqab* and want you to respect their liberty, I say in what respect? I say you are in prison because you have chosen to cut off communication and you don’t understand the meaning of liberty.” (26 January 2012)

<sup>16</sup> Names not provided to protect anonymity.

something every Tunisian boy does not like. The *niqab* never existed in Tunisia before and not just because of Ben Ali. The *niqab* prevents boyfriends. It is manipulated by a very small group...the Saudis are funding the Wahhabist movement in Tunisia” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). As usual, the involvement of a garment that covers a woman’s entire face has made the argument about much more than freedom, and points to growing concerns about the new presence of conservatism in the country. Omezzine Khélifa, one of the youngest women to be on the electoral lists for Ettakatol, asks, “Even if this is a question of individual liberty to wear what you want, where is this violence coming from?” (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). As Ms. Arfaoui relayed to us, when asked about the necessity of wearing the *niqab*, one of the female protestors replied “Islam is at threat” (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). The issue of women wearing the *niqab* has lodged itself at the center of the debate between secular and Islamist principles.

### **Failure on the Part of the Left and Right**

The response of Ennahdha and its supporters to accusations of ambiguity, secret conservatism and “double-speak” is one of simple dismissal. When I raised the issue of women’s rights to Abderrazak Kilani, Minister for Coordination between the Constituent Assembly and the Government, he responded: “There is no anxiety or concern (*inquiétude*). Ennahdha will not touch these rights. Everyone agrees that we won’t change anything” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). When I asked him, then, why the left was showing concern, he responded, “The demands that women have in Tunisia are not even guaranteed in Europe, so that is not the problem right now” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). This dismissive attitude is reflective of many of the people we met, who seemed to think that achieving the same rights as women in Europe<sup>17</sup> is reason enough to stop pursuing women’s advancement.

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<sup>17</sup> The claim is also fundamentally false, as women in Europe and the United States do not face the same obstacles in inheritance laws and in attempting to grant citizenship to their non-Muslim husbands like Tunisian women do.

Ghannouchi, meanwhile, seems to believe that the presence of women in his party is proof that his party is pro-women. The first time I asked him about his answer to skepticism about his party's position on women's rights, he responded, "Islam guarantees equality between men and women. Since 1998, we have recognized the Code of Personal Status....Out of the 49 female representatives in the Constituent Assembly, 42 belong to Ennahdha. Some are veiled, some are unveiled" (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington, DC, 1 December 2011). According to these statements, the presence of unveiled women is proof enough that the party is pro-women. Many find issue with this stance; Lakhdar, citing comments by certain female Ennahdha representatives, explained: "Forty-two women from Ennahdha is not a victory for women because they aren't feminists; they are misogynist and anti-feminist" (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). For example, Souad Abdul Rahim, an unveiled party member who has been praised for her moderation, recently expressed her disapproval of women who have children outside of wedlock, stating, "Women are to be given freedom within limits and without violating divine rules" (Al-Hilali, 13 November 2011). Such comments are much more conservative than the opinions the Ennahdha leadership claims to hold.

The second time we met with Ghannouchi, I attempted to press him on his assertion that the "presence of women" means "pro-women" when I asked how his party would answer to the widely varying demands of the women in his party. Ghannouchi's response in January was similar to his response in December:

Competitors tried to consider Ennahdha as an enemy of women's rights, but the election proved that Tunisian women do not accept this condemnation. We convinced women that we are the main guarantor of Tunisian women's rights and this is clear in the Constituent Assembly because 42 of the 49 women are from Ennahdha. Some do not wear the *hijab*, and none wear the *niqab*...We challenged the secular parties to present a woman with a *hijab* and they could not, so we convinced people that our party is more tolerant than other parties because we represent all kinds of choices. (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012)

Mr. Ghannouchi is equally surprised at claims that his party has reacted slowly and ambiguously to the issue of the *niqab*. His comment was simply, “Ennahdha is not pro-*niqab* and not against it...We support the right to wear whatever....The salafists have the right to express themselves” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). While Mr. Ghannouchi is attempting to assume a tolerant stance, his answers reveal an attitude towards women’s rights that relies more on superficial indicators than on the reality of the situation. That being said, Ghannouchi is somewhat correct in the claim that Ennahdha has won over most women’s votes (though women, along with youth, were the largest category of non-voters). Many of the interviewees attribute this to the fact that the social left is out of touch with the average Tunisian woman.

While the majority of those we interviewed were most critical of Ennahdha’s stance on women’s rights, they acknowledged that leftist parties fail to meet women’s needs as well. Recent polls indicate that, when asked which party the respondents felt was “closest” to them, 55% of women throughout the country chose Ennahdha. When the data are broken down by region, Ennahdha won out in even the liberal urban centers like Manouba (46%) and Tunis (45%), though secular parties Ettakatol, CPR and PDP together formed a plurality, winning 48% in Manouba and 52% in Tunis (Geopoll/NDI, January 2012). As Ms. Arfaoui stated,

The political parties don’t mention women’s rights enough. There are only three women in government, and women are not visible in the liberal parties....The other example is Algeria: there were so many political parties that the Islamists won. There was the same problem as in Tunisia: lack of cohesion and collaboration between the social democratic parties.  
(SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012)

Others pointed to the general inability of secular parties to connect with the common man or woman and their appeal to only the intellectual elite. Masmoudi noted, “Tunisia is the only place where the leftist parties are bourgeois and the conservative parties are proletarian” (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Many remark that even if the representation of Ennahdha women is not proof that the party is pro-women, it is still a

better showing than the leftist parties. Abdelwahab Hafaiedh, Director of the Middle East Research Competition Programme (MERC), remarked: “The quota of men and women hurt the social democrats more than [it hurt] Ennahdha because the democrats did not have the women for the ticket and Ennahdha did” (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Thus, though its conservative base concerns many, Ennahdha received more support from and more representation by women in the electoral process. Meanwhile, perhaps more relevant than the politics of women’s rights is the social realities Tunisian women face—and potentially will face—on a daily basis.

### **Beyond Politics: Facing Realities**

Looking beyond the back and forth between secular and Islamist groups, many fear that despite the laudable gains made by women in all areas, there are two main obstacles to their advancement: the social norms still governing gender relations and long-term plans of conservative elements to make these norms even stricter. Some of the interviewees exemplified these normative attitudes. When speaking of the quota for women during the electoral process, Barouni argued:

We wanted to create women as partners in state affairs. The quotas on lists...are a bad way to do things. There shouldn’t be a gift for women; they must be active and present and fight for themselves. Many women have been in the assembly by accident because the parties have blank spaces so they just put women’s names on the lists, and the women aren’t ready to serve... Right now they are just there for the picture and image.  
(SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012)

While Barouni makes a good point that women should be treated equally to men, his arguments reveal a general lack of support for programs that would allow women to gain an equal footing. His argument is countered by other interviewees’ observations that none of the current representatives—male or female—are prepared or have experience to govern, as well as by the fact that women have not yet had the chance to play a major political role, so could not have had the experience expected of most men. Meanwhile,

Mr. Hedri showed concern over the loss of values that would occur through Tunisia's transition into a more liberal secular state; he wants women to return to their values and to be rewarded for staying home. According to Mr. Hedri, the problem with birth control and family planning is that it encourages women to have fewer children and decreases the number of children per family, which is against Islam (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). Zeina, meanwhile, expressed her frustration that progressive laws have not changed many beliefs about the real roles of men and women. She explains:

Women have rights on paper but not in society. I am allowed to visit the U.S. but I still must [follow certain societal guidelines] because if I marry a Tunisian man and I have not [followed these guidelines] there will be shame on my family...Other women ask their boyfriend or husband before they hang out with friends, and if he says no the women will stay home.... When women drink and wear whatever they want, they are considered to be abusing their rights. (28 January 2012)

Societal expectations such as this curtail women's abilities to achieve the same freedoms and positions in society as men. While there is certainly reason to believe these norms will break down over time as some have proven to do already, Mr. Bourial fears that Ennahdha has propagated a rising conservatism in society:

My deep feeling is that the agenda for movements like Ennahdha could extend for 30 years ...We have more and more kindergartens opening up on an Islamic basis and opening up with private funds that are sometimes coming from the East ...This is a trend that will probably change the whole generation and it will be worked out over 25 years ...so why create issues with Europe today? Let's just have things come naturally. Let's just have the shift change slowly... These people do not have a local agenda. They are in an international view of the Arab World. The whole idea is that Europe and France left physically, but that Europe is still present through culture, through the organization of the state, so we have to get rid of it... And this is the agenda. It is to change culturally the minds of the

people in this country, and then you will have changes with women...you will have changes with the whole society. (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012)

By letting conservative elements take root, Bourrial believes, Ennahdha is allowing the very social fabric of the country to develop more conservative undertones. Coming from a major member of civil society, such a view of the future does not bode well.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Though it is important to acknowledge the anxieties present in Tunisia regarding the issue of women's rights, one cannot lose sight of the fact that for now, women in Tunisia face progressive laws that are impressive when compared to the rest of the Middle East as well as, in some cases, to the United States. As Masmoudi proclaims, "If [democracy] won't work here, it won't work in any other Arab country;" the same is true of women's rights. The goal, then, should be to preserve the rights already achieved and provide a space for genuine, bottom-up dialogue and activity on women's rights to develop for the first time in Tunisia. The following recommendations are thus put forward:

#### Short-Term

- **Quotas for female representation should be maintained in the political process until a working government is established.** At a time when women's rights are still in question and skepticism about women's abilities remains, only by ensuring the participation of women through legal measures can their representation be guaranteed.
- **Women's rights should be integrated into debates about and decisions made by the new government.** Members of the Constituent Assembly and the new government must make it clear that women's rights are a priority instead of a "non-issue" by actively integrating considerations for women's needs into new legislation.
- **Political parties should be required to increase the representation of women at all levels through active recruitment.** Much of the anxiety about women's rights



has occurred in response to political parties' ambiguous positions on the role they see women playing in the future of their parties and the country. All parties should be encouraged to answer to these anxieties by actively recruiting women to join their top ranks.

#### Medium- and Long-Term

- **Scholarships and political training programs should be developed for women aspiring to be in public office.** In order to counter claims that women are not suited for political office, and to foster higher numbers of women at higher positions in government, civil society organizations (with the help of the international community) should train women who wish to go into public office.
- **The country should continue to make progress on inheritance laws, as well as citizenship laws for non-Muslim husbands of Muslim women.** Two legal issues that currently prevent Tunisian women from gaining an equal footing with Tunisian men are: 1) they are technically still only eligible for ½ the inheritance received by their male relatives; and 2) Muslim women still face obstacles when they apply for citizenship for their non-Muslim husbands. Both laws impact the potential for Tunisian women to achieve the same level of freedom as their male counterparts.
- **Robust and independent civil society organizations and lobbyist groups should be created that can educate about, raise awareness on, and advocate for women's rights.** Even if Tunisia maintains its progressive women's rights, if robust and independent women's groups do not develop, those rights will always be at the whim of the government. In order to continue to advance the dialogue about women's rights, free institutions need to be created to address the issue. Moreover, the only way to counter conservative social norms regarding the role of women is to educate the populace, raise awareness, and continue to place women in powerful positions in society.



## **Part II: Elections and the Constitution**



# **The Post-Transition Constitutional Process**

**Prudence Buxton**

The high-profile ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011 ensured that the world's gaze fell firmly on Tunisia as the first of the Arab Spring states to overthrow its previous regime. As the world's attention has been drawn to subsequent uprisings in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya and Syria amongst others, many international observers have comparatively neglected the process of transition through which Tunisia has been passing. The procedural and substantive issues involved in Tunisia's transition have not been neglected by Tunisia's citizens, however, and debates and struggles have been taking place since January 2011 within the context of the release of widespread public participation that was heralded by the fall of the previous regime. In the center of both the procedural and substantive debates is the new constitution being drafted by the National Constituent Assembly, a 217-seat body elected through Tunisia's first free election on 23 October 2011.

The task facing the National Constituent Assembly is a challenging one: to draw-up a new constitution that will provide a governmental and societal structure that is perceived to be representative of the values and the interests of Tunisian citizens and, therefore, a legitimate expression of a new social contract. In order to attain this outcome, procedural factors as well as the content of the document will be crucial, and constitute the subject of this chapter. First, I will provide a topic-specific background to Tunisia's current constitutional process so that the current struggles can be placed within their national and historical context. I will then go on to highlight some of the key debates in the post-conflict/transition, constitutional literature to provide an analytical structure to the subsequent discussion. From this foundation, an observation and analysis of the Tunisian case will be put forward highlighting where the trade-offs identified in the literature will have an impact in Tunisia's transitional period. I will conclude with recommendations for how best to secure a stable and legitimate transition in Tunisia and,

more broadly, to identify potential lessons to be learned from this case that might apply to other Arab Spring states in their continuing struggles to establish a new order.

## **Background**

Although wide-spread and broad-based political discussions pertaining to political institutions and constitutions are a new freedom for the vast majority of the Tunisian population, they are by no means an anomaly in modern Tunisian history. In fact, this institutional practice and method of reform can be traced back to 1861, when Muhammad III as-Sadiq, then Bey of Tunis, drew-up the first constitution in the Arab World. This was the culmination of a significant struggle between two movements in the Tunisian elite: the Zeytuna movement of the Zeytuna school, and the Destour (constitution) school. The enactment of this constitution, and the prominence that this later gave to the Destour Movement, began a process which continues to inform today's discussions. The centrality of the institutional underpinnings of this movement in subsequent movements in Tunisia gained prominence again when the Destour Movement, established in 1920, became the focal point of Tunisia's anti-colonial struggle against the French. Following Tunisia's independence in 1956, the leader of the Neo-Destour Party, Habib Bourguiba became the leader of the new nation. The constitution that he enacted in 1959, and the Destour ideology, remained in place, first through the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD), and later by the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) under Ben Ali, until the 2011 uprising.

The 1959 constitution was designed to encourage Bourguiba's modernist vision for Tunisia and included many progressive elements. Particularly of note was the inclusion of the Personal Status Code that included constitutional protection for women's rights unparalleled in the Arab World and beyond. It should be pointed out that although Bourguiba's vision was notably progressive, this is not to suggest that this was in opposition to 'non-progressive' Islamic groups. In fact, it is pertinent to note that the majority of Tunisia's population are followers of the Maliki religious school of Sunni Islam, a school of law that allows considerable scope for the interpretation of religious texts.

## **Theoretical Literature**

While there has been a considerable amount of scholarly attention, both theoretical and empirical, dedicated to different post-conflict or post-transition constitutional processes, they have led to little agreement on which prescriptions work best in order to ensure peaceful and stable outcomes. This is primarily due to the fact that constitutions, by their very nature, are not ‘one size fits all’ and will likely fail to increase stability unless they are carefully tailored to their specific local contexts. That being said, a short discussion of some of the agreed-upon points and highlighted trade-offs will help to frame an analytical discussion of the process which Tunisia is currently under-going. While there might be little agreement as yet about what specifics post-transition constitutions should aim for, a more general conception of what constitutes a successful constitution is possible. Widner describes the more uncontroversial attributes of a successful constitution as durability, the ability to transform conflict from the streets and into institutions, the ability to protect all citizens’ rights to participation and the inclusion of mechanisms that will allow it to become self-enforcing (Widner 2008, 1515). While these ‘end states’ are fairly uncontroversial, there is no clear cut answer about which procedural or substantive factors aid their attainment. The procedural debate takes into account the different impacts that different types of bodies and their operation can have on the success of a post-transition constitution. Some of the procedural aspects that can have an effect are degrees of transparency and public participation, the creation of an atmosphere of trust and inclusion, and the electoral or other incentives of those serving on the constitutional body (Widner 2008, 1517-20; Horowitz 2008, 3-20). Unsurprisingly, what these proposed procedural variables have in common is their ability to affect how easy it is for those drafting the constitution to favor compromise and long-term societal benefit over selfish short-term gain. And still, there are trade-offs involved in even this limited list of variables. For example, the degree of transparency and public participation can be both a good thing, where it helps to create public trust, understanding and buy-in, and a bad thing where it detracts from the task itself or encourages public posturing for subsequent elections. This trade-off will be particularly relevant for the Tunisian example since, as Horowitz notes, public participation and transparency are of particular importance where

the main obstacle to be overcome is high levels of public distrust of the out-going regime (Horowitz 2008, 21).

The other major debate concerns the content of post-transition constitutions with regard to the configuration of institutions that they create. Understandably, given the even greater sensitivity to local contexts with respect to content, there are even fewer ‘best practices’ to follow despite the fact that, in the long-run, the content of a constitution will have a much bigger impact on its ability to mitigate conflict than the procedure through which it was reached. There are an endless number of possible configurations, and only some relevant examples will be mentioned here. For example, Horowitz mentions the trade-offs associated with the ‘consociational’ model of democracy which aims to achieve governance through grand coalitions where all major groups are represented (Horowitz 2008, 3). While this has appealing characteristics, particularly its inclusiveness and attempt to build consensus, there are some drawbacks to this model as well. Not only does the policy process typically become very complex, but the willingness of moderate leaders to form cross-group coalitions can incite a backlash from their own group and, eventually, lead to the formation of fringe groups which tend to be more extreme.

Where the precise nature of the institutions is under debate, Horowitz concludes that at the least constitution drafters ought to aim for coherence of design. However, he notes in parallel that “the process of making constitutions...is much more conducive to partial or even conflicting innovations than it is to the adoption of coherent designs whose elements reinforce each other” (Horowitz 2008, 15). This, combined with Widner’s observation that conflict resolution and constitution writing often espouse conflicting imperatives (Widner 2008, 1533), highlights the delicacy of the post-transition constitution-writing process and will help us to identify potential pit-falls in Tunisia. Indeed, in his paper, Weiner argues that “in societies in transition, efforts to resolve deep divisions or fundamental disagreements about the nature of society through constitutional drafting may sharpen political differences and heighten the political salience of controversial issues or social cleavages” (Weiner 2011, 9).



## **Tunisian Case**

Following Ben Ali's departure on 14 January 2011, Tunisia went through three interim arrangements before the October 2011 elections. Due to continued protester pressure three reform committees were created, including The High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (also known as the Ben Achour Commission). This 150-member commission contained representatives from twelve political parties and eighteen civil society organizations. At this stage of the transition, the debate that polarized elites and protesters was what the next significant step should be; either a presidential election with constitutional continuity, or elections for a constituent assembly. In view of the high level of mistrust of old elites and institutions, combined with the revolutionary fervor of the population and particularly through the so-called "Kasbah 2" sit-in, the Ben Achour Commission announced elections for a constituent assembly and then, on 23 March 2011, suspended the 1959 constitution. It was replaced as an interim arrangement with Decree Law 14, which empowered the interim government to make decisions with a limited mandate such as adopting the new electoral law on 12 April 2011, which favored a variation on closed-list proportional representation.

### The National Constituent Assembly

Elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) took place on 23 October 2011 and resulted in a three-party coalition or 'troika' as it is now referred to. Ennahdha, the moderate Islamist party, gained the highest number of seats, winning 89 out of a possible 217. It made a coalition agreement with both the Congress for the Republic (CPR) party, which gained 29 seats, and Ettakatol (or Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL)), with its 20 seats. These elections, while being correctly lauded as a success under the circumstances, were not controversy-free with regard to the resultant operating legitimacy of the NCA. First of all, there was a high level of public confusion over the purpose of the elections. According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems

(IFES) polling data from May 2011,<sup>18</sup> less than half of eligible voters could identify that the elections were for a constituent assembly and not a legislature or executive. This lack of public awareness, combined with the closed-list system, has led some to suggest that the NCA began its mandate with a “credibility deficit” (Pickard 2011, 641).

The NCA’s mandate is to write the new constitution and to prepare the country for presidential or parliamentary elections in November 2012, depending on what the agreed institutional arrangements call for. Beyond this mandate, the scope of what the NCA can do is not completely clear. It is also a sovereign body that has semi-legislative powers that can enable it to determine how the country is governed in the interim. As Pickard notes, this has given rise to the unusual situation of sovereign authority being placed in a constituent assembly (Pickard 2011, 642). Referring back to the literature on this subject, this dual mandate may negatively impact the success of the constitution-writing process since it almost *requires* posturing for the upcoming elections in November through its semi-legislative powers, possibly resulting in the neglect in the constitution. The dual mandate means that the NCA’s legitimacy and efficacy face another challenge. The expectations of swift change in the day-to-day lives of normal Tunisians have been soaring at a higher-level than can be met in such a short time following the ousting of the previous regime. Economic and social issues are pressing, and having the same body try to tackle these and write a constitution may affect the legitimacy that the public is willing to give to the constitution if the NCA has failed to make progress in tackling these issues.

Following the elections, the first item on the NCA’s agenda was to determine how it would function internally before beginning work on drafting constitutional articles. The representatives of Ettakatol and some other parties were keen, at this stage, to form a ‘Government of National Interests’ in the NCA, or a grand coalition of the vast majority of the seats in the assembly. However, they were unable to reach a unanimous agreement, and so the ‘troika’ was formed, and government positions were divided among the three

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<sup>18</sup> “Tunisia Voter Registration and Voter Confidence Assessment Survey.” IFES. May 2011. Cited in McCurdy, Daphne. 2011. ‘A Guide to the Tunisian Elections.’ *Project on Middle East Democracy*. p. 16.

parties. With the internal arrangements finalized only in January, the Assembly could finally turn to the discussion of the articles.

### Major Issues

There are five main issue areas around which the debate has centered during the drafting of the constitution: the role of religion in public life, separation of powers, women's rights and universal values, decentralization and, finally, the 'style' of government, either presidential, parliamentary or some mix of the two. While some of these debates are likely to be uncontroversial, others are likely to divide both the constituents and the Tunisian population at large. Given Tunisia's status as a relatively ethnically homogenous and non-sectarian nation, the biggest social cleavage of political significance is between the secularists and the Islamists, and following the ousting of the regime and the subsequent transitional period, the polarization between this and other cleavages, suppressed for so long by the Ben Ali regime, has increased. As such, the most controversial issue that the constitution drafters will have to negotiate is the role of religion in public life. There is a considerable amount of debate, and in some cases fear mongering, about whether Article 1 of the 1959 constitution will remain or be strengthened. It currently reads:

“Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and its type of government is the Republic.”

At this stage it appears that the main parties have agreed to keep this article the same, which should not be too inflammatory since this article has been in the Tunisian constitution since 1959. What might prove to be more controversial are the actions that could be taken by those who feel that this article was neglected and not implemented, and so might call for greater constitutional protection of the role of Islam in Tunisian society. This could manifest itself, for example, in articles that concern the trade-off between collective and individual rights, such as weighing the importance of freedom of expression and religious sensitivity. The inflammatory potential of this topic was

demonstrated by the “*Persepolis* scandal” following the airing of the film *Persepolis* on Tunisian television. Many Islamist groups were appalled that a film that portrays God blasphemously, which is considered to be a sin in Islam, could be shown in Tunisia. Many secular groups were then equally appalled at the judicial proceedings that were initiated against the head of the television station which aired the film. This tension and debate may also spill-over into the discussion of women’s rights and universal values. Despite Ennahdha’s repeated assurances that the Personal Status Code will not be touched, there are secular women’s groups and groups of intellectuals who remain scared of potential back-sliding. While it seems unlikely that Ennahdha or any other party would wish to engage in such a costly and destabilizing move, women’s groups will remain alert to the possibility of the inclusion of any loopholes connected with rights issues that could be exploited at a later stage.

The decision about what ‘style’ of government to adopt, while less publicly divisive, also has the ability to test the young coalition’s ability to manage a plurality of opinions. In their election manifesto, Ennahdha favors a single-chamber parliamentary system with a president elected by parliament, whereas the CPR, one of their coalition partners, favors a clear separation of powers, a high level of decentralization and a universal declaration of human rights. There is also a diversity of opinion in the opposition parties such as Progressive Democratic Party (PDP)’s preference for an American-style presidential system. As was noted in the theoretical debate, there is little consensus on which of these institutional styles is best able to mitigate future conflict, but as Horowitz pointed out, coherence does appear to matter. The plurality of opinions on this topic and the requisite negotiations may make this coherence harder to achieve.

### Potential Challenges and Spoilers

In addition to the challenge to its legitimacy in its conception and tackling the issues outlined above, the NCA will face many other challenges in its attempt to create a new order in Tunisia. The most prominent of these is likely to be the tension between making sufficient progress on a coherent constitution to hold elections as scheduled in November, while a desperate and alert population increases their demands for progress on the ‘real’

issues of unemployment, reduced corruption, regional equality and social justice. These needs were repressed for so long under the Ben Ali regime that public expectations and demands are at an unsustainably high level. With the economy stagnant, and likely to remain that way until a higher level of stability can return to Tunisia, these conditions are harsh enough to damage the legitimacy of the governing body. These high expectations are compounded by the confusion over the mandate and purpose of the NCA during and after the elections. This challenge to its legitimacy, as well as the added degree of uncertainty, has meant that there are those who feel that October's elections could and should have been presidential and parliamentary elections. Proponents of this view argue that the pressing economic and social needs of the country cannot afford to wait through this extra year of uncertainty and flux before they begin to be addressed through a legislative agenda.

Another key challenge to the success of the NCA's constitution drafting process will be how it manages public participation in the process. As was discussed in the literature, there is a trade-off to be made between transparency and public participation, on the one hand, and the ability and willingness of representatives to compromise and to reach a mutually accommodating agreement on the other. In Tunisia, perhaps in response to the high level of public mistrust in public institutions following decades of dictatorship, they have so far taken a highly transparent and participatory route. This includes many of the assembly's sessions being televised, as well as a parallel civil society constituent assembly working alongside it as a form of oversight. This may well create necessary public buy-in among certain groups, but there are many associated risks. The first, which had already been widely noticed amongst the Tunisian population, is that the process has already begun to feel like a political campaign among the parties for the elections in November. This provides perverse incentives for representatives and party leaders to revert back to strategies for personal gain, rather reaching a compromise. Not only does this have the potential to further polarize the debate, the inter-party squabbling has reduced the public's trust in the assembly outright.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> As shown in Applied Social Science Forum polling data from January 2012.

There remain, however, many reasons to be optimistic about the eventual success of the transitional process in Tunisia. One of the most significant changes that Tunisia, and other parts of the Arab World, has undergone since the uprisings began is that the public is now alert and has shown itself willing to express itself forcefully if necessary. A developing civil society that is finding new and creative ways to engage people is also contributing positively to this. Tunisia's strong and neutral administration also deserves a lot of the credit for maintaining a certain level of continuity and stability and will continue to play an important role as the NCA continues with its task.

## **Conclusion**

Although most average Tunisians are more concerned with progress on substantive issues such as unemployment and social welfare, the importance of the constitution-drafting process cannot be neglected. This is because the institutions that it creates will determine what is *legitimate* in Tunisia's new developing social contract between its citizens and the state. Without this, the rule of law, stability and prosperity will not be able to take hold during the continued transitional period. Without some sense of national unity on the bigger issues, the government will not be able to work properly on the key social and economic issues that have the potential to derail steps towards stable democracy. As has been highlighted in the literature, there are a number of trade-offs that need to be taken into consideration during the drafting process which will affect the legitimacy of both the process itself and the resulting document. While the discussion of this chapter has shown that these trade-offs are at play in the Tunisian case, creating a number of vulnerabilities, there are also reasons for being optimistic. The revolution for 'liberty and dignity' has had an enormous social impact in Tunisia that has empowered the Tunisian population in a way unseen before. It is this new confidence in their ability to articulate and promote their demands that has given the Tunisian people continued optimism in this uncertain transitional period.

## Recommendations

- **NCA and political parties should conceive and implement a public outreach strategy** in order to manage public expectations and to educate them about the significance of the task at hand. Civic education programs should have national coverage and be perceived as emanating from a neutral source. This should include further clarification about the distinct mandate of the NCA as both a constitutional body and a body with semi-legislative powers. The importance of both aspects of its mandate should be stressed.
- **The NCA, with technical assistance from the international community, should take steps to address some of the perverse incentives currently faced by constituents** who, on the one hand, need to compromise to reach an agreement, but on the other need to posture for elections taking place in November. Delaying the elections is likely to be disruptive and further erode public trust in the NCA, but the inclusion of more informal and private mechanisms for reaching agreements on constitutional articles could be considered as an alternative.
- **The NCA should protect its own legitimacy and that of the draft constitution it will produce** by not over-stepping its mandate as a body. While the NCA is an important body, it should have a limited scope in terms of the creation and implementation of policy. Its primary task is to provide the framework for future policymaking.
- **The NCA, with technical assistance from the international community, should further enhance this legitimacy through formalizing civil society engagement with the process.** Establishing strong and institutionalized relationships between the NCA and civil society forums will help the new constitution to be seen as a genuinely “national document,” rather than one that reflects the interests of particular groups. This is crucial for the constitution to be a durable one.
- **Interested parties should take lessons learned from the Tunisian case** in order to apply them to other post-Arab Spring constitution-drafting procedures. Although writing constitutions, as highlighted, is not a one-size-fits-all process, careful

observation and analysis of the response to the process in Tunisia may prove an invaluable insight for those who are embarking on similar national processes.



# Political Party Development

Amy Hamblin

## Overview

In the last decade of Ben Ali's rule, the country's political system seemed increasingly out of touch with the majority of its people. The ruling party that had in various incarnations existed since the country's founding no longer enjoyed popular or grassroots enthusiasm—nor did its leader, Ben Ali. The eight legal opposition parties were weak, only expressing muted dissent in exchange for the privilege to participate formally in the political system (Long, Reich, and Gasiorowski 2010, 519). The only group with the potential to transform itself into a major political force—Ennahdha—was banned from forming a party. In short, the ossified political system at the time of the uprising in Tunisia was unable to respond to rising demands and discontent. The fact that tens of thousands of Tunisians were driven into the streets to express their grievances revealed the extent to which the Tunisian population no longer felt that their formal political system was responsive to their demands.

Following Ben Ali's departure, the formal political sphere was reconstituted in an attempt to become once again the legitimate channel for political activity. The adoption of a genuine multiparty system was supposed to inspire faith in the ability of political institutions to mediate between conflicting interests—rather than through protest or violent activity. Within months of Ben Ali's fall, the country went from having eight recognized opposition parties to more than 100 political parties. The multitude of newly formed parties was interpreted by many as a positive development showing the high level of enthusiasm for the democratic process. There was also the assumption that the large volume of parties would guarantee that all Tunisians felt represented by the political system.

The proliferation of parties, however, belies the fact that many Tunisians still do not feel engaged or are dissatisfied with the current political landscape. Approximately 51.7% of all eligible voters participated in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections in October. The seemingly low turnout for the country's first free and fair

multiparty elections may reflect a number of issues, including confusion over the new political process, lack of enthusiasm and barriers to people being able to cast their vote. The wide array of new parties, many without differentiated or well-articulated messages, certainly was overwhelming and confusing for voters. Of the more than 80 parties that participated in the Constituent Assembly elections, only the four largest parties fielded candidates for all 33 electoral constituencies. Many of the “parties” ran just one or two candidates, and lacked well-developed political platforms.

While it is apparent that Tunisia’s parties still need time to mature, we should not lose sight of the enormity of what these parties have accomplished in the last year. This chapter will trace the development of political parties since the departure of Ben Ali, using the results of the NCA elections to evaluate their progress. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of the current weaknesses in the party landscape and policy recommendations.

### **Recent Development of the Multiparty System**

With the opening up of the political system, Tunisians for the first time had the opportunity to organize themselves politically without any pressure from the regime. This hard-won right to form political parties freely did not come without serious challenges. The legacy of 60 years of dictatorship will linger for years to come.

The best organized and experienced political organization under the old regime, namely the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), was disbanded in March 2011, causing many of the party’s former members and some of the more politically-oriented Tunisians to disappear, at least temporarily, from the political scene. While the party had resorted to increasing levels of coercion to maintain its dominance, the RCD and its forerunners had enjoyed widespread support for periods of time under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. With 2.5 million members, 80,000 party activists and 7,800 branches, the RCD monopolized the political space (Long, Reich and Gasiorowski 2010, 527) and its sudden demise has thus left an enormous gap for other parties to fill. Some analysts such as Hatem Bourial have stated their belief that the involvement of RCDists, with their

experience and expertise, will be key to a successful political transition (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012).

Now that the RCD's monopoly over politics has ended, other political parties have begun to rapidly ramp up their capacity. Several of the challenges these parties have encountered are explored below.

### Messaging, Branding and Platform Development

Many of the parties have struggled to develop a clear and differentiated message, as well as a solid policy platform. This is partially due to the fact that opposition parties and leaders active under Ben Ali's regime never were forced to articulate a positive political vision. They could garner support merely by expressing their opposition to the policies of the old regime. The task of developing a distinct message also has been made more difficult by the size of the field of parties.

With Ennahdha consistently polling as the front-runner before the elections, most of the other prominent parties chose to draw a contrast with them by focusing on their secular credentials. As a result, the Islamist-secular issue dominated the public debate in the lead-up to the elections, despite Ennahdha's efforts to transcend the divide by espousing a vague but conciliatory message. Tunisia is known for its "moderate" brand of Islam, so that in order for Ennahdha to perform well in the polls, the party would need to garner support from all corners of the country, not just those inclined to vote for an Islamist party. While Ennahdha tried to remain above the fray, most of the secular parties fiercely attacked the notion that Ennahdha was moderate. This played to Ennahdha's advantage for three reasons. First, the contrast was drawn between Ennahdha and the rest of the nearly indistinguishable field of secular parties. Second, the fierce rhetoric against Ennahdha didn't match with the moderate image meticulously cultivated by the party, thereby making it a question of which party a voter was more inclined to believe. Third, the secularists' rhetoric was often perceived as being anti-religion or anti-Islam, which turned off voters who may generally support the idea of a secular state (Interview with Radwan Masmoudi, SAIS group meeting, 26 January 2012).

Unlike the smaller parties, the major parties did develop political platforms, but their policy proposals generally did not play a prominent role in their campaign messaging. To the extent that voters were even aware of the parties' policy proposals, some commentators worry that the parties' platforms were overly aspirational and have raised expectations to an unhealthy level.

### Organization and Outreach

The legacy of dictatorship meant that none of the current parties emerged from the old political system with a strong and active grassroots network of supporters. Nevertheless, an organizational gap soon emerged between Ennahdha and its secular rivals. Although Ennahdha had not been active in Tunisian society since the organization was decimated in the early 1990s, the group was able to quickly re-establish itself by tapping into its existing network of supporters. The daughter of the founder of Ennahdha, Soumaya Ghannouchi, explains: "Even though there was no organized structure on ground before the revolution because of the crackdown on the party, the people still kept their allegiance to the party. And once they were able to express that they did so and very quickly organized themselves" (Public Radio International, 6 January 2012). Building political networks requires time, resources and an inspiring vision with broad appeal, and Ennahdha seems to have wielded an advantage in all three areas. The Party of Justice and Development, a small Islamist rival to Ennahdha, illustrates the disparity. The party held its first meeting in February 2011, and lacking Ennahdha's existing network of supporters, it has primarily relied on Facebook to spread its message and recruit its estimated 900 volunteers, even though the party's founder also emphasizes the importance of direct voter contact (Interview with Mohamed Salah Hedri, SAIS group meeting, 24 January 2012).

In addition to the party's inherent advantages, Ennahdha's leaders recognized the importance of building a solid ground organization and allocated significant resources to grassroots outreach. It was the first party to open up offices around the country and its flyers, billboards and rallies helped establish its presence even in rural areas. Ettakatol also held popular rallies, but the party lacked the national reach of Ennahdha (Interview

with Laryssa Chomiak, SAIS group meeting, 26 January 2012). Several of the other large parties, with the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) being the most glaring example, largely relied on advertising campaigns to communicate with voters in urban areas.

It also should be mentioned that parties in Tunisia had to overcome the residual wariness of a population that was taught to believe that politics is a dirty and corrupt game.

### Funding and Resources

Lacking the well-oiled fundraising machinery that usually is built over multiple elections, most Tunisian parties were unable to generate enough financial support to pay for large-scale campaign operations. There were a few exceptions, however. Ennahdha, the PDP and Free Patriotic Union (UPL) appeared to have a sizeable fundraising advantage over their competition, though the source of the funds was not always clear. Some of the secular parties accused Ennahdha of taking money from Gulf states, a charge that the party's leader Rachid Ghannouchi has denied. He claims that the party's funds come from business leaders within the country. However, a 22 October 2011 *New York Times* article cites other party officials as admitting that Ennahdha has accepted taken contributions from Gulf states for its charity work. This highlights the problematic "gray areas" arising from a movement that blurs the line between being a social and political phenomenon. It also underscores the challenge of structuring a political system not to give undue advantage to Islamist forces that are embedded in society through mosques and charities in a way that purely secular political parties never could achieve (unless labor parties merged with strong labor unions). Aside from Ennahdha, the PDP was rumored to have benefited from close ties to Tunisian business, including many Ben Ali backers (Kirkpatrick, 22 October 2011). The source of the UPL's lavish spending was less secret: its founder, Slim Riahi, made his fortune in Libyan oil services and property development.

The clear financial imbalance between parties led Tunisian authorities in June 2011 to put a cap on campaign spending and ban foreign contributions. In addition, an advertising moratorium was imposed until the official period for campaigning began on 1

October 2011. The PDP and the UPL flouted this rule without serious repercussions, except perhaps at the ballot box. The electoral commission attempted to pursue legal action against the violating parties, but a judge dismissed the charges, highlighting the lack of enforcement power of the electoral commission (Zouari, 28 September 2011).

### **Interpreting the Constituent Assembly Elections**

The NCA elections on 23 October 2011 provided the first real opportunity to evaluate the strength of the political parties, and as predicted, Ennahdha was the clear winner. However, many analysts did not anticipate the performance gap between Ennahdha and its secular rivals. Ennahdha captured 37% of the vote, while the next closest party, Congress for the Republic, won only 8%. Of all the parties falling short of expectations at the polls, the PDP's poor showing came as the biggest surprise. The party captured only 3% of the vote, despite supposedly being well positioned as one of the main opposition parties under Ben Ali. The biggest surprise success story may have been Al-Aridha, a party that emerged from nowhere to place third in terms of seat allocations.

The distribution of seats between the parties is analyzed further below, but first, it is important to remember who the current NCA represents—half of all eligible voters who exercised their right to vote. Only two-thirds of those voters are now represented in the assembly by the party they selected. The other third voted for parties that did not receive enough votes to receive a seat in the NCA (Pickard 2011, 639). In other words, the current composition of the NCA reflects the will of approximately 34% of the voting age population.

For this reason and others, Ennahdha's victory does not lend itself to a clear-cut interpretation. Part of Ennahdha's success owes to its grassroots network of supporters and apparently deep financial resources, as well as its reputation for being effective and capable of getting things done. Moreover, Ennahdha enjoyed the greatest level of name recognition throughout the country, due to its highly visible opposition to Bourguiba and Ben Ali, as well as its efforts to campaign in both rural and urban areas throughout the country. It was the only party to make a concerted effort to have a presence on the ground in all electoral constituencies (Churchill, 27 October 2011). Also important, Ennahdha

represented a complete departure from the Ben Ali regime, whereas the former legal opposition parties were tainted by their involvement in the old political system.

Although Ennahdha has captured a significant share of votes, commentators are quick to note that the majority of votes were cast for secular parties. Many on the Left interpret this to mean that Ennahdha's influence can be countered if the secular parties simply unite under one banner in the next election. Ahmed Ibrahim, secretary of the liberal, secular Ettajdid party, supports such an interpretation, and when asked if there were any other lessons to draw from the election, he said no (SAIS group meeting, 25 January 2012). A fuller accounting of the secular parties' varying performance, however, would note several other factors. After all, the CPR outshone other secular parties, despite consistently polling behind the PDP and Ettakatol before the election. Similar to Ennahdha, CPR represented a clean break from the past regime. The party had remained outside of the formal political system under Ben Ali and thus was not tainted by association. The other two dominant secular parties, Ettakatol and the PDP, both had been legally recognized opposition parties and were seen by some as remnants of the old system. The CPR reinforced the notion that it represented a new era of politics by refusing funding from corporations, signaling the end of big business in politics. Also, CPR was not as openly hostile to Ennahdha as Ettakatol and the PDP, with the party's leader hinting at the possibility of aligning with Ennahdha in the Constituent Assembly (Radio France Internationale, 22 July 2011).

A look at the factors behind Ettakatol's surge ahead of PDP, which had been ahead in the polls, is also instructive. Lacking the financing of other top parties, Ettakatol nevertheless showed that it was possible to overcome this by: 1) building a strong grassroots operation using volunteers to go door to door; and 2) effectively using social media. The PDP, by contrast, hired an expensive New York-based advertising firm to craft slick messaging and all but ignored field organizing. Furthermore, its ads featured the images of the party's leaders Ahmed Nejib El Chebbi and Maya Jribi, harkening back to the personality-driven politics of the old regime (Interview with Laryssa Chomiak, SAIS group meeting, 26 January 2012). As one analyst noted, Tunisia is a small country of 10.5 million where word of mouth can be an incredibly powerful force. In the case of

the PDP, its lavish spending on overly polished, personality-driven advertising fed into the rumor that the party was tied to the old regime and whether true or not, this perception hurt the party at the polls (Interview with Laryssa Chomiak, SAIS group meeting, 26 January 2012).

While the dominant secular parties focused on the potential Islamist threat, the unknown populist party Al-Aridha, founded by London-based TV tycoon Hechmi Hamdi, demonstrated the potential appeal of populism in Tunisia. The party placed an astonishing third thanks to unrealistic promises, such as providing 100 dinars a month for the unemployed, universal health care, and affordable electricity and water (McCurdy, 31 October 2011). The surprise success of Al-Aridha has been dismissed by other political parties, which cite the apparent violation of campaign advertising rules and the reliance on unrealistic promises to gin up support in the under-educated regions of the interior. Such quick dismissal of the Al-Aridha phenomenon, however, misses a few important lessons. First, the meteoric rise of Al-Aridha showed that much of the population, especially in the interior, cares far more about bread-and-butter issues than questions of national identity and freedom of speech. Secondly, Hamdi comes from Sidi Bouzid, where the revolution started, and targeted his campaign to the concerns of people in the underdeveloped interior of the country. While other Tunis-based parties paid lip service to the development issues of the interior, Al-Aridha's focus on the problems there, made more resonant with Hamdi's background, likely was perceived as more genuine (McCurdy, 31 October 2011).

### **Problems in the Current Party Landscape**

The post-election political climate closely resembles the campaign period—polarized and frozen by the Islamism-secularism debate. Distrust of Ennahdha among secularists, particularly the elite, remains high, despite the party's coalition with CPR and Ettakatol. Secular critics cite Ennahdha's "double speak"—one party representative saying one palliative to its traditional base and another to appease its more moderate, secularist supporters. Unsurprisingly, a stalemate has emerged, with Ennahdha being too weak to impose its vision and opposition parties acting as obstructionists.



To some extent, the focus on the question of the country's identity is natural given the fact that the Constituent Assembly is charged with drafting the constitution—a document that establishes the contours of the political system to reflect some interpretation of “national identity.” However, many of the secular parties, including the PDP, Afek Tounes and PDM, that appear intent on thwarting Ennahdha in the Constituent Assembly risk falling out of step with the majority voters, who prioritize economic and security issues far above questions of national identity (GeoPoll/NDI, January 2012). These parties may appeal to their base, but they will have trouble expanding their reach with a continued focus on identity issues. If the elected party representatives prove incapable of passing key legislation and drafting a constitution within the Assembly's one-year mandate, it will not only undermine confidence in the parties but also in the capacity of a democratic system to address the needs and interests of the population.

Voter dissatisfaction with the political parties and broader political system has begun to be manifest in the polls. Confidence in the current political scene fell to 20% in January 2012, down from 56% in April 2011. A drop in confidence levels is to be expected given the messiness of a transparent democratic process, but the sharp decline should be a warning sign to politicians in a country still undergoing a very fragile political transition. Twenty percent of polled CPR voters stated that they would not be voting again for unclear reasons and 26% of surveyed Ettakatol voters expressed their intention to vote for a different party (Poll conducted by Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh, January 2012).

## **Conclusion**

After decades of dictatorship in which divisions were suppressed through coercion, it is not surprising that questions of national identity and old divisions between a Western-oriented elite and more traditional populations have resurfaced. As representatives of the country's diverse population, parties should reflect these divisions but not inflame them. In Tunisia, as elsewhere, these divisions have been exploited and deepened by the parties, though that is not to say that many of the party's leaders do not genuinely fear the

Islamist threat. The problem is that party elites tend to be more militant in their secularism than the majority of voters, with the result being an array of parties on the Left that lack broader appeal.

Politics will always be a messy game driven by the logic of the ballot box. Setting aside the greater responsibilities of political leaders, polling data seems to suggest that it would be politically popular to forge some pact on the country's identity, which would not eliminate divisions but at least allow for the political debate to move beyond its current obsession with identity issues. Such reconciliation cannot be mandated through policy; it can only be realized through the wisdom of political leaders to recognize the fragility of their country's transition and the sacrifices made to achieve a better political, social and economic life for Tunisians.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Many of the country's current political problems will self-correct through signals voters will send through the ballot box. If the lessons from the country's first free and fair elections were not clear to all, the results of the upcoming parliamentary elections will provide another opportunity to reinforce them and perhaps offer new lessons to the parties. Indeed, the Left is streamlining with several parties in talks to form a new coalition. Time will tell if parties such as the PDP adjust their outreach methods and messaging to appeal to a broader audience. As political analyst Radwan Masmoudi noted, the country could benefit from the entrance of an exciting new secular party, which does not prioritize freedom of expression above economic and security issues (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). It seems Masmoudi is correct in his analysis based on the fact that a majority of the country voted for secular parties and many secularists voted for Ennahdha based on its reputation for being able to get things done. It is up to a smart political entrepreneur to recognize and take advantage of the opportunity for such a party.

Turning to the realm of public policy, the main objective of electoral reform should be to further level the playing field to ensure equal opportunity for parties to compete politically and to allow new parties to emerge. To this end, two policy recommendations are offered below:

- **Enhance the legitimacy and enforcement power of the electoral commission.** Tunisian authorities already have taken significant and commendable measures to ensure fair play. However, the last elections illustrated the weakness of the electoral commission in enforcing its more controversial decisions, such as the one to implement a moratorium on political advertising. In addition to strengthening the legitimacy of the commission through enhanced communication with the parties, **legislation should be passed stipulating that the electoral commission's rulings are legally binding and stating the penalty for violations.**
- **Pass tougher campaign finance provisions.** The current regulations governing campaign financing leave too much to interpretation. Hamdi was able to exploit this weakness in the current provisions by broadcasting on his own TV network. More thought also needs to be given to the relationship between political parties and charity organizations, which thus far has only been an issue with Ennahdha. The party's past provision of social services needs to be viewed as campaign expenditures, and if such charity work continues, it should be conducted through an organization that does not bear the name of Ennahdha.
- Beyond closing such loopholes, **more resources should be invested in tracking campaign financing.** To build public confidence and promote transparency, **the parties should be required to publically disclose their large donors.**



# Ennahdha and the Salafis

Roberta Lusardi

Violence at Manouba university, attacks on a synagogue in the southern city of Gabes and anti-Jewish slogans during the arrival of the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh at the Tunis airport are just a few of the salafi initiatives in early 2012 that seem to cast a shadow over the new democratic Tunisia.

Many secularist, leftist activists and feminist associations have denounced these actions and fear a possible Islamization of the Tunisian society. They accuse Ennahdha, the main Tunisian party after the last elections, to have a hidden agenda aiming at creating an Islamic state. Ennahdha's attitude, they say, with its *laissez-faire* policy, might conceal Rachid Ghannouchi's desire to foster a transformation of the society in an Islamic sense.

Ennahdha's stance with respect to the salafis, the groups who adopt a strict interpretation of the Quran and are against democracy and modernity, has wavered between *laissez-faire* and open disapproval, without any timely intervention, and this is what the Islamist party's critics oppose. Why has Ennahdha not defined clearly its position with respect to the Islamists on its right? The purpose of this chapter is to delve into the relationship between Ennahdha and the salafis, in an attempt to sketch the challenges and the constraints Ghannouchi's party is grappling with in a crucial moment of its history.

The possible explanations for Ennahdha's hesitation in dealing firmly with the extremists are not clear-cut, and any analysis on the matter needs to take into account the deep transformations that Ghannouchi's party is undergoing, on top of its inexperience in the political arena. Also, the relationship between these two actors needs to be contextualized in the framework of the nascent Tunisian democracy.

The first part of the chapter will list the main episodes where salafis disrupted the public order and will report the official replies by Ennahdha. In the second part, this study will try to analyze the possible explanations for Ennahdha's unclear stances when

dealing with the fundamentalists. The last part will try to sketch some recommendations that the party might follow to contain the salafis.

### **The Controversial Episodes**

There have been since November of 2011 several episodes that alarmed the secularist segments of the Tunisian society and international public opinion with regard to the actual freedom of expression in the country.

The events at Manouba University in Tunis have been the most controversial, and the salafi sit-in there aroused bitter controversies around the freedom of religious expression in the public sphere. Two female students, Iman Melki, 20, and Faten Ben Mahmoud, 21, refused to take off their face veil, the *niqab*, during their exams in late November. Their requests to wear the *niqab* in class and during the exams have been supported by a group of 56 young salafi men, who occupied the university from 28 November 2011 until 24 January 2012. Such a vehement protest blocked the university activities, preventing 13,000 students from attending their classes.

The faculty board at Manouba University, however, steadfastly refused to allow the *niqab* in class or during the exams, supporting their decisions with a host of security and pedagogical reasons. However, no compromise was reached with the protesters, and Habib Kazdaghli, dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, requested the intervention of the Ministry of Higher Education to evacuate the salafis from the building in order to resume the school activities (Marks, *Middle East Channel*, 6 January 2012).

The official position of the government was the one expressed by the Minister of Higher Education, Moncef Ben Salem, who defined the sit-in as an “internal affair” of the university and refused to order police intervention. Also, in front of the National Constituent Assembly, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali declared that the government was determined to enforce the law.<sup>20</sup> After the accusations of inaction, the Ministry of Interior intervened and evacuated the building on 24 January, thus allowing the students to resume their studies.

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<sup>20</sup> “Tunisie: les islamistes au pouvoir confrontés à la pression salafiste.” *20 Minutes.Fr.* January 25, 2012. <http://www.20minutes.fr/monde/tunisie/866840-tunisie-islamistes-pouvoir-confrontes-pression-salafiste>.

The trial against Nabil Karoui, the owner of Nassma TV, also created vast polemics. Karoui has been accused of “violating sacred values” and “disturbing public order” because of the screening of *Persepolis*, a French-Iranian movie, considered against Islam because of the depiction of God by one of the characters. On the occasion of the trial against Karoui, a group of salafis attacked students and journalists who wanted to express their solidarity with Karoui in front of the court and to support freedom of expression. The Minister of the Interior was informed, but no concrete actions were undertaken. Ennahdha reaffirmed its support for freedom of expression with a press release where it took some distance from the judicial accusations against Nessma-TV. Prime Minister Jebali, a member of Ennahdha, also denounced the aggressions against the journalists outside the court.

The polemics also escalated after the attack on the El Hemma Synagogue, close to Gabés in the south of Tunisia. Furthermore, the anti-Jewish slogans cried by a salafi group at the Tunis Carthage airport to welcome the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh upset the Jewish community. Many within the community accused the Tunisian government of being slow in condemning such a display of intolerance.

All these episodes have alarmed many segments of the Tunisian society, especially the women’s associations. Khadija Arfaoui, member of Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, accused Ennahdha of a lack of the political will to act against the salafis, for their common desire to transform Tunisia into an Islamic state (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Ahmed Ibrahim, Secretary of the Ettajdid party, interpreted Ghannouchi’s party’s inaction as an example of Ennahdha’s double discourse: pro-democracy and in favor of women’s rights with the Western interlocutors and in favor of a more traditional view of society with the internal audience (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). According to him, Ennahdha wants to adopt a policy of *fait accompli*: if the salafis manage to impose some of the stricter Islamic rules, the society will therefore get accustomed to them. If this happened, he argues, Ghannouchi’s party will have the freedom to put forward a more conservative agenda, which in this way will appear to be shared by the whole society. Some other voices, like Hatem Bourial, highlight the fact

that Ennahdha has a totalitarian project, in the sense that it wants to shape and control vast areas of the Tunisian public spheres.

Against these critiques, Ennahdha has replied that the presence and the importance of the salafis has been magnified by the media. “As in many other countries.” Abderrazak Kilani, Minister for Coordination between the Constitutional Assembly and the Government, stated, “there are extremists of every color”. “Our problems,” he continued, “are social, economic, but not the salafis. If we keep on focusing on salafis, we are just scaring the tourists, who won’t choose Tunisia for their vacations, with great damage to our economy” (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012). Ghannouchi is on the same page: “We condemn them, they are not Muslim.” However, he is in favor of the expression of their views in the public arena: “Ennahdha is for freedom,” he maintained, “they have the right to express themselves. For me the salafis are Tunisian people who have the right to express themselves within the limits of the law.” According to the Ennahdha leader, the salafis emerged because of Ben Ali’s repression and violence. “We believe that the salafis are the product of dictatorship,” he stated; “When our party was expelled and persecuted by the government, there was a vacuum that was filled by them. Once democracy will be established, there won’t be a fertile ground for them to proliferate” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

The Ennahdha official line seems therefore to disapprove of the salafis’ actions in public statements and to marginalize their importance in the eye of the Western public opinion, by reminding the European and U.S. observers that extremists from left and right have always been a plague for many governors throughout the world. Also, he adds, extremist groups are present in the parliaments of some Western democratic countries.

Ennahdha’s official “recipe” is the re-education of the salafis, as Ghannouchi has proposed: “We need to re-educate them toward the real Islam. Islam radicalized in prison, under torture; our enemies have been demonized. Once freedom will be restored, the salafis will see their importance reduced drastically” (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).



### **Some Possible Explanations**

The hesitation that Ennahdha has displayed in dealing with the salafis has contributed to prolonged violence and tensions. This seems in contradiction to Ghannouchi's recent declarations and the text he published in January 2007, where he declared that the "radical groups like the Salafist Jihadists constitute a major obstacle to the democratisation of Tunisian society, which has never espoused a radical interpretation of Islam throughout its history" (Allani 2009, 266).

In order to shed light on what might appear as a contradiction, the reasons several factors need to take into account.

Firstly, Ennahdha is undergoing a crucial phase in its history. From a movement banned from politics and constrained to act clandestinely, it has become the main Tunisian party, representing 40% of the electorate. This dramatic change happened in less than one year. The ideological discourse that Ghannouchi had elaborated in more than 30 years suddenly had to be adapted into a political program in order to propose solutions to bread-and-butter issues, such as unemployment, economic crisis and violence on the streets. After the toppling of Ben Ali's regime, Ennahdha saw the chance to have its say on Tunisian politics and took advantage of that. However this choice came at a cost: Ennahdha had to grapple with the rules of the political arena and draft a program that could be appealing to the largest possible number of electors, who, however were ready to reward the party for its staunch opposition to the *ancien regime*. This transition marked the transformation of the movement from a marginal actor in Tunisian politics to a mass party.

In this change, Ennahdha is getting closer to what Otto Kircheimer called a "catch-all party," a party that sacrifices its ideological positions in order to maximize its electoral appeal and mobilizes voters on policy preferences rather than on ideology (Safran 2009, 543-554). Ghannouchi and other prominent Ennahdha members have several times declared that the priorities in today's Tunisia are the social and economic issues, and not the theological questions. This approach to politics has shown how Ennahdha is drifting toward a model of policy-oriented party, rather than an ideology-driven one, an approach that is more likely to guarantee good performances at the polls.

In this framework, the reference to Islam has been transformed into Ennahdha's appeal to a common Muslim identity, a concept able to rally vast segments of the Tunisian population, since it refers to values that are broadly shared in a conservative society. As Ghannouchi stated, "Nahdha puts forward proposals according to a set of values, like freedom or justice. Islam is an energy that can mobilize people toward these same values." Islam is therefore not a political project, but the crucial element of an identity; by reframing this concept, Ennahdha was able to attract the consent of a considerable segment of the Tunisian population. In this new framework, the ideological background has been diluted to focus on socio-economic issues, and theological considerations have been put at the service of the political necessities. An example is Ghannouchi's declaration about the tourism, reported by the Italian news agency ANSAMed: "Tourism represents an essential resource for our economy, and Tunisia is a country that is open to the outside world." Moreover, he added: "Islam is not a religion of isolation but of openness to the world. In truth, even in the Quran Muslims are told to travel around the world" (Secondino 2011).

As a consequence of this new orientation, the salafis are accusing Ennahdha of not "being Muslim enough," because Ghannouchi and his fellow party members are supporting behaviors that are considered non-Islamic. Facing these accusations and being an Islamist party, Ennahdha has displayed some hesitation in enforcing the law against them. The accusations, coming from the salafi ranks, represent a hard blow for Ghannouchi.

Ennahdha is therefore walking a tightrope, trying to protect its flank against the accusations of the radicals, but also from the criticism of the members of its coalition, the CPR and Ettakatol, which, on the opposite side of the political spectrum, are asking for the iron fist against the salafis. Its inexperience on how to deal with enemies and allies in politics have led it to adopt this middle-ground position, so harshly criticized.

Secondly, another possible reason for the lack of a resolute action against the radicals' violence may reside in the fact that Ennahdha's political bases might be close to the salafi position. Some commentators, such as Mokhtar Trifi and Alaya Allani, maintain that around 50% of Ennahdha militants have ideas and beliefs that are close to

the salafist movement Al-Salafiya Al-Ilmia. According to Allani's evaluation, only 25% of the members of Ennahdha have liberal position, in contrast to half of them who would espouse more conservative beliefs. In the last elections, he maintains, Ennahdha was also able to attract the votes of the members of Al-Salafiya Al-Ilmia, who ask to restore the purity of Islam. This happened, he explains, because Ennahdha and the salafis have an ideological common aim, the reislamization of the society. In fact, he stresses, the ideological platform of Ghannouchi's party has not changed since 1988, only its political discourse has been modified and has developed. The ideological discourse, he argues, is simple, whereas the political one is more stratified and complex. This hiatus would explain Ennahdha leaders' ambiguous stances and would lead to a double discourse: one, moderate for the Western audience and the other one, more conservative when it comes to dealing with the Tunisian public (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). On the other hand, Zied Boumakhla, responsible for Ennahdha students, denies that his party has as its bases salafi members and sympathizers. "We are very firm on this: we are against violence and we do not want the salafis to impose their will on other people" (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). However, many Tunisian commentators disagree with him and maintain that Ennahdha would not take a stance against the salafis, in order not to alienate the support to this part of its electorate. By following these considerations, Ennahdha, once again, shows how important electoral calculations are in this new phase of its life.

Thirdly, another reason that might justify Ennahdha's lack of resoluteness against the radicals is the desire to avoid the repression of dissent through Ben Ali-like type of techniques. As Ghannouchi commented about the salafis: "we condemn them, they are not Muslim. But Ennahdha is for freedom and they have the right to express themselves. We do not want to intervene with the police, as it happened in Bourguiba and Ben Ali years" (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). This lack of resoluteness might also be explained by the inexperience of the party in dealing with problems in the public order. Also, Tunisian society is still smarting from Ben Ali's repression, and Ennahdha does not want take any false steps in this delicate phase of the country's history.

Lastly, the opaque role of the Gulf states' funding in Tunisia needs to be taken into account. As Ghannouchi said in Washington in December 2011, the salafis "emerged during the period of the massive arrests of Ennahdha militants by Ben Ali in the 1990s. They made their appearance because of the TV channels owned by the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia" (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 1 December 2011). These channels propagandize a very conservative version of Islam, which has started to shape the beliefs and the behaviors of the Tunisians in the last ten years, according to several commentators. As Latifa Lakhdar, former vice président of the Haute Instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution et de la transition démocratique, stressed, the Gulf states have tried to impose a cultural hegemony through satellite TV in the last decade. The news media and the satellite TV have been used in such a way that Saudi news arrives in Tunisians' houses. All these aspects considered, Ennahdha would most likely avoid any type of conflict with Saudi Arabia and other states, especially Qatar, which recently has been very generous with its funding to Tunisia, as many commentators have reported (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).<sup>21</sup>

### **Recommendations**

The lack of resoluteness by Ennahdha has contributed to a climate of further violence and tensions. In order to reduce the conflicts with the salafis, Ennahdha's possible responses can be divided into short term and long term.

In the short term, **Ennahdha should promote the respect of the law by taking the necessary measures against the extremists.** The words of disapproval, expressed by the government officials, have turned out to be insufficient to protect those Tunisians whose freedom of expression has severely been jeopardized. The case of the aggression against the journalists reporting the *Persepolis* case and the professors at Manouba University have sent worrying signals to those in Tunisia concerned about the ability of Ennahdha to keep the salafis at bay. Ghannouchi's party and its coalition partners **should request the intervention of the police whenever the fundamentalists resort to**

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<sup>21</sup> See also Sana Anji, "Visit of Qatari Emir divides Tunisian political society," *Tunisia Live*, January 15, 2012, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/15/visit-of-qatari-emir-divides-tunisian-political-society/>

**violence**, to lay the bases for a new environment, which tolerates the different opinions, but protects everybody's rights.

In parallel, **Ennahdha should engage in talks with the salafis**. According to Ghannouchi's words, his party is already having meetings to convince the fundamentalists that "what they are doing is not Islam." Ennahdha can have a powerful influence over the salafis, since the two movements speak a "common language." The salafis are unlikely to pay attention to the Western rhetoric about the necessity to preserve freedom of speech, but might be susceptible to Ennahdha's argumentations, since they come from the same ideological arsenal.

In the long run, **Ennahdha should work with its coalition partners to design a plan targeting the economic revival**. In fact, only by fighting unemployment, poverty and inequalities can Ghannouchi's party win the hearts and the minds of the Tunisians, thus making the salafis' message less appealing. As Abdelwahab Hafaiedh, from the University of Tunis, and Alaya Allani have pointed out, the salafi message tends to resonate more in the areas where the economic conditions are harsher and young people have fewer opportunities. Under this perspective, working to diminish the regional disparities between the coast and the interior areas will contribute to reducing the frustrations of many youngsters, who struggle to find jobs to support themselves.

In the long run also, **Ghannouchi should accommodate salafis' requests to participate in political activity**, despite the Western fears. As Alaya Allani argues, the political practice ends up taming the extremists, since once in the electoral arena, the desire to have good results at the polls leads to a dilution of their ideological stance (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012).



# **Tunisian Civil Society Before and After the Revolution**

**Daniel Lawner**

What do the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Artisans (UTICA) and the Tunisian Association for Development and Education (ATED) have in common? In most ways, they could not be more different as organizations. UTICA represents the interests of large business and industry in Tunisia. Their elegant corporate headquarters in Tunis was built using funds from the authoritarian government of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and their concerns include representing Tunisian business interests within the country and helping to attract foreign investment. ATED, meanwhile, is a local organization based in the inland city Kairouan that offers educational programming to promote local development and student participation in the city's civic life. ATED is headed by a committed teacher whom I met at a computer station at a web and social-media training center in Kairouan while he was tweaking the organization's bare-bones website (SAIS Group Meeting, Kairouan, 28 January 2012). In the loosest sense of the term, however, these organizations are both "civil society organizations"—both represent the collective interests groups of citizens larger than the family unit, and neither are governmental bodies or political parties. And, as this paper will explore, both are operating in an environment which is hopeful but uncertain: civil society in Tunisia can, for the first time in Tunisia's history, operate uninhibited by tight government control and the paranoia that results from persistent repression.

Before we investigate the state of civil society in Tunisia, however, we must specify what we mean by civil society. In her 1995 assessment of civil society in Tunisia, Eva Bellin described "civil society" as an "exquisitely ambiguous term...elastic enough to accommodate a wide variety of political ambitions but historically weighty enough to imbue each with a deep moral resonance" (Bellin 1995, 120). Civil society can be defined narrowly as the roster of registered NGOs in a country or broadly as all forms of "associational life" ranging from local soccer clubs to multi-billion dollar corporations. Regardless of the inclusiveness of our definition, civil society organizations should serve

as a conduit for citizens' interests and as a check against government abuse. In authoritarian regimes, civil society does not properly perform this function. The authoritarian state co-opts and represses civil society, and the state's survival usually depends on keeping civil society weak and disorganized. Tunisia, from independence to the January 2011 revolution, was a classic case of a single-party state whose preservation was dependent on the ability of the party to "contain pluralistic competition within its own rules and organization or [to] skillfully manage the sources of pluralism so as to tame them within the single-party framework" (Zartman 1991, 11). In a healthy democracy, civil society is a central source of such pluralistic competition, but throughout Tunisia's whole post-independence history, civil society was effectively co-opted by the single-party state.

In Tunisia, the country's two single-party regimes between 1956 and 2011—Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destourian Party and later the Destourian Socialist Party (PSD) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD)—used different tactics to ensure that civil society in Tunisia remained fragmented and impotent, posing no serious opposition to their respective regimes. Bourguiba was a skilled manipulator, encouraging the development of a robust-seeming civil society and mass political mobilization while playing factions against one another and co-opting threatening opposition figures with attractive government jobs. Ben Ali was less cunning and more openly repressive—closely monitoring and tightly controlling all sources of opposition while maintaining a thin veneer of democratic openness.

### **The Bourguiba Years**

The fact that Tunisia does not seem an intuitive choice as an Arab authoritarian state is largely attributable to Habib Bourguiba's regime. Bourguiba embarked Tunisia on a national project of modernization that was extremely secular and progressive in its promotion of women's rights, and in many ways associated itself more closely with France and the tradition of French rationalism than with its Arab neighbors. The nurturing of an active, if tightly monitored and controlled, civil society in Tunisia was central to Bourguiba's project of modernizing and civilizing Tunisia. "Since the days of



Bourguiba,” Bellin points out, “the Tunisian elite has recognized the political value of nourishing *civisme* and civility in one’s citizenry—for the energy and talent it mobilizes, for the power it creates, for the control it affords,” a strategy she calls “controlled *civisme*” (Bellin 1995, 126). This control ranged from a weakening of opposition by co-opting the leadership of active civil society groups to harsh forms of repression such as harassment and political imprisonment.

While Bourguiba encouraged an active civil society, he was vigilant and skillful in recognizing and moving against perceived threats. “Bourguiba’s strategy for consolidating and holding power,” Christopher Alexander pointed out, “created new opportunities for protest, and workers, students, Islamists and others tried to use them to their own advantage” (Alexander 1997, 37). One early threat to Bourguiba’s power came from the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and its leaders, Ahmed Ben Salah and Ahmed Tlili, whom Bourguiba saw as potentially dangerous opposition. Bourguiba employed a divide and conquer strategy—encouraging a breakaway labor union, the Tunisian Labor Union (UTT) and then overseeing a merger which reduced the UGTT’s political potency and enticed its leadership with top posts in the Neo-Destourian political bureau. This strategy became one of Bourguiba’s trademarks for dealing with challenges from powerful civil society organizations:

Encouraging schism and reunification on his terms became one of [Bourguiba’s] standard methods for weakening organizations and eliminating leaders he could not control. It made more sense to personalize conflicts and manipulate people rather than kill or exile them...Part of Bourguiba’s genius lay in his ability to play competing factions and personalities off against one another and to use promotions to pull people under his thumb. (Alexander 2010, 40)

Control over civil society, however, was not just a matter of elite politics. The effective submission of civil society to complete state control was legalized through the constitution of 1959, which preserved rights of press, assembly and organization, but would be exercised only “according to the dispositions of the law.” Furthermore, the Law

on Associations (Law 154 of 1959 as amended) limited the categories of civil society organizations the state would allow to those of a non-political nature.<sup>22</sup> The law also required all associations to obtain a visa from the Ministry of the Interior to operate. The Interior Ministry, furthermore, could reject any application if the association's goals were "contrary to laws and morals or lead to disruption of public order," and could punish with fines and imprisonment any persons operating under an unlicensed association. Under this law, Bourguiba and his police continually harassed civil society leaders and took thousands of political prisoners.

### **The Ben Ali Years**

When Ben Ali assumed power in 1987, citizens were so relieved by Bourguiba's fall and encouraged by a series of pro-democracy presidential speeches that they became hopeful about the role of civil society in shaping Tunisia's future. Among his first acts as president, Ben Ali ordered the release of thousands of political prisoners and toned down rhetoric against the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), the group that would later become the Ennahdha party. He made it easier for civil society groups to obtain visas from the Interior Ministry—the 1988 Law of Association, for example, specified that non-responsiveness by the Ministry to requests would signify implicit permission to operate—leading to a ballooning of the number of associations.<sup>23</sup>

But it became clear by 1990 that civil society in Tunisia would be remain under tight control of the state. Ben Ali, at a symposium on democratic transitions in November 1990, clarified his position in relation to civil society: "The state fixes the fundamental framework, creates the climate and provides the necessities for competition and dialogue," he said. "Civil society should accept these and oppose any acts that go against the national consensus" (Daoud 1990, 793). By the 1990s, Ben Ali sought to control all associational life through the Interior Ministry and party apparatus, ensuring that it could

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<sup>22</sup> The law allowed citizens to form women's groups, sports groups, scientific groups, cultural and arts groups, charity and development groups, but did not allow human rights, democracy and watchdog groups.

<sup>23</sup> Official counts reported 3,300 registered associations in 1988 which increased to 5,100 by 1995 (Bellin 1995, 136). An unofficial estimate put that number at 8,000 in 2010.

nip in the bud any challenges to party authority. Understandably, civil society in Tunisia, under the constant gaze of security forces and party members, atrophied. For most citizens, participating meaningfully in associational life simply wasn't worth the risks of imprisonment or torture.

To ensure that civil society groups were not working “against the national consensus,” Ben Ali and the ruling RCD used a number of distinct mechanisms of control. The Interior Ministry, in addition to granting permits to civil society groups, also provided funding to those groups whose loyalty they hoped to shore up. Ben Ali's government provided the funds to build headquarters for UTICA, as has been mentioned, as well as for the Union de Femmes Démocrates, a group which prided itself on its independence. In some cases, when an association became effective in contesting the regime—such as the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH)—the regime would create a duplicate organization, fund it and provide its membership from the party ranks in an attempt to reduce the influence of the original association.

A crucial shift came when the government amended the Law of Associations in 1992, forbidding any association of a “general character” from denying membership to any person who professes to ascribe to the organization's ideals and mission. The law allowed the RCD to infiltrate NGOs by flooding their ranks with party loyalists who would report on any activities or plans that were disagreeable to the party. Members of civil society organizations with whom we met in Kairouan reported having to inform government officials of all meetings of more than two people and provide the time and location of all meetings along with a list of names of all persons in attendance. As the internet and then social media became a natural forum for organizing, the regime closely monitored the activities of known activists. One professor and member of the Femmes Démocrates reported having forwarded a message through Facebook in 2009 about a rumor concerning regime behavior and the next day being called to meet with the judiciary police—she was subsequently sentenced to 8 months house arrest (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Most citizens, however, preferred simply to avoid confrontation rather than risking scrutiny from the regime's security forces. A group of university students in Tunis all agreed that before the revolution their life revolved

exclusively around their studies, because there were not opportunities for students to become involved in associations. Any civil society activity on campuses occurred underground.

### **Civil Society After the Revolution**

Civil society in Tunisia today has been freed of nearly all of the restrictions of the Ben Ali regime, and as a result, thousands of new civil society groups have emerged throughout the country. The Law on Associations that allowed the Ben Ali regime to repress civil society was officially amended in a decree on 24 September 2011 by the interim government—the new law makes it significantly easier for citizens to form associations, and removes all criminal penalties for activities associated with establishing or running civil society organizations.<sup>24</sup> Now, citizens who wish to form civil society groups must only register with municipal authorities, instead of needing to obtain a visa from the Interior Ministry. An unofficial estimate by a Tunis-based scholar put the number of registered NGOs at 20,000 in the country by June 2011, compared to 8,000 in December 2010. The ease of registering new NGOs combined with the freedom with which groups can congregate has led to newfound cooperation across groups. NGOs have formed coalitions to address issues of mutual concern—one coalition formed of several different rights-based NGOs, for example, has become active in pressuring officials to abolish the death penalty in Tunisia. One university student in Tunis reported participating in “several” associations on campus, and described the feeling of participating in civic life as “finally being able to breathe.”

Civil society in Tunisia has already recorded a handful of tangible successes in promoting democracy, including playing a major role in preparing for and monitoring the elections for the members of the National Constituent Assembly in October 2011. U.S. democracy groups like the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) helped train representatives of Tunisian civil society in

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<sup>24</sup> From discussions with members or founders of groups formed after the revolution, it appears that the Ben Ali-era Law on Associations was not used to repress civil society after January 2011—new groups were formed and operated openly, even without the formal blessing of the Interior Ministry.

“training-of-trainers” (ToT) events, and the resulting elections were widely regarded as free and fair. In Tunis, we met with one of the main Tunisian organizations responsible for election monitoring. “I Watch” was formed shortly after the revolution by a group of students, and its membership consists primarily of students and young people. “I Watch” has been a tremendous success, implementing programs using SMS technology to conduct country-wide opinion polls, and another program that allows citizens to “text in” reports of corruption in their dealing with government officials or security services. The “I Watch” co-founder described his relationship with the American democracy-promotion NGOs as a positive one. And while he said the group remained reluctant to accept funds, he described the groups like NDI and IRI as providing extremely useful training and advice (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012).

The U.S. government has been eager to promote the development of civil society in Tunisia. Before January 2011, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)—a program formed after September 11 by the Bush Administration to strengthen U.S. partnership with the region—hardly gave out any civil society grants because of the regime’s chokehold on civil society. MEPI has since had trouble keeping up with the surge of civil society activity and has given many grants aimed at building the capacity of existing groups and in other ways promoting civic engagement. One MEPI-funded program is “E-Mediat: Electronic Media Tools, Technology & Training,” a Tunisian-run 18-month initiative to train civil society leaders on the use of social media technology. The initiative, according to MEPI, “helps grassroots organizations use digital technology to tell their stories, build membership, and connect to their community of peers around the world.” We visited E-Mediat’s computer training center in Kairouan, a simple room filled with desks, used computers, and a blackboard where several local civil society leaders were working on websites and connecting with peers through Facebook. The groups being trained in web technology ranged from the Red Crescent Society of Kairouan and the Association of Journalists in Kairouan to the Tennis Club of Kairouan and the local parent-teacher organization. The local leaders were visibly enthusiastic about their newfound freedom to organize and operate, and they had also clearly formed

strong relationships across organizations through their participation in the initiative (SAIS Group Meeting, 28 January 2012).

The recent large-scale grassroots nature of civil society development in Tunisia is unprecedented. Communities in the interior of the country—always having been politically disaffected and less prosperous than the coastal populations—are setting up local development groups, pooling community resources to implement projects. Another new trend in Tunisian civil society is the linkages between civil society organizations and political parties. This type of open association with a political party would have been seen as a direct challenge to the regime during the Ben Ali regime, but now political parties see civil society groups as an effective way to expand their reach to the community level. Ennahdha has been particularly effective in using civil society to garner support through a network of Islamic groups loyal to the party. It is unclear to what extent NGOs are funded directly using party funds, but Tunisians did point out that Ennahdha did maintain impressive patronage networks through the country.

Meanwhile, back in Tunis, representatives of civil society are attempting to register a high-profile success demonstrating their influence in a Tunisian democracy. 170 civil society activists including lawyers, professors, youth representatives, and heads of human rights and development organizations gathered to form a parallel constituent assembly with a mission to monitor and provide a check on the official body. At the body's plenary session on 23 January 2012, one of the assembly's prominent members, the Secretary General of the Foundation of Arab Democracy Moshen Marzouk, described the body as "not a platform of opposition or of loyalty," but with a mission "to strengthen civil society participation in the development of the new constitution and to support the work of the National Constituent Assembly." When asked whether the official assembly had given its blessing to its civil society counterpart, one activist said that he interpreted the official body's silence in response to the organization of the parallel body as approval. This seems a dubious claim and could simply mean that the National Assembly has chosen to ignore civil society and get on with the work of writing a constitution.

The focus of civil society groups in Tunis on rights and on the constitution is understandable given Tunisia's long history of authoritarianism and repression. Without a vigilant civil society to protect against abuses, the Islamists might feel more emboldened to please their more conservative constituents by enshrining more traditional values in the constitution, including turning back the clock on women's rights.<sup>25</sup> But keeping the primary focus on rights<sup>26</sup>—not on the economic issues with which most of the population is most concerned—is not helping the perception that civil society, at least in the capital Tunis, is dominated by left-wing elite groups: professors, intellectuals, and lawyers. It seems as if, to an extent, the “elite civil society” in Tunis has not yet adapted to a post-Ben Ali world and sees its role as remaining in steadfast opposition, vigilant towards any signs of repression or denial of basic rights.

Overall, after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the independent civil society in Tunisia has developed impressively in a very short time. The two main poles of civil society in the country—the grassroots civil society of the interior focused on local development and civic engagement, and the elite civil society of Tunis who have taken more of a rights-based watchdog role—could prove to be complementary in Tunisia's democratic development. As we saw with our introductory comparison between ATED and UTICA, civil society is by no means uniform, but is nonetheless unified in its role of serving as a channel for citizens' interests and as a check on state power. Over time, with the benefit of social media, civil society will benefit from the consolidation of interests that naturally comes from linkages across organizations and regions. And, finally, the development of a robust civil society that can aid in the country's development and enrich its democracy takes time. Considering that it has been only one year since the fall of a regime that had as a central strategy the co-option and repression of civil society, we can be cautiously optimistic that an effective civil society is in the making.

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<sup>25</sup> In fact, few civil society actors or Tunisia observers really know whether Nahdha's promises that they will work to protect gains in women's rights are genuine, or are simply paying lip-service to liberals and will be reneged on once they become more powerful.

<sup>26</sup> A recent poll of Tunisian citizens (by “I Watch”) revealed that Tunisians were not very concerned with the constitution-writing process but were much more interested in tangible issues such as security or jobs.

## Recommendations Moving Forward

### To International Donors

- The main problem that will derail Tunisia's transition in the medium term is unemployment and economic underdevelopment in the interior of the country. **International donors should ensure that a large portion of their civil society capacity-building activities have clear impacts for job creation or economic linkages. Support to local trade associations or entrepreneurship training** are among the activities that could bolster local capacity to improve the economic realities from a grass-roots level.
- With a huge surge in the number of NGOs and civil society organizations, **greater coordination is needed on issues of common concern.** Currently, coalitions are being built through personal networks and through Facebook. **The U.S. government or another donor should seek Tunisian partners to build a centralized web portal to coordinate the activities of Tunisian associations,** with a focus on coalition building and solutions to work across geographic divides.

### To International and Local NGOs

- A major aspect of Tunisian civil society that is currently opaque is how local civil society groups are associated with political parties and are being used to build local support, particularly for Ennahdha. **Organizations with transparency-related missions should investigate how political parties are using local civil society organizations,** specifically whether party resources are being used to effectively buy local support.

### To the UGTT

- Strikes and sit-ins around the country are harming Tunisia's economic prospects and deterring international investment in the country, while the UGTT seems to support strikes *de facto* with relatively minimal central coordination. **The UGTT should, with the input of local syndicates, generate a set of recommendations to political leadership to protect workers' rights while promoting medium- and long-term**



**economic development in Tunisia.** The UGTT is very influential by way of its nation-wide networks and should not squander its opportunity to present a strategic vision for Tunisia and involve itself more proactively in national politics.

To the Parallel Constituent Assembly

- **The parallel constituent assembly should clarify its role vis-à-vis the formal Constituent Assembly, particularly focusing on which constitutional provisions it worries the formal assembly will “get wrong.”** By writing its own separate constitution with minimal consultation with the formal assembly, that large group of influential civil society members risks isolating themselves from the government, where other forms of influence on advocacy could be more constructive. Furthermore, they risk delegitimizing a constitution-writing process which, aside from a few provisions, should not be extremely controversial.



# **The Tunisian Youth Fallout:**

## **A Look at Youth Voter Apathy During the 2011 Election**

**David Jackson**

*“Tunisian artists and politicians are alike. They only care what their colleagues think, and don’t create anything of substance that the general public can understand.”* Sheyma Arfewi, 23-year-old student at Ecole Normale Supérieure de Tunis

The legend of Mohammed Bouazizi, the fruit vendor whose continued encounters with corrupt police officials led to his self-immolation, epitomizes the struggle of Tunisian youth under the Ben Ali regime. The youths’ built up frustrations finally overwhelmed any fear of reprisal and initially led to mass protests in Tunisia’s interior. Word of the government’s heavy-handed repression of protests in Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Thala eventually spread across the country until youth, those between the ages of 18 to 35, lined the streets in Tunis calling for Ben Ali to *dégage*, or “get out.” But this narrative, so often used by analysts to describe the heroics of Tunisia’s youth, usually stops short. The harsh reality is that their interest in the democratic process might be slipping and their plight has not been given sufficient attention.

Since the end of the Ben Ali regime there seems to be a decline in the youths’ interest in the formal democratization process, as characterized by political parties competing in free and fair elections. One indication of increased disinterest in this process is seen in Tunisia’s recent National Constituent Assembly (NCA) election, where large numbers of eligible youth decided not to register to vote. Their apathy was realized during a “Rap the Vote” program, led by a local transparency organization. The program sent Psycho M, a prominent Tunisian rapper, to visit Gafsa to encourage youth to vote. When he enthusiastically asked the young audience whether or not they were going to vote they all replied in unison, “no” (Youth Activists Meeting, Tunis, 21 January 2012). Between the final days of the old regime in January 2011 and the NCA election in

October, something happened to discourage the youth from participating in the country's current democratization process. Ultimately, the lack of the youths' interest in the process can be explained by political parties' failure to address seriously their issues and the continuation of societal perceptions that view youth as inexperienced and incapable of political leadership positions.<sup>27</sup> In lieu of these perceptions youth have continued to fight for freedom, justice, and dignity by finding ways, both constructive and destructive, to channel their demands.

### **The National Constituent Assembly Election**

For better or for worse the NCA election was the product of Tunisia's revolution. After about a month of protesting, followed by months of debate under the transitional government, the youths' initial demand for change would manifest itself in an election that would decide who would be responsible for writing a new constitution. Though appearing far from creating an immediate democratic impact, the election signaled the end to a life under dictatorship. It seemed as though many were excited for their new freedom and a chance to build a new society. If this were the case, however, one would imagine that more people would have registered to vote.

The low youth turnout in the registration process is a significant indicator of the youth's dissatisfaction with the trajectory of the transition. It demonstrates that sometime between the euphoria of the ouster of Ben Ali and the first democratic election that they lost faith in the democratic process. Initially following the end of the old regime, youth were interested in democracy and viewed it as the appropriate formation of government for Tunisia. In March 2011, some two months after the youth made their stand, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized a focus group consisting of pre-screened men and women between the of ages 25-35, of different levels of education and from all of the different regions in the country. During their meetings, the participants confirmed

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<sup>27</sup> It also deserves mention that some youth failed to register to vote because of logistical problems. Some reported not having the proper identification documents or great distances between where they lived/worked and their polling station. For the purposes of this paper, there will not be a formal discussion of these factors that were often outside of the voters' control, and instead I will focus on those that were in control of the voters themselves.

that they found voting to be the most important vehicle for channeling political participation in newly democratizing Tunisia (NDI, 2011). After voting, they identified participating through social media and public forums as the next best method for political participation. They also confirmed an eagerness to participate in the NCA election that was planned for July 2011.<sup>28</sup> Following the departure of Ben Ali, youth were highly optimistic towards the prospects democratization held for the country and were willing to play their part to continue the country's transition.

But when it came time for Tunisians to register to vote many youth did not feel compelled to go to the registration centers. After three weeks of low voter registration turnout, allegedly due to confusion around the registration process, the High Independent Authority for Election (ISIE) increased the registration period by two weeks. In the end, only 4.4 million, or 69%, of Tunisians eligible to vote, registered (IFES, 2011). Though at first glance this number presumes that a substantial size of the population registered to vote, it fails to capture the youth's absence in the registration process. Even after ISIE extended the registration period, only 17% of Tunisians age 18 to 35 registered to vote (McCurdy, 2011). Regardless of the extended registration period, voter education programs, and campaigns to boost youth participation, the Tunisian political environment at the time still failed to convince many youth to register.<sup>29</sup> The NDI study and Daphne McCurdy's research highlight a crucial gap between the youth's initial willingness to work within the system around the time of the protests and their apathy towards voting in the NCA election. If voting in the NCA election was so important to them immediately after the regime change, then what kept them from registering for the election in August?

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<sup>28</sup> At the time of the focus group, elections were still planned for July. Because of difficulties in logistics, the transitional government agreed to postpone the process to October 2011.

<sup>29</sup> To be sure, it is unclear how many youth finally voted in the NCA elections. In the late stages of the electoral process ISIE was determined to improve turnout, which made it possible for any Tunisian with a national identity card to vote on election day. The final statistics on number of registered voters and voter turnout have yet to be made public, yet there is general consensus amongst NGOs and the media that youth turnout in the elections was also very low.

## **Issues Unaddressed**

Talking with youth around the country, it is apparent that they were generally turned off by the NCA campaign process because they felt that the politicians were not addressing their issues during the campaign period but rather were bickering among themselves. The three issues that seemed to be of greatest concern to youth during the time of the elections were justice, job creation, and educational reform. Though the value placed on each one may differ depending on the region, socio-economical background, and/or level of education, many youth would agree that these are the most important changes for Tunisian society. They may seem like obvious demands that any Tunisian politician would want to address during an electoral campaign. However, the youth felt that the politicians did not pay their concerns enough attention during their political campaigns.

### Justice

Many youth in the interior, who had been marginalized under the previous regime, suffered greatly for their participation in the protests in December 2010 and January 2011. Like Bouazizi, many youth in the region were not fortunate enough to receive a university education or have access to lucrative jobs. For a long time, Ben Ali typically invested along the coastal regions and tended to neglect developing the interior. Consequently, many youth either were unemployed or sought jobs in the informal sectors, selling minor goods or doing odd jobs. In the end, this frustration became so unbearable that the youth stormed the streets in protest, calling for massive change in the current living conditions. Starting in Sidi Bouzid after Bouazizi's self-immolation, the protests quickly spread to nearby Kasserine and Thala, where tensions flared as many residents took to the streets and protested day and night. As the protests grew and began to spread across the country, the Ben Ali regime grew desperate to find a solution. In a poorly calculated attempt to disperse the protestors, Ben Ali ordered the police to fire on the unruly protestors in both Kasserine and Thala. Around 7 to 12 January 2011, some 50 people,<sup>30</sup> many youth, were shot by snipers who intentionally aimed for the chest and

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<sup>30</sup> The actual number of those murdered during the Kasserine and Thala protests varies depending on the source. Most sources corroborate that the number is somewhere in the 50s.

head (*Dégage*, 2011). It should therefore come as no surprise that one of the greatest concerns of the youth from this region is seeking justice for those responsible for the murders of their friends and family members during the protests and those in the regime who have neglected the region for so long.

Walking up the dreary main road in Thala, it is hard ignore the youth lining the streets, either mulling around or drinking a cup of coffee. Equally as haunting are the plaques on the streets where martyrs once stood before they were gunned down by Ben Ali snipers in January 2011. The memory of what happened during the protests still lives on to the present day. Many youth are still in disbelief that the government has done so little to bring to trial those responsible for the attacks, or as they refer to them, assassinations (Personal Interviews, Thala, 20 January 2012). Since the transition, the acting government has acknowledged the role of ex-Chief of Riot Police, Moncef Ajimi, in the brutal attacks, and they sequestered him in Tunis for safe keeping. But, in the eyes of the people of Thala, little has been done to punish those who they see as the most responsible for Thala murders. Some youth claimed that it was this lack of justice for the fallen, that discouraged them from voting in the NCA election (Personal Interviews, Thala, 20 January 2012). In their eyes, many of the candidates neglected to discuss an issue that was most dear to their needs because the government was too uneasy about immediately punishing actors from the old regime. For a town that has paid a high price for freedom and has been marginalized under the Ben Ali regime for the last 20 years, many youth felt that the politicians were out of touch with the realities in the interior and their longing for justice.

The need for justice resonates with youth who were not necessarily victims to Ben Ali's direct repression but expect a newly democratic Tunisia to be free of its old oppressive rulers and their collaborators. During a meeting with Ennahdha youth, one active member pointed out that justice is needed in order to build a new mentality for democratic practices amongst Tunisian youth. They felt that the government needs to lead by example and hold accountable those who have committed grave crimes in the past to facilitate teaching youth the value of a democratic society (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 27 January 2012). This idea is a powerful one. Most Tunisian youth have never

known what it's like to live in a society where everyone, including the ruling elite, is held accountable for their actions according to equal standards. In the opinion of this particular youth party member, many youth were lost in the NCA campaign process because the parties neglected to address critically issues of justice for collaborators in the old regime and thus failed to show the youth that Tunisia's future leadership would be any different (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 27 January 2012). Consequently, what originally sparked political interest in the youth, the idea of justice, has caused many to lose faith in party politics.

### Job Creation

Regardless of region or educational background, job creation is the issue that resonates the most with youth across the country. Like the story of Bouazizi, many other Tunisian youth under Ben Ali were victims of high rates of unemployment and perceived little opportunity to seek employment. Compounded with Bouazizi's stand and crippling social conditions, youth in Tunisia's interior no longer feared Ben Ali's wrath and took to the streets. At the time, the unemployment rate stood at 14% and increased to more than 18% overall by early 2012, with those in the interior suffering an unemployment rate of 28% compared to 11% in the coastal regions (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 25 January 2012). Much of the recent increase in unemployment can be attributed to the increase in risk that investors and tourists face after the overthrow of the previous regime. Though this change comes as no surprise, it has increased economic hardship on the youth as the country's economy decelerates and work becomes scarcer. As a result, many youth demanded that their politicians address immediately their economic concerns. Karim, a 27-year-old from Tozeur, explained that he and his friends were discouraged during the pre-election period because none of the politicians were talking directly to the youth about job creation (Personal Interview, Tozeur, 16 January 2012). He, unlike many other youth, did go on to vote in the NCA election but held his reservations over the regime change and their ability to create employment.

One significant facet of Tunisia's unemployment problem is that many university graduates face high rates of unemployment. Around 15,000 out of 50,000 university



graduates are unemployed (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 25 January 2012). Often, when the youth talk about why they finally decided to protest against Ben Ali's repression, they claim that they wanted a life with dignity. But to them dignity seems in short supply when their society has a problem with providing enough jobs for the remaining 30% of Tunisia's graduates. Unfortunately during the campaign period the politicians neglected this concern. As the introduction quote suggests, many university students felt that the politicians were speaking in another language and were not making any attempt to reach out to their interests (Personal Interview, Tunis University Students, Tunis, 21 January 2012). The politicians' discourse no longer reached the mass public and instead was very much focused on the elite classes within Tunisia. This sentiment transcends socio-economic status and seemed to be a concern of many of the youth throughout the country.

### Educational Reform

Many youth feel that change in Tunisia's long standing education system is needed to improve the country's failing economy. Talking with youth around the country, it becomes apparent that they are very well aware of the limitations of the current opportunities that come with a university diploma. At face value, the education system is very progressive for the continent. For Tunisians, primary and secondary education is free, and if one can pass the baccalaureate, then they can seek the possibility of entrance in one of 12 university campuses with affordable registration fees.<sup>31</sup> If they do not gain admission to university, one can also go to a technical school to seek vocational training in a broad range of subjects from computer programming to hospitality services. In general, Tunisia's education system has been attributed to its success, producing a large number of college graduates and resulting in a literacy rate of around 78% for people over 15 (World Bank, 2011). But regardless of the availability and the accessibility of education, this system still does not necessarily translate into a job after graduation. As

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<sup>31</sup> The first year of university is normally free. Subsequent years require registration fees that can be as high as \$100. Normally this cost is affordable but there are people, like those from the interior, who struggle to afford it. Also, compounded with room and board fees, university can be prohibitively expensive for some.

mentioned earlier, a high number of youth with a university education are unemployed. This harsh reality has caused many youth to identify education reform as a crucial need for Tunisia's transition.

Many youth were concerned that education reform was not adequately identified by politicians as a serious issue during the NCA campaign period. Youth currently in the university system are greatly concerned that Tunisia's universities do not properly prepare students for a career, and that finding a good job, even with a degree, is difficult after graduation (Personal Interview, Tunis University Students, Tunis, 21 January 2012). This was often attributed to the fact that the university produces many graduates in the humanities fields and fewer in the sciences. Many students graduate with little prior work experience or practical training and either accept any job they can get or hold out for a long period with the hope that one day a position that lives up to their training will be available. Also career guidance counseling is normally not available to students, and few students consider internships or student mentorships during their studies. As a result, bright but inexperienced students hope that they can obtain either menial government or teaching assignments because they do not know what else they are qualified for, due to lack of career counseling (Personal Interview, Tunis University Students, Tunis, 21 January 2012). Current students who find themselves in this situation suggested the government needs to change the curriculum to provide more job counseling and offer more practical training in the technical fields. It came as a huge disappointment that none of these ideas were made a priority during the election campaigns and are still shrugged off by elected officials today. It seemed that one of the most efficient ways to improve the youth's unemployment trap was something that the politicians failed to discuss.

### **Politicization of Tunisian Youth**

The greatest deficiency that Tunisian youth face today is that they have never been incorporated into party politics during the Ben Ali era. The youth have gone their whole lives without having a voice in the political process and never seriously being asked to give their input to the political future of their country. Like many Tunisians of all ages, the youth have very little idea of what democratic culture means, let alone what it means

to participate as a citizen in a democracy. However the main obstacle that they face is that neither they nor Tunisia's older generation have confidence in their ability to participate in the government. This lack of confidence has resulted in a government that is almost exclusively controlled by politicians with an average age greater than 55 years old. In response, many youth distrust the government because of its failure to reflect their values and ideals, and put the onus of representative rule in the hands politicians that they feel are out of touch, yet are the only ones qualified for the job (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 24 January 2012). This perception of their collective lack of experience, whether true or not, is creating a vicious cycle in Tunisian politics that discourages youth from voting. They feel distant from the politicians who aim to serve them, yet seek no active role in government because they presume that they are not qualified to participate.

Even though the youth have psychologically distanced themselves from actively operating within the government, they still seek other means for channeling their political will. Up until now, this paper has suggested that the youth have become apathetic toward politics in Tunisia. Once they decided to bicker among each other, political parties had lost the youth's attention, and lost touch with their needs for dignity, justice, and the means to improve their lives. But apathy does not accurately explain the current state of the youth in Tunisian politics. Despite their distrust in the formal system so far, many have channeled their political will through activism online and through civil society. Since the fall of Ben Ali, there has been an explosion in civil society organizations, and many of them are led by youth seeking to improve the quality of their lives (SAIS Group Meeting, Washington DC, 5 December 2011). Under Ben Ali, society was closely monitored, and any organization that sought change contrary to the regime might face persecution. But almost overnight, thousands of civil society organizations, ranging from charity organizations that help the poor like Free Sight, to transparency and corruption watchdog organizations like "I Watch" sprang up, as if out of nowhere. Where youth feel their demands have not been properly addressed by politicians, they have created organizations to seek direct action themselves. The real challenge is gathering all of this positive dialogue and participation and transferring it to the traditional, formalized sphere of party politics. For Tunisia's democratic transition to be successful, the politicians need

to bridge the gap and draw in these industrious and active youth and get their increased participation in the political system.

### **What is at Stake?**

It is important to mention that while some youth did participate in the NCA election, many decided not to register to vote because they felt distanced from the political leadership at the time. While some of these potential participants chose to channel their political will through constructive means such as joining or creating civil society organizations, there are others who employed destructive means such as aggressive protests, illegal strikes, and sit-ins. Such destructive acts are on the rise since the NCA elections, and many are perpetrated by youth in the areas, such as the interior, most neglected by past politicians. In general, these groups make up two ends of the extreme. On the far left, there is a movement by workers and unemployed youth who employ illegal protests, not condoned by Tunisia's various unions, to gain improved benefits or job creation. On the far right, the salafists, a group of young men and women who practice Wahhabi fundamentalist Islam, aggressively protest the established order and the university system to gain greater expectance for the increased practice of Islam in society.

One of the biggest challenges the fledging government faces is how to get these two fringe movements, whose ranks are mainly filled with disgruntled youth, to buy into the new democratic order that Tunisia is trying to install. During the month of January 2012 alone, just a year after Ben Ali fled the country, strikes and protests shut down agribusiness and commerce in Béja, Gafsa, Jendouba, le Kef, Kasserine, Nabeul, and Seliana. Like most of Tunisia, these towns have been hit hard by Tunisia's economic decline, and desperate youth have been calling on the government to improve working conditions and create more jobs. At the same time, a group of young salafists staged a hunger strike at Manouba University to call for a removal of the ban of the *niqab*, or full-face veil, on campus. The strikes and protests from both groups destabilized their respective communities, causing commerce to shut down in much of the interior of the country and students' final exams to be postponed. Sadly neither group represents the majority of Tunisians, yet their actions are disturbing the transition process. The salafists

are rumored to consist only of 3,000 followers, who were allegedly youth converted from their exposure to Saudi television, yet they have a profound effect in changing the political debate through their actions (SAIS Group Meeting, Tunis, 23 January 2012). Ultimately, a link needs to be drawn between politicizing the youth and a collective buy-in of these fringe groups to the democratic process. The politicians' failure to do so during the NCA election highlights where improvements need to be made to encourage the youth to participate actively in the political process. The youth were neglected during a very fragile time in Tunisia's transition, but this does not have to continue. Now is the time to recognize the importance of the youth's role in Tunisia's transition, to engage the youth who have interest in changing Tunisia, and to educate those who have not been convinced that change is possible through democratic means.

### **Recommendations**

Though never before politicized, the Tunisian youth show their willingness to participate in Tunisia's politics regardless of their absence in the 2011 NCA election. Youth, distrustful of party politics, channel their concerns through other means, such as social networking sites, civil society organizations, and sometimes through protests or sit-ins. While some of these methods are constructive and effective for seeking political voice, ultimately the political parties will have to get the youth's buy-in to the formalized system of party politics for Tunisia's democratic transition to be successful. Efforts to address the concerns of the youth and pull them back into the transition process must be made in the short term, medium term, and long term, with the understanding that socializing a generation in democratic values cannot happen overnight.

#### Short-term

- **The current transitional government and the political actors need to create a clear and honest political discourse about Tunisia's state of affairs on job creation.** Much of the current chaos that has resulted in illegal strikes and sit-ins in the interior of the country is a product of the increasing slow-down of the economy due to weary investors and clients. The government could improve this climate by

openly sharing in the media their plans for improving Tunisia's image to investors and their efforts made for creating new jobs. One step would be to **launch a modest job creation plan and inform Tunisians on the step-by-step progress** being made.

- Given the countries' worsening economic environment, **the government needs to bolster its security presence, and assertively stop illegal strikes in the interior of the country and disruptive protests by the salafists.** It is understandable that the Ben Ali regime has made the government uneasy about using police to crack down on disorderly fringe movements. But the longer the government waits to fully secure and stabilize the country, the more foreign investment and confidence will diminish.
- Currently the youth are not as active in party politics as the older generations. **The parties, with assistance from international donors and NGOs, should continue to organize workshops and training to build youth wings and encourage youth participation.**
- **The government needs to start the trials against those responsible for the murders during December 2010 to January 2011.** There are still many people in the interior of the country who are disillusioned that the government has yet to bring to trial those who murdered their compatriots. The justice and reconciliation process will be long and daunting, but **it is now the responsibility of the government to regain the trust of those who sacrificed everything they had to change society.** Just commencing this process alone could be enough to win over the current dissenters in the region and buy enough time to enact meaningful reform as this region remains plagued by economic hardship.
- **More support, from both the government and international donors, can be given to aid programs that foster entrepreneurship.** It is time that Tunisia's youth become self sufficient and stop relying on the government to solve all of their problems. Given the proper motivation, training, and financial assistance, youth could be encouraged to create their own jobs rather than wait for the government to do so.

### Medium-term

- At some point, **the youth need to be socialized into democratic participation.** One of the first places the government can start is the schools. **The government should change primary and secondary school curriculum to include a civic-education class that teaches students about democratic institutions and participation.** Democracy cannot be learned overnight, but with the addition of civic-education, Tunisia can help prepare its youth to be active citizens.
- **The government should enact election reform that would require political parties to reserve a certain number of spots on their party lists for youth candidates.** Election rules currently hold that lists must have gender parity but there is no provision for youth. The requirement would encourage political parties to reach out and train youth for political service. This would give a greater voice to the youth in the country and would also have the effect of encouraging the youth to vote as the candidates become younger and reflect more of their interests.
- **The government needs to lay out a plan for educational reform.** Working with education professionals, more assistance needs to be given to students in the form of **career counseling** early on in their studies. Programs could also be set up to **promote internships and work study programs**, designed to train students for the professional world.

### Long-term

- Both the youth and older generations currently remain unconvinced that Tunisia's youth are capable of holding an elected post. **A new university, similar to the ones in Europe, should be created to train aspiring politicians and civil servants.** Institutionalizing political and civic education at the university will increase the capabilities and the confidence of youth to hold elective office and participate in state politics.





## **Part III: Security, Justice and Economics**



# **The Role of the Military in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia**

**Bryan Frederick**

The Tunisian military's refusal to use force against the January 2011 protests in Tunisia was a crucial factor in the fall of the Ben Ali regime. Since that time, the military has played an indispensable role in providing security and stability to a country whose other public institutions have seen tremendous upheaval. The story of the Tunisian military after the revolution is therefore largely one of success, a rarity in post-conflict situations. Nonetheless, the expansion of the military's role into unavoidably political areas carries with it significant risks both for the country and for the institution of the military itself. Wise policies will be needed to ensure the continued success of the partnership between the Tunisian military and the nascent civilian government. To this end, this chapter will address three main questions. First, why did the Tunisian military refuse its orders to fire on civilian protestors, and turn on the Ben Ali regime? Second, how has the military performed in its expanded role since the revolution? Third, what role is the military likely to play in the future of Tunisian political life? This chapter will conclude by making a series of recommendations for how to ensure that the Tunisian military continues to play a positive role in the country's ongoing transition to a democratic, constitutional order.

## **The Restricted Institutional Development of the Tunisian Military**

The Tunisian military has never previously played a prominent role in the politics of post-independence Tunisia. After an attempted military coup by Lazhar Chraïti in 1962, President Habib Bourguiba took numerous steps to curb the military's power and prevent it from accumulating any institutional experience in politics. Nonetheless, Bourguiba did rely upon the military on multiple occasions. In 1978 and 1984, the army was used to repress civil demonstrations and buttress the regime, and both times it complied with those orders. However, the military disliked being asked to perform tasks suited for the domestic security forces, and resented the resulting damage to its reputation for

professionalism. Although never lavished with resources under Bourguiba, the military was modernized in the 1980s, partly with U.S. military aid, in response to growing concern over Qaddafi's Libya (Grimaud 1995).

After Zine El Abidine Ben Ali seized the Presidency in a bloodless coup in 1987, further steps were taken to weaken the military institutionally. As a former general himself, Ben Ali was acutely aware that the military represented a potential threat to his rule. He reduced the size of the army, cut the defense budget, forced certain officers into retirement, and may even have accused innocent officers of plotting a coup, imprisoning them to serve as a warning to others who might contemplate such actions (Gaaloul 2011). By the end of the Ben Ali regime, Tunisian military expenditures accounted for only 1.4% of GDP, by far the lowest figure in the region<sup>32</sup> (CIA World Factbook 2012).

Under Ben Ali, the military limited its activities to border protection, natural disaster response, and participation in UN Peacekeeping missions. It became resolutely apolitical, with recruitment and advancement based on performance and academic achievement. Tunisian officers have also been frequent participants in military exchange and training programs offered by the U.S. and France. In keeping the military out of politics, and preventing it from gaining other sources of economic or political power, Ben Ali helped to ensure that the army would remain relatively weak and professional. By taking this approach, however, he also helped to ensure that the Tunisian military was not co-opted, and had no close connections or loyalty to senior figures in the regime. When the popular revolution in Tunisia finally came to a head in January 2011, the military had no institutional incentive to prevent Ben Ali's overthrow.

### **The Military's Role during the Revolution**

The initial stages of the Tunisian Revolution witnessed horrific displays of violence and repression on the part of the domestic security services.<sup>33</sup> When these efforts proved

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<sup>32</sup> By contrast, Algeria spends 3.3% of GDP on its military, Egypt 3.4%, Libya 3.9%, and Morocco 5% (CIA World Factbook 2012).

<sup>33</sup> The actions of these groups during the revolution are discussed in detail in the accompanying chapter by Machado.

insufficient to prevent the demonstrations from spreading to Tunis and growing in size, Ben Ali ordered the Army Chief of Staff, General Rachid Ammar, to have military units open fire on the protestors. Ammar refused the order, and was subsequently relieved of his command by Ben Ali. Nonetheless, Ammar's refusal to defend the regime, along with evidence on the street that the Army was clearly siding with the protestors, played a crucial role in convincing Ben Ali that his position was untenable. Some media reports even suggest that Ammar himself may have told Ben Ali that the only option open to him to guarantee his safety was to flee the country (Barrouhi 2011).

In the days following the departure of Ben Ali, the Army played a pivotal role in providing security throughout the country. It deployed troops to protect public buildings, control looting, and even hunt down elements of the domestic security forces that remained loyal to Ben Ali and continued to engage in violence against civilians (Kirkpatrick 2011). With the total collapse of the domestic security forces operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, the Tunisian military was the only force able to provide security in the country. Following the reinstatement of General Ammar by Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi, the Army for the first time began to play an overtly political role as well.

On 24 January 2011, General Ammar addressed a large crowd of demonstrators in Government Square in Tunis. Ammar outlined the four principles that would guide the actions of the Tunisian military in the post-Ben Ali era. First, "We are faithful to the Constitution and we will not move outside that framework." Second, "We are guarantors of the revolution of the youth and we will see to it that it succeeds in a smooth and sound manner." Third, "We will not repress the peaceful demonstrators, but the latter should not end up creating a void, because a void would lead to a return of dictatorship." Fourth, "We must allow to function [sic] this (enlarged) government, or another one." (Barrouhi 2011) Although Ammar was reportedly urged to make his remarks by Prime Minister Ghannouchi, whose ouster was a primary demand of the protestors, these remarks remain the most expansive statement by any Tunisian military official regarding the military's view of its role in the transition. Although no doubt hastily drafted and delivered,

Ammar's remarks do provide a helpful framework for understanding the actions of the Tunisian military during the first year of the transition.

### **The Tunisian Military during the Transition**

Since January 2011, the Tunisian military has greatly expanded the scope of its responsibilities, taking on both traditional defense roles and engaging in activities normally reserved for the police or other domestic security institutions. Remarkably, the military has managed this expansion of its engagement in domestic affairs while remaining extremely popular, a testament both to the relative skill with which it has operated and to the enormous reserve of good will the institution acquired due to its actions during the revolution.

The Libyan Civil War that took place throughout the spring and summer of 2011 represented a significant security challenge for Tunisia. Tens of thousands of Libyan refugees fled to Tunisia and were given refuge in makeshift camps and private homes throughout the country. The conflict in Libya created substantial incentives for the smuggling of fuel into Libya, and the army was enlisted to crack down on the practice. Further, after the fall of the Libyan regime, numerous armed groups loyal to Qaddafi infiltrated Tunisia, sparking clashes with Tunisian forces. Such clashes have persisted as recently as February 2012. The army has also maintained its traditional leading role in the response to natural disasters, as it did in the relief efforts following heavy snowfall in the north of the country in early 2012. For a military estimated to have only 35,800 total personnel (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2012, 351-2), these combined challenges represent a difficult test. It is therefore no wonder that the army has recently requested increased U.S. assistance both in controlling the Libyan border and for the overall modernization of its equipment.

Nonetheless, these challenges did not prevent the Tunisian military from playing a significant role in domestic security as well. During the October elections for the Constituent Assembly, the military deployed at least one army agent to every polling place in the country. Combined with a number of troops held in reserve in case of

disruptions during voting, the total operation employed 22,000 troops, well over half of the Army's total force (Gaaloul 2011).

More controversially, the Tunisian military has also taken upon itself the responsibility for preventing potentially ruinous disruptions to the national economy due to widespread strikes in key industries. On numerous occasions, the army has forced workers to return to their factories and even stored crucial commodities in its facilities when it felt that further disruptions to production or supply threatened the national economy. Such actions, while clearly legal under the state of emergency that has governed the country since the revolution, are inherently political at a time when economic misery has prompted numerous displays of worker dissatisfaction against current economic arrangements. Moreover, given the disorganization of the incipient civilian government, it is likely that the military is deciding which strikes to break on its own without significant political oversight. To this point, the military has avoided intervening in strikes where sympathy for the workers carried wider political resonance, but it is difficult to imagine it avoiding such complications indefinitely.

The case of Nabil Hajlaoui also represents a cautionary tale for how the increased involvement of the military in domestic politics may not come without costs to its reputation. Hajlaoui was an agronomist and a blogger from Sidi Bouzid who posted writings critical of the conduct of the military in the aftermath of the October 2011 elections. Shortly afterwards, Hajlaoui was arrested and sentenced to two months in prison for his writings.<sup>34</sup> While apparently an isolated occurrence, if repeated such incidents have the potential to put at risk the military's greatest asset in contemporary Tunisia, the enormously high regard in which the population holds it.

### **Perceptions of the Tunisian Military**

The Tunisian military is the most trusted institution in the country. In a public opinion poll conducted in early January 2012, 73% of Tunisian expressed confidence in the Tunisian National Army, against only 4% that expressed primarily distrust. (Applied

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<sup>34</sup> For more information on Nabil Hajlaoui's case, see:  
<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/11/10/tunisia-army-critic-sentenced-to-two-months-in-prison/>

Social Science Forum 2012) Similar polls were also conducted in April 2011 and August 2011, and views of the army have remained relatively consistent over this period.<sup>35</sup> This faith in the army contrasts sharply with the cautious attitude Tunisians have developed towards the security sector in general (31% express confidence, 31% express distrust), and the current governing coalition in the Constituent Assembly (25% express confidence, 34% express distrust). The institution of the Tunisian military has no peers in the eyes of the population.

However, this confidence in the Tunisian military is based on the perception that the army has no desire for greater political power, and that it continues to discharge its duties in as apolitical a fashion as possible. Throughout the numerous interviews conducted in Tunis at the end of January 2012, no one anywhere on the political spectrum expressed any interest in seeing the army take a more active role in the administration of the country. Tunisians trust the military far more than the civilian government, but they much prefer to see the latter institution work through its mistakes without military guidance.

While this view is to be expected from supporters of Ennahdha and other parties that belong to the current governing coalition, the same view was expressed just as strongly by politicians and activists that identify with the secular left. Although Tunisians often speak of Turkey as a developmental model to follow, there appears to be no appetite for the Tunisian military to act as a guardian of Bourguiba-style secularism, as the Turkish military has been generally seen as defending the modernizing, secular legacy of Ataturk. Neither is this commitment to civilian control of the military purely abstract. Salafist groups have exploited the security vacuum in Tunisia on numerous occasions to agitate for a fundamentalist vision of Islam that is clearly worrying to many members of the secular elite. Nonetheless, all parties appear to recognize that enforcing the law against the salafists is the proper role of the elected government, and no figure we spoke with felt the army should intervene to crack down on the salafists. The Army, for its part, appears to have no desire to become involved in such a fraught political dispute.

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<sup>35</sup> In April 2011, 82% of Tunisians expressed confidence in the army, as did 66% of Tunisians in August 2011. (Applied Social Science Forum 2012)



This is in sharp contrast to the military's vigilant and proactive attempts to ensure that ongoing, widespread strikes throughout the country do not jeopardize the country's economic well-being. The army is very unlikely to ever become a guardian of Tunisian secularism.

### **Civil-Military Relations after the Revolution**

The future role of the military in Tunisia will be determined in large part by the capacity of the civilian government, and its ability to exercise oversight of the army. The exact working relationship between the current transitional government and the Tunisian military is opaque, and the military was reluctant to allow any officers to speak with us directly. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the relationship can be inferred from other sources. The current Tunisian government is having great difficulty determining how to deal with its internal security challenges. Efforts to prevent the salafists from threatening public order have been half-hearted, and the Ministry of Interior has operated as though it is unsure of its mandate or policies. The current Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, a senior figure within Ennahdha, was himself tortured as a political prisoner at the hands of Ben Ali's Interior Ministry and has appeared reluctant to use force in politically-charged cases. The transformation of the bloated internal security forces constructed during the Ben Ali regime into a modern, professional domestic security force will take time, and there is little evidence that the process is even yet underway. In addition, Ennahdha appears to trust the military, and relations between the two appear to be generally warm. In this situation, there is every reason to believe that the army is largely deciding on its own when and where to end strikes, pursue militants inside Tunisia, and otherwise enforce domestic stability. As discussed above, this is a politically dangerous situation for the military, because without clearly established civilian oversight, it may be held responsible for those unhappy with the decisions it does make, for example, to force striking workers back to their factories.

That this arrangement has been workable thus far speaks to the professionalism and good judgment of the army, but also to the institutional weakness of the current government where military matters are concerned. The current Minister of Defense,

Abdelkrim Zbidi, was a medical doctor before being elevated to his current position under the previous interim government. That he was asked to stay on following the elections of October 2011 suggests that he has a good working relationship with General Ammar. However, there is little evidence of previous experience with security or military matters in his background, reinforcing the likelihood that he does not provide a significant institutional check on the decisions of the military.

The leaders of Ennahdha, for their part, do seem to be aware of the importance of ensuring civilian control over the military. In negotiations over the rules that were to govern the country while a formal constitution is being drafted, Ennahdha initially proposed that the Prime Minister be placed in charge of the armed forces directly. This would have both placed the military under Ennahdha's control, and fulfilled its long-term goal of weakening the office of the President in favor of the Prime Minister. However, objections from virtually all other political parties forced Ennahdha to agree that the President would remain the titular commander of the armed forces (Ghali 2011). While neither the current President nor the current Prime Minister is likely to disagree with the army over major matters in the near term, the fact that Ennahdha made this an issue suggests that they are sensitive to the future possibility of the military operating autonomously from the elected government, and interested in ensuring meaningful civilian oversight of the military.

This concern bodes well for the future of civil-military relations in Tunisia. A common refrain we heard while in Tunis was that the country desperately needs strong institutions than can balance one another. One example of this is the desire for an opposition political party that would be strong enough to hold the present Ennahdha-led government accountable, and provide a clear alternative. Similarly, while the Tunisian army's behavior has overall been exemplary, over the long term Tunisia will need robust civilian control of the military to ensure that the military continues to play a positive role, particularly if in the future the army were to come under less enlightened leadership.

## **Recommendations**

While the military has played a very positive role in post-revolution Tunisia, a number of important steps still need to be taken in order to ensure the continued and harmonious development of both military and civilian institutions. These recommendations should be considered alongside the suggestions for broader security sector reform made in the chapter by Machado.

### Short-Term Recommendations

- *To the Tunisian Ministry of Defense:* **Immediately establish a coordinating council to oversee and review all actions taken by the military in support of domestic stability.** Publicly verify that all actions taken by the military to end strikes or otherwise repress expressions of dissent are hereafter ordered and authorized by the elected government.
- *To the Tunisian Armed Forces:* **Publicly acknowledge that all actions hereafter taken in support of domestic stability are ordered and authorized by the elected government.**
- *To the United States Government:* **Provide the Tunisian military with increased logistical support and materiel to secure the Tunisia-Libya border and allow Tunisian forces to focus on their domestic challenges.**

### Medium-Term Recommendations

- *To the Tunisian Government:* **Create a Tunisian National Security Council to provide a formal forum for the coordination of policy between civilian and military officials.** Ensure that senior Tunisian military officials have the permanent voice in the creation of national security policy that they lacked under the Ben Ali regime. Ensure that civilian officials nonetheless have the dominant role in this National Security Council.
- *To the United States and French Governments:* **Focus military assistance to Tunisia primarily on officer training programs, technical advice, and the upgrading and**

**modernization of its existing force capabilities.** Do not financially support significant expansions in the size of the Tunisian military.

#### Long-Term Recommendations

- *To the Tunisian Government:* **Take legal steps to support the continued professionalism of the Tunisian military.** Formalize regulations on the political and financial activities of military officers. **Increase officer salaries** to ensure a military career continues to attract outstanding candidates with no need for outside sources of income. Remove the restriction prohibiting soldiers from voting, but prohibit political campaigning or organizing on military bases.
- *To the Constituent Assembly:* **Decriminalize non-violent speech critical of state institutions, including the Armed Forces.** Maintain the Tunisian President as the Commander of the Tunisian military in the forthcoming Constitution.
- *To the United States and French Governments:* **Initiate exchange and training programs for civilian officials designed to increase the institutional capacity of the Tunisian Ministry of Defense.**

# **Internal Security and Reform in Tunisia**

**Colin Machado**

Although the majority of international attention since the Tunisian revolution has been focused on macroscopic political change, the issue of security reform remains equally prominent among the concerns of Tunisian citizens. Among the many causes of the revolution, it is important to bear in mind that its foremost initial objective was not primarily a direct indictment of Ben Ali himself, but a rejection of his overbearing domestic security apparatus. Only when it became clear that the long-time president was unwilling to rein in his police did the populace turn its attention to his ouster.

Through the prism of international media, the Arab Spring has been cast to fit the narrative of a common people uniting to overthrow their oppressive dictators in favor of real democracy. In fact, the motives, identities, and objectives of the persons involved are much more varied and complex not just from one nation to another, but within each nation as well. This chapter intends to examine in particular the state of the domestic security sector before, during, and after the Tunisian revolution and its current prospects for reform. It will begin with a description of the organization of the sector and its methods of operation, then explain the role of the police in the revolution, and finally explore specific policy recommendations for the security sector in Tunisia.

## **Institutional History and Organization**

There exist three primary elements in the organization of internal security forces in Tunisia, one of which, the so-called “political police,” was formally abolished in March following the revolution. The other two forces are the regular, or administrative, police and the Tunisian National Guard, which comprises a mere 12,000 men<sup>36</sup> and has been largely irrelevant to the overall security apparatus. Although no official personnel counts are available due to the clandestine nature of the political police, which until recently

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<sup>36</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance 2008*.

accounted for the majority of the force, varying accounts estimate the size of domestic security forces at between 120,000 and 200,000 prior to the revolution—one of the highest police-to-civilian ratios in the world.<sup>37</sup> No accurate estimates are presently available to account for the dissolution of the political police, but the number should be significantly less.

The political police, officially the State Security Department, deserve special attention for its uncommon character and function, akin to the Iranian SAVAK or Russian FSB. The most controversial and nebulous of the three entities, the political police force was, until its dissolution, fundamental to the oppressive power of the ruling regime, and thus one of the primary reasons for its longevity. The force was created under Bourguiba in the 1960s to address the inability of the regular police to perform intelligence and surveillance operations necessary to the protection of the regime at a time of heightened political threat. From that time, the political police grew in number and scope and continued to flourish under Ben Ali after his ascension to power.

All three elements fall under the administration of the Ministry of the Interior, which is nominally responsible for internal affairs, including all matters pertaining to internal security and “local development.” It is currently headed by Ali Larayedh, who replaced Habib Essid on 24 December 2011. Essid was, himself, only Minister since March of that year—one of several names shuffled into and out of the post in the months immediately prior to and following the revolution. The volatility of the position is indicative of its highly political nature, exercising control over the entirety of the internal security forces; Ben Ali himself held the position prior to his ascent to the presidency. Since the revolution, the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior and its sub-components, like most other government bodies, has undergone significant reshuffling, but the current tumult of political affairs has made it difficult to establish with more precision the identities of those currently involved.

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<sup>37</sup> Yezid Sayigh. “Agencies of Coercion” cites 120,000, while Alexis Arieff speculates 200,000, but both concede the exact number is unknown.

## **The Implements of Repression**

There are two key issues to understanding the problem of internal security forces prior to the revolution; the first has to do with the repressive methods of the political police, especially in terms of electronic surveillance, and the second concerns the behavior of the administrative police.

As the enforcers of Ben Ali's doctrine of political conformity, the political police were essential to the perpetuation of a rigid system, unresponsive to the needs of its people. The methods of the political police were like those of the mafia, but imbued with the resources and authority of a nation—surveillance, kidnapping, intimidation, blackmail, even torture and most likely murder, the probable fate of the many political prisoners who “disappeared” over the years. Islamists, in particular, were subjected to various forms of torture, but adherents to other forms of political opposition deemed “dissident” were also targeted. The result was an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among the populace—fear of stepping out of line, and mistrust of the government and especially the security forces. Due to the clandestine nature of the activities and the prolonged period of media and academic censorship in the country, it is difficult to cite direct evidence of these activities, which are catalogued primarily in the accounts of its victims and their relatives, some of whom we met on our visit to Tunisia.

The surveillance operations of the regime merit further consideration beyond the scope of this chapter, however, they are worth summarizing. They have significant implications for oversight of the Internet and social media, which were—at least in international perceptions—the defining implements of the revolution. Even prior to the outbreak of the popular revolts, Internet surveillance was a regular tactic employed by the regime to target and monitor politically active citizens who were critical of the regime (Goldstein 2011). The precise affiliation of those involved in the monitoring is not publicly known and it is unlikely to be soon given the lack of existing documentation, but most sources point to the political police and the Ministry of the Interior, to which the suspect Internet traffic would be diverted. Some refer to the perpetrators as an entirely separate entity known as the “cyber police,” but still most likely under the purview of the political police and certainly the regime. The actual implementation of the monitoring is

also complicated, involving a complex manipulation of telecommunications infrastructure in cooperation with the Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI by its French title). The equipment used in this operation is still in place and it is not yet clear what will be done with it (Silver 2011).

At its most basic, the program would simply block certain websites; at its most deviant, the program would filter private e-mails en route, replacing them with nonsense, phony advertising, or in the worst cases, with sexually explicit material. In some cases, e-mails would simply not arrive. The result was an increasingly intimidating and unreliable electronic communications environment in an era when commerce, administration, and simple social interaction relies ever more heavily on digital correspondence. The indiscriminate application of politically-sensitive “flag words” that would appear in otherwise innocuous e-mails led to an exaggerated effect of the security program beyond those it intended to censor.

The second key issue with security forces during the revolution was a structural problem in the administrative police force. Although it is not possible to prove one way or the other, the Tunisian people might have been more tolerant of limitations on their political freedoms if it had not been accompanied by a corresponding assault on their daily welfare, including the cyber-assaults described above. Being a police officer in Tunisia before the revolution in most cases meant a free license to abuse or profit from civilians. However, the situation was more complex than a simple will to malice and extortion, which it must be noted did not affect all police officers, but was widespread enough to seriously taint their reputation as a professional corps.

In fact, a major part of the issue was that police officers were simply underpaid. This is, of course, not to condone their behavior, but rather to explain why it was so pervasive and how the regime had a hand in its perpetuation. The problem was not simply a matter of a preponderance of malicious individuals, it was the result of a deep-seated institutional problem, one that has yet to be adequately resolved (Arieff 2011).

If Ben Ali had been concerned only with repression, the situation might not have been so dire. It was his desire to maintain the facade of pluralism and civil society that required the employment of such a bloated security force. To force the closure of



undesirable organizations, stifle dissidence, and deny international access would have required many fewer police officers. However, to allow human-rights and civil society organizations to function, while impeding their operations, to condone social media platforms while monitoring their contents, and to subtly silence unwelcome voices required a massive exertion of human resources.

Although the security apparatus contributed positively to national employment, it could hardly be considered gainful to the larger economy, as it constricted the activities of the general population and occupied national resources without providing any valuable service or contribution to society. Additionally, the surplus employment of personnel meant inadequate salaries for police officers and thus contributed to their corruption.

On a fundamental level, the problem with the security apparatus, as with Ben Ali, was its lack of legitimacy. Although its tactics were severe and in some cases brutal, they were certainly not internationally unique; one could point to numerous examples of regimes employing similar means elsewhere in the world yet avoiding collapse or overthrow. The reason, then, that the internal security forces were so universally despised had to do with their lack of coherence to any larger publicly accepted narrative; they were, in the case of the political police, solely for the preservation of Ben Ali's position in power. The administrative police, on the other hand, seemed to be more concerned, justifiably or not, with personal enrichment than contributing in any positive way to public safety. An exacerbating factor was the level of civil development Tunisia had attained; it is conceivable that such flagrant repression would have encountered less resistance in a less developed, less educated population.

### **Role of Police in the Uprising**

The events leading up to 14 January 2011 will already be familiar to readers. However, it is worth highlighting the role of the police in igniting the upheaval that followed Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation. Bouazizi, a young fruit vendor in Sidi Bouzid, was publicly assaulted by administrative police officers on 16 December 2010, ostensibly for his lack of a vendors license. In fact, no such license is required in Tunisia, and the necessity of the license was presumably the pretense under which the police justified

their extortion, the price of which Bouazizi was unable to pay. Accounts of the exact events vary and in some aspects conflict, but the essence of the incident concerned unnecessarily aggressive police behavior (Abouzeid, 21 January 2011).

When the ensuing riots escalated and spread across the country, Ben Ali ordered the police to put them down. They complied and the result was numerous violent clashes between police and protesters. At the same time, the cyber or political police were waging an Internet campaign to track and disrupt communications among protest organizers and activists (Astrubal, 3 January 2011). Facebook and other forms of social media were indeed critical to the success of the revolution, for their role in facilitating communication, but also in a more subtle respect. Because the regime was still monitoring electronic communications and collecting data on those involved in anti-regime activities, those who might have relented to adequate pressure were driven on by the knowledge that failure would mean serious reprisals from the regime once accounts were taken. Thus, by attempting to exert control over Internet access, the regime was ironically contributing to its own demise.

### **Post-Revolution Security Problems**

After the departure of Ben Ali, the installation of the interim government, and a return to relative peace, the administrative police were perceived as vestiges of the old regime and its repressive methods. Many police chiefs were removed from office in the following months and the police personnel were treated with suspicion and contempt after their return to service. In September, it was announced that Tunisian police would be barred from forming or joining a union. Members of the police turned out in protest over the matter, and at what they deemed unfair treatment of incarcerated officers taken as scapegoats for the Ben Ali regime (Kalboussi, 6 September 2011).

The interim government announced on March 7 the dissolution of the infamous political police, the first step of a program intended to rehabilitate the country's tattered security forces (*BBC*, 7 March 2011). In an October press conference, Interior Minister Lazhar Akremi further discussed the prospect of security reforms, most notably the implementation of new uniforms for the police (Ajmi, 9 November 2011). Before the

revolution, many police, especially the political police, dressed in nondescript blue jeans and black jackets, which reinforced their thuggish image. As part of the government's campaign to present a new, just, and more civic-minded police-force, it was decided that distinct uniforms would serve as a visual representation of reform. Achieving a clean break from the former regime has been one of the most important goals of post-revolution politics, embodied most distinctly in their move to draft a new constitution.

However, the process of doing so is more complicated with the security force than it is with government officials. Several senior officials in the police and the Interior Ministry were removed or reshuffled, in an attempt to reform the organization, but it is not clear to what extent that has been successful. Additionally, although it may work for the leadership, it is simply not feasible to fire tens of thousands of police officers and hire replacements, nor would it serve the interests of the state because it would create a sizable faction of politically disaffected young men, accustomed to the use of violence. The logistics of training an entirely new police force during a time of national transition would also cause more problems than it would resolve.

Several other lingering or looming problems in the security sector will ensure that the issue remains prominent among the concerns of the Tunisian people. The most worrisome of these, especially in the context of the growing controversy surrounding salafist activities in certain areas, is the formation of so-called "morality" or religious police (Trabelsi, 7 December 2011). Not sanctioned by any government body, these groups are reported to consist of Islamist men attempting to impose religious norms and practices on others, by force or intimidation. There are also rumors that the political police have not truly disbanded but merely gone underground, and the specter of an apparatus devoted to political repression still hovers over the political dialogue.

In a more concrete sense, Tunisia is facing severe economic problems that challenge its ability to provide adequate funding for government services, including the police. Without resources to sufficiently compensate security personnel, there is little guarantee that they will not revert to their pre-revolution behavior of graft and extortion. Perhaps the largest dilemma facing police reform is, on the one hand, breaking the bad habits of those officers involved in nefarious activities, and, on the other hand, building

trust and confidence in a population that has long feared its police. For the time being, the majority of reform has come in the form of idealistic rhetoric, and it remains to be seen how its objectives will be achieved. This is especially pertinent as the government faces renewed protests over unemployment in underdeveloped areas and the police are forced to demonstrate their new sense of restraint and respect for human rights that have been touted by politicians.

## **Conclusion**

Legitimacy is one of the most important elements of a successful government, but so too is citizen welfare and the relationship between the government and its people. The former seems to have been satisfied, for the time being, by the success of October's free and fair elections to the Constituent Assembly, the body charged with drafting a new constitution. However, the latter remains ambiguous. As Tunisians continue to test the bounds of their nascent democracy and express open discontent with the pace of economic recovery, the temperance of the state security system will again come under scrutiny.

This presents a serious challenge to the beleaguered police force, which has not yet fully implemented the changes sought after the revolution and must deal simultaneously with the glacial pace of bureaucratic reform and the mounting impatience of the people. After issues of identity and economic recovery, security will be the primary logistical question confronting the new government as it seeks to define its relationship to its people.

The most serious challenge would arise in the event that the new government were to feel threatened and were to be tempted to employ the police to suppress dissent or to condone police excesses in the event that they align with regime priorities, especially concerning ideological matters. After all, it is a fine line between the enforcement of peace and the oppression of freedom, a balancing act with which Tunisia has had little institutional experience.

## **A Way Forward: Policy Reforms**

At present, security reforms are floundering for lack of meaningful action. No matter how the new constitution interprets democracy or Tunisian identity, there will still be major hurdles to overcome in pursuit of a stable and accountable security force. Presented here are just a few policy recommendations that would help achieve that end.

- **Competitive retraining. Reforming police behavior is paramount to the restoration of domestic security in Tunisia** and thus to the well-being of the country as a whole. Simply removing all those officers who served under the Ben Ali regime would not solve the problem, not only because it would mean the creation of a large group of disaffected and unemployed citizens, many of which would likely have made honest public servants, but also because of the logistical difficulty of replacing them all at once. Several countries, including Canada, Italy, and Finland, have offered assistance in retraining, but the problem remains of how to implement training on such a large scale, for tens of thousands of officers. That touches on the corollary problem of the inflated size of the police force.
- Both problems could be partially solved through the **implementation of a competitive retraining program, one in which officers are eligible for retraining in cohorts based inversely on seniority**, allowing those with longer service history more time to adjust to the new professional environment before competing for retraining. The Interior Ministry, in coordination with elected officials, would determine an ideal police force size, from which a passing rate for the retraining would be derived, thus succeeding in both retraining officers, retaining those who are best suited to the job, and reducing the size of the force to a more manageable number. Ideally, **professional development programs would help those who did not pass to transition to alternate employment.**
- **Wage increases.** The long-term gains from pay increases to low- and mid-level police officers should make the policy cost-neutral or even positive, even though it may appear more expensive in the short run. Substantial savings should have accrued from the dissolution of the political police, and the gradual reduction in the size of the administrative police outlined above should also cut program costs, even after

retraining expenses are accounted for. **Higher pay to officers would help reduce structural pressures to graft and extortion**, while improving the quality of officers and their social standing, resulting in a better behaved force. Additionally, the **improvement in domestic security should improve tourism and foreign investment by projecting a more stable Tunisia**, thereby increasing overall gains to the economy and thus to government.

- **Citizen Ombudsmen.** Accountability was one of the primary shortcomings of the security forces under Ben Ali. Citizens had no avenue for redress after police excesses, even if such behavior had not been sanctioned by the regime. It is unrealistic to expect an institution steeped in the repressive traditions of the old regime to suddenly become self-correcting. To address this, **Tunisia needs an official body with a mandate to investigate police misconduct** and the authority to discipline or remove those responsible. Citizens would need to be able to report misconduct to this body with credible protection from police retribution.

# Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation

Anna Wilson

## Defining the Enemy

What is perhaps most remarkable about Tunisia's revolution is the way in which the guilt has been focused down onto so few individuals: both the guilt for the suffering of the population under the former regime, and the blame for the current social and economic situation—in essence onto the person of the former President himself, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, his wife and her extended family. This is remarkable in that, while Tunisia's post-decolonialization history is one dominated openly by only two men, and a single (albeit renamed) party that funneled money and power in the country very tightly into the hands of very few, five decades of single-party rule has meant that it is difficult to see the limits of individuals' interactions with the regime.

Moreover, while there have been many expulsions from public office, particularly in the Ministry of the Interior, there could have been many more. Instead, Tunisians seemed content to wait patiently through a period of technocratic rule—essentially that of the same bureaucrats who had been running the country under the old regime—provided the clear term limits were adhered to and the President himself bowed to demands that he “dégage” (French for “clear out”). The question now, however, over a year after the revolution and with Tunisia governed for the first time by electoral will, is where the population and the political elites will draw the line between who should be punished and who was just doing their job, how to find the line for the bare minimum demanded for a sense of justice having been served.

There are a number of areas where these questions raise pressure points on Tunisia's post-revolutionary society. First, the question of what to do about the former members of the ruling party, the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), currently an illegal party, but whose members still make up the officials elected at municipal levels, since new elections have not yet been held. Second, there is the concern that members of Ennahdha are preoccupied with gaining political revenge for the

wrongs done them under the former regime, to the point where progress in the constitution writing process and in the governing coalition is affected. Third, Tunisia's autocracy was expressed through a police state, and it was the actions of a petty and corrupt police force grinding down that eventually exploded into the first sparks of the revolution. There are numerous anxieties now surrounding purging, vetting and reforming the Tunisian police, and what should be done with those found to warrant removal. Finally, there is the issue of pursuing justice with regard to Ben Ali and recuperating the personal wealth that was the product of his corruption. How much is it realistic or desirable to spend on attempting to force these issues? What should be done with the extensive property seized from the Trabelsi family and others? As the flush of success from the revolution fades, these questions are set to become more and more relevant.

### **Amnesty**

On 14 February 2011, exactly a month after former President Ben Ali boarded a plane for Saudi Arabia, the Transitional Government of Tunisia led by interim Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi reaffirmed the general amnesty for political prisoners imprisoned under the Ben Ali regime apparently granted on 19 January. More specifically, it called for the release of all prisoners detained as a result of their membership or active participation within the large number of political groups banned under the former regime.

The move was controversial at the time, as it deliberately did not distinguish more intimately between the charges against individual inmates. Although exact numbers are unavailable, it is estimated that hundreds of prisoners were released under this amnesty, if not more, although there remain many individuals who had been presumed imprisoned who remain unaccounted for. The reason for this may be that they "disappeared" while in police custody or that they were not classified as political prisoners by the Transitional Government's standards for release, but calls from families for information on their well-being remain strong.



Those released therefore included political prisoners from all strata of society and holding all political views—including a number of salafi adherents. However, it is important to note that the amnesty did not include those imprisoned on criminal charges—including for those individuals who claimed the evidence against them had been fabricated by the regime. These individuals consider themselves as political prisoners and several have demanded retrial or release.

Consensus amongst the Tunisian people appears still to be that the political amnesty itself was necessary, as was its all-encompassing nature; to understand why, it is important to grasp the interrelationship of the religious and the political in opposition to the regime in its latter years.

To Tunisians, theirs is not the “Jasmine Revolution.” Rather, it is known in the country as the Revolution of Liberty and Human Dignity, a much loftier title but one which carries with it a creed specifically in opposition to the repressions imposed on the Tunisian people by the Ben Ali regime—suppression of their freedom of speech, of many of their social and commercial freedoms, and, crucially, of many of the behaviors Tunisians associate with the practice of their religion.

It is within this context then—a context that includes acts such as banning the wearing of the headscarf in schools and universities, acts that were conducted under the mantle of President Bourguiba’s aggressive secularization policies, and interpreted strongly as anti-Islamic and contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of Tunisians—that the role of Islamist groups in Tunisia must be considered. North Africa’s history with Islamist political groups has been turbulent and violent for much of the past three decades. While Algeria stands as the most dramatic example—one not lost on Tunisia, both government and people—Morocco, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia have all seen political opposition be funneled through groups that, in addition to taking on a strong traditional identification with Islam, have specific political ambitions, with regime change as their ultimate goal.

For Ben Ali, the Western attitude of fear and distrust towards Islamic-based political organizations—particularly armed ones, unsurprisingly—created the opportunity for the former President to place himself, in the minds of Western leaders, as the

intermediary preventing the Ennahdha Movement from turning Tunisia into an Islamist nation, standing against the threat of creating a new Afghanistan or Iran. Western capital that therefore poured into Tunisia in the form of military aid, preferential trade agreements with Europe and strong political relations with Western nations, all served to strengthen Ben Ali's regime, and, while calls for political reform from outside were far from uncommon, in reality there were very few real conditions or constraints placed on the President or his single-party.

Heads of state from France, Italy, Spain and Germany all visited Tunis in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and in 2003 the association culminated in German Interior Minister Otto Schily signing an agreement on increased cooperation in fighting organized crime and terrorism (Report of the March 2011 Delegation of Attorneys to Tunisia, 10). By the middle of the last decade, therefore, Tunisia had some of the harshest and most heavily enforced anti-terrorism laws in the Arab World, which were applied stringently to political opponents coming from Islamist movements, including both Ennahdha and the salafi movement.

"Ennahdha has the stance of victims," the secularist politicians whine, seeking to explain the strong victory of the Islamist party in the elections for the Constituent Assembly—and it is true that much of the legitimacy that Ennahdha lays claim to as an opposition power comes from the strong and often violent treatment that its members received from the regime, including the exile of its leaders and the torture and imprisonment of many of its members, often after visibly unfair trials. But this treatment was not limited to Ennahdha, and, while the salafi are admittedly much less mainstream, and their actions often considered more counter to the general public good in many cases—there remained a sense immediately after the revolution that all of Tunisia had suffered under the repression, and, regardless of ideology, all Tunisians should experience their freedom. As Mokhtar Trifi, the head of the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), himself has argued, the League demanded the release of everyone, because the conditions that surrounded their trials were universally poor, and as such, irrespective of their guilt, they cannot be considered legally imprisoned (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

The current situation in many ways has carried forward this opinion. In the wake of increasing physical attacks and disruptions by salafi adherents like that at Manouba University, there is an admission that the general amnesty may well have released individuals that are now presenting public order concerns inside the country. However, the ideals of the revolution are still strongly felt, as is the sense of unfairness of the judicial system under the old regime. And it is unsurprising that in this new political and social context prisoners interred for all varieties of crime are claiming political designs behind their convictions—and while the problem of how to deal with the demands of these individuals is currently being overlooked, it is one that will not quickly fade away.

### **The RCD**

On 6 February 2011, the Ministry of the Interior banned all meetings and activities of the RCD, requesting that the Tunisian courts dissolve it. Just over a month later, on 9 March, a court in Tunis duly did so, deciding to liquidate all assets and funds associated with the party, and an organization that claimed membership by over 2 million people—almost one fifth of the Tunisian population—ceased to legally exist.

The Interior Ministry argued that it had started this process because the party itself had never in its thirty year existence been audited or filed annual accounts, but in reality the public demand for a definitive break with the party was clear. The Kasbah 2 demonstrations, where protestors occupied the main square between the Party and Government buildings from 19 February to 4 March, had two central demands—for a new Constitution, and for no more RCD. It was a protest against the risk that the revolution would not produce real regime change, a completely new system, but there was also a retributive aspect to it. Protestors rallied around demands for specific resignations, but also identified and publicized which of the newly created political parties had former RCD members on their lists.

And it is interesting, if not surprising, that a political elite that has enjoyed its privileged position thanks to membership of the party should have immediately sought out new ways to re-enter politics. However, it also seems clear that the ‘risk,’ not so much of the ‘regime’ as such managing a de facto return, but of the same individuals

managing to retain power, is one that the Tunisian population is very conscious of. These political parties have almost universally been extremely unsuccessful. Voting in the recent elections for the Constituent Assembly has been widely described by commentators seeking to explain Ennahdha's victory as an expression of identity by the Tunisian people—an expression that they are Arab Muslims first. However, a case might also be made that Ennahdha represented as far from the former regime as possible, as well as being a organization large enough to credibly resist the influence of former RCD members.

Of course, the opposing view might be offered as well—that by some estimated 25% of RCD members were Islamists and may well have voted for Ennahdha, while many others were unwilling to be seen voting for the parties of former RCD members in the recent elections, and therefore stayed home out of confusion. This might prove significant in terms of political electioneering for the next general elections to be held in late 2012.

Another vital consideration is the effect of the top-down political reform approach that Tunisia has chosen. While elections have been held to determine the state level government, municipal elections are scheduled to be held in April 2012. The individuals currently holding those offices, therefore, date to before the revolution, and an overwhelming majority of them either belonged to or were identified with the RCD. For many people, the corruption of the regime was not represented so much in the person of the Interior Minister or the President's extended family, but rather in the quality of service they received on a local level—the local RCD party chief in a district represents the party to them. This has implications in that it implies that a top down purge is also likely to be unsatisfactory, while at the same time, it is unlikely that many local level officials had the influence or power to be involved in the kind of serious and large scale corruption for which legal recourse might be considered.

While the public demand may have been for a complete break with the RCD, it appears that intellectual opinion inside Tunisia is split. There are many who are arguing that all the skill and experience of keeping the state functioning is held within the RCD and that they form a powerful organized group with great disruptive powers. Rumors are

circulating that the informal strikes and sit-ins taking place in the south of the country are driven by individuals who failed to win seats in the constitutional assembly elections and ex-RCD members out for revenge. However, it is also clear that the key figures in the party departed with the President, leaving a near complete leadership void. The answer instead, therefore, it might be argued, is to strengthen the other political organizations, rather than weakening further the RCD per se.

There is also a powerful argument to be made that for national reconciliation to happen, and for Tunisia to move forward in its political development, a cohesive decision must be taken on the status of former RCD members. Certainly the most grievous offenders of the central government (and at local levels, if the evidence exists) must be tried and punished, but this clearly cannot be done for the whole organization. If the party itself remains illegal, then it is to be expected that its former members might seek to replicate it under another (or several other) names. Interestingly, the Ennahdha leadership has reportedly been seeking dialogue with senior former RCD figures, with mentions of a proffered amnesty. How this would affect the public perception of the party and justice remains to be seen, especially considering the fact that the newly liberated media in Tunisia has denounced former regime members very harshly, and there is a huge stigma associated with belonging to the party, with little discernment made between members.

### **The Police**

“This was not a revolution against Ben Ali. It was a revolution against the police,” declared the young leader of one of Tunisia’s most successful new NGOs dealing with election monitoring and encouraging youth participation in the political system. And it is true that it was the continuous pressure of a police state, with its petty corruption as much as its limitations of freedoms, that finally exploded into the revolution. Of all the organs of the state, as Colin Machado points out in his chapter, it is the police which were most associated with Ben Ali and the power of the regime, and they who stayed most closely allied with him during the revolution. The contrast in the attitude of the population to the police and the army, which famously refused to fire on the protestors and eventually

sided with them, could not be more evident. The latter are fêted as heroes, the former remain anxious and cautious about their role in this new Tunisia.

During the latter protests and sit-ins many police officers chose to stay home, or else to wear casual clothes (rather than their uniforms) and attempt to blend in, and in the immediate wake of the revolution they remained off the streets (in any official capacity). Now that they have returned, both the police themselves and the government continue to show great anxiety and reticence about the use of force against protestors—as indicated by the two months of paralyzing protests permitted at Manouba University before the police cleared the protestors out. They are becoming bolder, however, as evidenced by the use of tear gas to disrupt recent protests in Tunis, perhaps as public opinion loses patience with the disruptions, and it will be vital that a firm limit of acceptable behavior be established.

The chiefs of police have all been dismissed and replaced, to be presumably brought up on charges of corruption and potentially more severe accusations of human rights abuses. However, a great challenge remains in deciding where to draw the line in indicting individual officers. There has been no indication so far that any formal decision has been taken on this, and indeed, crucially, the police themselves have retrenched around each other and refused to produce any further individuals for trial. Instead, they are permitted to take flight. Continuing in this vein therefore bears the very strong risk of a rupture between the police leadership and the government, should the police begin to feel themselves victimized.

### **Dealing with the Ben Ali Assets**

Great attempts are being made by the Tunisian government to have the personal funds and assets of the Ben Ali family, held in foreign banks, returned as government property. In some small cases they have succeeded—Canada returned two personal jets belonging to Ben Ali's brother-in-law, as well as promises to the proceeds of selling his property in the country. However, with regard to extracting funds from European and Arab banks, Tunisia has been far less successful. It is clear that the political will necessary to override

the commercial interests of the banks involved is lacking—and is unlikely to appear; however, the symbolic meaning of the attempts remain clear and meaningful.

A contrary situation exists with regard to the assets seized from within Tunisia when the Ben Ali and Trabelsi family members fled in January. These have remained frozen since and are rapidly losing value and operability. Considering the fact that they represent some of the most successful businesses in all of the key sectors of the country, it is important that the government make a decision on how they should be handled, and soon.

### **Trying Ben Ali**

At the end of June 2011, former President Ben Ali was put on trial *in absentia* in Tunisia. The trial is being held both in the Tunis Criminal Court and in a military court, and began with two embezzlement, money laundering and drug trafficking cases against the President personally, although other charges of conspiracy against the state and voluntary manslaughter are also expected. This however was only the beginning; Ben Ali has been tried and convicted in a military court for his role in a 1991 case in which 17 servicemen were accused of plotting a coup against his regime. He was sentenced to five years in prison, with the right of appeal.

In January 2012 a further trial was begun, trying the former President for his alleged role in the deaths of protestors during the January 2011 uprising. He stands accused before a military tribunal, alongside dozens of senior officials in the former regime, of ordering snipers to shoot protestors. The President himself may not be present, but the court is also trying various high-profile figures for the crime that are currently in custody in Tunisia—including in this case the former Director General of Public Security, Lotfi Zwawi.

Ben Ali himself has remained in exile in Saudi Arabia since January 2011 and Saudi officials have declined to respond to requests for his extradition. Significantly, the former President has spoken only through his lawyer, and has made no apologies, instead claiming that he was unaware of the events he stands accused of.

There is a case to be made that Ben Ali's lack of repentance and the superficiality of trying him *in absentia* are impeding Tunisia's ability to move forward. However, the opposite could also be argued—it is clear that the former President is highly unlikely to leave his exile to actually stand trial in the near future. Trying him regardless, while certainly less satisfying, may still have some cathartic value, while the trials themselves are far from mere showpieces—powerful figures in the former regime are being tried and sentenced, and there is effective action towards justice for the government to point to.

### **Recommendations**

- **Tunisia should reach an accommodation with former RCD members.** Whether or not the RCD party itself remains illegal, many of its former members are likely to remain amongst the political elite. It is important that these individuals do not perceive themselves as excluded from the political process, lest they become spoilers. The media, while remaining independent, should turn away from sensationalist coverage stigmatizing all ties to the party. Municipal elections should be held as scheduled.
- **Create a judicial review process for those claiming fraudulent imprisonment not covered by the 2011 amnesty.** Considering the long history of judicial abuse by the Ben Ali family and the regime, the widespread use of interrogation practices that violate human rights and the very poor conditions inmates are subjected to in Tunisian jails, there is legitimate cause to open these cases up to review. These individuals should not be forgotten and the general conditions of their care should be brought up to minimum human rights standards.
- **Clarify the limits to which police officers will be pursued for prosecution.** It is a matter for the Interior Ministry and the Tunisian prosecution service to decide under what circumstances, at what levels and for which crimes under the former regime they will pursue prosecution for police officers. However, irrespective of what those decisions might be, it is important that they be clear and communicated clearly to the police, not only to senior management but at all levels to reduce the impact of ungrounded fears on police morale and behavior. Similarly, it is important that **new**



**and clear limits to police behavior be established**, so that both the officers themselves and the populace consider a new social contract in place post-revolution.

- **Institute credible reform programmes for the police and the judiciary.** The state of the judiciary in Tunisia is an issue that has been often overlooked—while calling its legitimacy into question at the same time as the courts are trying others for corrupt practice may present a number of issues, it is also crucial to the development of the country that the judiciary is perceived to be independent and unbiased. The recent trials of senior regime figures perhaps represent an attempt to demonstrate the cut ties, but visible reform would still be beneficial. Similarly, a thorough vetting process for the police, as well as the institution of new codes of conduct, is important to restore public trust in the institution.
- **Auction off the businesses seized from the former regime.** Allowing these to remain unproductive is detrimental to the economic good of the country—something which has been identified numerous times as the key priority of the Tunisian people. Auctioning or selling them will both increase production and generate useful revenue for the government. Attempts should be made to ensure that an environment of competition is created, and that these businesses are not purchased by individuals or corporations particularly associated with past corruption.



# Addressing Unemployment

Rebekah Chang

Through his self-immolation on 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi became an important catalyst for Tunisia's recent "Jasmine Revolution." His economic struggles took on symbolic value and became the trigger for the protests in Sidi Bouzid, where the unemployment rate was around 30%. Economic grievances, with unemployment at the forefront, were at the heart of the revolution and remain a pressing issue today. Lowering unemployment is crucial for the success of this revolution and should be addressed with greater urgency according to the recommendations that follow below.

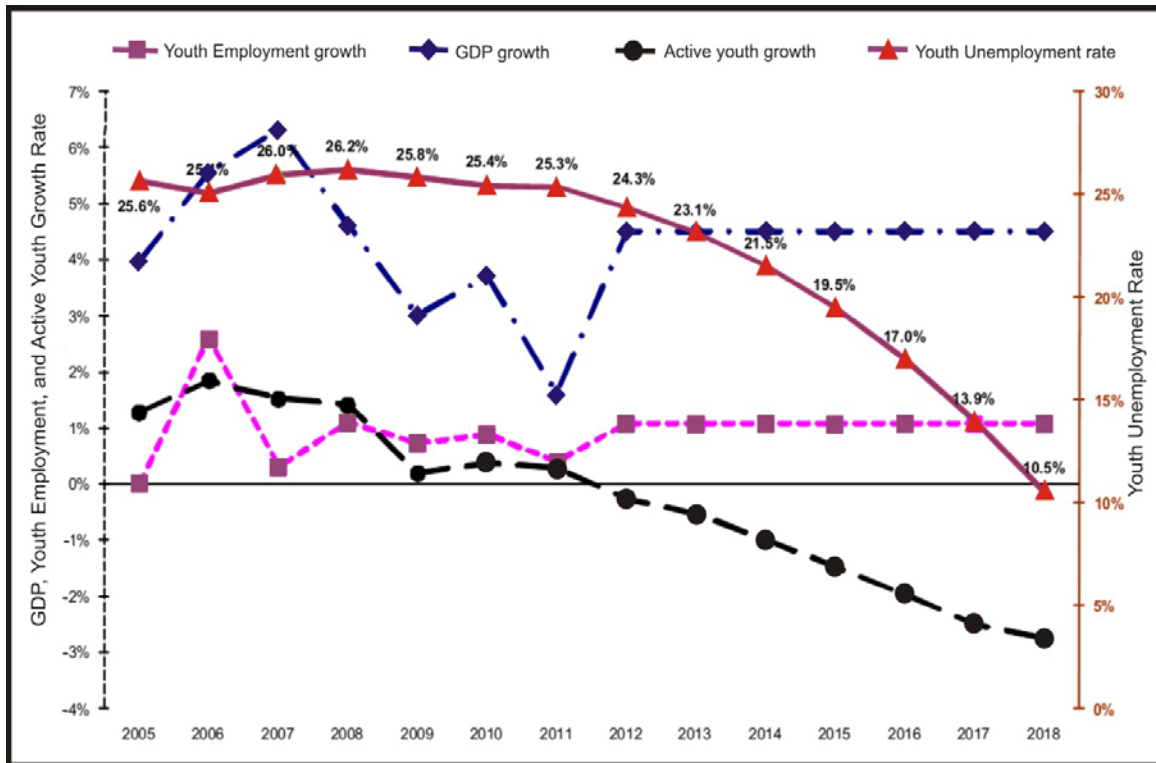
## Background

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region witnessed strong economic growth from the early 2000s, with a GDP growth rate that ranged from 4% to 6% through 2008. After two years of slower growth due to the global financial crisis, the region again recorded a high GDP growth rate of 4.5% in 2010. However, this was not accompanied by a similar rise in the employment growth rate, which remained between 2% and 4% throughout the 2000s. This has translated into an unemployment rate that ranges from 15% to 30% for the countries in this region, by far the highest in the world. Tunisia is not an exception. While witnessing real GDP growth levels around 5% between 2003 and 2008, the unemployment rate stayed around 13% during this time. In 2010, at the start of the Jasmine Revolution, the unemployment rate was 14.2%. However, due to ongoing instability in the country since the revolution, the unemployment rate is currently around 18%. In some towns bordering Algeria, it is estimated that unemployment is as high as 50%.

Further analysis reveals that the entry of more women into the labor force and the rapid growth of the youth population are the primary causes of high unemployment. Women have made substantial gains in labor force participation since the 1950s due to changing social norms and greater access to education. The youth unemployment rate, at 30%, is almost double the general unemployment rate. The prospects for university

graduates are even bleaker; the number of young unemployed graduates nearly doubled in 10 years, from 1996 to 2006, but there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of job opportunities. According to a recent study by the World Bank, 46% of young graduates did not have a job 18 months after graduation, and nearly 50% of graduates with Masters and higher level degrees were unemployed (World Bank, 2004, 6). However, as seen in Figure 1 below, Marco Stampini and Audrey Verdier-Chouchane’s forecasting analysis reveals that the youth unemployment rate should drop to 10.5% by 2018 (2011, 7).

**Figure 1: Youth Unemployment Outlook in Tunisia**



Source: Marco Stampini and Audrey Verdier-Chouchane, March 2011. The authors’ calculations are based on the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics’ and International Labour Organization’s data and authors’ assumptions. The youth unemployment rate is measured on the right hand side axis while the youth employment growth, GDP growth and active youth growth are measured on the left hand side axis.

The forecasting is based on the assumption that the GDP growth rate will be sustained at 4.5% from 2012 on. It is also driven by the trend of a declining birth rate, which translates into a youth labor force whose growth rate is slowing. Given these phenomena, the youth unemployment rate is predicted to decline drastically in the next decade. The long-term outlook is positive in this regard.

In addition to youth unemployment, the variation of unemployment rates by region is also a major issue. The unemployment rate differs greatly by region, as the marginalized interior regions reportedly have significantly higher rates of unemployment than the coastal cities. The disparate unemployment rates are mainly due to coastal areas traditionally attracting a larger proportion of investment, particularly in tourism and industry. Furthermore, Tunisia's economic growth in the past two decades has only benefited select regions. For example, the disadvantaged North-West region experienced significant poverty reduction and greater employment opportunities during this time period, while the disadvantaged Middle-West, particularly the governorates of Sidi-Bouzyd and Kasserine, did not benefit from the economic growth. Unfortunately, there is a lack of reliable statistics at the regional level to help clarify the extent of inequality. In some towns bordering Algeria, it is estimated that unemployment is as high as 50%, and the unemployment rate in Sidi Bouzyd was around 30% at the time of the first protests of the Jasmine Revolution. The National Democratic Institute conducted focus groups with Tunisian youth around the country in March 2011 (Collins 2011, 9). In this study, researchers found that participants from the cities of Sidi Bouzyd, Gabès, Le Kef and Kairouan were more likely to argue that the government has led an intentional effort to exclude interior regions, while respondents from coastal cities of Tunis, Sousse, Bizerte, Sfax and Nabeul were less likely to focus on regional disparities. As evident through these focus group studies, regional inequalities and the corresponding disparate rates of unemployment are a continued source of instability in Tunisia.

The current political context is one in which the economic crisis remains largely unaddressed, creating a grim short-term outlook for addressing unemployment. Elections were held for the Constituent Assembly on 23 October 2011, after which the assembly appointed a new government and initiated the constitution drafting process. Due to the

focus on these political processes, scant attention has been paid to economic grievances, which were the main trigger of the recent conflict. However, these issues are a major, if not the main, priority for the general population today. In public opinion polls conducted by the International Republican Institute in May 2011, 30% of survey respondents stated that unemployment and the economic crisis were the biggest problems facing Tunisia as a whole. Additionally, there is growing pessimism regarding the economic situation. In the same poll, 66% of the survey respondents described the current economic situation as “somewhat bad” or “very bad” in March 2011; this rose to 73% in May 2011 (International Republican Institute, 2011, 4-7).

The general population expected the Constituent Assembly, led by the Ennahdha party, and the transition government to take immediate action on these issues once elected in October. However, the government’s inaction has triggered protests and sit-ins across the country, which have escalated since January 2012. The level of unrest has discouraged a resumption of the normal level of economic activity, and the lack of economic growth has fanned further protests. Consequently, these recent events have created a vicious self-reinforcing loop and led to a period of continued economic recession. Furthermore, as general elections are tentatively scheduled for November 2012, the elections will likely be the main focus for political parties in the upcoming year. As they engage in a year of political campaigning, it is unlikely that the interim government will make significant headway on these issues. If the economic situation deteriorates further, there is potential for the society to look to more radical elements to lead the country. Multiple commentators have noted the threat of the growing popularity of salafism. This was evident in the recent two-month long protests staged by salafists at Manouba University against the ban of the *niqab*. The success of Tunisia’s democratic transition depends largely on the government’s ability to lower unemployment, and the government must readjust its priorities accordingly.

This also coincides at a time when Tunisia’s two biggest economic partners, the European Union (EU) and Libya, are also facing economic woes. The Eurozone continues to struggle through its sovereign debt crisis, and Libya is in a transition process, as the country struggles to establish a new government and deal with aftermath

of its revolution. This has had a considerable impact on Tunisia's ability to attract foreign direct investment and on its tourism sector. Given the substantial number of Tunisians working in Libya, the Libyan crisis has also significantly affected the level of remittances. Given this tough environment, the Tunisian government must make even greater efforts to encourage economic growth and promote job creation.

### **Immediate Issues**

Regarding the unemployment problem, there are three immediate issues facing the Tunisian government: the lack of security, its current unproductive strategy of seeking investment rather than foreign aid, and its failure to develop a comprehensive strategy for reducing unemployment. The lack of security across the country is currently the greatest hindrance to the growth of employment opportunities. Since January 2012, there has been an upsurge in the number of strikes and protests in response to the government's lack of initiative on economic reforms. As a result, there have been significant contractions in foreign investment and the tourism sector, both of which are critical factors for employment generation in Tunisia. From 2010, foreign direct investment was down approximately 30% and the income generated by tourism fell by 39%. However, the government has not yet taken a proactive stance to bringing a halt these protests.

Closely linked to the security issue is the government's current strategy for stimulating economic growth by encouraging domestic and foreign investment. While this strategy is a sustainable approach in the long term, it is currently unproductive because of the poor security situation. Investment has been paralyzed since the revolution, and it is not likely to revive in the near future due to continued instability. Until the security situation improves, the government's only alternative is to look to donors to provide the funding necessary to stimulate the economy.

The United States and China are potential sources of major funding. The United States has a strategic interest in stability in the MENA region, and if the democratic experiments in the Arab Spring countries are successful, then the United States will find itself with stronger allies in the region. Therefore, this rationale could be used to call upon the United States to provide major reconstruction funding to Arab Spring countries.

As Tunisia led the movement, its democratic success will take on symbolic value for other countries in the region. Additionally, China is one of Tunisia's most active new trading partners. Between 2000 and 2009, trade increased tenfold with China. Thus China also has an interest in the country's stability and could be called upon accordingly to provide foreign assistance. Given China's preference for funding infrastructure projects, the Tunisian government could negotiate to have China provide the resources to complete several major tourist infrastructure projects that were put on hold due to the global financial crisis.

Additionally, the government has failed to develop and implement a detailed, comprehensive strategy for reducing unemployment. This can be attributed to the lack of experience of the current government officials, the majority of which did not serve under the Ben Ali regime. While the Ennahdha party has outlined important goals for reducing unemployment in its 365 point program, it has yet to develop a comprehensive strategy for achieving these goals. Instead, the government has been implementing ad hoc measures that have failed to produce concrete results. In order to be more effective, the government should tie its efforts to reduce unemployment to a more developed strategy.

### **Long-Term Issues**

As seen in Figure 1 above, the youth unemployment rate will naturally fall to a manageable rate by the end of the decade if the GDP growth rate is sustained at 4 to 5%. Therefore, in the long term, encouraging economic growth and addressing several structural unemployment issues should be a sufficient strategy for addressing unemployment. In order to encourage economic growth, the government faces the long-term challenges of strengthening the private sector and encouraging foreign direct investment. Additionally, the government must develop certain sectors, including telecommunications and tourism, which are job-intensive and employ high-skill laborers. A last long-term issue is the education system, which is currently failing to adequately prepare university graduates to enter the workforce. Addressing these issues, which will be discussed further below, will generally boost economic growth and address structural unemployment issues.



### Boosting the Tourism Sector

The tourism sector contracted sharply due to the recent revolution and it has not yet recovered due to the continued instability in the country. According to the Tourism Ministry, Tunisia's tourism revenue declined by 39% in 2011 (Carey and Salama, 2011, 2). Though the tourism sector only accounts for 6% of the economy, it makes up 12% of Tunisia's total employment and 20% of Tunisia's exports. Thus, in terms of employment, rebuilding the tourism sector will have a major impact. The most urgent barrier to rebuilding the tourism sector is the instability in the country, which has discouraged tourists from vacationing in Tunisia. When the government takes stronger measures to ensure that internal security issues are under control, there will be an accompanying rise in tourism. The other major issue is the government's failure to take action on its proposals to develop the tourism sector. These proposals include enhancing tourist attractions in the interior regions of the country, focusing more on ecological, cultural and spa tourism, and improving visa processes. The tourism market in Tunisia has a great deal of room for growth, and such growth will help to ease Tunisia's unemployment levels.

### Growth of the Private Sector and Foreign Direct Investment

Under the Ben Ali regime, corruption was a major hindrance to the growth of the private sector and foreign direct investment. Investors, both domestic and foreign, were deterred by the predatory practices of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi families. Anecdotes abound of their practices, which often involved seizing or demanding cuts from profitable businesses. While this is currently less of a concern following the revolution, the interim government continues to face ongoing issues of corruption and clientelism. Currently, the greatest deterrence to domestic and foreign investment is the instability in the country. However, once the government gets the security situation under control, the next issues to be addressed are corruption and clientelism. The government can also address challenges such as poor access to credit, heavy "red tape," and a burdensome regulatory framework.

The low levels of foreign direct investment are also a challenge facing the country. The Eurozone crisis and the instability in Libya have had a harmful impact on Tunisia's levels of foreign direct investment, and indicate a need for Tunisia to diversify its pool of investors. The Tunisian government could build a safety net by developing its relationships with other countries. Tunisia has fairly new partnerships with China, India and Turkey in trade and direct investment, and it could expand these partnerships. The Arab Maghreb Union also has many potential consumers, but it has been inactive due to political disagreements between Morocco and Algeria. The functioning of the Arab Maghreb Union could also help to boost Tunisia's economy and create jobs.

#### High Value-Added and Knowledge-Intensive Employment Opportunities

Tunisia is in need of high value-added and knowledge intensive employment opportunities to meet the demands of the growing number of university graduates. Until recently, Tunisia's private sector employment opportunities have mainly been in low value-added activities, such as in agriculture, textiles, and construction. This has made Tunisia vulnerable, as it cannot compete with cheaper Asian competitors. However, due to its highly educated population and its developed infrastructure and telecommunications systems, Tunisia has the right profile to be able to develop a comparative advantage in sectors that provide high value-added employment opportunities. Creating high value-added employment opportunities will be especially beneficial for lowering unemployment among university graduates, who are currently employed primarily in the public sector. Tunisia is already on its way to becoming a high technology country, as evident in the presence of private companies that run call centers and provide support to software companies in Italy and France.

#### Education System

Under the Ben Ali regime, education was compulsory until an individual reached 16 years of age, and a university education was virtually free. As a result, the number of university graduates increased dramatically. University graduates have traditionally been employed by the public sector; however, the public sector does not have the capacity to

absorb all of the university graduates. Moreover, universities do not equip students with the technical and practical skills required by potential private sector employers. Ben Ali's education policy resulted in a highly educated populace, but it was not accompanied by parallel employment opportunities. Consequently, there is a large number of highly educated youth with high expectations, lacking skills, and frustrations about the lack of employment opportunities.

## **Recommendations for the Tunisian Government**

### Short-Term

- **Create an environment of security.** The government's most urgent priority is to create an environment of security. It should shift to taking a more proactive stance to address this situation, beginning by negotiating with protesters. If necessary, **the government should also assert its control over the police** and begin to use minimal forms of force to break up illegal strikes and protests.
- **Launch highly visible quick impact projects (QIPs), with a focus on the poorer interior regions.** These projects will help boost public confidence in the government, contribute to an environment of stability, and encourage employment in the short run. The main **focus should be on infrastructure projects** for electric power, telecommunications, road networks in the interior regions of the country, and water and sanitation. The QIPs can also include small agricultural and fishing projects and government capacity building.
- **Seek foreign aid.** Until the security situation improves, the government should shift its focus to seeking foreign aid in the short term. Donor financing can be sought from the United States and China. This funding can be used to fund QIPs and to provide direct assistance to farmers and micro-entrepreneurs.
- **Appoint a committee to develop a comprehensive strategy for reducing unemployment.** The strategy development should begin with a public consultation process, which will allow individuals to express their needs and help assure the public that progress is being made on these issues. The strategy should be specific and include short-term and long-term activities, a budget and a timeline for undertaking

activities. The strategy should also address the long term-recommendations provided below.

### Long-Term

- **Make tourism a national priority.** As the government gets the security situation under control, it should develop a communications strategy to ensure tourists and governments of the return of stability in the country. **This includes working with other governments to lift official travel alerts, such as the one currently in place by the United States.** Additionally, the government should begin to implement its proposed actions for developing the tourism sector, and expand upon them to include measures such as investing in better marketing overseas.
- **Address corruption and increase efficiency.** The government should tackle issues of corruption and clientelism, and focus on facilitating greater access to credit, reducing red tape and liberalizing the regulatory framework. For example, the government can take measures to remove onerous regulations on import transactions, reduce corporate taxes and ease restrictions on foreign ownership of property. As these policies are implemented, the government should clearly signal to investors that they are making strides to eliminate inefficient and corrupt policies and practices.
- **Diversify trade ties.** The government should expand its fairly new partnerships with China, India and Turkey in trade and direct investment. Additionally, in order to bolster the Arab Maghreb Union, the government should play a mediator role between the political disagreements between Morocco and Algeria.
- **Encourage the growth of call centers and other firms that seek to provide high value-added employment opportunities.** To this end, the government can explore the possibility of implementing infant industry regulations to further encourage the growth of these sectors. To help address the problem of regional inequalities, the government can provide additional benefits for companies that agree to locate to these regions of the country.
- **Reform curriculum at universities to better equip students for the workforce.** The education reforms should include measures such as placing greater emphasis on

language and technology skills, which are crucial for employment. Additionally, university programs can also incorporate more internship opportunities into their curriculum, which are virtually nonexistent in Tunisia.

## **Conclusion**

Tunisia is currently in a shaky place, as the population has moved from a euphoric state following the revolution to realizing that many of the realities on the ground remain unchanged. Unemployment, a major driver of the revolution and a key issue for Tunisians, has yet to be comprehensively addressed by the government. The sustained level of instability caused by the mass protests and sit-ins continues to hamper economic growth and job creation, and is the most immediate and pressing issue to be addressed. Economic growth and demographic changes will be the solution to unemployment in the long run. However, in the short term, the government should also make a greater effort to seek foreign aid to fund quick impact projects and to develop a more comprehensive strategy for addressing unemployment. This strategy should look foremost at encouraging the growth of the private sector and increasing levels of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, the strategy should address how the government can strengthen the weakened tourism sector and create more high value-added employment opportunities. Finally, the government should also seek to implement education reforms to address the high rate of unemployment among university graduates. By lowering unemployment, the government will help to encourage greater stability in the country and ensure the success of the Jasmine Revolution.



# **Understanding Unemployment in Tunisia**

**Tony Tsai**

High unemployment has been a consistent problem in Tunisia for over twenty years. Despite averaging one of the highest GDP per capita in Africa, unemployment in Tunisia is over 13% for the total populace and 30% for youth ages fifteen to twenty-four. Official figures reached a high of 47% for recent college graduates and first-time job seekers. Many argue that the country needs to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of the domestic economy through market liberalization, transparency incentives, and regulatory reform; however, the labor market dynamics in Tunisia require a much more targeted approach. Understanding the employment and labor market situation in Tunisia is critical as the country reforms both its political institutions and economic policies.

## **Existing Literature**

There are a myriad of explanations for the unemployment situation in Tunisia. Most of the existing analysis adopts a macroeconomic framework. Some studies argue that given the rapid expansion of the labor force, job creation was not high enough to lower unemployment rates. Others argue that many sectors, such as private services, enjoyed higher labor productivity, which resulted in lower employment growth. A deeper analysis of labor markets is needed to guide both policy and institutional reform.

In 2000 and 2004, the World Bank conducted studies to explain why, despite high growth rates, unemployment was rising. It concluded that the high and persistent unemployment rates reflected demographic pressures and a decrease in the employment intensity of growth. It highlighted the need to strengthen investment in the private sector to sustain higher growth rates and generate jobs. Thus, it recommended that “creating more and better jobs would call for moving up the value-added ladder, towards higher-skill exports and services, while facilitating the emergence of a knowledge-based economy in the long-term.” Tunisia is moving towards a higher-skilled exports and services economy, but these jobs are primarily filled by unskilled labor. Thus, unemployment of unskilled labor has gone down and will continue to decrease as the

economy continues to improve. Unfortunately, economic growth does not guarantee that new jobs will become available for university graduates or the skilled labor force.

### **Overview of Tunisia's Unemployment Situation**

Contrary to popular opinion, Tunisia's revolution did not stem from a lack of democracy or the endemic unemployment crisis, but was driven by a desire to restore liberty. Young Tunisians find many of the available jobs to be menial, with relatively low pay. While lower wages are beneficial to an export driven economy, Tunisia has not seen and will not see significant decreases in unemployment as a result of trade liberalization and democratization. This is primarily due to the current instability and insecurity in the country.

Since the revolution, industrial output dropped by 15% and tourism declined by over 45% percent. In 2011, an additional 200,000 people have lost their jobs, which further increased the number of strikes and demonstrations. Unemployment is particularly high among individuals between ages 15 and 24 (30%). More than 66% of university graduates are unemployed and typically unemployed for over 18 months after receiving their diploma.

Many young Tunisians are frustrated that they are still unemployed after the revolution, but begrudgingly understand that there is little the government can do to provide jobs in the short term. On the contrary, older generations believe that the youth have not taken their share of leadership in shaping the trajectory of both the government and economy. Regardless, the scale and persistence of unemployment has existed prior to the revolution, which indicates that the causes of the problem are much more complex and dynamic.

The labor market determines the payoffs from investment in education. Functioning labor markets allocate human capital into activities that are the most growth enhancing for the entire country. In Tunisia, job creation in private services and manufacturing has been declining over the past two decades. Yet this sector still accounts for over 50% of all new jobs. The public sector accounts for 20% of all new jobs per year. Economic growth in Tunisia stems from productivity growth within each sector,



rather than shifts from low to high productivity sectors. Consequently, workers have not moved from low to high productivity sectors with higher earnings potential. New jobs did not require a more educated populace but simply more unskilled labor to fulfill the increase in productivity.

### **Tunisian Unskilled Labor Market**

The main employers of unskilled youth labor for non-qualified jobs or intermediate qualifications such as clerical support, service and sales, agriculture, plant and machine operation and assembling are in the following sectors: agriculture, public administration, construction, retail, manufacturing, transportation, telecommunications, hotels, and restaurants. In almost all these sectors, the net generation of youth employment exceeded the growth rate of youth labor participation due to the general growth in the private sector over the past decade. As a result, unemployment rates in these sectors have decreased. This clearly demonstrates that labor markets are not inefficient for unskilled workers. Thus, sustained economic growth of the private sector will help reduce youth unemployment, especially in the unskilled labor markets over the next 5-6 years.

According to Marco Stampini and Audrey Verdier-Chouchane's forecasting analysis, using the assumptions that: (a) the GDP elasticity of youth employment will remain constant at 0.24 (the average for the period 2005-07), and (b) GDP will grow by 1.6% in 2011 (as a result of the revolution) and by a constant 4.5% from 2012; youth unemployment is expected to have peaked at 26.2% in 2008, to have currently decreased to 25.4%, and to further decrease to 10.5% by 2018. Thus, creating more jobs for unskilled labor requires developing a business climate that fosters private investment, both foreign and domestic (See chapter by Rebekah Chang).

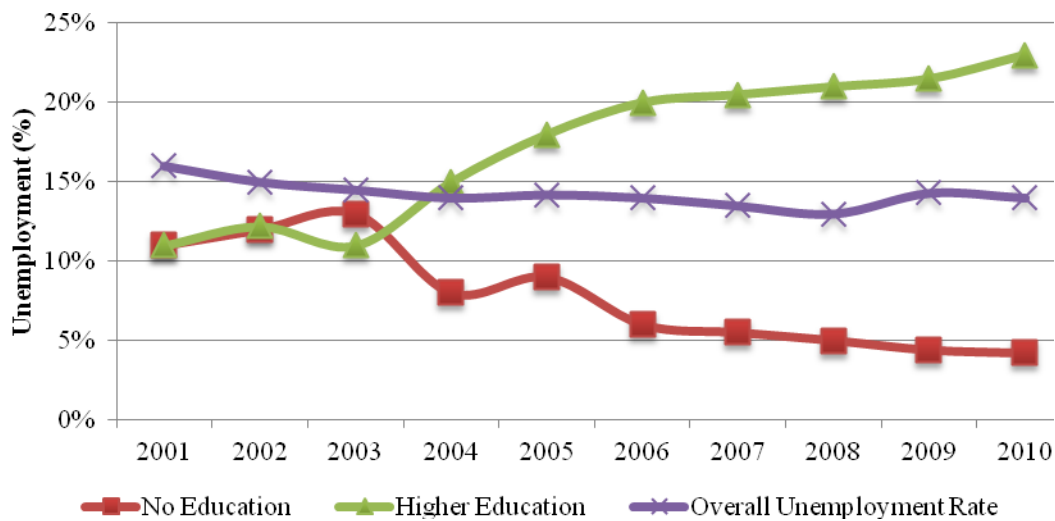
Foreign investment from Europe and around the world will doubtless slowly increase as the country stabilizes; however, domestic investments such as building infrastructure are necessary in the short term to promote jobs and stabilize the economy in the long run. These investments will not only help jumpstart the economy by reducing the number of unemployed unskilled laborers, it will also help close the widening income and social gap between the richer coastal cities and the poor interior.

Despite these positive forecasts, the barriers facing unskilled laborers will continue to persist. In comparison to holders of university degrees, unskilled laborers have turnover rates of over fifty percent. Irregular and temporary positions not only make them more vulnerable to be unemployed but they also earn 25% to 40% less than those who are permanent. Moreover, those who have not completed secondary school have a rate of labor force participation of only 68%, while graduates hold a staggering rate of 95%. The unskilled labor market is also the most susceptible to changes in the economy. As a result, programs such as professional development and training for unskilled labor are critical to help them move towards higher-skilled jobs and services.

### Tunisian Skilled Labor Market

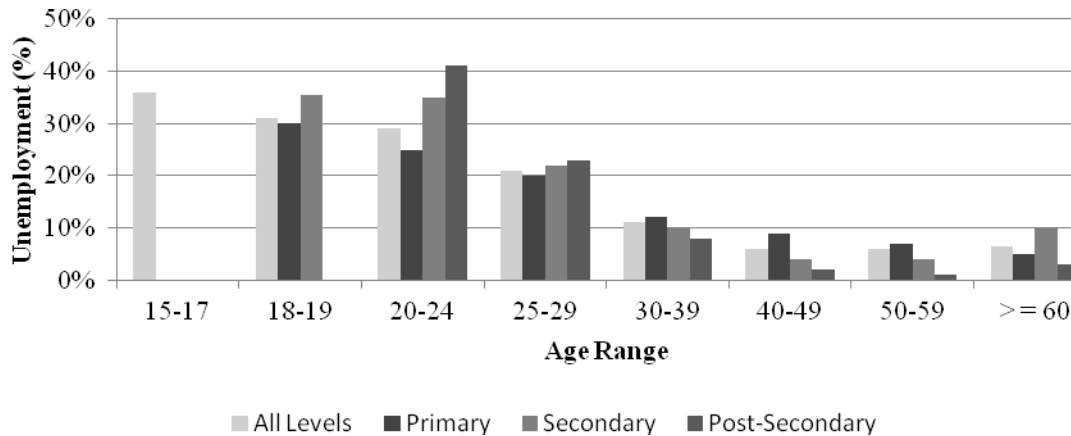
In the past two decades there has been an increase in youth labor market participation. Many of them are new university graduates who are entering into the labor market for the first time. However, on average university graduates have higher rates of unemployment compared to those that have not completed secondary education. (Figure 1 & Figure 2)

**Figure 1: Unemployment by Level of Education in Tunisia**



*Source: (Lahcen Achy, December 2011): The author's calculations are based on the data released by the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics. The unemployment rate is measured on the left hand side axis.*

**Figure 2: Unemployment by age and education**



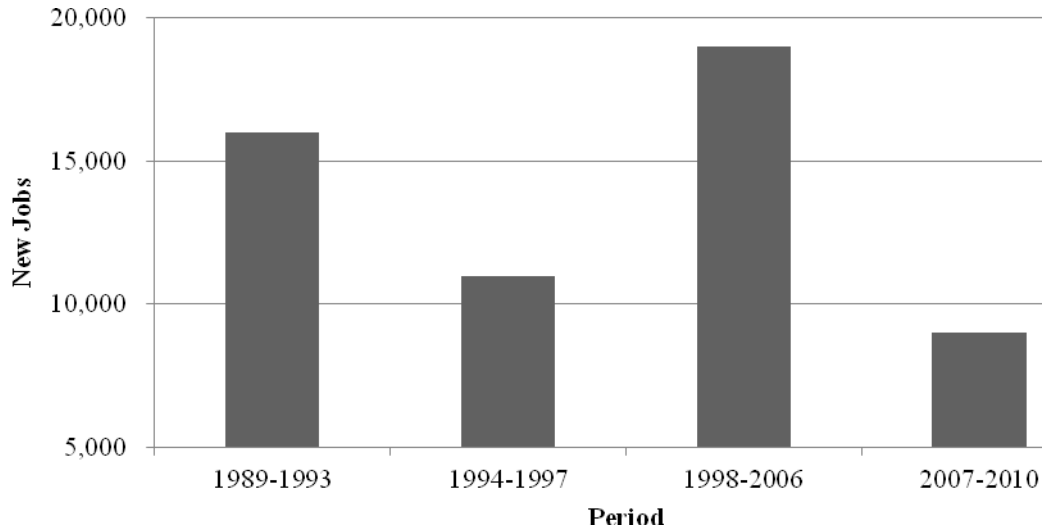
*Source: (Lahcen Achy, December 2011): The author’s calculations are based on the data released by the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics. The unemployment rate is measured on the left hand side axis and grouped by age.*

The figure above shows that within skilled labor markets those with a high school degree or higher find it extremely difficult to find a job. It also shows that unemployment rates decline with age. First-time job seekers within the skilled labor market find it extremely difficult to find jobs. Many argue that there is a gap or mismatch of workers and jobs because the skilled labor market does not hold the skills, training, or experience required by employers. Others argue that employers do not value the education of first-time graduates. As a result, skilled labor correlates to the skill required for a job, not the education of the worker. In looking at the relationship between education and the type of employment, it is clear why first-time university graduates are experiencing long periods of unemployment (over two years).

Over 32% of all university students are studying economics management, and law and 21% are concentrating in social sciences. Among university graduates, the highest unemployment rate is for graduates in economics, management, law, and social sciences (over 43%). This is because the public sector remains the primary source of employment opportunities for many of these graduates. However, only about fifteen percent of these

graduates work in the public sector because of the limited number of jobs. From 2007-2010 less than 10,000 new jobs were created in the public sector (Figure 3). The significant decline in new jobs in the public sector demonstrates that there is clearly a mismatch between labor supply and demand for university graduates in the public sector.

**Figure 3: Average Number of New Jobs Created in the Public Sector**



*Source: (Lahcen Achy, December 2011): The authors' calculations are based on the data released by the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics. The number of new jobs created in the public sector is measured on the left hand side axis.*

Moreover, even though the workforce as a whole is now more educated, job opportunities have not opened up for those with social science backgrounds. This is because there are not many opportunities for them in the private sector. Tunisia has not become a knowledge-based economy and is still working towards becoming a highly skilled exporter and services economy. In order for Tunisia to grow, it needs to spur innovation and creativity in science, technology, and other areas. While economics, management, law, and social sciences are important, they will not be the foundation of

the Tunisian economy. Thus, creating more and better jobs for skilled labor calls for reforming the education system and training programs.

There are real opportunities in industry and the services sector for skilled labor. The value-added in Tunisia's manufacturing sector accounts for only 18.5%. This is even lower in textiles and electromechanical industries. There is a need for skilled labor in areas such as computer science and engineering. Tunisia should also shift their telecommunications sector from simply being call centers to specialize in software development and communication services. Moreover, Tunisia should invest more in promoting the export of its medical services to its neighboring countries such as Libya and Algeria. All of these opportunities require Tunisia to adapt the current education and training programs to meet labor demand.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the dynamics of the labor markets in Tunisia above, the following recommendations are put forward:

#### Short-term

- **Incentivize students pursuing technical majors: Increase the number of scholarships, grants, and funding for students pursuing technical and science majors such as engineering and computer science.** This should help balance out labor supply and demand in the skilled labor market, which will help prevent long unemployment spells for future first-time jobs seekers. This will also help prevent the mismatch between skills and jobs.
- **Reforming secondary & primary education:** The quality of secondary education in Tunisia has deteriorated over the past decade. Over 34% of all unemployed youth are illiterate and school dropouts are frequent. Secondary school enrolment rate in rural regions is 19% compared to 78% in the capital of Tunis. **Improving and enforcing mandatory primary and secondary education in rural areas will help strengthen labor markets in the long run.** For the past several decades, there has

been an increased need for labor in Tunisia, which in turn requires an educated populace.

- **Encourage private sector employment for skilled workers:** The job security, high wages, and benefits of the public sector generate a bias in favor of the public sector, making employment in the private sector less attractive. As a result, university graduates tend to target public sector jobs and choose to wait for jobs in the public sector. To counter this, **the government should encourage universities to collaborate with firms to match job seekers and vacancies.** Most of the job opportunities in the private sector are for unskilled labor. For example, only eight out of 100 jobs created in the tourism sector require a postsecondary degree. Thus, universities need to work with the private sector to create opportunities for university graduates.
- **Develop internships and jobs board:** Secondary training programs, internships, and fellowships can also be developed through increased collaboration among universities, firms, and students.
- **Credit constraints:** Currently, most businesses have limited access to capital both debt and equity. Even though there are several microfinance institutions (MFI) and commercial banks that provide loans, **the government needs to make it easier for both microfinance institutions and credit unions to extend loans to first-time entrepreneurs.** This includes but is not limited to improving and developing credit information systems, credit guarantee programs, and much more. By developing and facilitating credit and consumer information gathering, this will help reduce the risk of doing business with young entrepreneurs and increase the flow of capital.

#### Medium-term

- **Reforming the curriculum:** Involve the private sector in redesigning the curriculum for university education. This will not only help foster relationships between the university and employers but also better match students' education with the employers needs. Emphasize technical skills such as language, computer science, engineering, architecture, biology etc.

- **Encourage entrepreneurship:** Traditionally, governments formulated policies to encourage international investment. However, if both the public and private sectors are not expanding or growing at a rate that results in significant increases in youth employment, measures should be taken to encourage them to start their own business. In order to foster small business and entrepreneurship there needs to be an environment that is suitable for business of all sizes to grow.
  - **Impact investing:** Over 57% of microfinance loans are made in rural areas. Yet financial services for microenterprises do not reach regions with high unemployment rates. **The government should encourage and incentivize MFIs to provide financial services to those living in regions with high unemployment.**
- **Tax incentives:** Provide tax incentives to set up manufacturing plants and telecommunications operations in Tunisia. These incentives should be structured so that they do not crowd out domestic investment.
- **Professional training programs:** Improve the focus and targeting of professional training programs. Currently, the government of Tunisia spends about 1.5% of GDP on vocational training programs for unskilled workers. These programs have cut the rate of unemployment for graduates in economics, management, law and social sciences by over fifty percent. These training programs should focus on both people that might be fired from their jobs and first-time job seekers.
- **Tackling corruption:** Small businesses with fewer than 50 employees account for half of all employers in Tunisia. Most of them provide fewer than five jobs that do not require educated labor. In order for the small businesses community to grow and thereby create jobs, **the government needs to address the bureaucratic red tape and corruption of the nation.** Fostering transparent and effective institutions are critical to the development and growth of small businesses.

#### Long-term

- **Infrastructure development:** **The development of large infrastructure is required in order to fully integrate and develop Tunisia.** From the development

of roads to bringing electricity to the interior of the country, large-scale infrastructure requires both skilled and unskilled laborers. **The focus of infrastructure projects should be building a better network of roads, power, and systems to the interior regions of the nation.** Furthermore, Tunisia also has the opportunity to assist its surrounding nations such as Libya and Algeria in developing their infrastructure.

- **Foreign relations: The government should work on strengthening the Arab Maghreb Union to promote trade and economic activity within the region** thereby creating more jobs for both skilled and unskilled laborers.



## **U.S. Assistance in Tunisia**

**Cody Dietrich**

High levels of unemployment in Tunisia in 2010 helped instigate the massive street demonstrations that eventually overthrew Ben Ali's 2010 government. Some of these demonstrations continue in 2012 and have a destabilizing effect on the country: reducing national investments and limiting employment. Tunisia is working to improve its image to attract various forms of investment and assistance from abroad, including the U.S. government and its associated aid programs. The U.S. understands the importance of a successful democratic transition in Tunisia and will provide assistance but is limited by assistance needs from other more volatile concerns in the region. Tunisia has other options in the region for assistance, but these will not exceed the mutual political and economic benefits from U.S. assistance. The following chapter will demonstrate how the current struggle for prosperity in Tunisia is constrained by instability that discourages fresh investment, and will highlight how U.S. assistance might best help Tunisia overcome its barriers to a successful democratic transition.

### **Tunisia's View on Barriers to U.S. Assistance**

Tunisians understand that in order to attract investment they will need to break the vicious cycle in which unemployment inspired protests create instability, which discourages fresh investment. The interim government has appealed to the protestors for a "truce" to cover six months in which low-paid or jobless workers will refrain from conducting public disorder. Its implementation in January of 2012 was to break the cycle that is seen as limiting investment from countries like the U.S. that are uncertain about the new government's ability to create order. Investors from these countries are waiting to see if Tunisia stabilizes before they commit high risk investment into the economy. The first month of the truce produced very few signs of stemming the protests. This situation among others raises the question whether the government is failing to project a stable environment that will attract foreign assistance.

Political actors in Tunisia have expressed concerns that the current government is not doing more to establish itself as a stable and functioning system that warrants assistance from the U.S. Professor Arfaoui, president of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, expressed her concerns that Ennahdha party's acceptance of funds from Qatar and other undisclosed foreign benefactors was feeding U.S. uncertainties over Ennahdha's foreign commitments (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). Islamophobia since 9/11, heightened by Western media and other sources, plays a significant role in inhibiting U.S. assistance to Muslim countries (Powell 2011). The populace also sees the inability of the government to create stability and security as a reason for the significant reduction in tourism in the country. This situation scares Western tourists, who have historically contributed a large portion to the country's gross domestic product.

Tunisia successfully held its first free democratic election in October 2011, but the government will need to build on this occasion with the development of sustainable democratic institutions in order to further attract American investment. To create a successful and attractive democratic system, Tunisia will need assistance from foreign government officials who have extensive experience in democracy. Ms. Arfaoui also expressed concern that, because people who previously pushed for democracy were jailed, the country has not been able to acquire the necessary set of skills required to manage the democratic process. Government officials have publicly tried to demonstrate that they are successfully transitioning to a democracy by making public the sessions of the Constitutional Assembly. If the Constituent Assembly is able to create an agreed upon constitution in a timely manner, the government will strengthen its image as a successful democratic transition and attract investment from like-minded countries, including the U.S.

### **Tunisia's Efforts to Attract U.S. Assistance**

The Tunisian government is working to educate the U.S. on its politics and economy to foster support for assistance in the country. The Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sent businessmen to the U.S. to explain their economic system to investors. Concerns of

cultural differences that may inhibit investment, such as Islamic laws in the banking sector, have been quelled by explanations that both Islamic and Western forms of banking will be accepted. Kamel Ben Younes, a correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation, stated in an interview on 25 January 2012 that the Tunisian government has talked with Western investors explaining that Islamic banking will not crowd out Western forms of banking, but rather they will complement each other. The two forms of banking will allow solicitation from a wider range of investors (SAIS Group Meeting, 25 January 2012). The media coming out of Tunisia have helped to play down fears of Islamophobia by explaining that a vote for an Islamist party was not a vote for Islamic extremism but a description of the reality that Tunisia is a Muslim country.

The security sector in Tunisia has begun efforts to establish an orderly environment in which investors will feel a sense of confidence. The unemployed population of Tunisia has continued its demonstrations and sit-ins, which disrupt the economic productivity of the country and serve as a public display to foreign investors that there is still an unstable environment. The security forces in Tunisia have started to use force to remove these protestors. Moncef Barouni, President of the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce expressed his belief that the general public in Tunisia understands the damage these protests are having on the economy and therefore are supportive of the security forces removal of these protestors (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012). This use of force by the police is a clear demonstration to foreign investors that the coalition government will take action to secure a positive investment environment.

The Tunisia government has sought U.S. assistance for potential investment opportunities by stressing the idea that the revolution in Tunisia epitomizes a successful democratic transition from a repressive dictatorship. Tunisia can be a model for Egypt and a showcase for the way in which the U.S. can be influential in preserving a successful democratic transition with limited financial aid and without military intervention. Tunisia's foreign policy elite have been able to argue that a small amount of investment will pay greater dividends than U.S. government assistance invested to create democracy in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the assistance towards prosperity in Tunisia will allow the

country to expand its agricultural production and begin to export goods to its struggling neighbor, Libya, to help with another democratic transition.

Mohamed Salah Hedri, a retired colonel in the Tunisia Army, stated that due to the U.S. strong interest in building alliances in the Middle East region, the Tunisian government has sought to exchange cooperation on strategic defense issues for assistance in training its military. For decades, the U.S. and Tunisian military have conducted training exchange programs. Mr. Hedri, who had previously participated in some of these programs, commented that since the revolution both countries have agreed to continue military training exchanges. This agreement by Tunisia has ensured that its military cadre will continue to receive advanced training from the U.S. in order to be prepared for the defense of its borders against instability in the region (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

### **Tunisia's Request for U.S. Assistance**

After receiving the plurality of votes in the 23 October 2011 election, the Ennahdha Party and its leader Rachid Ghannouchi traveled to the U.S. to solicit assistance for the new government. In his visit to the State Department, Ghannouchi asked for assistance in strengthening Tunisia's tourism. He requested the creation of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the U.S. and Tunisia and an Open Skies Agreement to have direct flights between the two countries as a way to economic recovery. Tunisia's economy is greatly supported by the tourism industry, and reductions in tourism since the revolution have resulted in a major loss in government revenue.

Democratic institutions are highly regarded in Tunisia, and from the beginning of its revolution its leaders have requested assistance from the U.S. to help with its democratic transition. The people in Tunisia who had taken action to create democratic institutions in the country prior to the revolution were often jailed. The fall of the Ben Ali government was unexpected, and policymakers found themselves unprepared to establish a democratic government in the face of significant social and economic problems. The Tunisian government submitted requests to the U.S. to provide support in the form of election observers in the 2011 election of the Constituent Assembly. Minister Kilani of

the Constitutional Assembly in Tunisia remarked that the election assistance provided by the U.S. was beneficial to the success of the recent election. Due in part to this success, the Tunisian government has requested additional assistance from the U.S. to provide constitutional scholars to help draft the new constitution (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

Policymakers in Tunisia's security sector have requested that the U.S. provide training to its security forces to enable them to manage the social unrest and create an attractive investment environment. The Tunisian police force is associated in the Tunisian public with the oppression of the Ben Ali government and lacks the training to enforce a fair legal system. The government has valid concerns about political assassinations carried out by Islamic extremist groups, and the integrity of its borders is threatened by ongoing civil unrest in Libya. Mokhtar Trifi, head of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, stated that the Tunisian security force has sought out technical training from the U.S. This training will help them conduct crime scene investigations in order to use forensic science techniques to convict criminals that are creating instability in the country (SAIS Group Meeting, 24 January 2012).

Additional training programs to strengthen the labor force of Tunisia have also been submitted to the U.S. The Tunisian vision for assistance from the U.S. is not in the classic form of bags of seed to help feed the country, but rather for technical assistance training programs. Executive Board members of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) have repeatedly expressed their concerns that employers in Tunisia see recent college graduates as being insufficiently educated to meet the needs of the economy. Organizations in Tunisia like UTICA have asked the U.S. to provide training programs in the education system for skills such as entrepreneurship so that young Tunisians will learn how to start businesses and make the economy grow. Proposals have also been made for the U.S. to provide training on other technical areas such as renewable energy in solar and wind power production (SAIS Group Meeting, 26 January 2012).

### **What the U.S. has Promised Tunisia**

The U.S. State Department's Conflict Stabilization office has provided and promised to continue providing various forms of technical training to a broad range of service sectors in the country. Technical training is a low cost method to improve the efficiency of the country as a whole. In addition to the longstanding military exchanges to train Tunisian military at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, which strengthen the alliance between the two countries, the U.S. has also begun training programs with the police and justice departments to ensure that the rule of law prevail in the country. This will help to develop institutions that will attract investment. Government departments in the U.S., such as Commerce and Agriculture, have worked with industries in Tunisia to develop their export capabilities. This will prove to be mutually beneficial as Tunisia acquires the ability to compete competitively on the global market and the U.S. is able to purchase Tunisian goods at a desirable price.

U.S. Ambassador-Gordon Gray, has indicated that his staff is working with U.S. investors to improve their perception of the risks in investing in the Tunisian economy. The Embassy is also facilitating discussions for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries. Embassy personnel are working with U.S. policymakers to showcase the stability and mutual benefits to investment in Tunisia. However, Ambassador Gray stated that any aspirations for a type of Marshall Plan to be implemented in Tunisia will not be forthcoming. Domestic and international pressures have compelled the U.S. to allocate proportionately more monetary assistance to other volatile areas (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012).

Assistance through subsidized loans and grants to Tunisia will be limited by concerns by U.S. policymakers that it will encourage dependency on foreign aid. To alleviate this, the U.S. has been able to specialize its assistance by sector and region to provide sufficient funds for sustainable independent growth. Organizations such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the USAID Office of Transition Initiative (OTI) are helping to put money into development projects in the near term. Their assistance to the greater Middle East region compels intended recipients to establish competitive plans for development in

order to receive these funds over other potential recipients. To be competitive, these recipients will need to take action and provide assurance that foreign assistance will not create dependencies.

### **Reception of U.S. Assistance in Tunisia**

Large portions of the educated youth in Tunisia, of which 23% are unemployed, have expressed resounding support for U.S. assistance (*The Economist*, 16 July-22 July 2011, 52). This sector of the population has been soliciting U.S. assistance programs such as the MCC and MEPI to secure a favorable proportion of the \$2.6 million grants that have been proposed for 2012<sup>38</sup>. This assistance is not only perceived as providing employment to the highly active portion of the population, but also as focused on establishing sustainable development. The tourism sector that saw high losses in customers following the revolution has also been graciously accepting U.S. assistance to regain Tunisia's image as a desirable vacation destination.

Ms. Arfaoui also commented that Tunisians understand that in order to ensure the sustainability of the new democracy, foreigners with expertise in democracy will be instrumental (SAIS Group Meeting, 23 January 2012). The initial sessions of the Constituent Assembly shown on television highlighted the fact that the assembly is still working to build public consensus on key issues including *shari'a* law. However, in contrast to the transition currently taking place in Egypt, the Tunisian transition is proving to be far more successful. Tunisia's more peaceful protests of the current Constituent Assembly demonstrate the fruits of a successful democratic transition and not security oppression. Tunisians do believe that their democratic transition has the potential to be implemented even more efficiently and in a timelier manner than what is currently taking place. It is this belief that is contributing to Tunisian's desire to look to the U.S. for assistance in the future regarding the drafting of the constitution. Tunisians in general are willing to accept assistance from foreign experts in the creation of their democratic institutions, because it will enable their system to reach its desired optimal potential.

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<sup>38</sup> Taylor, Bill. U.S. Embassy-Tunis Public Affairs Section. Personal interview. 27 January 2012.

U.S. assistance will be able to support economic development programs and security reforms. However, youth members of the Ennahdha party warned that this assistance should not be expected to influence Tunisian foreign policy in the region on issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). The sentiment in Tunisia is that there is a difference between the U.S. technology and training opportunities, that is appreciated, and U.S. foreign policy, that is often contested. U.S. assistance in Tunisia will be more successful if it is able to play a behind-the-scenes role instead of the lead element. U.S. assistance during the election was successful because it was able to train Tunisian political actors such as “I Watch” volunteers who were more publicly accepted in their role as observers than Western observers. Assistance from USAID that visually displays their logo on seed bags have had their markings removed by the time they reach the end user in Tunisia’s agricultural areas. These are clear examples that the U.S. will be able to achieve its goal of fostering a successful democratic transition, but remains inhibited in some of its efforts to improve its image in the region.

### **Tunisia’s Alternatives to U.S. Assistance**

The persistence of U.S. investment, in particular commercial investment is uncertain. Therefore Tunisia has considered alternative benefactors to achieve its goals regarding economic development. If the requests for assistance made to the U.S. to develop its economic sectors, security and democratic transition are not met, they will be solicited in the Maghreb and broader Middle East region. Tunisia has the option to solicit assistance from other international organizations to include the European Union (EU), United Nations Development Program and the African Development Bank. However, certain technical training and large sums of financial assistance will not be easily obtained without cooperation with the U.S.

The interim government has looked to Libya and other countries in the Maghreb region to develop an economic union to hedge against the possibility of reductions in future U.S. assistance to the country. Tunisian officials have frequently visited neighboring Libya in an effort to revive the domestic economy through increased trade



and access to jobs in Libya for Tunisians. Libya's revolution has obstructed production in its economy and, therefore, Libya has become more dependent on Tunisian imports. However, this is likely to diminish as the security situation in Libya improves. Therefore, Tunisia will need to identify a more stable economic policy.

The mutual political and economic benefits to cooperation between the U.S. and Tunisia far exceed the potential for Tunisia to develop independent of U.S. assistance. U.S. training programs for Tunisia's security sector and industry will help to pull the country out of the vicious cycle wherein unemployment generates the social unrest that bars new investment to create jobs. Tunisian efforts to create a stable environment to attract U.S. investment will lead to greater efficiency in the economy. Limited amounts of monetary assistance and training resources allocated to Tunisia will achieve a relatively high level of success in fostering a successful democratic transition. Ultimately, the benefit of cooperation between the U.S. and Tunisia has the ability to foster an enduring democratic system that can be admired by other transitioning democracies, with priority of U.S. assistance focused on economic rather than military means.

### **Recommendations to Improve Current U.S. Assistance**

- **The U.S. should help build support for the current campaign to reduce the debt accrued by Ben Ali.** The U.S. has notable influence in international organizations to include the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and should use this influence to achieve greater support for assistance to Tunisia. Loan agreements signed with the dictator should be reviewed to evaluate the degree to which the Tunisian people benefited. Mismanaged loans given to Tunisia that exclusively benefited the ruling elite should be reviewed to determine if the loans should be forgiven. This will hold lenders accountable for their poorly managed lending instead of penalizing the former subjects of an unrepresentative dictatorship. A *New York Times* article reveals that the U.S. announced that it will provide \$100 million cash infusion to assist Tunisia repay its debt to the World Bank and other international banks (Myers 30 March 2012, A6). The U.S. should complement this assistance effort by

requesting that other institutions such as the EU that also support democratic transitions provide comparable increases in their assistance.

- **The U.S. State Department should adjust its travel advisory for Tunisia along the lines of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel Advice, updated 16 February 2012, to highlight the fact that most visits to Tunisia are trouble free and the widespread unrest of 2011 is no longer occurring.** The current U.S. State Department Travel Alert for Tunisia dated 13 January 2012 expresses concern that Americans in Tunisia should take caution, but overemphasizes the volatility of the current social and economic environment. The U.S. State Department's Travel Alert for Egypt of 7 November 2011 uses similar language, and that the situation has continuing possibility of sporadic unrest. The lack of violent crime directed against American tourists in Tunisia justifies an easing of the State Department's warning advisory for tourism in the country. This permissible adjustment should help to turn around Tunisia's declining tourism that, according to the head of the National Office of Tunisian Tourism, in March of 2012 has declined by 34% since the revolution.
- **The official U.S. foreign policy position should refocus on Tunisia because of the relatively high level of return each dollar of invested assistance achieves in supporting a transitional democracy.** The U.S. is now shifting its assistance towards higher profile in more volatile regions in the Middle East. Ambassador Gray justified shifting assistance to more volatile regions on the grounds that the situation in Tunisia is stabilizing (SAIS Group Meeting, 27 January 2012). Consequently, the State Department's Travel Advisory at that time expressed concerns for potential volatility. U.S. international commercial interests look to the State Department for guidance on the potential for investment opportunities in countries like Tunisia. State Department policies to refocus and furthermore encourage U.S. investment and assistance in Tunisia will greatly contribute to the development of Tunisia. It will not only help to ensure that the social and economic situation continues to stabilize, but also becomes an enduring model with lessons for a successful transitioning democracy for others undergoing similar transitions.

## **Conclusion**

**P. Terrence Hopmann**

The SAIS Conflict Management field trip took place in January 2012, one year after the revolutionary events of 2011 that have come to be known as the “Jasmine Revolution” or the first uprising of the Arab Spring. The events of early 2011 were unique in many ways. A largely spontaneous revolution succeeded in overthrowing a well entrenched dictatorship using almost entirely non-violent means and with relatively little overall bloodshed. As the chapters in this volume by Gary Decker and Malikat Rufai indicate, this revolution originated among mostly young, often unemployed citizens in the interior regions of Tunisia who had been marginalized by the Ben Ali regime and treated with brutality by the political police. Without any central organization or broadly shared ideology, the idea of citizens opposing the autocratic rule of Ben Ali spread through social media across the country and led to a wide range of non-violent protests, often broken up by violent police reaction. However, large-scale violence was largely averted as the Tunisian Army remained on the sidelines, and Ben Ali and close family members quickly decided to opt for exile abroad rather than putting up a lengthy fight that has become commonplace in response to other subsequent rebellions in the Arab World.

The mostly non-violent revolution has facilitated a largely peaceful transition in its aftermath as well; however, that does not mean that the transition has been without conflict. Indeed, the absence of a unifying ideology behind the revolution has meant that the primary result has been to open space for a fundamental debate about the nature of Tunisian society and its governance. This debate focused initially on the elections in October 2011 to choose representatives to a Constituent Assembly, charged with writing a new constitution while also serving as an interim government; after the elections, the debate turned directly to address the content of the new constitution and the policy priorities for the new regime. Undoubtedly the most divisive issue highlighted by the revolution is, as Jennifer Pogue-Geile emphasizes, the role of religion in the future Tunisian state.

Under the post-colonial regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the Tunisian state had been defined in strictly secular terms, building upon both the French model of *laïcité* as well as the Turkish model of secularism in the Kemalist tradition. As a result, Tunisia in many ways became a model in the Arab World for a liberal state that granted extensive rights to women and embraced pluralism of belief and religious practice. Yet, as Jennifer Fishkin notes, this had largely suppressed a deeply felt Islamic identity in many parts of the Tunisian population, which erupted in a wave of religious engagement after the tight controls of the Ben Ali dictatorship were lifted. One consequence was that the oldest, best organized religious party, Ennahdha, emerged from the October 2011 election with a plurality of seats in the Constituent Assembly and quickly formed a governing coalition with two secular parties that had judiciously avoided attacking the Islamic parties prior to the election.

This immediately opened the debate, about which Jennifer Nath writes, concerning the role that the new constitution should assign to Islamic principles versus maintenance of the previous secular traditions, and this debate has assumed a central role in Tunisian politics since the election. In particular many secular liberals fear that this introduction of religion into the political life of the state may undermine the many rights to which they had become accustomed, even during the dictatorship, and which they hoped to expand in a new, liberal, Western-style democracy. The greatest concerns, however, as Sara O'Rourke observes, have been voiced by women, many of whom fear that their role in society may be subordinated in a more religiously observant country in which at least some of the rights granted to women by Bourguiba's progressive Code of Personal Status may be circumscribed. This concern has played out in debates about the censorship of the showing on TV of the film *Persepolis* and by debates about student rights to wear the *niqab* during classes and examinations at Tunisian universities. And of course it plays out most importantly in the debates about the possible role of *shari'a* law in the new constitution. As Roberta Lusardi indicates, it has been manifested as well in debates about the likely evolution of the Nahdha Party: will it follow the moderate and tolerant path so often emphasized by its leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, or will it fall under

the domination of the salafis and other more radical, conservative elements represented in its political base?

Regardless of the direction Ennahdha takes over the long term, in the short term it is unlikely to be in a position to dictate unilaterally the contents of Tunisia's new constitution, which itself represents a new social contract between Tunisia's citizens and their government, as Prudence Buxton emphasizes. With 89 out of 217 seats in the Constituent Assembly, Ennahdha falls well short of a majority and is governing in coalition with two secular parties, the Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol, which combined hold 49 seats, giving the coalition a substantial majority of 138 seats or 64% of the total. Therefore, Ennahdha will have to compromise with at least the more secular orientation of its two coalition partners, and likely with other parties of the left not represented in its coalition. Consequently, most observers who met with the SAIS Group suggested that the preamble to the constitution would likely identify Tunisia as a "Muslim and Arab nation," more or less along the lines of its present constitution, without incorporating more specifically Islamic principles in the body of the constitution. Furthermore, as Amy Hamblin notes, the political parties represented in the Constituent Assembly are looking ahead to the elections for a permanent parliament, tentatively scheduled for late 2012. Ennahdha appears to have been so successful in the October 2011 vote in part because it was the best organized of the political parties that were also widely viewed as having been in opposition to the Ben Ali regime. However, the secular and left-of-center parties, previously divided and competing with one another, appear to be coalescing, also distinguishing themselves more clearly from the widely discredited parties that Ben Ali had allowed to function openly. Furthermore, fewer parties are likely to enter in the next round, compared with more than 100 parties that took part in the October 2011 elections, so many votes were cast for parties that failed to pass the threshold necessary to have any of their candidates represented in the Constituent Assembly. These changes could thereby enhance the influence of secular and left-of-center parties in the parliament in comparison with the Constituent Assembly, even while support for religious parties like Ennahdha may remain strong.

Another delicate issue that the Constituent Assembly has approached cautiously involves how to deal with those elements of the *ancient regime* that remain in Tunisia. As Anna Wilson points out, most attention has focused on the very top of the regime, especially on Ben Ali and his extended family, especially his wife's family, now in exile abroad. This has left two different issues in its wake. First, immediately after Ben Ali's departure, all political prisoners were granted general amnesty, including many radical salifis, whose behavior has at times become problematic for the new regime. Second, and more importantly, the new government banned the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), the political party of the former regime. However, at least some of its leaders continue to play a role in Tunisian political life, though their future remains uncertain. On the one hand, the new regime requires experienced political elites and government officials with the training and practical skills required to administer a modern state, experience that could generally be obtained only by having served in the previous regime; on the other hand, they wish to make a sharp break with the past and therefore minimize the role of individuals tainted by their previous association with Ben Ali. As Wilson suggests, this will require a process of reconciliation between the new political elite and many who were associated with the *ancient regime*, if for no other reason than to assure that the latter do not become spoilers.

As Tunisia prepares for its next election in late 2012, however, two apparent limitations of the October 2011 election loom prominently on the horizon. Given that the "Jasmine Revolution" largely began with the youth and spread rapidly through social media and civil society, it seems curious that the youth turnout in the Constituent Assembly election was disappointingly low, and likewise civil society has not assumed the highly visible role in the political life of Tunisia that many expected since the revolution. As David Jackson notes, many of Tunisia's youth were disaffected during the election process by the neglect of the issues that had been prominent for them in their effort to unseat the Ben Ali regime, especially unemployment among the youth and lack of respect by the police and other government agencies for ordinary citizens. Indeed, the debate among political elites, especially in Tunis, over the relationship between religion and the state has largely failed to address the high priority issues for Tunisia's relatively

well educated, but under or unemployed youth. Similarly, as Daniel Lawner argues, Tunisia's civil society was kept weak under the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, so that it is only beginning to emerge one year after the revolution, taking advantage especially of their access to the same social media that played such an important role in the revolution. However, they have yet to exert their full impact on the political life of the country, especially as advocates for human rights, though their influence may make itself more broadly felt in the next round of parliamentary elections.

Much of the disenchantment with the early post-revolutionary scene stems from frustration that the interim government has focused so much attention on writing the constitution, and especially on the issue of the role of Islam in political life, that they have largely neglected to pay sufficient attention to the most pressing economic problems that were at the center of the 2011 revolution. Tunisia has a highly educated population, especially by comparison with most neighboring states, but it also has a very high rate of unemployment, especially among the youth including those with university degrees. Furthermore, these economic problems are magnified by a clear bifurcation between the relatively well-off coastal regions, where tourism and other industries had led to substantial economic development, and the interior regions in the south and west, which remain very poor. Furthermore, the short-term effects of the revolution have also exacerbated the economic problems, by frightening away tourists who were a mainstay of the country's economy, and by discouraging new foreign investment. Therefore, Rebekah Chang emphasizes the necessity for the new government to provide a sense of security, especially as perceived from abroad, in order to encourage the return of tourists to Tunisia's beach resorts and famous historic sites dating from antiquity and to encourage greater foreign investment and foreign assistance in a politically stable environment.

From another perspective, Tony Tsai emphasizes the necessity of reforming Tunisia's educational system in order to match the skills of graduates with the demands of Tunisia's labor markets. Excessive reliance in the recent past on government as the employer of last resort has left a generation of young graduates trained in skills that are no longer in demand, while neglecting areas in which Tunisia's comparative advantage in

a global market may lie in the present and near-term future. Cody Dietrich, in his chapter, argues that the United States ought to play an especially prominent role in promoting these changes and in assisting the Tunisian economy to respond to its economic development challenges. The United States needs to stop regarding Tunisia as a risky place to visit or do business, while also assisting especially in the development of infrastructure that may be necessary to bring development to the interior regions in order to overcome the vast regional divide that threatens the unity of the country and the disillusionment of many rural citizens whose early actions were largely responsible for the “Jasmine Revolution.” This can be accomplished through direct assistance, training for civil society (especially in the rural centers), and by indirect support through institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

This analysis also points to the need for reforming security institutions to provide a stable and democratic political order in the aftermath of the revolution. Security is often especially problematic in post-revolutionary societies, as typically the security institutions have served as the primary instruments of repression under the previous regime. Fortunately, this issue is less serious in Tunisia than in many other cases, although there are important issues that need to be addressed. Perhaps of greatest significance in the peaceful transition in Tunisia, especially compared to some of its neighbors undergoing similar transitions, is the role of the army. As Bryan Frederick shows in his chapter, the Tunisian Army was relatively small, professional and well-trained, and with a long tradition of being subordinated to civilian authority. For these reasons among others it largely stood aside throughout the insurgency, and it has emerged as the most trusted institution in Tunisia in public opinion polls taken after January 2011. It has focused mostly on territorial defense, especially during the insurrection in neighboring Libya, and on participation in international peacekeeping operations, thereby largely staying out of the political conflicts in Tunisia

Of greater concern have been the internal security forces, all responsible to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Colin Machado analyzes the role of these security forces in his chapter, emphasizing that the political police were the main instrument of repression under the Ben Ali regime, consisting of somewhere between 150,000 and 250,000



persons, a huge contingent for such a small country; virtually all of the violence that occurred during the January 2011 uprising was instigated by these political police. Therefore, a major but difficult task for the interim government has been to disband the political police, with the troubling side effect that this has pushed a large number of individuals trained in the use of violence into the ranks of the unemployed. The administrative police, the traditional uniformed police force, have largely been retained, but there remains the daunting task of retraining them and socializing them in the role of police in a democratic, pluralistic society. At the time of this writing these reforms are just being put into effect, and the success or failure of the government in implementing reforms in the entire justice sector will undoubtedly be a major factor affecting the sustainability of liberal democracy in Tunisia.

Most participants in the SAIS trip would likely agree that, if the transition from the Arab Spring to a consolidated liberal, democratic regime fails in Tunisia, it is unlikely to succeed soon anywhere else in the Arab World. Although Tunisians are divided along political and socio-economic lines, there is a genuinely shared identity as being part of the Tunisian nation with no significant ethnic divisions. Furthermore, because the revolution was mostly nonviolent and the transition has been characterized by a focus on developing institutions to resolve basic conflicts of interest and belief nonviolently, a firm foundation for a positive outcome in Tunisia has been established. Issues remain, most notably in the debate between adopting an explicitly Islamic form of governance versus a secular one. Social and economic divides remain wide between the coastal and interior regions, exacerbated by an overall economic downturn since the revolution. And all of the classic post-revolution problems of reforming justice institutions, strengthening civil society, forming coherent and representative political parties, promoting reconciliation between those who were associated with the previous regime and those who support the new government still challenge the new leadership of Tunisia. The focus in 2012 on drafting a new constitution is itself a herculean task, and yet this focus also distracts attention from efforts to resolve the longer-term economic and social problems of the country. In the end, the eventual consolidation of the “Jasmine

Revolution” will depend on the efforts of the Tunisian people themselves, who appear to be well prepared to undertake this daunting task.

That said, it is also clear that the international community, and individual countries such as the United States, have a strong interest in seeing the Tunisian revolution completed by a successful transition to an open, democratic polity. There can be little doubt that a successful outcome in Tunisia will provide an impressive model for others to follow, including regional states that have subsequently undergone revolutions against authoritarian regimes, namely Egypt and Libya, and perhaps as well to states in the midst of such a revolution (Syria), to say nothing of those states that have not yet experienced the upheavals of the Arab Spring, including neighboring Algeria and Morocco. Given its relatively small size and the richness of its human capital, even a modest amount of international assistance could go a long way to assure the success of the democratic transition in Tunisia. When compared to the huge costs of the effort to impose democracy in Iraq, a modest investment in assisting Tunisia in its transition could produce untold benefit throughout the region, and therefore should be a high priority for the United States and, indeed, for the entire international community.

## List of Interviewees

### Washington DC, Briefings

- **I. William Zartman**, SAIS, Conflict Management, 5 October 2011
  
- **Previewing Tunisia's Historic Elections**, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 October 2011, POMED panel with
  - **Chiheb Ghazouani**, Attorney at Law and Vice President of the Tunisian nongovernmental organization Afkar;
  - **Mongi Boughzala**, Professor of Economics, University of Tunis El-Manar and Research Fellow at the Economic Research Forum;
  - **J. Scott Carpenter**, Principal, Google Ideas
  - **Stephen McInerney**, Executive Director, POMED
  
- **Tunisia: Act Two - On October 23 the first free elections will be held in the country where the "Arab Spring" started. What next?** SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations, 17 October 2011
  - His Excellency **Mohamed Salah Tekaya**, Ambassador of Tunisia to the United States
  - **Mohamed Ali Malouche**, President Tunisian American Young Professionals
  - **Tamara Wittes**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State
  - **Ambassador Kurt Volker**, Senior Fellow and Managing Director, Center for Transatlantic Relations
  - **Daniele Moro**, Visiting Scholar, Center for Transatlantic Relations

- **After the Tunisian Vote: Analyzing the First Elections of the Arab Spring**, New America Foundation, 28 October 2011, POMED panel with
  - **Daniel Brumberg**, Senior Adviser at the Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, United States Institute of Peace
  - **Leila Hilal**, Co-Director, New America Foundation Middle East Task Force
  - **Stephen McInerney**, Executive Director, POMED
  - **Steve Coll**, President, New America Foundation
  
- **Hatem Bourial**, author, journalist, TV personality, and democracy activist, American Tunisian Association and SAIS Conflict Management Program, SAIS, 7 November 2011. **Towards Democracy - Who are the new actors in Tunisian political life? What are the new challenges after the first free elections? What are the next milestones in the roadmap leading Tunisia towards democracy?**
  
- **Jose Gijon**, Senior Economist, Middle East and Central Asia Department, International Monetary Fund, SAIS, 9 November 2011
  
- **Chema Gargouri**, manager and major shareholder of the Centre for Applied Training (CAT), American Tunisian Association and SAIS Conflict Management Program, SAIS, 14 November 2011. **Role of Civil Society Organizations in Sustaining Tunisia's Transition Towards Democracy**
  
- **Radwan Masmoudi**, Founder and President of the Center of the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID), American Tunisian Association and SAIS Conflict Management Program, SAIS, 16 November 2011. **Islam and Democracy - The election of members of the Constituent Assembly in Tunisia has brought declared Islamists into official Tunisian institutions for the first time. What does this mean for the future of the political system? What do Tunisian Muslims want and what do Islamist parties promise?**

- **Salah Bourjini**, former division chief of UNDP (United Nations Development Program) in New York for the UNDP programs in the Arab World, American Tunisian Association and SAIS Conflict Management Program, SAIS, 29 November 2011. **Tunisia: From Dictatorship to a Democratic Era.**
- **Marina Ottaway**, Senior Associate, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, SAIS, 30 November 2011.
- **Rachid Ghannouchi**, President of the Nahdha Party, SAIS, 1 December 2011
- **Barrie Freman**, Director, North Africa Program, National Democratic Institute, SAIS, 5 December 2011
- **Daniel Brumberg**, Senior Adviser at the Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, United States Institute of Peace and Associate Professor in the Department of Government at Georgetown University, SAIS, 6 December 2011

## **Itinerary—Conflict Management Field Trip to Tunisia: 22-29 January 2012**

### **Saturday 21 January – Sunday 22 January**

Participants arrive in Tunis

### **Sunday 22 January**

Walking tour of Carthage and Sidi Bou Saïd (optional)

Group Arrival Briefing at the Carlton Hotel, 31 avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis

### Monday 23 January

- **Ben Ezzine Mustapha**, “I Watch” organization co-founder & Treasurer
- **Khadija Arfaoui**, Tunisian Association of Democratic Women; Retired Professor, American Studies, Women’s Studies, English and Human Rights; activist on environmental, human rights and women’s rights issues
- **Abdelwahab Hafaiedh**, University of Tunis; Director, Middle East Research Competition Programme (MERC)
- Dinner with SAIS **Alumni** in Tunisia, Restaurant Dar Bel Hadj, Medina

**Tanja Faller**

**Patrick Hettinger**

**Edith Laszlo**

**Florian Theus**

**James Weatherill**

### Tuesday 24 January

- **Mohamed Salah Hedri**, Colonel (ret.) l'Armée Tunisienne; President of the Justice and Development Party (PJD)
- **Moncef Barouni**, Attorney; President, Tunisian–American Chamber of Commerce and Friendship
- **Rachid Ghannouchi**, President of the Nahdha Party and Interim Prime Minister of Tunisia, Nhadha Party Headquarters, Montplaisir, Tunis
- **Sofiene Ben Hmida**, Chief of the Information Department, Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), UGTT Offices, Tunis
- **Mokhtar Trifi**, Ligue tunisienne des droits de l’homme

### Wednesday 25 January

- **Kamel Ben Younes**, Executive Director, International Studies Institute; reporter for BBC World Service

- **Ahmed Ibrahim**, Secretary of the Ettajdid Party; leader of the Modernist Democratic Pole
- Visit to Zeitouna Mosque, Tunis Medina
- **Mohamed Sayah**, former student leader and member of the Destourian Party of former President Habib Bourguiba
- **Hatem Bourial**, author, journalist, TV personality, and democracy activist
- **Oussama Romdhani**, former Minister of Communications in the Ben Ali government

#### Thursday 26 January

- **Ouided Bouchamaoui**, President; **Tarak Ben Yahmed**, Vice President; **Ali Nakai**, Director, International Relations; and **Tarek Yakhlef**, International Relations Center, Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce, and de l'Artisanat (UTICA), UTICA Headquarters, Cité El Khadhra, Tunis
- **Latifa Lakhdar**, former vice president of “La Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution et de la transition démocratique”, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Tunis.
- **Abderrazak Kilani**, Minister for Relations with the Constituent Assembly, Office of the Presidency of the Government, at the Kasbah (Office of the Prime Minister)
- **Laryssa Chomiak**, Director, Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis
- **Radwan Masmoudi**, President, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy

#### Friday 27 January

- **Alaya Allani**, Professor of Contemporary History, Manouba University, Tunis
- **Omezzine Khélifa**, Ettakatol Party
- **Gordon Gray**, U.S. Ambassador-Designate to Tunisia, and staff, US Embassy, Tunis

- **Habib Slim**, Professor Emeritus of Law and Political Science, University of Tunis
- Informal meeting of SAIS students and **Ennahdha youth**; Ennahdha office, Tunis

### **Saturday 28 January**

Departure by bus for **Kairouan**, accompanied by **Mehdi Barhoum**, International Alert, Tunisia

- Tour of Kairouan historic sites, Great Mosque and Medina
- Meeting with a group of about 12 students and workers who were active in the revolution, Café Bir Barouta
- Lunch with “**I Watch**” activists in Kairouan, local restaurant
- Meeting with NGO representatives at the “**e-mediat**” Training Center, **Ahmed Hanza**, training coordinator; NGO representatives included:

Center for Young Entrepreneurs

Association of Journalists in Kairouan

Kairouanians for the Culture of Citizenship

Medical Association of Kairouan

Youth Observatory for Democracy

Tennis Club of Kairouan

Association for Human Development of Kairouan

Parents and Teachers Association

\*Unless otherwise indicated, meetings took place at the Centre d’Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis, Rue d’Angleterre, Tunis



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