

# Insights

Fall 2012

**TUNISIE**



**NIMEP**

New Initiative for Middle East Peace

A Program of the Institute for Global Leadership at Tufts University

Cover photo: A young boy at a parade in Tunis celebrating the one year anniversary of the resignation of former President Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali and Tunisia's democratic beginnings. Tunisia, 2012/Jessica Kulig

# Insights

Tunisia 2012

## NIMEP

New Initiative for Middle East Peace

A Program of the Institute for Global Leadership at Tufts University

NIMEP takes no institutional position on policy issues. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in this publication are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

The material in this journal may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form (beyond copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and excerpts by reviewers for public press), without written permission from the author(s). For information, write the New Initiative for Middle East Peace, c/o Tufts Institute for Global Leadership, 96 Packard Avenue, Medford, MA 02155.

<http://www.tuftsgloballeadership.org/program/nimep>

© 2012 by the New Initiative for Middle East Peace



# Insights

Tunisia 2012

## NIMEP

New Initiative for Middle East Peace

A Program of the Institute for Global Leadership at Tufts University

NIMEP is a non-polemical student think-tank and outreach initiative devoted to finding progressive solutions to historic and emerging conflicts in the Middle East. NIMEP provides a forum for productive dialogue, scholarship, and exploration of the region.

The contents of this journal are the work of NIMEP student researchers. NIMEP insights is a culmination of months of research and preparation, thousands of miles of travel, and immense dedication on behalf of our members and supporters.

NIMEP c/o The Institute for Global Leadership, Tufts University  
96 Packard Ave, Medford, MA 02155

<http://www.tuftsgloballeadership.org/program/nimep>  
[tuftsnimep@gmail.com](mailto:tuftsnimep@gmail.com)

# EDITORS

NIMEP *Insights* was peer edited by all members of the trip.

Layout Editor: Leah Muskin-Pierret, International Relations '13

# DEDICATION

This trip to Tunisia would not have been possible without the spirit of Tunisia's youth. On the surface, without the youth led revolution of 2011, Tunisia would not have likely been the location for the 2012 NIMEP research trip. More importantly, the eagerness of Tunisia's youth to share their stories with us during our time there made our trip unique. Listening to people our age in Tunisia speak about their country's past and future truly was inspiring.

Special thanks must go to Montassar Jemmali, who helped us in many of our meetings throughout the country. Mr. Jemmali is a remarkable young man who through his own views and connections provided us with multiple perspectives on the future of Tunisia that are not readily accessible in Western media. Like many of his peers, he is ready for the challenges that will face Tunisia in the future as it aims to be a thriving democracy.

Therefore, it is our honor to dedicate this journal to the youth of Tunisia as their current and future leadership will strive to hopefully make their country a beacon of hope for much of the world.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before we start thanking everyone that helped make this research trip and journal possible, we must start with the Institute for Global Leadership. Despite the fact that none of us had ever been to Tunisia before, Sherman Teichman, Heather Barry, and the rest of the IGL staff had faith in us to plan and execute this trip. Without their vision and financial support, this trip would have been impossible. We owe an enormous debt amount of gratitude to them. We would especially like to thank Yvonne Wakeford for helping us navigate the IRB process and to Katie Burns, Patricia Letayf, and Saba Movahedi for answering all of our little questions in working on the trip and journal.

In preparing this trip to Tunisia, we needed to learn about the country and build a wide network of contacts. This task would not have been possible without the help of Ravi Kaneriyia, Emily Parker (A'11), Professor Tony Smith, Professor Rich Jankowsky, JJ Emru (A'08), Daphne McCurdy, Duncan Pickard (A'10), Radwan Masmoudi, Nasser Wedaddy, Ahmed Benchemsi, Meghan Fenzel (A'09), Jessie Lynch, and Professor Bruce Hitchner.

Special thanks must go to NIMEP Co-Founder Rachel Brandenburg (A'05). Back in the summer of 2011, she helped convince us to take the delegation to Tunisia. Throughout the fall, she was incredibly helpful in building our network and knowledge about Tunisia. Then, she topped all of this previous work by joining us in Tunisia for the majority of the trip. Her presence in Tunisia greatly improved the quality of our trip as she added new insights and fresh perspectives while encouraging all of us to critically examine the current situation in Tunisia.

In Tunisia, our trip would not have been possible without the help of Montassar Jemmali, Oussama El Echi, and Ahmed Medien. First, Oussama and the English Language Fan Club at ENIS (National Engineering School in Sfax) graciously hosted us for three days, providing us with a unique insight into student life in this conservative Tunisian city. In addition, he connected us with Montassar who set up numerous meetings for us during our stay in Tunis. Without Montassar, we would not have gained a broad and thorough understanding of Tunisian politics. We were also grateful that Montassar was able to come to Tufts for this year's EPIIC symposium to share his story. Ahmed is a Tunisian student who travelled with us to Sousse and Sfax and helped us organize numerous meetings while conducting translations for us in many difficult situations. Thank you!

# CONTENTS

- 10 Introduction by Seth Rau
- 12 Foreword by Sherman Teichman
- 16 Quinn RASK  
Setting Order to Chaos: The Future of Secularism in Post-  
Revolutionary Tunisia
- 30 Jessica KULIG  
Photo Essay: Tunisia One Year Later
- 55 Stephanos KARAVAS  
Constitutional Debate and Political Developments in Post-  
Revolution Tunisia
- 82 Phil HOFFMAN  
Dissent and the Political Police: Past, Present, and Future
- 95 Sari EL-ABBOUD  
Post-Revolution Relations Between the Police and Public in  
Tunisia: Moving Beyond Brutality Towards Trust & Reform
- 113 Stephanie PHOUTRIDES  
Books in the Street: The Role of Education in Tunisia's  
Democratic Transition
- 134 Jessica KULIG  
Photo Essay: Snapshots of Tunisia
- 151 Alice PANG  
Tunisian Higher Education: Revolution Not Reform
- 166 Daniel RESNICK  
An Assessment of U.S. Democracy Assistance Efforts in Tunisia
- 189 Seth RAU  
The Foreign Keys to Tunisia's Economic Recovery

# INTRODUCTION

In 2011 Tunisia grabbed the world's headlines when its people overthrew the dictatorship of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Tunisia became the first state in the Middle East since Iran in 1979 to overthrow its government through a popular uprising. However, the course of this revolution has proceeded far differently from the one in Iran and any subsequent regime changes across the region. That is why Tunisia was chosen as the destination for the 2012 New Initiative for Middle East Peace (NIMEP) research trip.

Tunisia is a unique case study to examine whether or not a country in the Middle East or North Africa can build a fully functioning democracy with the participation of both secular and Islamic parties that maintains the integrity of its population. The year 2011 contained many firsts for Tunisia. The country overthrew Ben Ali and established a new regime. It also held free and fair elections that represented the diversity of interests and opinions across the Tunisian electorate. However, 2012 has proven to be a far more critical year for the future of Tunisian democracy. It is one thing to hold elections, but it is far more challenging to actually govern a nation, especially when many of the key political actors have no prior experience in governing. With regional instability in Libya and Egypt and internal problems ranging from unemployment to Salafism, Tunisia has faced real crises in the past year without the solid framework of a completed constitution to further enshrine democracy into the fabric of the nation.

In January 2012, nine members of NIMEP, including myself, went to Tunisia for two weeks to study many of these issues firsthand in order to gain insight into whether or not Tunisia's transition to democracy would indeed be successful. Quinn Rask considered the roles of the major political parties in Tunisia at the time<sup>1</sup>, and how both Islamic and secular parties will need to work together to ensure the success of Tunisian democracy. Stephanos Karavas conducted research on the lengthy process of writing a new constitution for Tunisia that will hopefully be ready in the coming year. Phil Hoffman investigated the history of the political police to see if it would become a barrier to a successful transition to democracy. Sari El-Abboud explored the complicated relationship between the citizens of Tunisia and the police that repressed them for years to see what role the police would play in the future Tunisian democracy. Stephanie Phoutrides surveyed the state of primary and secondary education in Tunisia to see if it was going to be capable of producing citizens able to handle the responsibilities of democracy. Alice Pang

---

<sup>1</sup> They have since changed the formation of Netaa Tunis in the summer of 2012.

examined the state of the Tunisian higher education system, and how it is currently failing to produce graduates that are ready to meet the needs of the modern global economy. Daniel Resnick studied Western democracy promotion within Tunisia and what models and advice the West could provide for Tunisia during transition. I looked at the role foreign investors are playing in Tunisia's economic recovery, which will be essential for a successful transition to democracy. Finally, Jessica Kulig served as the trip's photographer and her photos and essays grace this journal adding further insight into the culture of Tunisia.

After the trip, our delegation became far more aware of the true extent of the problems facing Tunisia. In the Western media, Tunisia is often presented as the glorious example of what the Arab World could become. There are very serious threats to democracy in the country, and this journal details many of those threats and challenges. But despite the obstacles on the road ahead in finishing the constitution and effectively governing the country, Tunisia has maintained the spirit of the revolution. Despite many disagreements, most Tunisians have remained committed to the political process through democratic means rather than violent ones. The troika government of Ennahda, CPR (Congress for the Republic), and Ettaktol has held the country together to prevent it from going the way of Egypt. The coalition's struggle to survive is a testament to the difficulty of building a new form of government that meets the needs of all Tunisians. Therefore, we approach Tunisia with cautious optimism as we move forward into 2013, which should be another historic year in Tunisia with a signed constitution and elections for a permanent government. If Tunisia can complete these tasks, it will have achieved the second major step in becoming a truly functioning democracy.

I would like to offer one final note before concluding this introduction. While some of the recommendations of this journal can be applied universally, many are specific to Tunisia. We must make sure that the lessons learned from Tunisia's transition to democracy are applied with the proper context in both Tunisia and across the wider region and world. Learning the wrong lessons from this transition could be just as harmful as learning no lesson at all from Tunisia's experience. Tunisia is a unique country due to its history, people, and traditions. Hopefully Tunisian culture will allow for democracy to prosper in the coming years.

Seth Rau  
December 2012



# FOREWORD

NIMEP's wonderfully insightful recent research and fact-finding trip to Tunisia is ready to review. While time has passed since their immersive experience, this volume is testimony to their prescience and thoughtful analysis.

When our NIMEP delegation students visited Tunisia in January 2012, hope was infectious.

Young Arabs had overthrown a Western-supported dictator's regime, a police state run on the politics of fear and intimidation. Tunisia was seemingly leading the way towards a new era, one of more democratic order and governance. With almost unprecedented fair elections, there was a feeling that the country might create a stable and empowering politics of inclusion and create a new stable civic political order capable of confronting its deep challenges.

Nonetheless our students approached their inquiries cautiously, with honed skepticism.

What started as the "Jasmine Revolution," when President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced out of power by popular protests, and what ignited what was optimistically termed the "Arab Spring," is now in serious jeopardy.

The Tunisian government and its people still face immense persistent challenges: a stagnant economy, inequality, heightened unemployment, persistent corruption, unchecked police brutality, and severe disparities in rural-urban/coastal-interior development.

But perhaps more urgent, the governing Ennahda Islamist party has proved itself both unable, perhaps unwilling, to curb the zealots in its midst. While the Tunisian military has pursued alleged militants in the Mount Chaambi area near the border with Algeria, and so called "blasphemy laws" have been defeated, many in Tunisia still fear the roll back of decades of secular advances.

The political assassinations of prominent leftist leaders Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, allegedly by Islamist extremists, has exacerbated Tunisia's deep political divisions and fostered fierce competition for power.

The recent secret talks held in Paris between the leaders of the Ennahda and the secular opposition, Nidaa Tounes, to try to solve their political crisis has thus far yielded no results. An Egyptian-inspired Tamarod, or "rebellion" protest movement, has lodged accusations that the Ennahda party is trying to impose a religious state that threatens personal freedoms. The effort at forging consensus on a new Constitution, with many discordant conceptions, especially over the role of women in society, is paralyzed by an immobilized Constituent Assembly.

Our students captured many of these concerns and anticipated many of these tensions.

Thanassis Cambanis recently posed, and responded to, the question: Is democracy possible in the Middle East? In the *Boston Globe*, he wrote, "*The conventional wisdom is that secular liberalism has been all but wiped out as a political idea in the Middle East. The strains of the 20th century—Western colonial interference, wars with Israel, windfall oil profits, impoverished populations—long ago extinguished any meaningful tradition of openness in its young nations. Totalitarian ideas won the day, whether in the form of repressive Islamic rule, capricious secular dictatorships, or hereditary oligarchs. As a result, the recent flowerings of democracy are planted in such thin soil they may be hopeless.*

*"This understanding shapes policy not only in the West, but in the Middle East itself. The American government approaches "democracy promotion" in the Middle East as if it's introducing some exotic foreign species. Reformists in the Arab world often repeat the canard that politicized Islam is incompatible with democracy to justify savage repression of religious activists. And even after the revolts that began in 2010, a majority of the power brokers in the wider Middle East govern as if popular forces were a nuisance to be placated rather than the source of sovereignty.*

*“An alternative strain of thinking, however, is starting to turn those long-held assumptions on their head. Historians and activists are unearthing forgotten chapters of the region’s history, and reassessing well-known figures and incidents, to find a long, deep, indigenous history of democracy, justice, and constitutionalism. They see the recent uprisings in the Arab world as part of a thread that has run through its story for more than a century—and not, as often depicted, a historical fluke.”*

I extend our great thanks to all of NIMEP’s leadership and students engaged in this effort, particularly Stephanos Karavas and Seth Rau for their research preparations, editorial contributions and the trip’s cohesion. Seth Rau earned a special distinction. His senior research in Tunisia’s foreign investing climate secured him the only undergraduate invitation to participate in a May 2012 international conference, “The Arab Spring: Getting It Right.” The forum was cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) and Georgetown University’s Democracy and Governance program. His paper was subsequently published in *Islam and Democracy: Perspectives on the Arab Spring*.

The success of NIMEP’s trip was in part due to the significant assistance given our students by Montassar Jemmali, a young Tunisian law student at Manouba University and the head of the Tunisian Youth Parliament. Montassar is also the President and founder of the Tunisian League of Young Patriots and was their representative to the European Union. He introduced our NIMEP students to many important contacts and enabled significant interviews and peer relationships with Tunisian University students. We subsequently had the privilege of hosting him at Tufts for the EPIIC symposium. His presentation can be found here (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wNZVLe0w1c>).

I particularly want to thank our Institute’s alumni community for ensuring that the Tunisia trip was well prepared and enacted safely and thoughtfully. Rachel Brandenburg, a co-founder of NIMEP as an undergraduate and currently a Program Officer for Middle East Initiatives at the United States Institute of Peace, advised, mentored and accompanied our students in Tunisia. Her intelligence and knowl-

edge, and her experience at the U.S. State Department, in the Office of Middle East Transitions as the Tunisia assistance coordinator, were invaluable.

Leah Muskin-Pierret deserves our gratitude for enabling this edition to be formatted and published on-line. Our staffers, Patricia Letayf and Jeremy Zelinger were fastidious fact checkers and editors, and the Institute's Associate Director, Heather Barry, once again was thoughtfully and intelligently responsible for Insight's final editing process.

We are hopeful that people will find the time to delve into the serious research of our students and editors of this volume of NIMEP Insights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sherman Teichman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Sherman Teichman  
Founding Director  
Institute for Global Leadership  
Tufts University

# Setting Order to Chaos: The Future of Secularism in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

by Quinn Rask

International Relations & Middle Eastern Studies '12

## Introduction

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, on December 17, 2010, shocked the world. His protests against police harassment, economic deprivation, and lack of legitimate political avenues to voice grievance struck a chord, inspiring popular protests first in his own country of Tunisia, then across the Middle East and North Africa. On January 14, 2011, Tunisia's president, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, bowing to popular demands for greater democracy, accountability, and freedom, resigned after nearly a quarter century in office. Just as Tunisia was the first Arab Spring country to successfully oust its sitting autocrat, so too was it the first to hold elections. On October 23, 2011, the Tunisian interim government held the first free and fair multi-party democratic parliamentary elections in the country's history. As many analysts predicted, Ennahda, the moderate Islamist party led by Rached Ghannouchi, won the greatest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly, a body charged with rewriting the Tunisian constitution. The most surprising outcome of the elections was the relative failure of individual secular left parties to garner a sizeable percentage of the vote. Ennahda may have only won 41 percent of the seats (90 seats), failing to win an outright majority, but the next most popular party, the secular Congress for the Republic (CPR), won only 29 seats. This outcome is particularly surprising in Tunisia which has both a longer history with secularism and secular reform, dating back to the policies of Ahmed Bey beginning in the 1830s, and a larger middle class which subscribes to the secularist policies of former Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali, than many other Arab states.

This election would seem to throw the very nature of the Tunisian state into question. If the pre-revolutionary Tunisian state was dogmatically secular and an Islamist party won the lion's share of the votes in the first

free and fair elections in the history of modern Tunisia, does that not point to a rejection of the post-colonial conception of the Tunisian state?<sup>1</sup> This is the question being asked throughout academic and political circles the world over, especially given the West's historical reticence to accept Islamists as a legitimate democratic force.<sup>2</sup> While at first glance this may seem to be the case, this perception belies the social and political reality of post-Arab Spring Tunisia. It is unquestionable that Ennahda won the elections fairly, but not all Tunisians who voted for Ennahda did so in support of their Islamist program. Many were attracted to Ennahda because of their largely secular campaign platform that emphasized economic development, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and combatting corruption, or as a protest vote against the policies of the old regime.<sup>3</sup> Ennahda was also the only party that participated in the October 23 elections that was able to open up branch offices in every province in Tunisia, due largely to a communal network cultivated since the late 1970s.

Despite Ennahda's victory, and its continual expansion of its political network, secularism remains a strong political force in Tunisia after independence. Although the secular left vote was dispersed amongst a large number of individual parties, they make up 34 percent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, faring far better than secular left parties in other Arab countries such as Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Secular parties, which have no experience in government, also suffered in the elections. They had very little legitimate grounds on which to criticize Ennahda and fell back on anti-Islamist rhetoric, alienating some of the Tunisian public. Lastly, the systemic advantages that Ennahda benefitted from, being seen as a protest vote against the oppression of Ben Ali's regime, and the disadvantages from which secular parties suffered, being seen as connected to the former regime ideologically, will become less and less prominent as subsequent electoral cycles distance the political realm from the revolution.

The political developments in the months since the October 23 elections point to a continued vitality in the secular culture in Tunisia, underpinning continued support for a secular conception of the Tunisian state. A secular left bloc has begun to form amongst the parties of the secular-left, and important concessions have been extracted from the Ennahda-dominated government and Constituent Assembly in the constitutional drafting process, both of which will be important in the next elections. Above all, the persistence of secular influence in the Tunisian government is a function of the post-colonial history of the Tunisian state, wherein secularism was the

defining characteristic for over half a century. It is because of this history, and the reforms made during this period, that secularism remains a powerful social and political force in Tunisia and will continue for the foreseeable future.

## **Tunisian Secularism from Bourguiba to the Present**

Secularism began to influence the governing apparatus of Tunisia even before the establishment of the French protectorate in 1881. Ahmed Bey, the ruler of Tunisia from 1837 to 1855, introduced a slew of modernizing reforms to Tunisian society, and although these reforms were not fully secular and they did not last beyond his death, they formed the foundation for further secularization in the Tunisian state after colonization.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the cultural influence of French secularism extends far beyond the colonial period. The Neo-Destour Party of Habib Bourguiba that took over power from the French in 1956 maintained, and even expanded, the secularism of the Tunisian state with secular reforms, like the Personal Status Code, that continue to this day.

Secularism in its modern interpretation, however, is not indigenous to Tunisia, nor to any part of the Islamic world; it grew out of European colonial rule and continues to be influenced by Europe and the United States.<sup>6</sup> This trend of secularization has come to refer to three things: “the increase in the number of people with secular beliefs, lessening of religious control or influence over major spheres of life, [and] growth in state separation from religion and secular regulation of formerly religious institutions and customs.”<sup>7</sup> In the case of Tunisia, Bourguiba and Ben Ali sought to lessen the religious control over every-day life by bringing them under the strict control of the state, reminiscent of Mustafa Kemal’s secularizing reforms in Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Official Tunisian secularism emerged after independence from France in 1956. Habib Bourguiba and other leaders of the Tunisian independence movement were introduced to secularism both through their participation in the French colonial government and through their education in France. Upon their return to Tunisia, they sought to replicate this system.<sup>8</sup> After Bourguiba sidelined those members of the neo-Destour Party who did not subscribe to his view of secularism (or to his absolute authority in both party and country), he began to systematically bring Tunisian religious institutions under government control.<sup>9</sup> This would become one of the defining pieces of Bourguiba’s



(and therefore Tunisia's) secularism: not simply a division between religious and state institutions, but an active subjugation of Tunisian religious institutions to state authority.<sup>10</sup> Bourguiba's campaign of secularization started in 1956 when his government confiscated the property of the Habus Council that managed the land used for mosques, Quranic schools, and other similar Islamic religious institutions. This brought a great deal of Tunisia's educational, religious, and charitable organizations under the direct control of the government. Later that same year, in August 1956, the Maliki Shari'a courts were absorbed into the secular state court system.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps most importantly for modern discussion about secularism and Islamism in Tunisia, this subjugation of the country's religious institutions paved the way for the reform of the Tunisian Personal Status Code.<sup>12</sup> Most, if not all, Arab countries have a section of law called the Personal Status Code that delineates the rights that citizens have in social institutions such as marriage or inheritance. In all other Arab countries, these reforms are based on the laws outlined by Islamic law and jurisprudence. However, in Bourguiba's final effort to strip the religious conservatives from political sway in Tunisia, he reformed the code in favor of a more Western view of "personal status" in 1956. Under the reformed Personal Status Code, women were given new rights in divorce and marriage (setting a minimum age and giving women the right to approve arranged marriages), and Tunisia became the first, and remains the only Arab country, to outlaw polygamy.<sup>13</sup>

The secularizing reforms that Bourguiba undertook in the first years after independence were among the most extensive and long-lasting in the Arab world, but they were largely imposed on the Tunisian population. The French conception of *laïcité*, or secularism, goes beyond the American conception of secularism, envisioning a strict divide between the political and religious realms, in which religion is relegated completely to private life and should play no part in public life, including both government and education.<sup>14</sup> After being officially codified in 1905 in the Law of Separation, it has become an integral part of the French political system. Habib Bourguiba and his compatriots were inculcated in this system during their time studying in France and working in the French colonial government in Tunisia; they sought to replicate it in Tunisia after independence. This French vision of secularism continues to influence the Tunisian view of secularism to this day, and defines the political spectrum.

## Political Successes and Failures in the October 23 Elections

The elections held nation-wide in Tunisia on October 23, 2011, ushered in a new age in Tunisian politics, both functionally and ideologically. For the first time since independence, the Tunisian government held truly free and fair multiparty elections for the Constituent National Assembly, the body that is charged with rewriting the Tunisian constitution. These elections resulted in a victory for the Islamist movement that had stood in stark ideological opposition to previous regime. The political and social realities of post-revolutionary Tunisia are crucial in understanding the electoral outcomes of the October 23 elections, and why there is still hope for greater secular political success in the future.

Ennahda's electoral win stems both from political success (especially in comparison to the relative failure of its opponents) and systemic advantages it had over the opposition. While Ennahda's activity has not always taken on a political bent, it has helped them to build up considerable name recognition amongst the Tunisian electorate since the late 1970s and early 1980s. This name recognition allowed Ennahda to capitalize on being recognized by the electorate as an indigenous religious movement, shielding them from considerable criticism.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, and most importantly, Ennahda, like other Islamist groups, was viciously repressed by the previous regime's security apparatus. Most, if not all, of the leadership of the movement were either imprisoned or fled into exile. Hamadi Jebali, Ennahda's Secretary-General, was imprisoned in 1990 for 16 years, ten of which were spent in solitary confinement.<sup>16</sup> His story is far from unique: the current Interior Minister, Ali Laarayedh, now in charge of the Tunisian police force and security apparatus, was subject to imprisonment and torture by that very same apparatus.<sup>17</sup> While Islamists were far from the only opposition group subject to such treatment by the security apparatus of the previous regime, this allowed them to portray themselves as having stood in stark opposition to the previous regime, and led many Tunisians to support them not because of their ideology or campaign platform, but as a final vote against the excesses and oppression of the Ben Ali regime.<sup>18</sup>

These systemic and historical factors alone, however, do not encompass the full picture of Ennahda's political success: Ennahda simply beat the secular parties at the game of politics. Ennahda was the only political party that was able to establish offices and mobilize grassroots support in every

province and voting district across Tunisia. Ennahda was able to use the grassroots community and familial networks that it had built up since the late 1970s to connect with voters personally, rallying popular support to their cause.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Islamists in many other countries, Ennahda ran on a liberal economic platform, seeking to open up the Tunisian economy to further international investment, while also promising to bring economic development to the country's interior, a part of the country long ignored politically and economically, while emphasizing other secular demands as well such as freedom of speech and of religion.<sup>20</sup>

The political failures of secular parties and the systemic disadvantages that they faced come in stark contrast to the successful political strategies employed by Ennahda on top of their social and political systemic advantages. Like Ennahda, the vast majority of the secular parties that participated in the October 23 elections were newly created or had been illegal under the previous regime. But unlike Ennahda, they lacked the grassroots socio-religious movement, hampering them from developing a similar political base. Additionally, while many of the leaders of secular parties had been imprisoned or forced into exile because of opposition to the regime (Congress for the Republic leader Moncef Marzouki was forced to flee Tunisia after publicly opposing the regimes treatment of Islamists in the early 1990s), their ideological similarities meant that they could not distance themselves from the Ben Ali regime in the same way that Ennahda and its leadership was able to.<sup>21</sup>

While the political reality and history of Tunisia put secular parties at a considerable disadvantage, it was not insurmountable. The major failures of secular parties in their electoral campaigns were fourfold. The secular left was incredibly fragmented. While Ennahda represented the sole Islamist voice in the elections, the secular left was split amongst the rest of the more than 80 parties that participated. Ennahda garnered just over 40% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, and the next five most successful parties (excluding the *Aridha Chaabia*, or Popular Petition), were all secular left parties that differed mainly in leadership and the foci of their electoral platforms. This political fragmentation on the left was exacerbated by the political inexperience that these parties demonstrated in their campaigns and platforms. The parties failed to adapt their political platforms to address the demands of the revolution and political realities, even rejecting polling information about the Tunisian electorate.<sup>22</sup> Several secular parties, particularly the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), fell back on an almost purely anti-Islamism, an-

ti-Ennahda platform, which coupled with popular sympathy for the abuse sustained by the leadership of Ennahda over the past two decades and the religious nature of the movement, led to the PDP and others performing far worse than expected.

The campaigns of the secular left also exposed cultural divisions within Tunisian society itself. The secular left fundamentally failed to communicate with the electorate on a popular level, taking an elitist approach to their discussion of the economic hardships facing many Tunisians and failing on a fundamental linguistic level to communicate with the average Tunisian. When candidates or representatives of secular left parties communicate they generally communicate in either Modern Standard Arabic or French, both of which are distinctly different from and alien to the Tunisian dialectic Arabic.<sup>23</sup> Their use of this language both connects them to the former regime (Ben Ali was well known for giving all of his speeches, except his very last one, in Modern Standard Arabic) and sets them apart as both socio-economically and educationally superior to the majority of the Tunisian electorate. Many of the leaders or members of the secular left parties are incapable of communicating fluidly, or at all, in the Tunisian dialect, forcing them to seek help from international organizations such as the National Democratic Institute.<sup>24</sup> This has its roots in the bifurcated nature of the Tunisian education system. Those Tunisians with enough money study in private schools where the language of instruction is French, and often go on to study in universities in France. Tunisian students without such means study in state schools that are taught in Arabic, and continue on to study at universities in Tunisia, where instruction may be in either French or Arabic. As such the divide between the cultural and socio-economic elite and those of lower incomes, reinforced by the nature of the Tunisian education system, is reflected politically. Those students who attend French schools tend to be wealthier and more influenced by French political philosophy such as French *laïcité*-style secularism, and therefore often support the secular left parties. Those students who attended Arabic-language public schools are less influenced by such philosophies and therefore more inclined towards an alternative view of state ideology.

Lastly, because of the constraints placed upon opposition parties during Ben Ali's reign, secular parties lacked the grassroots network that Ennahda had built up since the late 1970s. This lack of grassroots support rendered secular parties unable to develop a large enough political machine to compete across the country, and they were forced to confine their political campaigns

to the major metropolitan areas and coastal regions of the country. Even in the provinces where secular parties had a presence, they still lacked the membership to conduct ground level outreach to potential supporters. This lack of voter outreach, coupled with the lack of definition within their political platforms, an inability to communicate effectively and on a popular level with the majority of the Tunisian electorate, the fragmentation of the secular left vote among a multitude of parties, and the general lackluster performance of each individual party in the polls led many potential supporters to vote for Ennahda.

Aside from the political failures of the secular-left political parties themselves, the success of the *Aridha Chaabia* (Popular Petition), a group of independent list candidates, had an important affect on the outcome of the elections, drawing votes away from both Ennahda and secular left parties. The *Aridha Chaabia* was formed in March 2011 by Tunisian media magnate Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi, who controls several Arabic language television stations. His group of independent list candidates, organized under the somewhat curiously named “Party of Progressive Conservatives,” ran on a platform of handouts and promoting expensive social and welfare programs while simultaneously affirming Tunisia’s “Arab-Muslim identity.”<sup>25</sup> In doing so they sought to challenge both secular left parties, by emphasizing the creation of a leftist welfare state, and Ennahda, by promoting the Arab-Muslim identity of Tunisia and its place in the greater Islamic world. Using Hamdi’s television station, *Aridha* was able to work around the strict limits placed on television advertising for the other political parties and directed the majority of their campaigning via television at the interior provinces like Sidi Bouzid where the Tunisian revolution began.

As a result of *Aridha*’s populist message, its socially conservative outlook, and its targeted campaigning at the underdeveloped interior of the country, it received the third largest number of votes, coming in behind the Congress for the Republic with 252,025 votes total (beating Ettakatol by 4,000 votes) and receiving 26 seats in the Constituent Assembly, the majority of which coming from the interior.<sup>26</sup> Despite the fact that seven of their seats were invalidated because of electoral law violations, *Aridha* remains the fourth most represented political faction in the Constituent Assembly.

## The Future of Secular Politics in Tunisia

While Ennahda may have beaten the secular left parties at the polls on October 23, 2011 for the reasons discussed in the above section, many of those political and systemic advantages are rapidly disappearing. There have been several developments in the months after the election that point to continued vitality in Tunisian secular culture: consolidation of the majority of secular-left parties into a secular bloc, drawing important concessions out of Ennahda in the drafting of the constitution, and political victories in subsequent elections. Even the systemic factors that contributed to Ennahda's success at the polls have waned, and will continue to wane until the next elections are held in the spring or summer of 2013. Secular parties, however, may have to make several concessions to curry favor with an audience outside of its traditional support base of educated socioeconomic elite. The most glaring change that may need to be made to the secular left agenda is a reevaluation of secularism in the Tunisian context.

The most important development in Tunisia since the elections last year has been the announcement in January of a merger between most secular left parties to create a secular left bloc called the Republican Party (not to be confused with the old Republican party which is a member of the coalition).<sup>27</sup> This coalition, while originally between the PDP, Afeq Tunis, and the (old) Republican Party, has expanded to encompass even elements of the CPR and Ettakatol. Because of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the internal elections for leadership within this new party several prominent members of the PDP have left the coalition to potentially found a new party. Nonetheless, this consolidation marks an important development in secular left politics in Tunisia, and a step that was crucial to a potential electoral win. With a far more united front, the secular part of Tunisian society will be far better equipped to compete on a national scale with the well-developed political machine that Ennahda possesses.

On the other hand, there have been political developments outside of the realm of strict party politics that lend a far more optimistic view to the future of secularism in Tunisian political society. Since the revolution stripped away governmental edicts forbidding or strictly controlling the establishment on non-governmental organizations in Tunisia, thousands of such organizations, both domestic and international, were established or established offices in the country. These organizations, focusing on a myriad of issues ranging

from human rights to political transparency, will act as another societal balance against completely abandoning the secular nature of the Tunisian state, just as similar organizations hinder government overreach in European and American democratic processes. On March 16, 2012, a secular-leftist union, the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET), won a landslide victory against the Islamist-backed General Tunisian Union of Students (UGTE), winning 250 out of 283 seats in the Tunisian Student Board Elections.<sup>28</sup> While neither of these events definitively suggest that secular parties will fare better in the next elections, it does show that although Ennahda won in the last elections, their mandate is far from universal and that there is still a great deal of debate in Tunisian society about the role of religion in society.

Unfortunately, it remains to be seen whether or not the lessons to be learned from their loss in the last election have been learned. When asked why they believed that their platform was so much less successful than that of Ennahda, a very common response from representatives of different parties was, “We lost to Ennahda because our platform was too pragmatic.”<sup>29</sup> This shows two things: one, that they failed to grasp the political climate of Tunisia before the election, and two, that they failed to understand exactly why they lost. While this is by no means necessarily a reflection of the majority of secular left party activists, it does indicate a lack of communication with the electorate, which could work strongly against the consolidation of political support outside the main secular left base.

No matter the political developments over the next year until the next elections, the electoral map will look far different than in the October 23 elections. Not only have the secular left parties mostly banded together to form a political bloc, but the *Aridha Chaabia* will also be a far less potent political force in subsequent election cycles. *Aridha* and its leader, Mohammed Hechmi Hamdi, campaigned on an untenable economic platform, promising social welfare programs that the Tunisian government simply cannot afford. Given that they targeted this message at the most economically disadvantaged areas of Tunisia, their inability to deliver on their economic platform will result in a marked decrease in support.

Ennahda’s main systemic advantages--popular sympathy for the leadership because of victimization by the Ben Ali regime, long-standing ties to the community resulting in greater name recognition and a wide-spread grassroots support network, and being shielded from criticism by their re-



ligious mantle--will begin to fade as years and election cycles put distance between them and the legacy of the Ben Ali regime. As the secular-left continues to consolidate power into one or a few political parties, and as they continue to participate in the political process, the Tunisian electorate will begin to distinguish them from the rule of Ben Ali, and their name recognition (if they can come up with one) will inevitably increase. As Ennahda is forced to make political decisions in the secular realm, they will be more and more subject to criticism from the secular-left.

Overcoming the secular-left's systemic disadvantages means nothing if its politicians fail to rectify their political failures in the last election cycle. Here, things are far less certain. While more time until the next election will give secular left parties more time to expand their political machines outside of the coastal region, especially if they succeed in forming a more unified secular party, the parties must also craft platforms that address the needs of Tunisians, not just running on a fear mongering anti-Ennahda platform, and that communicates with a broad swatch of Tunisians, not just the French-speaking educated classes, but those in the interior as well. In this, the secular parties can take several cues from Ennahda, which was very successful in doing just that by using existing local networks to appeal to Tunisians on a personal level. There is no reason that secular parties cannot do the same thing, since the demands remain the same across the board, increasing jobs and lowering unemployment.

As the recent student board elections and comparative success of secular parties in Tunisia have shown, Ennahda's electoral victory in October did not herald the end of secularism in the Tunisian state. Even if Ennahda wins in the next several electoral cycles, should the secular left parties be able to establish a united front against them, they will continue to be able to influence policy and remain a check on the role of religion in society. It does depend, however, on the secular parties being able to identify, understand, and learn from their own political failures, or new parties will emerge to fill that void. While even the long-term viability of the Tunisian democratic system may lie in doubt, there is little likelihood that the secularism in Tunisian society will disappear. It may, however, have to change to fit the political realities of post-revolution Tunisia. French *laïcité*-style secularism is no longer a tenable conception of secularism in Tunisia, and the secular left parties must shift their policies to reflect this political and social reality if they are to stay relevant. If they do not, Ennahda will be quick to pick up the slack.

## Endnotes

1. Erik Churchill, "Tunisia's Electoral Lesson: The Importance of Campaign Strategy," <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/27/tunisia-s-electoral-lesson-importance-of-campaign-strategy/6b7g>.
2. See US and European response to the elections held in the Palestinian territories in 2006.
3. Erik Churchill, "Tunisia's Electoral Lesson: The Importance of Campaign Strategy," <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/27/tunisia-s-electoral-lesson-importance-of-campaign-strategy/6b7g>.
4. Max Fisher, "Tunisian Election Results Guide: The Fate of a Revolution," *The Atlantic* (October 28, 2011).
5. Perkins, *Modern Tunisia*.
6. Nikki Keddie, "Secularism & its Discontents," *Daedalus* 132, no. 3 (2003): 14-30.
7. Keddie, *Secularism*.
8. Keddie, *Secularism*.
9. Perkins, *Modern Tunisia*, 134-5.
10. Keddie, *Secularism*.
11. Perkins, *Modern Tunisia*, 135.
12. Marion Boulby, "The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia since Independence," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April, 1988): 590-614.
13. Perkins, *Modern Tunisia*. 135-6.
14. Nalini Rajan, "French Secularism, Headscarves, and Indian Schoolchildren: Anthropological Concerns of Political Philosophy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 36 (Sep. 4-10, 2004): 3968.
15. Melani Cammett, "The Limits of Anti-Islamism in Tunisia," *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/31/will\\_an\\_islamist\\_victory\\_translate\\_to\\_democracy](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/31/will_an_islamist_victory_translate_to_democracy).
16. Alexis Arieff, *Political Transition in Tunisia*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011.
17. Ahmed Medien. "Ali Larayedh," Tunisia-Live. Accessed March 23, 2012.
18. Leila Hilal, "Next Challenges for Tunisia," *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting\\_tunisia\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting_tunisia_after_the_elections).
19. Leila Hilal, "Next Challenges for Tunisia," *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting\\_tunisia\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting_tunisia_after_the_elections).
20. Leila Hilal, "Next Challenges for Tunisia," *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting\\_tunisia\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting_tunisia_after_the_elections).
21. David Kenner, "Meet the New President of Tunisia," *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/15/meet\\_the\\_new\\_president\\_of\\_tunisia](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/15/meet_the_new_president_of_tunisia).
22. Ben Hafaidh, Abd al-Wahhab. Personal Interview. 1/14/2012.
23. Gorbali, Sami, Personal Interview. 1/6/2012.
24. Borovsky, Gabriella, Personal Interview. 1/6/2012.
25. Max Fisher, "Tunisian Election Results Guide: The Fate of a Revolution." *The Atlantic* (October 28, 2011). And Asma Ghribi, "Hechmi Hamdi Elected as Head of Party of Progressive Conservatives." *Tunisia-Live*, February 6, 2012.
26. Sam Bollier, "Who are Tunisia's Political Parties?" *Al-Jazeera English*, October 27, 2011.
27. Fakhfeh, Borhen, Personal Interview. 1/14/2012. Farah Samti "Tunisian Opposition Parties to Announce Official Coalition," *Tunisia-Live*, April 12, 2012.
28. Hend Hassasi, "Leftist Student Union Scores a Landslide Victory in Tunisian Student Board Elections," *Tunisia-Live*, accessed March 19, 2012, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/16/leftist-student-union-scores-a-landslide-victory-in-tunisian-student-board-elections/>.
29. Ghorbal, Sami, Personal Interview. 1/6/2012. Borhen Fakhfekh, Personal Interview. 1/16/2012

## Works Cited

"Tunisia's Islamist Governing Party Ennahda to Oppose Shari'a in the Constitution." *Reuters* (March 26, 2012).

“Tunisia’s New Government: Islamists and Secularists at One.” *The Economist* (November 26, 2011).

Ajmi, Sana. “Ennahda Leader, Rached Ghannouchi: Religion Should Not be Imposed by the State.” *Tunisia-Live*, March 3, 2012.

Arieff, Alexis. *Political Transition in Tunisia*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011.

Atkin, Nicholas. “The Challenge to Laïcité: Church, State, and Schools in Vichy France, 1940-1944.” *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 1 (March, 1992): 151-169.

Bayat, Asef. “Islamism and Social Movement Theory.” *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 891-908.

Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamic Turn*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Bayat, Asef. “Post-Islamist Revolutions: What the Revolts in the Arab World Mean.” *Foreign Affairs*, accessed December 20, 2011.

Ben Khalid, Kal. “Secularists and Islamists in the Maghreb: The Dangers of Polarization.” *Tunisia-Live*, accessed December 18, 2011, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/12/07/secularists-and-islamists-in-the-maghreb-the-dangers-of-polarization/>.

Berman, Sheri. “Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society.” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 2 (2003): 257-272.

Bollier, Sam. “Who are Tunisia’s Political Parties?” *Al-Jazeera English*, October 27, 2011.

Boulby, Marion. “The Islamic Challenge: Tunisia since Independence.” *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April, 1988): 590-614.

Bradley, Allan. “Tunisian Election Results Tables.” *Tunisia-Live*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/24/tunisian-election-results-tables/>.

Cammatt, Melani. “The Limits of Anti-Islamism in Tunisia.” *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/31/will\\_an\\_islamist\\_victory\\_translate\\_to\\_democracy](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/31/will_an_islamist_victory_translate_to_democracy).

Carter, Khalifa. “A Rereading of Islamic Texts in the Maghreb in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Secular Themes Or Religious Reformism.” In *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, edited by John Ruedy, 37-51. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Churchill, Erik. “The Day After Tunisia’s Elections.” *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/25/the\\_day\\_after\\_tunisias\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/25/the_day_after_tunisias_elections).

Churchill, Erik. “Tunisia’s Electoral Lesson: The Importance of Campaign Strategy.” <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/27/tunisia-s-electoral-lesson-importance-of-campaign-strategy/6b7g>.

Dunn, Michael Collins. “The an-Nahda Movement in Tunisia: From Renaissance to Revolution.” In *Secularism and Islamism in North Africa*, edited by John Ruedy, 149-165. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Fisher, Max. “Tunisian Election Results Guide: The Fate of a Revolution.” *The Atlantic* (October 28, 2011).

Ghedira, Mahmoud. “Ghannouchi: “Islam does Not Present a Specific Plan for Governance.”” *Tunisia-Live*, August 28, 2011.

Ghribi, Asma. “Hechmi Hamdi Elected as Head of Party of Progressive Conservatives.” *Tunisia-Live*, February 6, 2012.

Ghribi, Asma. “Major Tunisian Secular Parties Announce Merger.” *Tunisia-Live*, accessed March 19, 2012, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/11/major-tunisian-secular-parties-announce-merger/>.

Ghribi, Asma. “Tunisian President Marzouki Supports Granting Licenses to Salafist Parties.” *Tunisia-Live*, February 29, 2012.

Ghribi, Asma. “Tunisian Union and Government Meet to Ease Rising Tension.” *Tunisia-Live*, March 5, 2012.

Hamid, Shadi. “The Rise of the Islamists: How Islamists Will Change Politics and Vice Versa.” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June, 2011, 2011): 40-47.

Hassassi, Hend. “Leftist Student Union Scores a Landslide Victory in Tunisian Student Board Elections.” *Tunisia-Live*, accessed March 19, 2012, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/16/leftist-student-union-scores-a-landslide-victory-in-tunisian-student-board-elections/>.

Hermassi, Abdelbaki. “The Political and the Religious in the Modern History of the Maghreb.” In *Secularism and Islamism in North Africa*, edited by John Ruedy, 87-99. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Hilal, Leila. “Next Challenges for Tunisia.” *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting\\_tunisia\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting_tunisia_after_the_elections).

Keddie, Nikki. “Secularism & its Discontents.” *Daedalus* 132, no. 3 (2003): 14-30.

Kenner, David. “Meet the New President of Tunisia.” *Foreign Policy*, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/15/meet\\_the\\_new\\_president\\_of\\_tunisia](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/15/meet_the_new_president_of_tunisia).

Knickmeyer, Ellen. “Tunisia’s Surprising New Islamists.” *Foreign Policy*, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/21/new\\_tunisia\\_islamist\\_elections](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/21/new_tunisia_islamist_elections).

- Kuru, Ahmet. *Secularism and State Policies Towards Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Labat, Severine. "Islamism and Islamists: The Emergence of New Types of Politico-Religious Militants." In *Secularism and Islamism in North Africa*, edited by John Ruedy, 103-121. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Lindsey, Ursula. "In Tunisia: A Clash between the Religious and the Secular." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2011, sec. Global News.
- Lynch, Mark. "Tunisia's Election." Foreign Policy, [http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/23/tunisias\\_election](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/23/tunisias_election).
- Lynch, Mark. "Tunisia's New Al-Nahda." Foreign Policy, [http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/29/tunisias\\_new\\_al\\_nahda](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/29/tunisias_new_al_nahda).
- Medien, Ahmed. "Rached Ghannouchi at Davos Debate: Islam and Democracy are Compatible." *Tunisia-Live*, January 27, 2012.
- Mohanty, Manoranjan. "Secularism: Hegemonic and Democratic." *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 22 (1989): 1219-1220.
- Perkins, Kenneth J. *A History of Modern Tunisia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Rajan, Nalini. "French Secularism, Headscarves, and Indian Schoolchildren: Anthropological Concerns of Political Philosophy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 36 (Sep. 4-10, 2004): 3967-3970.
- Ruedy, John, ed. *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Samti, Farah. "Tunisian Opposition Parties to Announce Official Coalition." *Tunisia-Live*, April 12, 2012.
- Tucker, Joshua. "Tunisia's Pre-Election Report: Hope and Angst in Tunisia's Elections." The Monkey Cage, <http://themonkeycage.org/blog/2011/10/20/tunisia-pre-election-report-hope-and-angst-in-tunisia%E2%80%99s-elections/>.
- Waltz, Susan. "Islamist Appeal in Tunisia." *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 4 (1986): 651-670.
- Zartman. "The Challenges of Democratic Alternatives in the Maghreb." In *Secularism and Islamism in North Africa*, edited by John Ruedy, 201-218. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

# Photo Essay: Tunisia One Year Later

by Jessica Kulig  
Economics '12



Exactly one year ago, Tunisians gathered along Avenue Habib Bourguiba on what will forever be known as the day that President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. This event was the culmination of the mass protests that swept the country in the month following Mohamed Bouazizi's desperate self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid on December 17th, 2010. Marking this momentous occasion, Tunisians once again took to the streets in Tunisia's capital city of Tunis. One year later, Tunisians have voted for the first time since the country's independence in 1957 and have begun defining the post-Ben Ali trajectory of their country.





A view of the crowds from atop El Hana International, a hotel located along the main stretch of Avenue Habib Bourguiba.



For some, the anniversary is a day for political expression, something that was strictly forbidden under Ben-Ali.



Many people come out donning red, the color of the Tunisian flag.





A group of Salafists came out in protest. Although the more moderate Islamist party, Ennahda, ran and won a plurality of seats in the country's October elections, formerly banned Salafi parties, like Ettahrir, were not permitted to participate and remain unrecognized.



Police and military forces block the Ministry of the Interior, an icon of the former regime's tyrannical hold on the country, with barbed wire and tanks.





In a symbolic gesture, police officers, who Tunisians are wary to trust due to their prominent role in the brutal repression of the revolution, drape a Tunisian flag over one of their vans.



A young woman marches in celebratory parade, complete with a marching band, stilted clowns, and paper mache masks, as it makes its way through the Kasbah (the old quarter of Tunis) and out onto Avenue Habib Bourguiba.



A man holds a photograph of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's second president, known for his pan-Arabist ideologies.





A man walks a masked Ben-Ali character through the streets in chains.



A man carries Libya's flag in solidarity with Tunisia's neighbor that experienced a similar, though much more violent, revolution this past year.



Many Libyans are still taking refuge in Tunisia, mostly along the Tunisia-Libyan border but also in major cities like Tunis, where medical facilities are much more readily available.





People gather along Avenue Habib Bourguiba with posters and flags, each carrying different messages but unified in their celebration of the revolution's success.



A young Salafist marches through the streets.



الإسم : يونس الشنه  
تاريخ الولادة: 14 جانفي 1971  
المناسبة: ما احتفالي باله  
تحياتكم « وبالسنه الاو

A man holds a birthday cake in celebration of the one-year anniversary of Ben Ali's departure.





Political posters still hand from the October 2011 elections.



Ennahda party founder, Rachid Ghannouchi, speaks to the press at the official January 14th ceremony. Those in attendance include Tunisian interim President Moncef Marzouki, Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani of Qatar, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and Chairman of Libya's National Transitional Council, Moustapha Abdeljalil.





Crowds of people gather in front of the National Theater of Tunis, an important site in the revolution.



A man prepares a sign to be held during the celebrations.





Tunisian youth, who played an integral role in the revolution, don “Janvier 14” tee shirts.





Strings of Tunisian flags hang in front of the clock tower in Tunis, which is located in the square renamed “Place du 14 Janvier 2011.”



Tunisians come out to the National Theater on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the revolution.





Young people are festive and celebrating on the one-year anniversary of the revolution.



But there is still much to be done to keep the country moving in a democratic direction.



A Tunisian man, part of the celebratory parade, takes a moment to reflect.







A message displayed on the wall lining Avenue Habib Bourguiba, “Long live Tunisia, free and democratic.”

# Constitutional Debate and Political Developments in Post-Revolution Tunisia

by Stephanos Karavas

History '13

## Introduction

**A**s the developments of the Arab Spring are gradually relegated to the fringes of the mainstream media's attention, Tunisia continues to stand alone as an example of a successful and ongoing revolution. While it should not be treated as a foregone conclusion that the Tunisian Revolution will eventually succeed, one could not be faulted for believing so given that the evidence for this view is both compelling and ample. No single paper can do justice to the aim of addressing every facet of this current and fascinating revolution, thus this paper will be concerned with one component thereof: the constitution-making process and political developments relevant to it. This paper seeks to provide the reader with a concise and substantive understanding of the nature and implications of the aforementioned process in Tunisia. In highlighting the successes, failures and challenges of the constitution-making process, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that Tunisia's political class has exhibited a unique and unexpected level of competence and foresight in guiding the nascent state through a period of transition. Though many variables in transitional Tunisia remain at best uncertain and at worst bound to failure, the premise of this paper is that no substantive reforms may be successfully implemented without resolving Tunisia's current political crisis. At the heart of resolving this crisis lies the task of creating a viable constitution that meets the standards of the liberal democracy which Tunisians aspire to establish.

The first section of the paper intends to provide historical context on constitution-making in Tunisia through a brief assessment

of the merits and faults of the currently suspended 1959 constitution. The second and third sections will analyze the time period between November 2010 and April 2012, highlighting the relevance of important political developments to the process of creating a constitution. The fourth section will present a set of prescriptions for what the Tunisian elected constitution-making body must include in the new document, and what pitfalls it must avoid. This section will draw from a varied set of sources, primarily non-governmental organizations, which have offered their respective visions of the new constitution in a series of open letters to the aforementioned elected body. The fifth and final section will conclude by highlighting the major successes of the Tunisian transitional process while outlining the road ahead towards the completion of the constitution-making process. Ultimately, the underlying notion posited by this paper is that the Tunisian post-revolution process of transition provides unique insight and lessons that deserve emulation in any other pro-democratic transition around the world.

## **Why Tunisia's Former Constitution Failed**

**T**he Republic of Tunisia's constitution was promulgated in June of 1959.<sup>1</sup> Although the extent to which the constitution of 1959 will be used as a model for the new one remains unclear, it is nevertheless a distinct possibility. When a state descends down the path of authoritarianism, some wrongly fault the constitution given its foundational nature with respect to the state. Such would be the case in Tunisia. Prior to any added amendments, the constitution was a relatively benign document that left a modest amount of room for abuse by the state, but only due to its necessarily broad wording. The chief reason why the constitution failed in ensuring the existence of a representative republic in Tunisia has little to do with the document itself, and significantly more to do with the state's abuse of the constitution coupled with the continued consolidation of executive power by the ruling party.

In his work, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Kenneth Perkins effectively illustrates Tunisia's descent into a single-party dictatorship in his analysis of Tunisia's first post-independence President Habib



Bourguiba's initial and continued concentration of power around himself and his Neo-Destour Party (later to be renamed the Socialist Destourian Party [PSD] in 1964 and Constitutional Democratic Rally [RCD] in 1988).<sup>2</sup> Even prior to the adoption of the constitution, Bourguiba had effectively created a presidential monarchy that he proceeded to legitimize by law in the formation of the constitution. Strategically modeling the document after France's highly centralized presidential system, Bourguiba set up the constitution for abuse by the executive in later years.<sup>3</sup> From 1956 up until the departure of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, the Tunisian state actively worked towards suppressing or marginalizing political opposition, vehemently neutralizing dissenting voices within the legislature, cabinet and among Islamist groups. The creation of a state apparatus that monopolized power within the ruling party and its head was facilitated by the evolution of the Ministry of the Interior into the headquarters of the secret police.

By 1974, the legislature, composed entirely of PSD members, had been thoroughly cleansed of all its democratic mechanisms. In the same year, two developments ensured the essential end of the legislative body's function. First, Habib Bourguiba was appointed as the lifetime head of the political bureau – thereby eliminating the process of elections for the post that were formerly carried out by the central committee. Second, Bourguiba was appointed “president of the republic for life” by the assembly – eliminating the integrity of the five-year presidential term and the electoral process as a whole (which had previously been continually rigged by fraudulent vote-counting and voter intimidation). The transition to authoritarianism had been all but complete by the mid-seventies, and was codified in the amendment of Article 4 of the constitution in 1976. This first amendment to the constitution altered the motto of the republic from “liberty, order, and justice” to “order, liberty and justice”, symbolically reflecting the realignment of the state's priorities.<sup>4</sup> From thenceforth, amending the constitution would become the recourse for the president to legally legitimize an increasingly firm grip on rule. Powers were continually transferred towards the institution of the executive, and specifically the Office of the President.

Under the amended constitution, the president was the single most influential figure in government. He appointed the prime minister, the cabinet, and the governors of all twenty-three provinces. He could initiate legislation, return a bill to parliament for a second reading and needed to approve all legislation. In practical terms, when the legislative body is under the control of the single ruling political party whose head is the president, this aforementioned power places the function of the assembly in the president's hands. The president ruled by decree when the legislature was not in session while also being endowed with emergency powers in times of "peril menacing the institutions of the republic" – all the while enjoying judicial immunity during his term in office.<sup>5</sup>

As for the judicial branch, its independence had also been effectively neutralized. Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, laws had been passed which indirectly placed the power of appointment, tenure and transfer of judges into the hands of the president. The Supreme Judicial Council, which appoints all judges, was also controlled by the President who served as the Head of the Council. Furthermore, the judicial body charged with determining the constitutionality of legislation – the Constitutional Council – was rendered toothless by a 1987 presidential decree which allowed the president to appoint the council's judges. The same decree also limited the council's ability to pass rulings on legislation solely to cases referred to it by the chief executive.<sup>6</sup>

Such was the state of the consolidation of power within the executive leading into 2011. The original constitution of 1959 bore little resemblance with the currently suspended document in terms of the real power distribution among the branches of government; and the chief reason for this state of affairs was that the constitution became a tool in the hands of a well-consolidated and powerful presidency which fashioned the political landscape of the Tunisian republic according to its will. Excluding the symbolic 1976 amendment of Article 4, the constitution of Tunisia was amended on three different occasions.

On July 12, 1988, a series of amendments were passed, which included allowing the president to serve three five-year terms. In

addition, the president was given the power to rule by decree when the legislature, the Chamber of Deputies, is not in session. Given that the Chamber of Deputies was not in session from the beginning of August until the beginning of October, this amendment essentially gave the president a two-month window to unilaterally alter the laws of Tunisia.<sup>7</sup>

On May 2, 2002, a sweeping set of amendments was passed that altered 38 out of the 78 articles of the constitution. Key changes included the abolition of term limits, the raising of the age limit for presidential candidates from seventy to seventy-five and presidential immunity while in office. In addition, a second legislative body called the Chamber of Advisors was created that operated in a purely consultative capacity for the purpose of facilitating the passing of presidential decrees.<sup>8</sup>

The final set of amendments made to the constitution came in April of 2008 when Articles 39 and 40 were amended to allow for multi-candidate presidential elections. Both the creation of the Chamber of Advisors and these amendments were presidential initiatives that aimed to appease the voices which called for greater popular representation in government. Indisputably, they were both part of a growing democratic veneer on an autocratic state. The Chamber of Advisors was designed to provide a representative façade to the president's rule by decree. The multi-candidate elections were also a front, as the licensing of political parties was required by the Ministry of the Interior. Any political party that was licensed had to operate under the Political Parties Law of 1988, a law that forbids the creation of parties along religious or regional lines. Given that the major source of political opposition in Tunisia since the late sixties came from Islamists, and the majority of mass political grievances descended from socio-economic neglect propagated along geographic lines, these laws provided a frontage of reform while further marginalizing any political opposition in practice.<sup>9</sup>

It is no coincidence that all major amendments to the constitution were enacted during the rule of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. While Habib Bourguiba, the charismatic and visionary founding father of Tunisia, deftly utilized his political influence and experience

to expand his executive power, Ben Ali was a military general who deposed Bourguiba in a bloodless coup and had little experience as a politician. Instead, he elected to rely on altering the legal framework of Tunisia as a route for maintaining and expanding his hold on power.

A republic on paper, Tunisia became an increasingly oppressive single-party dictatorship leading into 2010. Bourguiba and Ben Ali, who controlled the political apparatus of the state, exploited the 1959 constitution as an instrument of power redistribution. Those who are currently framing the new constitution must take the lessons learned from the experience of the previous five decades in Tunisian history to heart. Firstly, a sound constitution is not sufficient by itself in terms of guaranteeing the integrity of a representative government. Secondly, the independence of each branch of government must be preserved – whether the state operates under a presidential or a parliamentary system. Thirdly, the process of constitutional amendment needs to be well-protected when establishing the balance of power. Finally, enforcement mechanisms are necessary when it comes to the protection of rights. All of these points will be addressed more extensively in penultimate section of this paper.

## **Political Developments in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia**

The popular pro-democratic uprising in Tunisia was exceptionally swift in catalyzing regime change. What began as a series of mass demonstrations against socioeconomic disparities, infrastructural neglect and rampant unemployment transformed into a vehicle for the long-awaited toppling of a dictatorship in Tunisia – and hence the opportunity to implement democratic reforms and remold the state. Hindsight has the potential effect of clouding an appreciation for decision-making at any given moment in history, as it often makes the observer take for granted the fact that events transpired as they did. This is especially true when considering the rapidity and abruptness of the Tunisian Revolution. The time period between the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi and the departure of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali was less than a month. The protest movement against the government was an amorphous, leaderless mass of discontented citizens without

any outlined objectives, never mind the collapse of the 24-year rule of a dictator. The road towards the drafting a new constitution began on January 14, 2011 with Ben Ali's flight from Tunisia. This section intends to highlight the major political developments leading up to November 2011 that set the stage for the constitution-making process – all the while emphasizing the shrewdness of the Tunisian political class in the delicate balancing act of leading a democratic transition.

Following Ben Ali's departure, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi announced his assumption of the presidency. As interim president, he invoked Article 56 of the constitution, which stipulates that the President may delegate his powers to the Prime Minister in a time of temporary disability for the duration of thereof. Ghannouchi was accused of citing Article 56<sup>10</sup> to circumvent Article 57<sup>11</sup>, as it was argued that Article 57 was pertinent to the state of affairs in January of 2011. The latter article stipulated that, in the cases of death, resignation or absolute disability, the duty of interim president falls to the speaker of the lower chamber of parliament. On January 14, it seemed likely that Tunisia was headed towards a possibly protracted power struggle within the top echelons of the RCD.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the following day witnessed the quick resolution of the crisis when Ghannouchi peacefully returned to the post of Prime Minister, relinquishing the presidency to Fouad Mebazaa, the former President of the Chamber of Deputies.

The following month was characterized by a remarkable display of calm, maturity and competence on the part of the political class in Tunisia. On January 17, Mebazaa and Ghannouchi announced the composition of the interim government while incorporating therein members of opposition political movements. In the following three days, the government allowed an open inquiry into the finances of the Ben Ali regime, while dissolving the central committee of the RCD and forcing all who belonged to it to step down from power. By February 6, an international arrest warrant was issued for Ben Ali and the RCD was suspended indefinitely. On February 27, amid growing protests, Mohamed Ghannouchi stepped down from the office of the Prime Minister and veteran statesman Beji Caid Essebsi assumed the post.<sup>13</sup> Though protests over the continued presence of RCD members in the interim government and in various departments

persisted, the Mebazaa-Essebsi administration displayed great deftness in undertaking measures that instilled confidence in government while simultaneously allowing for the continued progression of the transitional process.

This trend in decision-making continued into March of 2011 with the official and immediate dissolution of the secret police and the RCD, along with the legalization of the formerly banned Islamist movement Ennahda. Crucially, the government also announced that the country would hold elections for a constitution-making assembly on July 24, 2011. Despite the fact that, for the time being, the road towards democratic transition seemed well-charted, wide protestation and political polarization continued to be endemic. Due largely to organizational obstacles and delays, the interim government announced in early June that elections would have to be postponed until October 23, 2011, in order to allow for more time to rectify such flaws.<sup>14</sup>

In the months and weeks leading up to the October elections for the Constituent National Assembly (CNA), numerous realities had manifested themselves that provided varying degrees of potential for derailing the transitional process. Primarily, the post-revolutionary period had exposed long-suppressed and deep fissures in Tunisian society. The newfound freedom of expression allowed for the exposition of an unforeseen level of political polarization, especially between liberal secularists and Islamists. The socioeconomic inequalities within Tunisia, cast along geographic lines, provided ample ammunition for the expression of political discontent by those from the developmentally neglected interior towards the urban classes of the coastline – especially Tunis. Workers' unions, led by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), engaged in widespread sit-ins and wildcat strikes to a debilitating extent for their respective sectors. Exacerbating all of the aforementioned divisions was the unsettling level of uncertainty for the future of the transitional process. Many variables, including the execution of elections and the composition and mandate of the CNA remained unclear. The political crisis continued to fuel the economic crisis, as perceived political instability crippled the tourism industry and limited foreign investment.



The immensity of the obstacles set before the process of democratic transition nevertheless failed to derail preparations for the upcoming elections. The pre-election process of transition was placed under the guidance of the High Commission for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, otherwise known as the Ben Achour Commission after its chairman, Yadh Ben Achour. Composed mostly of lawyers and academics, the commission was best known for its creation of the Independent Electoral Commission (ISIE) under the leadership of human rights activist Kamel Jendoubi. The ISIE proved instrumental in the independent organization of free, fair and transparent elections in Tunisia. It assisted both illiterate and literate Tunisians in understanding the logistics of the voting process and the role of the CNA while ensuring the presence of thousands of foreign and domestic election observers in the month prior to the elections.<sup>15</sup> Despite predictions of possible large-scale disruptions and potential turmoil<sup>16</sup>, the October 23 elections ran smoothly and were heralded in the international media as a uniquely positive development in a seemingly frozen Arab Spring<sup>17</sup>.

The time period between January 14, 2011, and October 23, 2011, ought to be viewed as the Post-Revolutionary Period in Tunisia's recent history. This phase in the revolution took place in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the entrenched regime and was necessarily governed by undemocratic and interim political forces that, despite the challenges set before them, successfully and peacefully facilitated the shift towards a representative form of government. After the October elections, the stage was set to finally begin organizing the drafting of the constitution.

The handling of Tunisia's post-revolutionary course by the interim government deserves the highest praise in spite of its flaws. Following the departure of Ben Ali, mixed feelings of optimism, skepticism and cynicism pervaded the Tunisian and global media regarding the country's political future. Although the head of the regime was gone, the statecraft which he and his predecessor had forged over the course of decades was still operating. Tunisia found itself in the position of having been liberated from dictatorial rule, yet still operating under the same political party and the same legal and

constitutional prerogatives that had enabled Bourguiba and Ben Ali to consolidate their hold on power. In January of 2011, one could not have been faulted for anticipating a fierce, protracted and potentially bloody power struggle in Tunisia. Instead, what the world witnessed was the peaceful beginning of a democratic transition at the hands of a politically astute interim government.

## **Political Developments in Transitional Tunisia**

On November 22, 2011, Tunisia's Constituent National Assembly held its inaugural session at Bardo Palace in Tunis roughly a month following the October elections. The formerly banned Islamist party, Ennahda, won a plurality of the seats in the CNA, gaining 89 seats out of the total 217. The runners-up were the left-wing Congress for the Republic (CPR) which gained 29 seats, followed by Aridha Chaabia with 26. The Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties, otherwise known as Ettakatol, won 20 seats while the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) underperformed compared to expectations, winning only 16 seats.<sup>18</sup> The remaining seats in the assembly were distributed amongst a variety of smaller parties.

The differences in the platform, vision and history of each political party will not be discussed extensively in this paper. However, it is important to note the extent of political polarization witnessed in Tunisia in the ten months following the fall of the Ben Ali regime. The newfound freedoms of expression and political participation in Tunisia exposed a political fault line between Islamists and more liberal secularists that was previously obscured under the repression of the ruling regime. The October elections revealed a newfound reality: that political Islam has a significantly larger following in Tunisia than previously imagined.

Many explanations have been posited in the media worldwide and by various think-tanks, politicians and academic institutions regarding the electoral performance of Ennahda. To many, it seems clear that Ennahda's performance was a reflection of its superior organizational capacity, widespread reach and proactive pursuit of

voters. Others have suggested that the divisions among the liberal secularist parties coupled with the simultaneous existence of a single conservative political bloc in Ennahda allowed for a disproportionate part of the political spectrum to be consolidated into a single party (especially given the ban on Salafist parties). While other explanations abound, the reality of Islamism as a new, vigorous and popular voice in the Tunisian political landscape is not bound to change in the near future, and carries with it significant implications for the process of framing the new constitution.

By the time of the inauguration, Ennahda had forged a unity government with both the CPR and Ettakatol. Under this new power-sharing agreement, the presidency would fall to human rights activist Moncef Marzouki of the CPR, while Mustapha Ben Jaafar of Ettakatol will hold the chair of the CNA. Hamdi Jebali of Ennahda would occupy the office of Prime Minister.<sup>19</sup> Given the precedent of political polarization propagated partly by the perceived rise of Islamism in Tunisia, the peaceful creation of a power-sharing deal between two left-wing parties and an Islamist one was an important milestone. As Tunisia entered a new phase in its democratic transition – one in which the forces of government were representative – the civil coexistence of political movements whose respective visions are viewed by much of the Tunisian public as mutually exclusive is of the utmost importance, both for the short-term end of writing a constitution and the long term goal of sustaining a nascent democracy.

Leading into December of 2011, three major questions remained unanswered: the drafting process of the constitution, the mandate of the CNA, and the duration of the CNA's mandate. If not addressed immediately, these three questions posed a significant threat to Tunisia's transition in that the indefinite mandate and duration of the CNA left the door open for abuse of power by the newly elected body. Tunisians, fearful that they had handed over power from one dictator to 217 autocrats, remained apprehensive about what to expect in the near future.

The CNA immediately began drafting legislation on institutional procedures and powers that will be in effect until the

permanent constitution is drafted and approved.<sup>20</sup> Informally known as the “mini-constitution”, the twenty-six-article document catalyzed debate in the CNA which served as a harbinger for the major disagreements that the political parties have had in the actual drafting of the constitution. One of the revealing debates that took place over the mini-constitution was the question of the balance of power between the president and the prime minister. Initial proposals by Ennahda that essentially deprived the presidency of any real power were met with strong opposition from other parties, especially CPR and Ettakatol.<sup>21</sup> It was later agreed that, though the presidency would not be the weak institution that Ennahda had envisioned, the prime minister would retain more prerogatives than the president. The presidential powers included the following: outlining foreign policy in consultation with the prime minister; designating the head of government; signing and promulgating laws passed in the CNA; and commanding the armed forces.<sup>22</sup> The debate over the balance of power essentially confirmed the presence of a future political obstacle that would have to be confronted during the course of drafting the constitution: Ennahda’s clear support for a parliamentary system over the leftists’ support for the presidential system.

Article 7 proved to be the most controversial of all the articles passed, and underwent heated debate on December 8 before being eventually passed. It allows the president, prime minister and the head of the CNA to assume additional powers in “exceptional circumstances” that would temporarily deprive the elected body of its function. Fears proliferated amongst members of the CNA and the public alike that the emergency powers outlined in Article 7 provide fertile ground for a new dictatorship.

It still remains unclear whether or not the mini-constitution achieved its most important goal of defining the mandate of the CNA. While the duration thereof remains indefinite, the assembly’s mandate has undoubtedly expanded. The extent to which it has expanded is vague and has created additional uncertainty along a number of lines. Given the legislative vacuum for the months prior to the October elections, it has become imperative that the CNA acts as both a regular parliament and a constitution-drafting body. This development brings

with it the potential for both positive developments and setbacks. Acting as a normal parliament, especially given the imperatives of reform and recovery in the wake of an ongoing economic crisis, is a necessary evil. Yet, it also carries with it the potential to distract and prolong the assembly's goal of drafting the constitution while leaving the door open for differences in ideology to propagate factionalism and division along a wide range of issues beyond the constitution.

The more challenging questions lie ahead of December 2011. After adopting the mini-constitution, the CNA's activity drew closer to the actual task of drafting the permanent constitution. Part of the next phase in this process was to determine the drafting process and its function. Important questions underlie this process. Would it only involve members of the CNA or the consultation of legal experts as well? Would the role of special interest groups such as the UGTT and think tanks be seriously considered? What would constitute a majority in approving decisions and passing articles? How would the constitution be finally approved, and when and how would a popular referendum be incorporated into the process of approval? An even more imminent question remained to be answered before the constitution would be drafted: what would be the role of religion in the state?

Given Ennahda's place in the driver's seat of policymaking in transitional Tunisia, the answer to this question would spark a potentially tumultuous debate, both within the CNA and in the public sphere. As a nation with strong European cultural roots and a decades-long history of fiercely secular government – all the while retaining the most liberal personal status code in the Arab world – Tunisia's integrity as an emerging democracy largely hinged on the extent to which shari'a law would become a source for legislation under the new constitution. When drafting of the constitution officially began on February 13, 2012, the question of the place of shari'a dominated discussion for a month and a half. As March drew to a close, a growing chorus of voices within and outside of government deplored the CNA's lack of progress. In the four months since its inauguration, the assembly had failed to produce any written portion of the constitution. This frustration was reflected by Beji Caid Essebsi, the former interim prime minister, in a speech in Monastir on March 24 when he lashed out at the CNA,

stating that the body tasked with writing the foundational document of the new republic was in no hurry to deliver on its promises.<sup>23</sup>

Two days later, Ennahda declared that it would not mention shari'a as a source of legislation. Instead, a drafting committee would preserve the language in Tunisia's currently suspended 1959 constitution that refers to Islam as the religion of the state, with Arabic as its language.<sup>24</sup> By confirming that Tunisia would remain constitutionally secular, Ennahda had successfully ensured that Tunisia would forego a major crisis in its transition over the identity of the state. Yet, at the same time, it indirectly created a new outside threat. In refusing to allow any mention of shari'a in the constitution, Ennahda effectively signaled a break between itself and an increasingly vocal, powerful, politically marginalized and ultra-conservative brand of Salafi Islamism in Tunisia. Thousands of Salafists took to the streets in protest during the following week.<sup>25</sup>

The growth of Salafism as a political opposition movement in Tunisia constitutes a major threat to the success of the transitional process not merely because of its radical political agenda, but also because its ascendancy in the public sphere is a product of continually deteriorating economic conditions. As a movement which thrives on public discontent, Salafism in Tunisia taps into a social base composed of lower-class poverty belts surrounding inner cities.<sup>26</sup> The rising unemployment rate, continued economic stagnation and the slow pace of democratic reform provide Salafist groups like Hizb-u-Tahrir with the political ammunition they thrive on. A recent survey carried out by the Tunisian Ministry of Religious Affairs estimated that roughly 400 of Tunisia's 5,000 mosques are held by Salafists; in fifty of those cases, the imams had been forced out as a consequence of their extremist views.<sup>27</sup> While the ministry has undertaken measures to combat this conservative tide, Tunisian Salafism as a political-cum-socio-economic phenomenon continues to hold formidable destabilizing potential for the democratic transition.

The resolution of the question of shari'a in the constitution paved the way for the CNA to begin the constitution-making process in earnest, focusing more on technical questions rather than ideological



ones. By April 19, 2012, the drafting process had been established and agreed upon. Six commissions would undertake the majority of the constitutional drafting, each being composed of twenty members from the CNA drawn from all parties on a proportional basis depending on the number of seats each maintained. Ennahda holds the chair of four of the commissions, while CPR and left-wing Ettajdid occupy the remaining two chairs. The six commissions will be responsible for drafting articles pertinent to a single issue. These include the following: 1) the preamble, basic principles and constitutional review 2) rights and freedoms 3) legislative and executive powers, and relations between the powers 4) civil, administrative, financial and constitutional justice 5) constitutional bodies dealing with media pluralism, financial regulation, religion on the political level, law enforcement and security 6) local, regional and municipal issues.<sup>28</sup> The selection of topical concentrations for each commission reflects the CNA's desire to avoid divisive political issues in favor of establishing a comprehensive, practical and democratic framework for the new republic.<sup>29</sup>

The six chairpersons of each commission collectively constitute a coordinating draft committee charged with consolidating the articles produced by each commission into a complete draft. Mustapha Ben Jaafar of Ettakatol, who is also the President of the Constituent National Assembly, is to hold the chair of the coordinating committee. While his role is intended to be a mostly ceremonial post, a major architect of the constitution will be Habib Kheder of Ennahda, the general rapporteur of the same committee. The unity government will undoubtedly have the lion's share of the responsibility in drafting the constitution given its control of five out of the six drafting commissions.<sup>30</sup>

The complete draft of the constitution, as finalized by the coordinating committee, will be presented to the CNA and adopted if it receives a two-thirds vote of approval. If the first vote is unsuccessful, a second vote will be taken. If the second vote fails, it will be followed by a popular referendum in which a simple majority would guarantee the adoption of the constitution. In the case of a failure to achieve a majority on a popular referendum, the CNA would likely discard the draft and restart the drafting process; in such a circumstance, it was not specified whether new elections for the CNA would be held or not.<sup>31</sup>

From April 2012 and onward, the CNA will begin drafting and producing the contents of what will be the permanent constitution of the Tunisian Republic five months after it was democratically elected. The key issues that remain to be addressed are institutional, and not ideological. Thus, what can be expected is significantly less public discontent as a direct result of political developments. However, political issues maintain the potential to act as catalysts for turmoil fueled by continued disillusionment over the slow pace of the democratic transition and the deteriorating effects of economic stagnation. It is of the utmost importance that the CNA completes the drafting of the constitution within a year of April 2012. Given the precedent of postponement for major deadlines such as the CNA elections and the commencement of constitution-drafting over the past year, it is unlikely that such a goal would be realized.

## **Constitutional Imperatives**

**I**n drafting the new constitution, there are a number of issues pertaining to the constitution-making process that the CNA must effectively and prudently engage in order to craft the constitution soundly. These issues can be broadly divided into three categories: institutional, legal, and participation by civil society and the public.

### **Institutional Issues**

Countries emerging from authoritarian rule face significant procedural and constitutional questions surrounding the process of institutional reformation. The first question that needed to be answered in post-revolutionary Tunisia regarded the sequencing of constitutional reform and elections. Deciding which of these steps ought to come first was not a simple task, as placing either before the other presented considerable potential for compromising the integrity of the revolution. Engaging in constitutional reform prior to elections held the possibility of leaving the constitution-making process in the hands of an unelected and possibly untrustworthy transitional government composed of members from the former regime, while placing elections prior to constitutional reform may be tantamount to empowering a new set of actors over the preexisting machinery of authoritarianism.<sup>32</sup>

The temporal component of these questions matters as well. Placing elections too early favors political organizations that existed and operated prior to the fall of the regime over newly formed parties. Holding elections too late delays the implementation of necessary political and economic reforms that are essential to the continued function of the economy and state. The question which looms largely above all of the aforementioned is the duration of the transitional period as a whole. Though it may seem prudent to allow the requisite time period for successfully effecting the necessary institutional restructuring of the state, excessively long transitional periods nevertheless create the potential for entrenching transitional political actors, and thus, stifling the entire process.<sup>33</sup>

As demonstrated earlier in this paper, Tunisia effectively avoided the major potential pitfalls that go hand-in-hand with questions surrounding the sequencing of the transition to democracy. By choosing to place constitutional reform prior to elections, Tunisia's ruling class acknowledged the impossibility of holding free and fair elections under the preexisting corrupt electoral framework. Gradually incorporating the opposition into the interim unelected government, members of the former ruling party acquiesced to popular demands for democratic reform by suspending the 1959 constitution and clearing the way for handing over power to an elected body charged with drafting the constitution. As of April 2012, the CNA has been applying its efforts to both governing and constitution-making in what has been the most successful democratic transition of the Arab Spring thus far.

The CNA currently faces a new set of institutional issues that must be debated and resolved in the new constitution. These issues may be broadly placed into six categories: 1) founding principles 2) human rights 3) emergency powers 4) security sector reform 5) power sharing 6) separation and balance of powers. With the majority of these issues still unresolved, it remains to be determined how the CNA will address each in the new constitution and can only be known when the document is ready. Nevertheless, there exist important concerns surrounding each issue.

The founding principles of the state relate to the essence, character and identity thereof and have the potential to be hotly contested along ideological lines within a society if they are to reflect the values, interests and personality of the entire nation.<sup>34</sup> Tunisia has overcome this hurdle with the decision by Ennahda to retain the language of the 1959 constitution for Article 1. As far as human rights are concerned, the membership of many human rights activists in the CNA – the foremost of whom is President Moncef Marzouki – allows much room for hope in the body’s capacity to draft a document that not only extensively enumerates fundamental human rights, but also creates mechanisms for their implementation and enforcement. One means of guaranteeing the protection of human rights in Tunisia is to constitutionally maintain the supremacy of international law above domestic law. Given that the treaties and conventions to which Tunisia is a state party contain rigorous human rights provisions, constitutionally maintaining their superiority above domestic law ensures their enforceability in a court of law. In the constitution-making process, the issues of emergency powers and security sector reform are intertwined because preventing abuse of the former partly depends on the neutrality of the latter. Egypt provides a relevant example of the dual peril of the military’s politicization coupled with few, if any, controls over sweeping emergency powers. Placing strict limitations on both the circumstances under which the executive may declare a state of emergency and the powers conferred on the executive therein can ensure that the Tunisian state’s democratic mechanisms do not become abused and suppressed by a powerful executive. At the same time, the constitution must contain provisions that secure the integrity and neutrality of the security forces under the vertical command structure of a civilian-led government. While Tunisia does not have a history of having had its military apparatus co-opted and utilized for undemocratic purposes under a powerful executive, its police forces essentially became the enforcement arm of the state under the former regime. Even if one discards historical precedent, the controversy over Article 7 of the mini-constitution provides some ground for stressing caution regarding security sector reform in the constitution.<sup>35</sup>

The most crucial and divisive institutional issue in the process of constitution-making will undoubtedly come from debate surrounding

the questions of the separation, balance and sharing of powers in the government. The first component of this question entails deciding on whether Tunisia will follow a presidential or a parliamentary system. Ennahda supports the establishment of a parliamentary system for a number of reasons. As a persecuted and banned political organization under the regime of Ben Ali, Ennahda, along with many Tunisians, has a historical antipathy towards a system that favors centralization of power in the executive. Given the party's electoral performance and high level of popularity, a parliamentary system will likely make it a more influential force in policymaking than a presidential system. Most leftist secular parties, the foremost of which is CPR, support a presidential system while some centrist parties such as Afeq Tunis and the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) advocate for mixed system in which a popularly elected president shares power with a prime minister elected by the parliament.<sup>36</sup> As demonstrated in the heated debate between Ennahda, CPR and Ettakatol over the prerogatives granted to the offices of the prime minister and the president in the mini-constitution, similar debate over the balance and separation of powers in the permanent constitution are bound to be contentious, divisive and potentially prolonged.

Ultimately all political parties within the CNA can find common ground in their collective desire to prevent the executive from monopolizing power, albeit to varying degrees. There are a number of ways to ensure that the first post-transition elected president of Tunisia does not exercise political hegemony as Bourguiba and Ben Ali did in the past. First, the constitution must strengthen legislative oversight of the executive, in part by reinstating parliamentary control of the budget and improving legislative transparency.<sup>37</sup> The current function of the CNA attests to the progress already made in this respect; under the mini-constitution, the legislative body is tasked with reviewing and approving the budget, setting the precedent for the implementation of this practice in the permanent constitution as well. In addition, legislative transparency has improved significantly since the installation of television cameras in the legislative assembly at Bardo Palace as part of the newly created Wataniya TV, a channel that functions along the lines of C-SPAN in the United States.



A second measure ensuring against the executive's monopolization of power will likely be the establishment and maintenance of an independent judiciary. This system will promote mechanisms that shield judges from the pressure of the executive branch with respect to their appointment, discipline, assignment to cases and career paths.<sup>38</sup> An important component of an independent judiciary entails a means instituting judicial protection of the constitution itself from the executive power. Tunisia's first independent constitutional court will likely serve in this capacity. The function of such a court would extend to determining the constitutionality of laws and invalidating laws that are not in conformity with human rights standards affirmed in the constitution.

A third measure of preserving the separation of powers is to revise and strengthen the amendment procedure of the constitution so that the document does not revert to being an instrument of power redistribution in the hands of the executive. The process of amendment in the 1959 constitution required two-thirds majority approval by the Chamber of Deputies, which was under the control of the president.<sup>39</sup> While it is not clear how the CNA intends to improve the protection of the amendment procedure, it must look to examples in other constitutions to strike a balance between the formerly lax protocol and overprotection to the point of making amendment unfeasible.

A more nuanced debate can be anticipated in the CNA over the question of determining the power-sharing scheme that the constitution will adopt. The key question informing this debate is the extent to which the new constitution will decentralize power in government. The historical precedent of a highly centralized government operating under a vertical power-sharing arrangement favors those who advocate for decentralization under a horizontal scheme. Under the old constitution, the president maintained the power to appoint governors for Tunisia's 23 provinces while governorates were granted little autonomy. Governors could not levy their own taxes, and were subject to central planning rather than having the ability to initiate infrastructural development or improvement.<sup>40</sup> The result was the creation of a nepotistic and corrupt system that favored the allotment of government funds to Tunis and the urbanized coastline at the expense

of the interior. In doing so, the power-sharing scheme of the 1959 constitution deepened the socioeconomic divide along geographic lines that sparked and fueled the uprising which toppled the Ben Ali regime. Decades of developmental neglect for the interior will likely provide ground for the provision of a more decentralized power sharing system that empowers the outer regions of Tunisia.

## Legal Issues

Although the 1959 constitution has been suspended indefinitely since March 2012, Tunisia's repressive legal codes and decrees that existed under the Ben Ali regime remain in effect.<sup>41</sup> These laws were utilized by the regime to limit many freedoms while restricting political participation and stifling the activity of civil society. In a November 2011 report, Human Rights Watch identifies a series of laws which are incompatible with the enjoyment of rights affirmed in the international treaties Tunisia has ratified such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1969 and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1983.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the underlying premise of the report is to advocate the repeal or limitation of such laws while constitutionally mandating the supremacy of international law.

The HRW report identifies ten categories of freedoms and protections that suffer infringement as a result of the continued existence of certain Ben Ali-era laws. Among these are included the freedoms of expression, privacy, association, formation of political parties, assembly, movement and judicial independence. While an intensive examination of these laws is outside of the analytical scope of this paper, the continued existence of these vestiges of authoritarianism nevertheless carries the possibility of damaging the integrity of the new constitution by allowing for the existence of two conflicting sets of law regarding human rights and freedoms.

The legal codes and decrees which retain provisions that are not in alignment with the international treaties Tunisia has ratified include the Penal Code, Press Code, the 1997 Internet Decree, the Law on Associations, the Law on Passports, the Law on Magistrature, the 2003 Law on Terrorism, and other less prominent laws.<sup>43</sup> Collectively,

these laws qualify the exercising of the aforementioned freedoms and rights by enumerating vaguely worded conditions under which they may be restricted. An important example of such a restriction is the broad definition of what constitutes a terrorist in the 2003 Law on Terrorism. This law gives the government sweeping powers to detain suspects while limiting their ability to mount an adequate defense. The Penal and Press Codes contain numerous examples of freedoms of expression that have been criminalized. Speech that defames, insults or offends other persons, state institutions or religions is a criminal penalty, as is speech that incites hatred, religious extremism or is likely to harm public order or Tunisia's reputation. The 1997 Internet Decree allowed the government to censor, monitor and interfere with online expression by requiring all internet service providers (ISPs) to turn over data about their subscribers as a matter of course – not under particular circumstances or court order.<sup>44</sup>

The continued existence of such markedly authoritarian laws and provisions currently poses a threat to a swathe of freedoms that ought to be protected in a democratic Tunisia. Yet, the repeal of these laws seems to have evaded the attention and redress of both the interim government and the CNA while continuing to be obscured beneath the more pressing task of drafting a permanent constitution. If left unaltered, they hold the potential to undercut the progress made thus far in the democratic transition by undermining the integrity of the new constitution once it is completed.

### Civil Society and Public Participation Issues

A key component of the constitution-making process in any country is the extent to which it embodies and employs certain principles that encourage, if not mandate, the participation of both civil society and the public. Tunisia provides much fertile ground for the realization of this end. A formerly weak, controlled and ineffectual civil society has flourished since the toppling of the Ben Ali regime. The political involvement and awareness of the public has been remarkable; Tunisians are widely reputed to joke that their country has gone from having ten million football coaches to ten million political analysts.<sup>45</sup> Yet, despite the willingness of both civil society and the public to

engage in the constitution-making process, the CNA has made little effort to allow for the process to become participatory for the general public.

The merits of providing for an inclusive constitution-making process are numerous. Inclusivity allows for the full expression of the country's diversity of voices to influence the drafting of the constitution while creating the necessary transparency to build public confidence in the project. Given the amount of time and resources applied towards the drafting process, it would be politically advantageous for the CNA to allow for broad civic involvement therein to minimize the potential for opposition at referendum. Above all, such civic engagement encourages the development of a nationally owned process that the Tunisian people as a whole regard as legitimate.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the clear desire of the public and civil society to open the constitution-making process to some form of consultation, the CNA's receptiveness towards institutionalizing such participation has been notably absent. Thus far, the drafting of the constitution has been a largely closed process that many Tunisians perceive to be elite-driven and exclusive. The imperative of creating a participatory drafting process is not merely an ideal – rather, it is essential to realizing the chief aim of the revolution in democratically restructuring the state in a manner that the people view as legitimate. Ultimately, the CNA has failed to apprehend an important lesson: that it is public, and not political, consensus that guarantees a successful constitutional referendum. The lack of a constitution-making process in which public consultation has been institutionalized is undoubtedly the greatest misstep of the CNA during the course of the transitional period in Tunisia thus far.

## Conclusion

In many ways, the democratic revolution and transition in Tunisia have compelled academia and the global media to question, if not rewrite, what was previously held to be conventional wisdom regarding the MENA region's troubled history with democracy. It has long been asserted that only a cohesive and well-organized political opposition maintains the potential to overthrow an authoritarian system in an Arab



state.<sup>47</sup> The Tunisian revolution debunked this theory, as a leaderless and unstructured group lacking political agenda and composed of the masses of the people forced out a decades-old dictatorship. Another theory with wide currency in the Western world implicates the ascendancy of political Islam in a given state to the erosion of personal rights and the imposition of cultural values on a society-wide scale.<sup>48</sup> In Tunisia, not only has Ennahda participated as an important political actor in the country's transition to democracy – it has been at the political forefront in its electoral participation, its creation of a coalition government with secular parties, and its leadership in the constitution-making process. In addition, Ennahda can notably claim the distinction of an Islamist party that forbade the inclusion of shari'a as a source of legislation in the constitution.

Tunisia achieved a significant milestone in 1861 when it promulgated the first constitution of the Arab world.<sup>49</sup> Roughly a hundred and fifty years later, the nascent republic is distinguishing itself in the Arab world with its sustained political gains coupled with the ongoing project of a new constitution in the most successful revolution of the Arab Spring. As elaborated in this paper, the political actors in post-revolutionary and transitional Tunisia have exhibited a remarkable degree of astuteness and competence in their decision-making despite their lack of political experience. The interim government guaranteed the smooth transition towards handing over the machinery of the state to representative elements, culminating with the holding of free, fair and transparent elections in October 2011. Since its inauguration, the Constituent National Assembly has been successfully undertaking the task of drafting the permanent constitution as it simultaneously functions as a de facto parliament. The political parties which constitute the elected body have displayed their ability and understanding of compromise by forming a unity government, all the while evading the expected ideological confrontations in favor of addressing substantive institutional reforms.

As the Constituent National Assembly continues to work toward the completion of the constitution-making process, important institutional, legal and civic questions will have to be addressed. The new document must have the necessary rigor in the checks, balances,

protections and enforcement mechanisms it establishes regarding human rights, emergency powers, security forces, power-sharing and the balance and separation of powers in the government. At the same time, the framers of the constitution must take accountability for the faults which they have made in the transitional period thus far. Their failure to eliminate or revise existing authoritarian laws coupled with an apathetic attitude towards institutionalizing public consultation in the constitution-making process will pose serious threats to the new constitution's integrity and legitimacy, if not addressed. Nevertheless, if the political class continues to exercise the levels of prudence and restraint that have sustained and advanced the revolution thus far, it will likely be a matter of time before Tunisia is democratically operating under a new and robust constitution.

## Endnotes

1 Perkins, Kenneth, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 133

2 Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 130-184

3 Carnegie Publications, "Arab Political Systems: Tunisia," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/11/12/tunisia/699r>

4 Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 159

5 Carnegie Publications, "Arab Political Systems: Tunisia".

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Text of Article 56: "In case of temporary disability, the President may, by decree, delegate his powers to the Prime Minister, to the exclusion of the power of dissolving the Chamber of Deputies. During such temporary disability of the President of the Republic, the government shall remain in place until the end of that disability, even if it is subject to a motion of censure. The President of the Republic shall inform the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the President of the Chamber of Advisors regarding such temporary delegation of his powers."

11 Relevant portion of the text of Article 57: "Should the office of President of the Republic become vacant because of death, resignation, or absolute disability, the Constitutional Council meets immediately and certifies the definitive vacancy by an absolute majority of its members. It addresses a declaration to that effect to the President of the Chamber of Advisors and to the President of the Chamber of Deputies who shall immediately be vested with the functions of interim president of the republic for a period ranging from 45 to 60 days. If the definitive vacancy coincides with the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies, the President of the Chamber of Advisors is vested with the functions of interim president of the republic for the same period."

- 12 Tunisia: Time of Change. "Constitutional Debate." *Al Jazeera*. January 14, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/2011114204942484776.html>.
- 13 Timeline: Jasmine Revolution, *Britannica Academic Edition*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1753072/Jasmine-Revolution/299733/Time-line-Jasmine-Revolution>
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Churchill, Eric. "Putting Tunisian Democracy to the Test." *Foreign Policy*. October 17, 2011. [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/17/putting\\_tunisian\\_democracy\\_to\\_the\\_test](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/17/putting_tunisian_democracy_to_the_test)
- 16 Bradley, Allan. "Testing Tunisia's Commitment to Democracy." *Al Jazeera*. October 19, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/10/20111017114745619449.html>.
- 17 Hilal, Leila. "Next Challenges for Tunisia." *Foreign Policy*. November 10, 2011. [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting\\_tunisia\\_after\\_the\\_elections](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/10/rewriting_tunisia_after_the_elections).
- 18 Tunisia: Time of Change. "Final Tunisian Election Results Announced." *Al Jazeera*. November 14, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/11/20111114171420907168.html>
- 19 Tunisia: Time of Change. "Tunisian Parties Agree to Power Sharing Deal." *Al Jazeera*. November 22, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/11/20111121202513273979.html>
- 20 Ghali, Amine. "Tunisia's Constitutional Process: The Road Ahead." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. December 9, 2011. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2011/12/09/tunisia-s-constitutional-process-road-ahead/84zy>.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 "Tunisia Ex-PM Hits Out at Islamists." *AFP*. March 24, 2012. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gSof6xVaaqKr6EHBbrCLXQENcOIQ?docId=CNG.ca12d2002c78ae41294f6201a3645777.cd1>
- 24 Fahim, Kareem. "Tunisia Says Constitution Will Not Cite Islamic Law." *The New York Times*. March 24, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/world/africa/tunisia-says-constitution-will-not-cite-islamic-law.html>
- 25 "Islamists and Arab Constitutions: Put Faith in Writing." *The Economist*. March 31, 2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21551543>
- 26 Wolf, Anne; Lefevre, Raphael. "Tunisia: A Revolution at Risk." *The Guardian*. April 18, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/18/tunisia-revolution-at-risk>
- 27 "Hundreds of Tunisia's Mosques Held by Extremists." *AFP*. March 31, 2012. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5grdzU2VofZgF7vvAcBUVkgSkPQrA?docId=CNG.5ba00d350acdc99f903fb64f33d3cb13.a31>
- 28 Pickard, Duncan. "The Current Status of Constitution Making in Tunisia." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. April 19, 2012. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/19/current-status-of-constitution-making-in-tunisia>
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Gluck, Jason. "Constitutional Reform in Transitional States: Challenges and Opportunities Facing Egypt and Tunisia." *United States Institute of Peace*. 29 April, 2011. <http://www.usip.org/publications/constitutional-reform-in-transitional-states-challenges-and-opportunities-facing-egypt->
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Pickard, Duncan. "The Current Status of Constitution Making in Tunisia." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 "Letter to the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly Regarding the New Constitution." *Human Rights Watch*. March 19, 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/19/letter-tunisian-national-constituent-assembly-regarding-new-constitution>
- 39 Pickard, Duncan. "The Current Status of Constitution Making in Tunisia." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 "Tunisia's Repressive Laws: The Reform Agenda." *Human Rights Watch*. November, 2011. 1 <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/tunisia1111webwcover.pdf>
- 42 Ibid, 2

- 43 Ibid, 4-7
- 44 Ibid, 24-27
- 45 Mersch, Sarah. "Pressing Issues in Tunisia Raise Concerns." *The Daily Star, Lebanon*. November 15, 2012. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2012/Nov-15/195088-pressing-issues-in-tunisia-raise-concerns.ashx#axzz2DrpUj1OI>
- 46 Gluck, Jason. "Constitutional Reform in Transitional States: Challenges and Opportunities Facing Egypt and Tunisia." *United States Institute of Peace*.
- 47 Dunne, Michelle. "What Tunisia Proved—and Disproved—about Political Change in the Arab World." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. January 19, 2011. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/01/19/what-tunisia-proved-and-disproved-about-political-change-in-arab-world/8ho>.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Pickard, Duncan. "The Current Status of Constitution Making in Tunisia." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*



# Dissent and the Political Police: Past, Present, and Future

by Phil Hoffman  
International Relations and Arabic '14

## Introduction

In President Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali's Tunisia, the principles of human rights and democratic pluralism were perpetually enshrined by law but paid no heed in the daily conduct of the state. Regularly scheduled elections would invariably result in a nearly one party parliament and the reelection of the president of an ostensibly republican system with a portion of the total vote that rarely dipped below 98%. The handful of officially-sanctioned human rights groups were constantly denied the infrastructure to lodge any sort of complaint against this type of electioneering because of an implicit understanding that any effort among Tunisian citizens to assist them would result in incarceration. As Moncef Marzouki, the current Tunisian President and a veteran human-rights activist, lamented, Ben Ali spent his tenure "establishing laws in order to violate them and... promoting democracy in order to mask his totalitarian regime... Ben Ali's Tunisia... has become 'schizophrenic'".<sup>1</sup> The institutional embodiment of this "schizophrenia" is an important subject to analyze, especially considering Tunisia's current efforts at far-reaching institutional reform.

Ben Ali, a man who initially termed himself a reformist and vowed to correct the excesses of his predecessor, "President for Life" Habib Bourguiba. He was able to stifle public dissent to the extent that he did primarily because of his command, in a tenure that extends long past his assumption of the presidency in 1987, of the State Security Office, the official name of the governmental department that supervised the Tunisian secret police. Supposedly disbanded in the wake of the Tunisian Revolution and the departure of Ben Ali, the "political police", as it was called by many, was an institution as opaque as it was powerful; a thorough examination of its history is in many ways a necessary corollary to any comprehensive analysis of the recent Tunisian political landscape, as nearly all political events have been shaped by the specter of its influence.

Less than a year after Ben Ali's departure following an unprecedented series of mass demonstrations calling for his ouster, many of the political police's structures remain obfuscated, and information regarding the full extent of its reach--and the efforts that have supposedly been taken to disband it--remains protected. Few veterans of this unit have been publicly identified, much less prosecuted, and police officers have vocally resisted attempts to do so by new ministers. The Interior Ministry's archives, filled with the results of over 50 years of meticulous surveillance, remained sealed, and efforts to open sections of them have not gained significant institutional traction. In short, much about the political police remains unknown. By examining the precise nature of these informational gaps, however, one can get an illuminative outline of an understandably opaque institution and the challenges that will future reformers will undoubtedly face.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status of the Tunisian political police--in essence, inferring the shape of an institution from a combination of information that has been made available by the government and that which has been gleaned from those who have encountered it. This analysis is divided into three distinct sections. The first examines the institutional structure and operational methodology of the political police as it existed under Ben Ali, focusing on the experiences of those who encountered it in various capacities. The second section concerns the events of 2011, detailing the force's actions during the period immediately preceding Ben Ali's departure and the steps taken to disband the unit in the period after the revolution. Finally, the third section focuses on the future of Tunisian security sector reform. Paying special attention to recent controversies surrounding the political police's substantial surveillance archives and voices within Tunisia calling for a public reconciliation process, both the will for and obstacles to substantive police reform will be considered as the country moves forward.

## **Structure and Function: 1987-2010**

Until early 2011, the Ennahda party was a banned political group, both serving as a case example in Ben Ali's treatment of dissent and a dissident organization through which the power and methodology of the political police could be observed. With its name meaning "renaissance" in Arabic, Ennahda served as both the country's most popularly supported opposition movement<sup>2</sup> and the state's oft-invoked threat used to illustrate the dangers posed to the secular status quo. For nearly his entire time in the Tunisian public sphere, Ben Ali waged a pervasive campaign against Ennahda; his argument that

Ennahda posed a threat to state security enhanced by the group's violent actions<sup>3</sup>, Ben Ali attacked this particular group with a combination of repression and ideological cooptation that showcased the substantive state security apparatus at his disposal.

After Ben Ali assumed power in 1987, he took many immediate and high-profile steps to project the image of himself as a committed reformer. Full analysis of these public proclamations with his treatment of Ennahda shows the extent of his strategies in fully managing dissent.

“During his first year in power, Ben Ali seemed bent on establishing himself as the country's most dedicated reformer: He amnestied thousands of political prisoners, revamped Bourguiba's Parti Socialist Destourien (PSD) [Socialist Destourien Party] into the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique (RCD) [Constitutional Democratic Rally], abolished the state security court and the presidency for life, reformed laws governing pretrial detention and ratified the United Nations' convention on torture. Ben Ali also supported new legislation that made it easier to form associations and parties, and he negotiated a National Pact with the country's principal social and political organizations”<sup>4</sup>

While Ben Ali's promised reforms seemed expansive, it quickly became apparent that the substance of dissent would remain forbidden in Tunisia and that participation in the political process would be strictly relegated to membership in one of a small number of approved opposition parties that faced massive official regulatory hurdles and an accreditation process that excised all but the most benign messages of opposition. The case of Ennahda was no exception, and its treatment under the Ben Ali regime illustrates quite well the position of Ben Ali's own political police within Tunisian society and the way in which opposition groups in general reacted to it. Cast aside from the political mainstream by a Bourguiba regime that had undertaken a high-profile campaign of national secularization, the Mouvement du Tendance Islamique (MTI), as Ennahda was known at the time, formed from distinctly ideological roots but came to political prominence through social outreach and mobilization around problems that were fundamentally socioeconomic in nature. The organizational traction that the movement had lacked under its previous incarnation as the Société Pour la Preservation du Coran (Society for the Preservation of the Qur'an) was regained by devoting the majority of its focus to social welfare efforts, benefiting mainly those who had been

adversely affected by market-oriented state economic policies. During this time the MTI paid special attention to residents of the Tunisian interior and agricultural workers, demographics who were especially hurt by the Tunisian government's loosening of tariffs as a condition for continued support from the International Monetary Fund<sup>5</sup>. This type of outreach would eventually draw the ire of the Tunisian state for previously mentioned reasons and lead to a demonstration of the methods of Ben Ali's security forces in repressing it.

After Ben Ali opened up a mechanism for political participation, with the added caveat that parties could not reference any sectarian or religious themes<sup>6</sup>, the MTI renamed itself Ennahda to signify the "economic Renaissance" for which they were working and to acknowledge the vein of grassroots socioeconomic outreach that had already endeared them to a large portion of the Tunisian population. Nevertheless, their party was not officially recognized.

"Angered by their exclusion from parliament despite strong support for their candidates who ran as independents, [Ennahda] activists intensified protests at the university and in working class neighborhoods. The government, in turn, stepped up its repression against [Ennahda]... Late-night raids and house-to-house searches became commonplace in some neighborhoods. Stories of torture under interrogation and military court convictions multiplied. The campaign to crush [Ennahda] intensified in 1991 following an attack on an RCD office in the Bab Souika area of Tunis and after the government claimed that security forces had uncovered a plot to topple the regime. Susan Waltz reports that the government's extensive dragnet hauled in more than 8,000 individuals between 1990 and 1992"<sup>7</sup>.

The extent to which Ben Ali went to repress Ennahda is useful to consider in light of recent events and moving forward into the future of Tunisian political expression; more specifically, the structure of the force used in his repression of Ennahda and other groups must be understood in order to gain a clear picture of the efforts undertaken to disband it after his departure.

Though there is a dearth of public information on the political police's structure, interviews with members of the small officially sanctioned human rights community under Ben Ali describe an organization whose workings were, in many ways, much better known. To those who dealt with the political



police on a regular basis, its inner workings became much clearer than the disparate public narratives could aspire to.

The political police as it existed under Ben Ali was neither a single cohesive unit nor a loosely structured network of informants. Throughout the Ben Ali administration a core unit of roughly 200 officers served within a police force estimated to be over 120,000<sup>8</sup>. Tasked with the broad mandate of monitoring public discourse, this unit had two main focuses: sifting out “subversive” words and practices from members of the general public and closely monitoring the select group of officially recognized civil society “associations” (namely human rights groups and labor unions) to ensure that their workings stayed in a very specific window of acceptable speech. Though these two lines of work had a significant amount of overlap, political police members in each of those specialties had a distinct mission whose very divisions revealed much about the methodology of dissent suppression that existed in Ben Ali’s Tunisia.

For the general public, contact with members of the political police per se was limited, but awareness of the unit’s activities extended beyond the relatively few people who had direct contact with it. Under Ben Ali, police patrols were ubiquitous and not relegated to a reactive societal role. Officers routinely asserted a presence in residential neighborhoods and community buildings, with mosques in particular given special attention; attending prayers immediately made one an object of suspicion and attendees were oftentimes subject to extensive personal searches.<sup>9</sup> Recruited from the ranks of the vocally secular neo-Dustur movement<sup>10</sup>, many patrol officers carried an antipathy for the outwardly religious and were seen by the regime as especially suited to stifle the rise of groups like Ennahda. More broadly, however, regular police officers were trained to report any activity, whether overheard speech or suspicious patterns of movement, that they viewed as unordinary. After passing through a filter of sorts by traveling up the police chain of command, the words and actions of ordinary citizens were evaluated by members of the smaller political police unit<sup>11</sup>. Often, the action in question would be recorded, filed away, and for all intents and purposes forgotten by the state. Sometimes, however, the police would take what it saw as preemptive action against a threat to its own security. Buoyed by their former commander’s status as prime minister, members of Ben Ali’s police enjoyed a near-complete freedom of action, raiding mosques with near impunity and subjecting detainees to types of torture, the details of which are still largely sealed. Indeed, the full extent to which the general Tunisian populace was under surveillance remains unknown, an issue to be covered later in this analysis.

For those in the small niche of officially sanctioned rights associations, the activities of the political police were less of an abstract threat, embodied only by a wary look cast by a passing patrol officer, and more of a begrudgingly accepted obstacle in their profession. The political police's frequent interference in the workings of rights groups created a routine of sorts between activists and members of the political police to the point where rights lawyers grew to begrudgingly admit the seemingly patriotic motives of those tasked with censoring their line of work.<sup>12</sup> Members of these groups described living in a precarious balance; though Ben Ali saw a need to keep aspects of the NGO community around to placate international sources of funding, the groups in question were prohibited from operating in any meaningful way. Open communication with members of the broader human rights community was almost impossible (save the occasional discreet message about an especially egregious imprisonment smuggled through an Amnesty International worker<sup>13</sup>) and any attempt to publicly organize would be impeded by a police force empowered to threaten cooperating businesses with the loss of their licenses.

With the advent of the Internet, the Tunisian surveillance apparatus grew more powerful with the aid of censoring technology.

“Opponents of the regime ... received threatening messages such as ‘you can run but you can’t hide,’ while people with no role in politics found their correspondence snagged if it inadvertently included words flagged as critical of the government. Ammar 404 [a name given by Tunisian activists to the monitoring program used by Ben Ali’s regime] even damaged reputations by inserting pornographic images in work emails and routing intimate photos onto Facebook”<sup>14</sup>.

It is useful to observe this type of repression and general state action through the a “dichotomy of repression”, focusing on the distinction between ideological and socioeconomic sources of antipathy towards the state and societal conflict in general. As Bourguiba did before him, Ben Ali’s programs of repression focused heavily on the latter category, intentionally spreading misinformation among a very specific demographic (in this case the young, urban-dwelling, and educated) in the hopes of containing and generally reducing a potential source of ideologically-motivated opposition to his remaining in power. Ironically enough, this focus would ignore the sources of discontent whose realization would begin the process of Ben Ali’s exit from power. Although the Tunisian police unit tasked with this kind of opposition

dispersion was ostensibly disbanded immediately following the departure of Ben Ali in early 2011,<sup>15</sup> the full extent of these reforms remains unknown. Through this two-pronged effort of broadly monitoring currents of speech for hints of dissent and marshalling token oppositional groups to the point at which they were effectively rendered useless, the political police managed to enforce the notion of a one-party state to the point at which Tunisia was considered among the most stable autocracies in the Arab world.<sup>16</sup>

## **Revolution and Reform: 2010-Present**

The events that transpired after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 illustrate both the unexpected reach of officially sanctioned civic organizations and the lengths to which actors within the political police went to preserve the status of that institution. Ultimately, the drive for democratic renewal unleashed by this chain of events would include a push for security sector reform that has had limited results to date.

Though it is often overlooked in the gradually forming narrative of the recent Tunisian revolution, Bouazizi was not the first Tunisian to set himself on fire over disillusionment with the society around him. Following the previously established dichotomy of dissent as it had existed since the Bourguiba presidency, several young urban-dwelling Tunisians had set themselves on fire before Bouazizi to protest political repression and censorship,<sup>17</sup> but their efforts gained little traction outside the small circle of liberal activists under significant government surveillance. In Bouazizi's case, it took several days of mass agitation by the Union Generale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), aided by Bouazizi's status as the member of a prominent family in Sidi Bouzid, for the primarily economic discontent shown by his self-immolation to spread to the capital and take on a more distinctly political tone. Once the current of dissent crossed the threshold that existed between agitation for the redress of economic concerns and political ones, units of the political police acted out of fear for both the institution that employed them and, they believed, a country under serious threat.

As demonstrations escalated in Tunis in late 2010 and early 2011, Ben Ali's political police launched a significant repressive effort, drawing on units across the 125,000 person strong force in an attempt to stifle what would become the start of the Arab Spring. Though many details during this period remain unknown, testimony from the activist community paints a picture of the political police carrying its usual method of operations onto a national scale; using units that ranged from censorship experts blocking

access to online discussion forums to paramilitary teams of snipers that would eventually kill roughly 150 peaceful protestors, the political police mounted an ultimately unsuccessful effort to preserve the Ben Ali regime that had given them such operational latitude.<sup>18</sup> In the drive for police accountability after Ben Ali's departure, the fates of the officers involved would play a role in the broader effort to enact major police reforms.

After Ben Ali's departure, the fate of the Interior Ministry weighed heavily on the minds of many politicians. The appointment Ali Laarayedh, a member of Ennahda who had been tortured by the political police, to head the Interior Ministry, sent a clear message to the public that security sector reform would play an important role in the Tunisian political sphere moving forward. The top-down political pressure that this appointment placed on the ministry, however, was insufficient to overcome the intense institutional resistance that the police force as a whole, accustomed to highly privileged treatment under Ben Ali, offered in return. After Laarayedh, in one instance, dismissed the commander of the Police d'Intervention (the unit responsible for sniper activity during the demonstrations) members of the unit staged a series of public protests that eventually led to the decision's reversal. In the case of the Tunisian police force, the protected status that many Tunisian workers had due to their powerful representative unions was greatly increased by the institution's elevated reputation under Ben Ali, making subsequent restructuring efforts extremely difficult. Though the political police was officially disbanded less than two months after Ben Ali's departure<sup>19</sup>, the vast majority of its former members still remain members of the police force.<sup>20</sup> Shuffled to other units by a ministry that was less than forthcoming about the details of this restructuring, these officers serve as a testament to the significant difficulties that well-intentioned politicians have encountered while attempting to account for such a powerful and far-reaching institution.

## **Moving Forward: Reform and Reconciliation**

**F**or a country of less than 11 million people, possible tensions the continued existence of a 125,000 person police force, a unit that has acted with relative impunity over nearly the country's entire history, could bring on are not especially difficult to imagine. With regard to the political police in particular, two prominent issues serve to illustrate the substantial obstacles faced by those in government, media, and civil society alike as the country moves past the Ben Ali era. The surveillance archives of the Interior Ministry, their contents largely unknown to the public except for a few high profile leaks, and the future of media censorship both merit further analysis

as important indicators of the state of a possible reconciliation surrounding the political police.

A nearly complete accounting of the political police's actions during the Ben Ali regime, necessary for the start of a meaningful reconciliation process, remains currently sealed in the headquarters of the Interior Ministry, its release to the public precluded by the numerous pieces of incriminating evidence it undoubtedly contains. Reasons for this wariness among the new political class, Ennahda members in particular, are not hard to find. Recently, a video emerged of newly-appointed Interior Minister Laarayedh having sex with another man<sup>21</sup>; filmed during his incarceration, it served as a warning of the public humiliation, not to mention possible prosecution, that could befall public figures upon the expanded release of even a portion of the Interior Ministry's records. Because of the still unknown scope of the political police's surveillance efforts, politicians have largely chosen to err on the side of caution, tempering the public calls for openness with their own fears about the potential fallout of such drastic revelations. Accordingly, the prospects for a public and comprehensive "truth and reconciliation" commission thoroughly examining the political police's actions in the near future look increasingly slim.

In addition to the future challenges that will inevitably arise as public pressure mounts for the accounting of past misdeeds by the Ben Ali regime, a new type of censorship may very well take hold in Tunisia. Ennahda has already, at least tacitly, admitted that it does not see actions taken against depictions of immorality as censorship and the Ennahda-controlled Interior Ministry has recently put this doctrine into place in several high profile instances. A semi-nude photograph of a popular soccer player, for example, was recently deemed forbidden for publication in the Tunisian press; the several newspapers that defied this ban are currently fighting the subsequently imposed legal penalties in court.<sup>22</sup> Cases like this serve to illustrate an important point, that the machinery of an institution that was historically used for its own preservation can easily be converted into the instrument that imposes a very particular form of morality.

This last point must be reiterated. As a group that faced the worst aspects of Ben Ali's system of repression, Ennahda is understandably wary of preserving the institutions through which that repression was most strongly felt. This apprehension, however, only applies to the very specific paradigm through which key Ennahda members saw the stifling of their group under Ben Ali. In the minds of many of its leaders, there exists an important distinction between the censorship of political discourse and the



regulation of public morality; one Ennahda leader remarked that a decision of a democratically elected legislature to ban depictions of certain behaviors in public media could not even be defined as censorship.<sup>23</sup> Though opinions like this have been largely kept from secular audiences, Ennahda's plurality in recent elections points to an arguable traction that they have among many Tunisians. Tunisian secularists feel largely apprehensive with these new trends, arguing that the so-called "moral regulation" of public discourse could easily serve as a stepping-stone to greater censorship.<sup>24</sup> Keeping this in mind, one must realize that institutional reforms within the political police are not the only important factor in the broader state of freedom of speech as the country moves past the Ben Ali era.

Another recent development following the departure of Ben Ali, though occurring in an ambiguous political and societal landscape, shows an increase in state surveillance efforts, especially among new forms of media. The Tunisian Interior Ministry has recently announced the creation of two new law enforcement divisions (their names roughly translate to the "Investigation Group of New Crimes" and the "Economic Police") with the long-term intention to sue print and Internet publications over certain types of "inflammatory" political writing and to impose economic restrictions on the operations of many of these publications.<sup>25</sup> These new bureaus could be seen as analogous to many powers given to the United States' Department of the Treasury under recent antiterrorism laws, but because they were created relatively recently the full acceptable scope of their actions remains unknown. Accordingly, the long-term ramifications of the decision to create them, and even more broadly, the exact figures and internal motivations behind that decision, remain relatively unknown as well.

## Conclusion

Moving into the country's first year without the rule of Ben Ali, the role of Tunisia's strong precedents in repression of dissent remains relatively uncertain. A bevy of rights-oriented reforms have been promised and a newly open climate of political dialogue has brought a deluge, for lack of a better word, of new citizen-based ideas for future civic reform. In stark contrast to the political landscape around the time of Tunisia's independence, no dynamic figure stands to unquestionably assume power, as Bourguiba did in 1956, and consolidate it in a manner that would necessarily involve the curtailment of rights that has in the past. Simply put, the future Tunisian political climate, the role of political dissent, and the Tunisian state's involvement in the entire process remain unknown. Several policy reforms within the Tunisian security

sector, however, have the possibility of mitigating this situation by starting the process of accountability in the Tunisian government's most opaque ministry.

Though Interior Minister Laarayedh, having suffered immensely under the agency he now leads, has an undeniable personal motivation to pursue reforms within the Interior Ministry, his status creates a fair amount of obstacles to substantive reform as well. Laarayedh's lack of experience with the powerful police unions and relative ignorance of the Interior Ministry's intricate internal structures puts him at a disadvantage when advocating for accountability efforts within an understandably wary body. While there are obvious political reasons for his appointment, and the alternative of an official with experience in the Ben Ali era would most likely have been publicly unpalatable, supplementing a figure like Laarayedh with a deputy armed with the knowledge of the inner workings of the Interior Ministry would be a constructive step towards implementing a sustainable and effective series of reforms.

While placing an administrator with more knowledge of the Interior Ministry's functions to head that body would help supplement the political pressure already in place and lead to the implementations of sustainable internal reforms, public trials of those in the senior echelons of the ministry would likely engender public trust and begin the extensive process of building a relationship between the Tunisian security services and general populace. Though the long range of the police's activities would make this problematic, confining prosecutions to those directly responsible for violence during the revolution would promote an image of public accountability while preventing large-scale fracturing within the ministry, which in turn would reduce the possibility of immediate reform. While an extensive accountability process will stretch far into the future, a starting round of trials will begin the process and hopefully bring a small amount of public trust to a ministry that has been sorely lacking in it.

As the Tunisian political class moves to address a bevy of economic and social concerns, security sector reform may very well languish with these other priorities, preventing a long-term public reconciliation process and perpetuating the opaque tradition of the political police in particular and the Interior Ministry as a whole. Though obstacles to these small reform steps undoubtedly exist in an entrenched and complicated institution, the process of true societal reconciliation in Tunisia cannot begin in earnest until these challenges are addressed.

## Endnotes

- 1 Perkins, Kenneth. *A History of Modern Tunisia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.
- 2 Hammer, Joshua. "In a Worried Corner of Tunis." *New York Review of Books* 27 October 2011. Print.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Sadiki, Larbi. "Bin 'Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29.1 (2002): pp. 57-78. Print.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Alexander, Christopher. "Back from the Democratic Brink: Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia." *Middle East Report*. 205, Middle East Studies Networks: The Politics of a Field (1997): pp. 34-38. Print.
- 8 Ben Cherni, Mondher. *Interview with Mondher Ben Cherni*. 12 January 2012
- 9 Chihhi, Mehdi. *Interview with Mehdi Chihhi*. 11 January 2012
- 10 Mayouf, Marwan. *Interview with Marwan Mayouf*. 11 January 2012
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Silver, Vernon. "Post-Revolt Tunisia Can Alter Email with "Big Brother" Software." *Bloomberg News*. 12 December 2011. Web. <<http://www.bloomberg.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/news/2011-12-12/tunisia-after-revolt-can-alter-e-mails-with-big-brother-software.html>>.
- 15 "Tunisia interim leaders dissolve secret police agency." *BBC News*. 7 March 2011. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12669461>>
- 16 Hamid, Shadi. "Looking Back: Syria and the Arab Spring". 20 March 2012, New York. Council on Foreign Relations, Print.
- 17 Lawrence, Bill. *Talking about a Revolution: The Uprising in North Africa One Year Later*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. 2012. Print.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 "Tunisia interim leaders dissolve secret police agency." *BBC News*. 7 March 2011. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12669461>>.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Baeder, Charles. "Release of Unauthenticated Prison-Sex Video Denounced in Defense of Tunisian Interior Minister." *Tunisia Live* Web. 19 January 2012.
- 22 Shirayangi, Kouichi. "Newsmen Arrested in Tunis After Publication of Racy Sami Khedira Photo." *Tunisia Live* Print. 15 February 2012 .
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Medien, Ahmed. *Interview with Ahmed Medien*. 08 January 2012.
- 25 Lachheb, Ahmed. "Ministry of Interior to Sue E-Newspapers and Magazines." *Tunisia Live*. 12 July 2011. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/07/12/ministry-of-interior-to-sue-e-newspapers-and-magazines/>>.

## Works Cited

- Alexander, Christopher. "Back from the Democratic Brink: Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia." *Middle East Report*. 205, Middle East Studies Networks: The Politics of a Field (1997): pp. 34-38. Print.
- Baeder, Charles. "Release of Unauthenticated Prison-Sex Video Denounced in Defense of Tunisian Interior Minister." *Tunisia Live* Print. 19 January 2012 .
- Ben Cherni, Mondher. *Interview with Mondher Ben Cherni*. 12 January 2012.
- Ben Saleh, Hatah. *Interview with Hatah Ben Saleh, Former Tunisian Minister of Education and Human Rights*. 12 January 2012.
- Chihhi, Mehdi. *Interview with Mehdi Chihhi*. 11 January 2012.
- Durac, Vincent, and Francesco Cavatora. "Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion? Examining the Paradox of the US and EU Security Strategies: The Case of Bin 'Ali's Tunisia." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2009) Web.

- Goldstein, Eric. "Dismantling the Machinery of Oppression." *Wall Street Journal* 17 February 2011. Web. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704409004576145671631374778.html>>.
- Hamid, Shadi. "Looking Back: Syria and the Arab Spring". 20 March 2012, New York. Council on Foreign Relations , Print.
- Hammer, Joshua. "In a Worried Corner of Tunis." *New York Review of Books* 27 October 2011. Print.
- Lachheb, Ahmed. "Ministry of Interior to Sue E-Newspapers and Magazines." *Tunisia Live*. 12 July 2011. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/07/12/ministry-of-interior-to-sue-e-newspapers-and-magazines/>>.
- Lawrence, Bill. *Talking about a Revolution: The Uprising in North Africa One Year Later*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. 2012. Print.
- Mayouf, Marwan. *Interview with Marwan Mayouf*. 11 January 2012
- Medien, Ahmed. *Interview with Ahmed Medien*, 2012. 08 January 2012
- Perkins, Kenneth. *A History of Modern Tunisia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.
- Sadiki, Larbi. "Bin 'Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29.1 (2002): pp. 57-78. Print.
- Shirayangi, Kouichi. "Newsmen Arrested in Tunis After Publication of Racy Sami Khedira Photo." *Tunisia Live*. Print. 15 February 2012 .
- Silver, Vernon. "Post-Revlot Tunisia Can Alter Email with "Big Brother" Software." *Bloomberg News*. 12 December 2011. Web. <<http://www.bloomberg.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/news/2011-12-12/tunisia-after-revolt-can-alter-e-mails-with-big-brother-software.html>>.
- "Tunisia interim leaders dissolve secret police agency." *BBC News*. 7 March 2011. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12669461>>.
- "The Tunisian Constitution." *Middle East Journal* 13.4 (1959): pp. 443-448. Print.

# Post-Revolution Relations Between the Police and Public in Tunisia: Moving Beyond Brutality Towards Trust & Reform

by Sari El-Abboud

International Relations and Italian '13

## Introduction

The police have long been antagonized in Tunisia, as in many countries that have been led by dictatorships resembling the autocratic state that former president, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali was in charge of until the revolution of 2010-2011. The Tunisian Revolution, which was sparked by government corruption, inflation, unemployment, and the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, reaffirmed the public's generally negative view of the police force.

Police brutality was not uncommon during the period of unrest lasting from December 18, 2010, until January 14, 2011, during which the Revolution took place. Whereas the army initially stayed out of the matter and later supported the demonstrators, the police were clearly on the regime's side. However, since the military refused to fire on the demonstrators, Ben Ali was left with no means to forcibly quash the demonstrations, and he subsequently fled to Saudi Arabia. Numerous reports circulated of violence between the police or the National Guard and the Tunisian Army in the immediate aftermath of his departure. In some areas the police fled, and the army was deployed "to maintain order on the streets, assuming the internal security tasks of securing the population, manning checkpoints, and protecting strategic sites and public buildings."

Though the government said that only 78 people had died during the protests throughout this period, the actual figure was discov-



ered to be much higher. In fact, a United Nations team led by Bacre Waly Ndiaye found the figure to be at least 219<sup>1</sup>. The team, which was investigating human rights abuses by the Ben Ali regime, also said this figure included 72 people who died during prison riots.

In one of the deadliest waves of violence during the Revolution, 14 civilians were killed in clashes with the Tunisian police over the course of one weekend. Protesters maintained that their demonstrations revolved around their anger about a lack of jobs, but officials said the rioting was actually the work of a minority of violent extremists intent on damaging Tunisia. A regime-friendly news agency said the people who were killed during the protests had been armed with gasoline bombs, sticks and stones and were attacking public property. According to the agency, several officers were also wounded, some of them seriously.<sup>2</sup>

An opposition leader, Nejib Chebbi, said President Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali should order the police to stop using firearms “to spare the lives of innocent citizens and to respect their right to protest peacefully.”<sup>3</sup>

While officials said the police had fired only in self-defense when violent crowds attacked and ignored warning shots, activists allege that police resorted to using live ammunition on unarmed protesters far too readily. The government, on the other hand, said in a statement that the police were “doing nothing more than carrying out their legal and legitimate mission to maintain order and guarantee the safety and liberty of citizens.” The reputation of the police was further tainted during the Revolution by the use of harsh tactics against demonstrators. Throughout the protests, there were rumors of snipers deployed by the government to ruthlessly quell the dissent. However, many government officials dismissed these allegations as mere rumors, until Marwen Bougara, representative of the Military Court in the Ministry of Defense, announced that dozens of snipers were being investigated.<sup>4</sup> Bougara claimed that forty police agents were involved in killing Tunisian citizens during the revolution in January and he confirmed rumors that snipers operated at protests. Hence, just as the public had assumed before, there were, in fact, masked snipers stationed on the rooftops in

order to shoot at protesters. Additionally, snipers were allegedly told to target protestors in the head, the neck and the chest.

Furthermore, the police force under Ben Ali appears to have had close ties with the immensely oppressive regime of Moammar Gaddafi. While standing trial for the deaths of protestors during the Tunisian revolution, former Chief of Presidential Security Forces, Ali Seriarte, revealed that Moammar Gaddafi provided President Zine Ben Ali's police forces with loaded tear gas canisters.<sup>5</sup> Such canisters likely contributed to the injuries and deaths of demonstrators across Tunisia during the revolution in the governorates of Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous, Manouba, Zaghouan, Nabel and Sousse.

Seriarte denied responsibility for the deaths of demonstrators and claimed to have never ordered the firing of live bullets. He went on to deny ever having participated in the repression of Tunisian citizens in any way. He claims that presidential security officers were not involved in killing demonstrators and said that he accompanied deposed President Ben Ali during his last trip to Dubai while three people were killed during protests in Sidi Bouzid.

Nevertheless, many other security forces were implicated in brutally suppressing the protests of their fellow countrymen. For this reason, a December 2011 poll focusing on Tunisia's socio-economic problems found that 71.9% of the Tunisian public thought the police was "the most corrupt sector of Tunisian society."<sup>6</sup> Hence, as expected, the police force is still frequently antagonized and scapegoated by the public. To better understand why this is, I will present a detailed background of the Tunisian police force and I will also discuss the police's image and behavior before and after the Revolution. In this manner, I intend to discuss the past, present and future relationship between the police and the public in Tunisia.

## **Background on the Tunisian Police**

**T**he reasons for the general public's distrust of the police may be rooted in the setup of the police force within Tunisian society. In Tunisia, as in other Arab countries, the Interior Ministry has long been

the “Ministry of Fear”, an instrument used by unpopular rulers to keep a restless population in its place. According to reports from Tunisian civilians, it is also where friends or relatives would disappear for hours or days and emerge shaken, a little different, and unable or unwilling to talk about what happened. The Interior Ministry was the home base of the plainclothes officers who stormed political meetings and the riot police who stood against protesters.

The police force is among the several internal security forces controlled by the Minister of Interior such as the National Guard, the Judicial Police (which operates in the Ministry of Justice and the courts but is controlled by the Ministry of Interior), the Intervention Forces (SWAT forces), and the Presidential Guard Forces (PGF). In terms of general policing duties, the police share responsibility with the paramilitary National Guard; the police operate in the capital and a few other cities, while in outlying areas, their duties were ceded to the National Guard.

The police regularly used violence on government opponents and other offenders. Arbitrary arrests, especially of dissenters, were common and members of the security forces were also widely known to have tortured and physically abused prisoners and detainees. These atrocious acts occurred under the Ben Ali regime despite the fact that Article 101 of the Tunisian Penal Code imposed a term of eight years in prison for acts that rise to the level of torture. Furthermore, Tunisia’s penal code states in article 101 a five-year prison term for any public agent who, while on duty, “uses or causes to be used, without legitimate purpose, violence against persons.” In addition to these serious violations of both Tunisian and international law, international observers were not allowed to inspect prisons, and lengthy pretrial detention and a lack of communication during detention remained problems.<sup>7</sup>

Although Tunisia’s judiciary was empowered to investigate such assaults and bring charges when warranted, security forces still routinely used various methods of torture to coerce confessions from detainees and to punish political prisoners. The forms of torture implemented included electric shock; confinement to tiny, unlit cells; submersion of the head in water; beatings with hands, sticks, and police

batons; suspension from cell doors resulting in lost consciousness; cigarette burns, and food and sleep deprivation. Police also reportedly beat naked, manacled prisoners while they were suspended from a rod. Some credible reports indicated the use of sexual assault and threats of sexual assault by police and prison officials against the wives of Islamist prisoners to extract information or to intimidate or punish prisoners.

It is important to note that Ben Ali's regime repeatedly denied arbitrarily detaining dissidents, especially those of a political nature. In order to justify their actions, the police relied on a variety of broad or vague provisions in the Penal Code, including against "spreading false information aimed at undermining the public order," and "belonging to an illegal organization," to arrest and charge political opponents, human rights activists, and Islamists, among others.

The most noticeable challenge to the security apparatus's seemingly absolute power took place in June of 2002. Ali Mansouri, a prisoner who alleged he was severely beaten by prison guards, received the final payment in compensation for amputation of both legs as a result of mistreatment received in prison. In the first case of its kind, Mansouri filed criminal charges against the mistreatment by prison guards in 2000. In 2001 the court found four guards guilty of torture and sentenced them each to 4 years in prison. The court also ordered the Government to pay \$210,000 (315,000 dinars) in compensation to Mansouri. Later, on January 25, the Criminal Court of Appeal reviewed the Mansouri decision. The Court upheld the convictions of three of the guards, sentencing two of them to four years imprisonment and reducing the sentence of a third guard to two years. However, the Court went on to overturn the conviction of the fourth guard. Nonetheless, the Mansouri case was an unprecedented example of a Tunisian citizen challenging the police and its preposterously tight grip on Tunisian society.

Seeing as the Government of Ben Ali did not tolerate any dissent, security forces physically abused, intimidated, and harassed citizens who voiced public criticism of the Government. The Government continued to impose significant restrictions on freedom of speech and of the press. Editors and journalists practiced self-censorship, as the

Government remained intolerant of public criticism, using physical abuse, criminal investigations, the court system, arbitrary arrests, and travel controls (including denial of passports), to discourage criticism and limit the activities of human rights activists. As if these limitations were not enough, the Government enlisted the help of the security forces in restricting the Tunisian public from freedom of assembly and association.

The Ministry of Interior building, a gray Soviet-style compound of glass, steel and concrete, served as a symbol of the harsh brutality imposed upon the Tunisian people - as well as the police officers themselves. New recruits traditionally came from extremely secular families and many were dropouts from school. Ideology played a significant part in recruitment, as Islamism was greatly frowned upon. Recruits were asked if they prayed in interviews, and an officer risked promotions if he became religious.<sup>8</sup>

Police recruits often went through a year of training that is described as abusive and humiliating. Many officers, even those who had been working for over a decade, received salaries of equal to or less than the equivalent of \$67 a week.<sup>9</sup> Much of the training was meant to dehumanize and humiliate recruits, and commanders constantly verbally abused them.

In addition to brutal training routines, the security apparatus infiltrated every aspect of an officer's life. For example, permission from one's superiors was required before an officer could marry. This was especially true if the woman observed Islamic dress code. Even visiting different cities proved difficult, as police officers were constantly under surveillance. Officers were also barred from voting or obtaining a passport to travel abroad thus leaving them helplessly hinged to the security apparatus.

Much of the violence that occurred at the hands of the police before the Tunisian Revolution took place at soccer matches. Occasionally melees erupted, and officers were known to crack heads with impunity. Officers were forced to endure the contempt of fans as well as harsh treatment from commanders, who did not tolerate any bit of



insubordination. The common motto was: “You follow orders. You keep your mouth shut.”<sup>10</sup>

## Post-Revolution Police Brutality

Even after the President’s was ousted, the relationship between the Tunisian public and its respective police force remained tense. One might think that the police would have been far more lenient in light of Ben Ali’s departure; however, the security forces proved as tough and fierce as ever after January 14.

As protests continued in Tunisia after the interim government of Mohamed Ghannouchi took charge, the police cracked down harshly. Protests had erupted following the declarations of former Interior Minister Farhat Rajhi published on Facebook, in which he claimed that there would be a military coup by loyalists of the ousted President Ben Ali, if the Islamist Party Ennahda were to win the elections on July 24. Rajhi also claimed that the country’s politics were being run by a shadow government, headed by a friend of Ben Ali, Kamel Ltaief.

As a result, pro-democracy protesters gathered on Habib Bourguiba Avenue calling for the overthrow of the government. According to Express FM, security forces used batons and tear gas to disperse peaceful protestors. Demonstrators responded to the brutality by yelling slogans such as “Get Out”, and “the people want a new revolution”. The situation was eventually defused after Rajhi called for calm: “I have called for calm on Tunisian radios. My statements were purely hypothetical and not directed at anybody and I am not responsible for interpretations.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the episode was yet another example of police brutality- this time after the fall of Ben Ali. Furthermore, police beat photographers and confiscated cameras from some as they covered the protest. Hence, the police force was still excessively brutal with regards to its tactics in dealing with protesters, bloggers and journalists.

The former group mentioned above, bloggers, have been targeted on several notable occasions by the Tunisian police. Tunisian blogger, Bassem Bougeurra, was kidnapped, beaten, and abandoned by the police. Also, according to numerous Twitter reports, Azyz Amami,

a Tunisian activist and blogger, was arrested and beaten by police after telling a joke about bananas in front of a police station. The joke stemmed from a statement in a recent speech by Interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi that compared violent policemen to monkeys. Amami, known for his particularly sarcastic sense of humor, combined the subjects of monkeys and bananas to poke fun at the police. He was severely beaten in a police station on Yugoslavia Street as a result.

Further anger oriented towards the police is a result of more deliberate killings at the hands of the security forces. The official Tunisian news agency reported in February 2011 that a police chief in the northwestern town of El Klef fired at a crowd of angry people, killing at least four people and injuring 17 others. The regional prefect, Mohamed Najib Tlijali, called for calm on a local radio Saturday night, and said the police official was hospitalized and under arrest. A local journalist who witnessed the events said the violence erupted after the police chief slapped a woman, angering the crowd, which began throwing stones. This, however, does not justify the disproportionate reaction of the police chief, who only perpetuated the legacy of Ben Ali's police force.

Tension mounted in the summer of 2011 as elections neared and as Islamists protested against a ban on women who wear the niqab, or full-face veil, enrolling in university, and the decision by a Tunisian television station to broadcast an animated film called *Persepolis*, which they said denigrated Islam. The privately owned Nessma television station provoked an angry reaction in October 2011 when it broadcasted a dubbed version of Iranian director Marjane Satrapi's award-winning adaptation of her graphic novels about growing up during Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Nessma TV's owner, Nabil Karoui, drew heavy fire for airing the animated film, and his house was even attacked. Critics accused Karoui of trying to inflame a tense pre-election environment in Tunisia and several suits were filed against him. Karoui was also accused of "attacks against sacred values and morals and disturbing the public order."<sup>12</sup>

Several hundred protesters were angered by Karoui's decision to air the film, and they proceeded to gather outside the main university campus in Tunis. From there, they went to the working-class neighborhood of Jebel El-Ahmar, north of the city center, where clashes with police broke out. About 100 police vehicles, and several hundred police officers wearing anti-riot gear were deployed. Young protesters blocked a main road and threw stones at vehicles trying to get through.

Tunisian police, who fired teargas at protesters in retaliation, later arrested about 30 people at a rally by Salafist Muslims demanding the release of comrades who ransacked a cinema that showed *Persepolis*, witnesses said. Then, a few days later, six members of the Salafist movement were arrested after they stormed a cinema and broke its glass doors in a bid to stop the screening of the film: "Neither Allah, nor Master" on secularism in Tunisia. The cinema raid prompted outcry from several corners of Tunisian society, which had not seen such violence related to religion in decades. The result of lacking such exposure was the series of protests by Islamists, who were and still are trying to incorporate an appropriate role for Islam in Tunisia.

Hence, the police have been forced to cope with the new challenge of dealing with Islam's new role in Tunisia. Thus far the police still appear to be treating protesters, particularly Salafists, with the same sort of brutality exhibited while Ben Ali was in power. Evidence of this can be seen in the events of April 9, 2012 when police forces violently cracked down on protesters who had gathered along Avenue Habib Bourguiba to commemorate Martyr's Day.

One must note that these protesters are not always peaceful, and many instances have pitted aggressive and sometimes armed demonstrators against police officers. It does seem, however, that live fire used against protesters has decreased, and the police may be moving gradually towards moderation in regards to their tactics. Possible evidence of this was displayed during the tense takeover of a mosque by Salafists in the suburb of Kram, where police displayed tolerance and restraint. The takeover of the Khadija mosque came just nine days before Tunisia held its first elections after the ousting of former President Ben Ali, and the Salafists were accused of intimidating the local

population as well as assaulting the mosque's imam. Furthermore, the suspects reportedly even turned the Friday sermon against democracy. The Salafists proceeded to partake in protests, which the police did not break up since the organizers of the demonstrations had made sure the protests were in order.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning, the protest was mostly bearded men followed by entirely veiled women, but eventually, people from all backgrounds – even children – joined the crowd. Similar protests in downtown Tunis, however, had to be broken up by police with teargas as “any men with beards, often interpreted as a sign of affiliation with conservative religious movements converged in the Kasbah Square.”<sup>14</sup>

In February of 2012, the Tunisian police found themselves having to deal with a political protest largely unrelated to Tunisia itself. Tunis served as the host of the Friends of Syria conference, which was expected to challenge Syria to allow in desperately needed humanitarian aid and give support to the country's opposition. The US Secretary of State and other leading Western and Arab officials were present at the gathering and aimed to increase pressure on President Bashar al-Assad's regime over its bloody crackdown of the opposition. However, police wielding batons<sup>15</sup> were forced to beat back several dozen pro-Assad protesters trying to enter the venue of the meeting. The protesters, chanting “No to the conference!” and “No meeting of the enemies of Arab nations,” had attempted to force their way into a hotel on the outskirts of Tunis where the conference was taking place.<sup>16</sup>

In each instance, the police's response to protesters varied, and the character of the current police force still resembles that of Ben Ali's police. Though the police appeared to have started abiding by the guidelines of the UN's *Human Rights Standards and Practice for the Police*, such as attempting non-violent means first and minimizing damage and injury, there have been significant lapses in their behavior.

Brutality resembling that of the Ben Ali regime arose on February 25, 2012 at a demonstration organized by the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT).<sup>17</sup> Reporters Without Borders witnessed many direct physical attacks by police on journalists that took place when the media were filming their use of violence and tear-gas to dis-

perse the protesters. Their report said, “the way the police insulted journalists and the brutality with which they dealt with some of them signals a clear return to the use of police violence against the media.”<sup>18</sup> The incident was painfully reminiscent of demonstrations on 5 and 7 May 2011 when violence used to disperse protesters ended up injuring 15 journalists.<sup>19</sup> The interior minister at the time, Farhat Rajhi, reacted by saying the police needed to be able to identify the media. Nonetheless, wearing “Press” vests and armbands and showing press cards failed to prevent reporters from being attacked by police officers on 25 February. Reporters Without Borders said, “an example must be made of the police officers involved in this violence if the interior ministry wants to prevent the entire law enforcement apparatus from being discredited.”<sup>20</sup>

The possibly most discrediting act on behalf of the police came on June 12, 2012 when a 22 year-old man was shot dead during a clash between protesters and security forces in the city of Sousse. It is unclear whether the victim was simply a protester or a violent rioter, as the police claim. However, if the man is found to have been a protester, the incident would mark the first time police had used live ammunition on protesters since the days of the Revolution.

## **Reforms & Improvements within the Police**

While there have been hints of hope for improvements within the Tunisian police, substantial and lasting reform will be no simple task. Such reform will not take just simple training and rearrangement, but a complete change in culture to reflect a new and open Tunisian society.<sup>21</sup> Lazhar Akremi, Delegate Minister to the Interior Minister in Charge of Reforms, held a press conference during which he declared that the security system can only evolve when the rest of the state institutions have undergone administrative, legislative, and judicial reforms.

A committee composed of experts from both the judiciary and financial sector, in addition to volunteers and civil society members, is trying to develop the reform project. The reforms are intended to establish better security measures and services, adapted to a democratic state. Akremi added that the reform program aspires to change the



mentality and the behavior of the police force by enhancing the training and recruiting process.

Even aesthetic changes to the police force are planned to be implemented in the coming years. There will be changes in the architecture of police stations, and new stations will be divided into two sections. One section will be dedicated for public services such as passports, identity cards and the processing of official documents, while the other specialize in judicial services. Investigation rooms will be equipped with cameras in order to verify statements of the accused.<sup>22</sup> Also, starting in 2012, the police force will wear a new uniform so as to present a new image. Akremi argued that this new image has to foster a democratic culture that entails a break from violence.<sup>23</sup> Such violent behavior, he said, came from security forces' lack of training in the human rights.

There is much promise in the human rights field with regards to the Tunisian police. The Interior Ministry and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized a training session held from July 21 to August 16, 2011, at the academies for the police and the National Guard. The cooperative program was announced on July 14th on the occasion of the opening of the UN's new office in Tunis. An expert in human rights training from the UN Development Program reviewed existing training programs in the different interior security forces from July 11th to 14th, following meetings between Ministry and UN representatives on July 10 and 11.<sup>24</sup>

In order to further understand the possibilities of repairing the Tunisian police force, a three day conference attended by numerous foreign guests was held. Though the presence of Tunisia's civil societies was lacking, many reforms were discussed. While speakers remarked on the difficulty of rebuilding Tunisia's security apparatus, they insisted that the administration must continue the rigorous reforms that were launched during the post-revolutionary period. The conference speakers also insisted that national security is a unified goal, regardless of any distinctions in uniforms, and that the attitude of collective work must be integrated in order to achieve this goal.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, other speakers emphasized the need to maintain the current conditions of

admission into the police academy. Most importantly, the conference attendees discussed the necessity of building a bond of trust between the police and the population. Thus, the conference concluded that the goal was to revert Tunisia's police force to "the genuine role of the police and respecting the law..."

Lazhar Akremi has sought to improve the aforementioned relationship between the police and public via a "white book" of proposed reforms to the security system. The "white book" consists of six chapters discussing the restructuring of the security system, including the revision of the recruitment standards of the security forces, their programs and trainings.

The book proposes to establish a national academy of security and an information agency, and it emphasizes internal and external dialogue of the police and the unification of governance mechanisms in the administration. The proposed reforms also aim at changing the controversial Law 4 of 1969,<sup>26</sup> which deals with public meetings, parades, and protests, and sets the conditions for the intervention of security agents. In addition, the book proposes to redeploy security forces on the regional level and to have a municipal police under the control of the president of the municipality. Therefore, the "white book" intends to usher in a new era of radical change to improve the relationship between the Ministry of Interior and Tunisian citizens, who underwent long years of aggression, tension and submission to the security forces during the regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

Adding to the improvements surrounding the Tunisian police's image have been the recent pushes for ending torture. Declaring that torture deprives individuals of their humanity and dignity, Kathem Zin El Abedine, representative of the Ministry of Justice, asserted that there is no place in post-revolutionary Tunisia for silence concerning torture cases.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the Minister for Human Rights and Transitional Justice, Mr. Samir Dilou, announced the creation of an officially appointed committee which will start working on a draft law to establish a national preventive mechanism (NPM) against torture in Tunisia.

## Conclusion

The relationship between the Tunisian police and the public after the Revolution seems to be developing at quite a gradual yet nonetheless positive rate. Ties appear to be improving through various reforms and changes in tactics used by the police to handle protesters. In this manner, the negative view of the security forces may be altered, and perhaps in the near future the Tunisian public will begin to see their police force in a better light.

The image of the police is improving since Ennahda is “making the police friendlier.”<sup>28</sup> Before the Revolution, people were hostile toward the police. At the time, the police force was serving the Interior Ministry rather than serving and protecting the people. After the Revolution, there was a slight change in people’s perceptions of the police, but there wasn’t a dramatic shift in popularity as seen in the case of the army, which became hailed as one of the heroic entities of the Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, there was and still continues to be a competition between the army and the police to win the hearts of the people. The root of this competition between these two institutions dates back to the Ben Ali era, when the military was minimized and sidelined. In this manner, “Ben Ali created a professional, apolitical institution that was little known—and little feared.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, even when General Ammar emerged a national hero, he was largely unknown. Yet it were his actions that “propelled the Tunisian Armed Forces to a position of preeminence—the institution that protected the Tunisian state, not the corrupt regime, and protected the Tunisian people.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike the Tunisian police, the Tunisian Armed Forces possess attributes such as credibility and a commitment to return to the barracks. Furthermore, the army’s “skill and willingness to assume an internal ‘peacekeeping’ mission suggest that the scope for reform of the military is very small.”<sup>32</sup>

Hence, it appears that armed forces are far more capable of carrying out policing duties at the moment, and this will not change until the legitimacy and capacity of the MOI is addressed and improved. Until Tunisia witnesses this milestone, the armed forces will likely con-

tinue to provide an internal security function, although increasingly in a supporting role as responsibility begins to shift back to the police.

Since it has become quite clear that army has won the battle for popularity with the people, the police have often feared being scapegoated by the public since the Revolution. This left many security forces feeling vulnerable; however, a public apology to people in a demonstration on Avenue Bourguiba three days after Ben Ali left showed the public a more human side of the police force. This move along with the subsequent creation of the police union, which was praised as one of the most prominent achievements of the Revolution, symbolized to the public the police's push for progress and modernization. Furthermore, in a progressive decision, the police allowed children to enter the Interior Ministry and paint the once grim basement, where torture had once been commonplace.<sup>33</sup> Actions like this, along with the UN human rights training and a revised recruitment process have set promising precedents for the future of the relationship between the police and the public in Tunisia.

Nevertheless, only time will be able to concretely improve issues of trust since the sour memories of long-term police exploitation and corruption still linger in the minds of the people.<sup>34</sup> Tunisians need time to witness the improvements the police have begun to embark upon. Only then will the public begin to see the police as a trustworthy and effective entity that is set on serving the people of the country rather than the government.

## Endnotes

- 1 BBC News - Tunisia protests against Ben Ali left 200 dead, says UN. (2011, February 1). BBC - Homepage. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12335692>
- 2 REUTERS. (n.d.). Tunisia Police Kill 14 Civilians During Protests - NYTimes.com. The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/world/africa/10tunisia.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/world/africa/10tunisia.html?_r=1)
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ghribi, A. (n.d.). Ministry of Defense Confirms Snipers. [www.tunisia-live.net](http://www.tunisia-live.net). Retrieved November 22, 2011, from [www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/20/the-truth-behind-snipers/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/20/the-truth-behind-snipers/)
- 5 Mzioudet, H. (n.d.). Former Tunisian Chief of Presidential Security Reveals: "Gaddafi Provided Ben Ali Police With Tear Gas Bombs" : Tunisia Live.
- 6 Gamha, E. (n.d.). Study Conducted on Tunisia's Socio-Economic Problems : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/09/24/study-conducted-on-the-socio-economic-problems/>
- 7 Tunisia Human Rights. (n.d.). American History and World History at Historycentral.com the largest and most complete history site on the web. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.historycentral.com/nationb>
- 8 Interview with AIC Tunis; Tunis, Tunisia
- 9 Daragahi, B., & Times, L. A. (n.d.). Yacine Labib | A Tunisian state police officer shares harrowing inside view - Los Angeles Times. Featured Articles From The Los Angeles Times. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/03/world/la-fg-tunisia-police-201102020>
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Mhirs, Z. (n.d.). Tunisia: Police Brutality is Back : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/05/06/tunisia-police-brutality-is-back/>
- 12 BOUAZZA, B. B., & Press, T. A. (n.d.). Tunisian Trial On Persepolis Showing Ends In Chaos. Breaking News and Opinion on The Huffington Post. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/tunisian-trial-persepolis\\_n\\_1100235.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/tunisian-trial-persepolis_n_1100235.html)
- 13 Melki, Wiem. "Salafists Take Over Kram Mosque." : Tunisia Live. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/16/salafist-taking-over-the-area-of-kram/>>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 AFP. "AFP: Tunis Police Beat Back Protesters at Syria Meeting." Google News. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i7RqMjNem2e6Pjsro0-hmITWCFSA?docId=CNG.334a3ab5dbbad137a80794e6ea91cb8c.5e1>>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 "AllAfrica." AllAfrica.com: Tunisia: Need to Defuse Tension After Violent Attacks On Journalists By Police. Reporters Sans Frontières. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201203010877.html>>.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Minister Hopes to Change Culture of Security Forces : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/01/minister-hopes-to-change-culture-of-security-forces/>
- 22 New Uniforms Proposed For Security Forces : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/19/the-interior-ministry-displaying-samples-of-the-new-uniforms-for-security-agents/>
- 23 Minister Hopes to Change Culture of Security Forces : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/01/minister-hopes-to-change-culture-of-security-forces/>
- 24 Human Rights Training at Police, National Guard Academies : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/08/human-rights-training-at-police-national-guard-academies/>
- 25 Ali, H. S. (n.d.). Security Forces Transforming Into a Public Service : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/09/26/security-forces-transforming-into-a-public-service/>
- 26 Melki.
- 27 Parker, E. (n.d.). Minister of Justice: We Will Punish All Involved in Torture Cases : Tunisia Live.



- Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/27/minister-of-justice-we-will-punish-all-involved-in-torture-cases/>
- 28 Interview with Tunisia Live media staff. Tunis, Tunisia.
- 29 Interview with AIC Tunis. Tunis, Tunisia.
- 30 Hanlon, Querine. *Security Sector Reform in Tunisia*. Rep. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012. Print.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Interview with Tunisia Live media staff.
- 34 Interview with AIC Tunis.

## References

- AFP. "AFP: Tunis Police Beat Back Protesters at Syria Meeting." Google News. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i7RqMjNem2e6PJsro0-hmITWCFSA?docId=CNG.334a3ab5dbbad137a80794e6ea91cb8c.5e1>>.
- Ali, H. S. (n.d.). Security Forces Transforming Into a Public Service : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/09/26/security-forces-transforming-into-a-public-service/>
- "AllAfrica." AllAfrica.com: Tunisia: Need to Defuse Tension After Violent Attacks On Journalists By Police. Reporters Sans Frontières. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201203010877.html>>.
- Baeder, Charles. "Reforming Tunisia's Internal Security Apparatus-- Transitional Justice Left Unfinished." Reforming Tunisia's Internal Security Apparatus. " Transitional Justice Left Unfinished : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live, 10 June 2012. Web. 14 June 2012. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/06/10/reforming-tunisia-s-internal-security-apparatus-transitional-justice-left-unfinished/>>.
- BBC News - Tunisia protests against Ben Ali left 200 dead, says UN. (2011, February 1). BBC - Homepage. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12335692>
- BOUAZZA, B. B., & Press, T. A. (n.d.). Tunisian Trial On Persepolis Showing Ends In Chaos. Breaking News and Opinion on The Huffington Post. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/tunisian-trial-persepolis\\_n\\_1100235.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/17/tunisian-trial-persepolis_n_1100235.html)
- Daragahi, B., & Times, L. A. (n.d.). Yacine Labib | A Tunisian state police officer shares harrowing inside view - Los Angeles Times. Featured Articles From The Los Angeles Times. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/03/world/la-fg-tunisia-police-20110202>
- Gamha, E. (n.d.). Study Conducted on Tunisia's Socio-Economic Problems : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/09/24/study-conducted-on-the-socio-economic-problems/>
- Ghribi, A. (n.d.). Ministry of Defense Confirms Snipers. [www.tunisia-live.net](http://www.tunisia-live.net). Retrieved November 22, 2011, from [www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/20/the-truth-behind-snipers/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/20/the-truth-behind-snipers/)
- Hanlon, Querine. *Security Sector Reform in Tunisia*. Rep. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012. Print.
- HRW. "Tunisia: Reform Legal Framework to Try Crimes of the Past | Human Rights Watch." Tunisia: Reform Legal Framework to Try Crimes of the Past | Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch, 3 May 2012. Web. 15 June 2012. <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/03/tunisia-reform-legal-framework-try-crimes-past>>.
- Human Rights Training at Police, National Guard Academies : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/08/human-rights-training-at-police-national-guard-academies/>
- Interview with AIC Tunis; Tunis, Tunisia; 4 January 2012
- Interview with Tunisia Live; Tunis, Tunisia; 5 January 2012
- Magid, Pasha. "Hospital Director Confirms: 22 Year-Old Man Shot and Killed by Police in Sousse." : Tunisia Live. N.p., 13 June 2012. Web. 15 June 2012. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/06/13/hospital-director-confirms-22-year-old-man-shot-and-killed-by-police-in-sousse/>>.
- Melki, Wiem. "Salafists Take Over Kram Mosque." : Tunisia Live. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/16/Salafist-taking-over-the-area-of-kram/>>.
- Melki, W. (n.d.). "White Book" to Reform Tunisia's Ministry of Interior : Tunisia Live. Tu-

nisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/22/white-book-to-reform-tunisias-ministry-of-interior/>

Mhirs, Z. (n.d.). Tunisia: Police Brutality is Back : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/05/06/tunisia-police-brutality-is-back/>

Minister Hopes to Change Culture of Security Forces : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/01/minister-hopes-to-change-culture-of-security-forces/> Mzioudet, H. (n.d.). Former Tunisian Chief of Presidential Security Reveals: "Gaddafi Provided Ben Ali Police With Tear Gas Bombs" : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/03/former-tunisian-chief-of-presidential-security-reveals-gaddafi-provided-ben-ali-police-with-tear-gas-bomb/>

New Uniforms Proposed For Security Forces : Tunisia Live. (n.d.). Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/19/the-interior-ministry-displaying-samples-of-the-new-uniforms-for-security-agents/>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Right. Human Rights Standards and Practice for the Police. 3rd ed. Vol. 5. New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2004. Print. Professional Training.

Parker, E. (n.d.). Minister of Justice: We Will Punish All Involved in Torture Cases : Tunisia Live. Tunisia Live. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/27/minister-of-justice-we-will-punish-all-involved-in-torture-cases/>

REUTERS. (n.d.). Tunisia Police Kill 14 Civilians During Protests - NYTimes.com. The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. Retrieved December 22, 2011, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/world/africa/10tunisia.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/world/africa/10tunisia.html?_r=1)

"Tunisia: End Police Attacks on Protesters | Human Rights Watch." Tunisia: End Police Attacks on Protesters | Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch, 31 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 June 2012. <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/31/tunisia-end-police-attacks-protesters>>.

"Tunisian Police Shoot Dead Four Protesters." World News. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 June 2012. <[http://wn.com/Tunisian\\_police\\_shoot\\_dead\\_four\\_protesters](http://wn.com/Tunisian_police_shoot_dead_four_protesters)>.

"Tunisia: Torture Prevention Mechanism in New Constitution." [Http://www.apt.ch](http://www.apt.ch). APT, 22 May 2012. Web.

Winslow, Dr. Robert. "Comparative Criminology | Africa - Tunisia." Comparative Criminology | Africa - Tunisia. San Diego State University, n.d. Web. 5 June 2012. <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/rwinslow/africa/tunisia.html>>.

# Books in the Street: The Role of Education in Tunisia's Democratic Transition

by Stephanie Phoutrides  
International Relations and International  
Literary and Visual Studies '12

A most unusual sight met the eyes of passersby on Tunis' main avenue, Avenue Habib Bourguiba, on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2012. Hundreds had gathered in solidarity, not to shout chants or wave banners, but to read books. Asma Ghribi of Tunisia Live reported that the readers wanted to promote the image of Tunisians as “committed, cultivated, and literate.”<sup>1</sup> Tunisia is a country that has become iconic of the Arab Spring, and is most often associated with fruit-seller Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation. If Bouazizi represents the over-educated and under-employed Tunisian youth in desperate need of jobs, the readers on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April signify hope for the future and the recognition of the importance of education to society. As the country continues its transition from autocracy, it is increasingly clear that education will play a critical role in developing the citizens, skills, and institutions needed for a stable democracy.

This past January, I was fortunate enough to travel to Tunisia and conduct a series of interviews with politicians, activists, students, professors, and other civil society members. Their backgrounds were diverse and their experiences varied, but nearly all of them saw education as a linchpin of their society, critical for economic as well as democratic development.

Among our interviews were students Houda Rjab and Ahmed Medien. Ms. Rjab is a young woman we met in the coastal city of Sousse who was highly expressive and refreshingly frank. She had spent time abroad studying at Colorado College and was a colleague of Andrea Calabretta, a Fulbright scholar from the U.S. teaching social media marketing and English at a university in Sousse. Ahmed Medien was an endless source of information and opinions. A student at the Mediterranean School of Business, he works for Tunisia Live, an online news source, and traveled with our group from Tunis to Sousse and Sfax. In Sfax we met with students who were members of the Tunisian Cultures Club and English Language Fan Club who had a

penchant for break-dancing and Japanese anime. A more enthusiastic group of college students I have yet to encounter. They graciously hosted us for three days in their city, and eagerly shared their experiences as students and citizens. Abderrahmen Besbes, president of the Young Engineers Club, spoke carefully and thoughtfully, summarizing his peers' and his own passionate ideas. We met with equally passionate students at the American Corner in Tunis, which is run by the U.S. Embassy and Amideast and is a cultural center with a small American library. When we visited, there were roughly 40 students with whom we were able to speak. While in Sfax our student hosts arranged for us to meet with Aref Maalej, a regional representative for the Islamist party Ennahda. Aref was a thoughtful speaker who had studied engineering at Ohio State before returning to teach in Sfax. We were also lucky enough to interview the former Minister of Education, Hatem Ben Salem. A fascinating individual, Ben Salem was intensely excited but also fearful for the future of Tunisia and the role of education. On the other end of the spectrum was Mondher Cherni, a lawyer and ant-torture activist under Ben Ali. Quiet and pensive, he offered realistic thoughts on the future. Additionally, there were a number of American expatriates whom we interviewed, including Gabriella Borovsky with the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Insightful and knowledgeable, she jokingly attributed her and the Tunisian air of optimism to being in the Mediterranean. There were also the everyday people, not activists but still invested in their nation's future. Kais Ghiloufi and Rim Sioua, both employees of Fidelity, exemplify these types. Mild-mannered and sweet, they valued their families and were cautiously optimistic about the future.

As Tunisia continues along its transition to what will hopefully be a democracy, the role of education will undoubtedly play a critical role. The people we were able to interview felt strongly about the need to reform education at this critical juncture in their nation's history. Some interviewees saw education as critical to teaching democratic skills, while others saw it as important for developing job skills that could contribute to a more stable political system. Almost every interviewee, however, saw education as vital to the needs of the transitioning nation, and this will likely shape the attention given to education as the nation moves forward.

# History of Education in Tunisia

## Education Under Habib Bourguiba, 1957-1987

After the French Protectorate ended and Tunisia established its independence, Habib Bourguiba, the nation's first president, pushed for many positive education reforms. He saw education as critical to development as well as a tool of social progress, and one way by which citizens could learn to see their place within greater society. Bourguiba also saw primary education as something that could unify citizens in the new state of Tunisia. More specifically, he believed schools should teach respect for the party's anti-colonial struggle, and for Bourguiba's role as "Father of the country".<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Bourguiba's 1958 Education Reform Act contained goals meant to unify the people and educate them for the nation's needs.

In the wake of the French departure, Bourguiba's reforms had very tangible effects. Between 1956 and 1965, primary education enrollment nearly quadrupled as schools became more accessible and people were encouraged to enroll. Gender equality in education improved significantly. Female enrollment increased from 30% of total students in 1958 to 40% in 1975. Bourguiba's government also recognized that there was disparity in education between urban and rural areas, and so tried to make education more accessible in rural areas, an effort that continues today. One problem that persisted, however, was that while primary and secondary education were widely accessed, higher education tended to be limited by class, and only those in the upper echelons made it this far. In this way, education was not as equalizing as the government hoped.<sup>3</sup>

## Education Under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, 1987-2011

Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, the dictator of Tunisia who was deposed in January of 2011, had a reign marked by oppression throughout society and in academia. As Larbi Sadiki argues in "Ben Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means," the state held up the façade of democratic rule, when in fact it tightly controlled many aspects of society. At the time when the article was written in 2002, Sadiki noted that Tunisian government monitored associations closely, did not abide by the rule of law, and limited freedom of the press.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that the regime continued to hold elections and there was officially an opposition party (as decreed by law since 1994), the state remained authoritarian. Sadiki reports that when Ben Ali came to power, he promised many democratizing reforms. By 2002, these reforms



had failed to materialize. Reforms were largely economic and did not include social or political initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

Ben Ali's government limited freedoms and demanded loyalty to the state. Non-governmental actors had little place in governance. Criticism was not welcomed, as seen in the case of Muhammad Muwa'adah, who was arrested after writing about human rights abuses by the state.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the state took control of much of the media, and most reliable information on the country could only be obtained from foreign coverage.<sup>7</sup> There are numerous examples of academic oppression as well—such as the October 2009 arrest of 17 students of UGET (General Union for Tunisian Students) at Manouba University during a peaceful protest.<sup>8</sup> Another instance of the state oppressing academic took place when Moncef Marzouki (current President of Tunisia) was fired from the University of Sousse in July of 2000. When his colleagues protested, the police assaulted one of them, Mohammed Bechri.<sup>9</sup> In this way, state oppression extended to the academic world.

During Ben Ali's rule, there was certainly displeasure in the universities regarding the extent of state control. Notably, however, the basic tenets of democratic education remained in primary education, and overall education remained a national priority. Higher education was less democratic, however. In an interview in January 2011 with Hamed Ben Dhia, the vice-chancellor of Sfax University, there is some optimism about improvement of academic freedom in the new Tunisia. He was also, however, disappointed with Ben Ali's failure at reform. He notes that governance of the universities had been implemented from the top down, and that universities were expected to carry out all governmental decisions. The government closely monitored academics' activities, and even controlled student elections so that the RDC (Constitutional Democratic Rally) won all the seats. There were also reported incidents of bribery. One man noted that the one thing barring him from becoming a teacher was his inability to pay the bribe for education.<sup>10</sup>

## Structure of the Ministry of Education

The structure of Tunisia's Ministry of Education is fairly straightforward. The Ministry maintains national control over most aspects of education, but regional organizations retain some local control. The central ministry controls all human resource management, including teacher hiring, training, and pedagogy.<sup>11</sup> The government creates statutes that govern education via the constitutional council.<sup>12</sup> It is also reported that the central ministry controls infrastructure, resource allocation, selection of primary and secondary school directors, teacher recruitment, curriculum and textbook

content, and exam standards. Regional administration shares some control with the central ministry in the creation and closure of primary schools, and managing in-service and pre-service training. Regional ministries also maintain full supervision of teachers. The central ministry maintains some control over private education.<sup>13</sup>

## Recent Education Reforms

In 2008, the Ministry of Education published a report on reforms taken between 2004 and 2008. These reforms were broad and addressed all levels of education with special emphasis on the quality of education. The report claimed reforms had been made to improve pedagogical supervision through monitoring and training, as well as inspection methods and teacher training. Curricular changes were also made, such as adding more Arabic, more English, and more technological training. Finally, the report stated that the ministry had improved their systems of evaluation, exams, and grades.<sup>14</sup>

Some of these supposed reforms might have had a direct impact on teaching democratic values. The 2<sup>nd</sup> diennial plan adopted principles that would prepare students for making decisions and working together.<sup>15</sup> The reforms are reported to have included improved communication facilitation, more clubs and associations, career advisors, environmental consideration, and even class council elections.<sup>16</sup> All of these changes have the potential to prepare the populace to support democratic systems at a micro level.

While these reforms were described in great detail in the report, very few of the interviewed students had any idea that such reforms had occurred. They saw no positive improvement from these reported changes. As many countries published similar reports on the state of education for UNESCO, it is possible that the report was made for show. Otherwise, it may just be that the reforms were too slight to be noticed by students.

## State of Democracy

While Tunisia is today a relatively free and democratic country, this was not the case just over a year ago. Its Polity IV<sup>17</sup> rating left it as a “closed anocracy” prior to the revolution (with a score of -4), which changed to an “open anocracy” in 2011 (unrated).<sup>18</sup> Freedom House ranked Tunisia as “not free” before the revolution and upgraded it to “partly free” in 2012. In the last year Tunisia has taken incredible strides toward democracy. The press is growing (although still not fully free, Al Jazeera reports 100 new media outlets since the revolution), civil society is thriving, and voter turnout in

the last election was beyond 90%.<sup>19</sup> In order to determine the nature of democracy's success in relation to education, it is necessary here to examine the education system in-depth.

## Access to Education

Today, school enrollment rates are very high. The net intake rate<sup>20</sup> for primary schools in 2009 was extremely high at 92% (this is one of the highest rates in the MENA region). Students stayed in school, as evident by the gross primary graduation rate in 2009 at 91%.<sup>21</sup> Males and females had fairly equal access. In primary schools, females composed nearly 48% of all students, and in secondary schools, they were 51% of all students. While females are clearly present in schools, Rjab informed us that in the southern regions, boys and girls were often separated for activities, such as eating.<sup>22</sup>

The southern regions, which are more rural than the coastal cities, possess other barriers to education. Although UNESCO reports the rural population was only at 33.9% in 2007, they still compose an important part of the populace. Some of the challenges these regions face are as basic as infrastructure: the buildings are dilapidated, there are too few teachers, or students do not have access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).<sup>23</sup> Staff members of the online news source Tunisia Live also claimed that teaching standards are lower in the interior. Nonetheless, there is an increasing number of programs that seek to address this disparity in the rural interior. For example, the organization Madrassiti has undertaken a fundraising campaign solely to refurbish schools. In higher education programs, private universities such as the Mediterranean School of Business (MSB) are working to attract students from all segments of society. MSB in particular is pushing to recruit from more rural areas and trying to offer more scholarships.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that this will have a cyclical effect and encourage students to return to their hometowns and encourage education at the primary and secondary levels, as well. The human rights lawyer, Mondher Cherni, explained one interested project called the "Citizen School Project." The plan is to take a group of 25 students, train them on citizenship for 16 months, and then bring them back to rural communities to pass on their education. In this way, the very instruments of democracy are brought by the people to the people, and to the people who need such education the most.

## Educational Quality

While Tunisia's access is remarkably high, anecdotal evidence suggests that the quality of teaching is somewhat low. The numbers do not

reflect extremely low quality, but students often complained about teaching quality and resources.

## Literacy and TIMSS

Tunisia actually has some of the highest literacy rates in the MENA region. Among youth they are at 97%, while adult literacy rates are around 78%. TIMSS<sup>25</sup> scores were slightly below average in 2007, with an average of 420 in math and 445 in science.

### *Basic Education System*

The Tunisian education system is generally based on the French system, which stresses rote memorization. In 2007, Tunisia adopted the LMD system, which stands for Lycee, Master, Doctor.<sup>26</sup> We interviewed many people who found that this change had negative effects.<sup>27</sup> Many Tunisians felt education was getting worse in other ways as well. Aref Maalej claimed that each generation of education was getting worse. Others claimed that Bourguiba's system had been much more effective, and that students today emerge from hours of schooling with no useful skills.<sup>28</sup>

Students in Tunisia take far more subjects than students in the United States. In university, for example, students said they took 13 subjects each semester, and engineers at the University of Sfax said they were in class 38 hours a week.<sup>29</sup> Andrea Calabretta noted that the high number of subjects meant that each subject only got a couple of hours each week—for example, one hour of lecture and one hour of discussion with an assistant. This left very little time for homework and independent research, and also made it difficult to participate in extracurricular activities.

The curriculum in Tunisia is broad and varied and contains many of the subjects one might hope to find in any standard course of study. Some of the subjects include sciences, philosophy, computing, education, technology, math, physics, Arabic, English, French, civic education, management, body awareness, and Islamic thinking.

## Structural Barriers

Quality of education is hindered by basic structural as well as content-based problems. Rjab reported that many classes did not have enough chairs for students. She said students would have lectures of 60-70 people that were so crowded they had to write with their papers on their knees. Other reasons for the poor quality, however, can be found in the method and content of

teaching. Rjab said they rarely received assignments and would read as few as two books each semester.

Another student, Ahmed Medien, said he had difficulty with the subject material because it was poorly explained and used textbooks from the UK that used case studies from the West with which he was not familiar. They also used unfamiliar terms, and he ended up spending most of his study time doing background research on these terms and case studies.

## Type of Instruction

Besides these barriers to quality education, many students reported a lack of debate and critical thinking in the classroom. Rjab, Medien, and students at the American Corner agreed that debate did not occur. One student at the American Corner added that teachers do not ask for students' opinions and even take offense at students who challenge them. On the other hand, Sioua, who had been educated during Bourguiba's rule, said they had debated frequently—but were never asked to debate from a point of view with which they did not agree.<sup>30</sup> Ms. Rjab said debating was something with which she struggled when she studied in the United States. There are, however, promising steps in the direction of debate. Gabriella of NDI said they would love to see the formation of an extracurricular debate society. There is also a new program initiated by Tim Sebastian called the "New Arab Debates," which holds periodic debates on a variety of political topics.<sup>31</sup>

It was also evident that students were excited to exercise their debating skills. We witnessed various discussions and formal debates where students took time to formulate arguments and respond to others. While in Sfax, our student hosts held two formal debates—one with the trade union, and one with our research group about the future of Tunisia. These students also debated frequently over meals and coffee. One particularly lively debate occurred between Besbes and the rest of the club members. Besbes had not voted in the last election, and was defending his decision to abstain (he saw it as a political statement about his dissatisfaction with the party system and its representatives). Where debate would not have occurred a year earlier, his classmates comfortably and capably challenged him.

### *Teachers*

Another barrier to quality education is teaching. The unions in Tunisia are very strong, especially the teachers' union (UGTT, personal interview, Jan. 2012). Once admitted to the union, it is difficult to fire a teacher. Under Ben Ali, the admission process to the teacher's union was very difficult, and even if the teacher performed well on the entrance test, he or she would often have to pay a bribe.<sup>32</sup> There is now a new exam and the UGTT (the umbrella



trade union) said that since the revolution, all teachers, once certified, were automatically admitted to the union. Despite the high number of educated Tunisians, it has proven difficult to fill all the teaching positions that are available, and those teachers who do teach are not always of the highest quality (although Rjab did mention that she had a few great teachers). The former Minister of Education, Hatem Ben Salem, also mentioned the difficulty of attracting good teachers to public schools, as they preferred private schools. One professor, Tahar Abdessalem at the Ecole de Polytechnique, mentioned this problem and said that for a while they had sought to recruit teachers from abroad, only to be met with demands to hire only Tunisian professors.

### Private Schools vs. Public Schools

While the focus of this paper is primarily on public education, it is also important to mention the state of private education in Tunisia, if only for comparison. The particular focus here is on the Mediterranean School of Business (MSB), but some general trends will be noted as well. Many people indicated that, while public schools used to be far superior to private schools in Tunisia (some claimed people only attended private schools if they were not smart enough to go to public schools and had to pay to get in), there is now a shift, and some of the best schools are private. In the case of MSB, they attribute their higher-quality education to using “North American pedagogy,” and having great teacher-student interaction.<sup>33</sup> The success of MSB shows the promise of decentralizing educational control from the government.

### Democratic Values

**W**e turn now from general questions of quality to the presence of democratic practices in the curriculum and in society that might be addressed by education. These practices include teaching human rights, developing a democratic mindset, patience, tolerance, and associational practices.

Human rights under Ben Ali were a particularly neglected area for fairly obvious reasons. Ben Salem had even served temporarily as the “General Coordinator for Human Rights,” but he told us that this job was nothing but a title and an office. He had no support staff, and everything he did had to be reviewed by people higher in the administration. Human rights education was minimally present in the curriculum, but most people seemed to recognize the need for these things, including Cherni from the General Legal Council Against Torture. Professors at MSB also saw the importance

of establishing their school as a place of “global education.” Basma Azizi and Sofiane Khammar at the American Islamic Congress noted that an awareness of human rights was growing via younger generations and NGOs geared toward human rights.

An interesting theme that came up throughout the interviews in Tunisia was that Tunisians felt their people lacked a “democratic mindset.” This was expressed by students, as well as Basma and Sofiane Khammar, and was also confirmed in focus groups conducted by NDI<sup>34</sup>. Khammar and Azizi elaborated on this idea, saying that freedom was a new notion to which Tunisians were adjusting<sup>35</sup>. Azizi and Ben Salem<sup>36</sup> both believed that there was almost an *excess* of freedom since the revolution. They argued that there was a need for some rules. Many people noted that what began as street protests for rights had devolved into pointless strikes, and no one was working, which hampered productivity, which did not help the employment situation, and was ultimately counter-productive to democracy. Potentially, the democratic mindset is one that can be taught in schools, but Khammar thought it was a “natural metamorphosis” that would happen with time<sup>37</sup>.

Another interesting theme was that Tunisians felt their fellow citizens lacked basic skills that would be beneficial in a democracy. For example, many people stated that patience was a value that was lacking. Rjab told us that Tunisians want democracy and they want it now. Cherni noted that this could potentially be a good thing, because it meant the people would hold their policymakers accountable and keep them from spending too much time drafting the constitution and consolidating power. Cherni said that impatient groups included the jobless, those unpaid by the government, and those whose family members had been killed by the government. On the other hand, patience is needed for democratic practices to take place, and people need to understand that democratic practices take longer to effect action than an authoritarian government.

Another basic skill that came up was the ability to admit when one is wrong. One of MSB’s founding goals was to teach the principle of self-critique. Borovsky also mentioned that political parties would have benefited from learning to form and express opinions more clearly, and to respect other platforms.<sup>38</sup> While patience is probably not something to be taught in schools, the ability to admit when one is wrong can be taught in schools. Academic rigor teaches us how to think critically and question our biases and misperceptions.

One quality that did not seem to be lacking was the principle of

tolerance. People often reiterated the fact that the Tunisian mentality was one of openness and tolerance.<sup>39</sup> NDI refused to even work with other parties unless they were open to democratic values and practices. MSB noted that education reform was critically important to teach values such as tolerance.

Besides these qualities, there are also a number of democratic practices that do or should take place in schools. NDI reported that there were various skills they thought could be learned in schools that would help parties campaign more effectively. The skills they mentioned were team building, creativity, organizing events, and forming student unions and campus groups. Regarding clubs, a number of students at the American Corner noted that clubs and extracurricular activities were difficult to fit into their course-heavy schedule. If they wanted to come to these sorts of activities (or ISEC trainings) they had to “escape” school. Nonetheless there was a vibrant club culture in Sfax University, as evidenced by the clubs that hosted us. Prior to the revolution, however, students at the American Corner noted that while they had many frustrations to discuss, very few of them actually vented them. They only occasionally chatted in coffee shops.<sup>40</sup>

## Civic Education

These activities of an open society took place separately from a formal civic education. Students seemed to have varying degrees of civic education, but it was clear that there was not a biased state-sponsored civic education. Rjab, for instance, had no civic education. Medien, on the other hand, did. Despite the political exclusion of Islam and Islamism, he said they still learned about the history of Islam in Tunisia. Ahmed also noted the emphasis on women’s rights, and he also observed that while Tunisia’s section in the history book was often at the end (and not always reached by the end of the term), its history was not biased. It did not especially emphasize the goodness of Ben Ali or Bourguiba, and his teachers were fair-minded. Students at the American Corner had studied the constitution in school during Ben Ali’s reign but agreed there was no particular bias in covering the topic.

People generally seemed to agree on the need for a new type of civic education that taught about human rights and other principles. Cherni said he believed the people’s first goal in the new democracy ought to be building political awareness. This was being done by various organizations through workshops and conferences that sought to simplify notions of citizenship and democracy. Rjab stated that most citizens are less aware of their rights and

duties. The polling company IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) agreed that civic education ought to be addressed. Cherni made a distinction between civic education and citizenship education. He believed citizenship education should be taught, particularly saying that Tunisians can be Arab and Muslim, although they could also be other ethnicities and religions. He believed the constitution should be made up of general principles, not specifications for ethnicity and religion. NDI noted that Tunisians had a very vibrant civil society, but that it was neither professional nor institutionalized in the educative process. One interesting initiative that a student mentioned was the Young Women’s Initiative for Leadership, which had invited people who had experienced democratic change (for example, in eastern Europe) to share their experiences about democratic transition. It is evident, then, that while citizenship education is not yet in place at schools, it does exist in less formal structures throughout society. The one benefit extending this education to formal schools is that it would reach a much wider segment of society, especially those that might otherwise be cut off from it because of their distance from urban centers.

## Citizenship and Identity

The Tunisians with whom we spoke seemed to have varying concepts of what it means to be a citizen, or even a Tunisian. Many seemed reluctant to discuss the concept at all, saying Tunisia had no identity problem, while others claimed that their patchwork history necessitated discussion of a diverse society. One person stated that even after 56 years of independence Tunisia still had an identity problem. In any case, whenever the word “identity” was mentioned, a long debate ensued. There was also a lot of debate over the first two amendments in the constitution, which stated that Tunisians are Arab and Muslim. Many people thought it was good to leave in these clauses because a vast majority of the country *is* Arab and Muslim. Furthermore, since their history is marked by the French protectorate, Tunisians may have been denied these basic claims to identity, or made to think they were inferior to the colonizer’s identity. Various students at the American Corner described Tunisians as multinational, global citizens, unsure of their ethnic origins, and multicultural. They also noted that Tunisians were very tolerant and could coexist. The trade union claimed that Tunisian culture is about happiness. One student in Sfax noted that at the end of the day, identity was a universal question, but in terms of politics, the important question was what the government should do to address or accommodate identity. There did not seem to be a consensus that citizenship identity should to be taught in schools.

Besides religious and ethnic identities, regional and socio-economic identities seemed to be an even bigger issue for Tunisians. Some students in Sfax stated that while identity was an issue, economic concerns should be addressed first. They also noted the great regional disparities in the country, and there seemed to be a clear sense of regional identity between the various cities and provinces. For example, Sfaxian students were very aware of who was a native Sfaxian, and who spoke in the Sfaxian dialect.

The regional disparities are closely linked with socio-economic disparities. Our research group only traveled for one day into the interior of the country, and then it was to a tourist destination. We therefore had to rely on what people told us about the interior compared to the relatively well-to-do capital and coastal areas. Students at the American Corner noted that there were many real problems in the interior that people ignore. The UGTT trade union was also very vocal about the economic disparities they saw, which they claimed were a result of the former regime, under which laborers did not always have an opportunity to work or acquire benefits.<sup>41</sup>

## **Free Flow of Information**

**A**nother interesting aspect to examine in Tunisia's academic system is the freedom of academic expression, or more generally, the free flow of information. Prior to the revolution, a fair amount of censorship existed. Organizations as diverse as the UGTT (which is reported to have links with the regime) to families to professors and lawyers expressed their experiences with limited information access. This is especially interesting considering the critical role of social media in the revolution, suggesting that some degree of freedom must have existed in order for Internet access to have been effective.

Even in 2009, information was fairly accessible, as we can see with Internet access. Tunisia had an Internet access rating of 4.3 on a seven-point scale.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the government found other ways to limit and control information, both at informal as well as formal levels. At the informal level, students, professors and family members were wary of what they said within the classroom, as they feared the presence of spies. Medien said this was especially true during the revolution, when teachers would tentatively broach the subject but were still careful about what they said. Members of the UGTT felt that classroom discussions could be open, but there was less freedom to speak in public forums (UGTT, personal interview, Jan. 2012). One student from Sfax University reported that he had a teacher who was suspended for speaking too freely about the government in the classroom; however, he took the case to court and ultimately won.<sup>43</sup>



The government also had more formal ways of limiting information access. For instance, it had a system of licenses that academics and lawyers had to obtain before traveling or researching. Cherni reported that as a lawyer, he had to obtain a permit, fill out a card, and register members so that their activity could be monitored. Their group was unable to obtain a permit, which limited their ability to practice law, and they had to exist more as an awareness-raising organization regarding human rights. He reported that obtaining the permit was very difficult, and usually required a close link with the regime, or else paying a bribe. The government also monitored academic freedom. Research had to be approved by the state, and if someone went abroad to an academic conference, that individual would have to get approval by a special government body.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these limitations, it is clear that ICT access was a fairly important priority for Tunisians prior to the revolution. The Ministry of Education's website shows that technology is valued and well utilized. From the website, one can connect to Edunet.com. Edunet.com has everything from training for pedagogy to a virtual school that has different language labs. It is a one-stop site with information about exams, school calendars, and news from the ministry. This is an incredible asset to students as well as teachers and education administrators. In many ways, Tunisia's school websites are far superior to many public schools in the U.S. It does, however, indicate the centralized nature of the ministry, since everything comes from a single source. The website also has options for feedback and comments, though, which shows it is open to pluralistic discussion.

While many governments surely see ICT access as an important avenue to global competition, it also has the unintended side effect of allowing greater flow of information within Tunisia. One example of ICT utilization for democracy is the website Aswat.com, which Gabriella reported allows users to blog anonymously. Simply having access to the Internet made it possible for these bloggers to express themselves without fear of repercussion from the government. The former Minister of Education reported that he took the initiative to connect students with technology in the classrooms. He even created a center for ICTs called "New Technologies and Education." He did not make any claims, of course, about implementing such projects so that citizens would have tools to organize revolts.

Institutions also make ICTs a priority, as was the case at MSB. MSB noted that private schools had greater ICT access than public schools. Professor Abdessalem confirmed this by noting that his university (Ecole de

Polytechnique Tunisie) officially had campus-wide wireless access, but it did not work correctly. This demonstrates how information access is not always as free as it seems.

Interviewees had mixed opinions on the current and future state of free information. One person made the point that media from the private sector (ie not government-sponsored) dominates, which will ensure free information. Ben Salem was also positive about the current state of free speech and thought. Cherni, however, was less positive. He mentioned the tight controlled state TV channel, Tunis1. Maalej from Ennahda was of two minds. On the one hand, he hoped that there would be no censorship under Ennahda, since they had suffered from censorship under Ben Ali. On the other hand, however, he noted that parliament has the right to determine censorship, and he also said that freedom should have limits if it is in conflict with the majority.

## Religion

The conflict in the above statements by Maalej signifies a larger debate of the role of religion in government. In Tunis especially, there seemed to be a stark and growing polarization between secularists and Islamists. Bourguiba left a strong secular legacy in Tunisia. Many Tunisians feel that there should be a strict separation between religion and government. Ben Salem was especially wary of the presence of Islamists in the government. He believed Islam had taken too great of a role, and that it had become less tolerant. He believed that mosques, which had previously just been a place of prayer, had become political and were places of “brainwashing.” He mentioned one girl he knew who, prior to the revolution, felt she could speak freely among her family members, but now, because of Islamism combined with family pressure, she felt more constrained.

Some of these fears seemed justified after speaking with Maalej, who stated that freedom should exist, but that 1% of the population could not impose their beliefs on the majority. He was likely basing these numbers on the religious makeup of the country, which is 98% Muslim.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted, however, that while Ennahda won a plurality of the popular vote for the constituent assembly with 37% of the votes (and 41% of the assembly’s seats), they did not win a majority. Their plurality win is indicative of the fact that Ennahda was a unified front for the religious representation, while the secularist parties were far more splintered.<sup>46</sup> Maalej did not want Tunisia following what he saw as a path of moral degradation taken by Western

nations. He thought freedoms should be limited in cultural regards, and that legislation should be in place controlling sexuality (especially homosexuality) and drugs.

Interviewees also disagreed on the role religion should play in education. Members at the American Islamic Congress noted that Islam strongly encourages education. They also noted that many values of Islam overlapped with democratic or peaceful principles, such as the idea of offering oneself for God or for others, or values like respect. Khammar at the AIC thought religion could be a subject that was studied, but academically—just like any other subject. Maalej on the other hand believed education should stress and teach Islamic values and an Islamic way of thinking, but still leave the individual to choose whether or not to believe. Besides these basic issues, the use of the *niqab* (face veil) in schools has generated a great deal of debate. In most schools it is banned, and students and teachers who wear it are prohibited from entering the building. Rjab noted that the ban was for pedagogical reasons, for it is difficult to teach students whose faces and reactions cannot be seen. She also said it had the potential to scare little kids. Many see the move as a political move, seeking to reassert secular influence from the old regime<sup>47</sup>.

## Family

While religion is one strand of informal democratic education, families also seemed to be a highly salient factor in political education. Families seemed to be involved in education as well as democracy at varying degrees. Students at the American Corner noted that there was a body similar to a PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and that some parents were highly involved in primary and secondary education. Many students expressed that parents were involved only to the extent that they wished their children to do their best and succeed. Some students reported that parents were more satisfied with their education under Bourguiba, which was a sentiment echoed by Sioua.

Family spaces also varied in their discussion of and involvement in politics. Some students at the American Corner reported that they only discussed politics after the revolution, because they were afraid to do so before. Other students said their families openly discussed these ideas before the revolution as well. One student at the American Corner said that he depended on information from his uncle who lived in France. Since information in Tunisia was limited or sometimes one-sided, he liked to get an

international perspective. Rjab's family did not debate before the revolution, but now debates all the time, and discussed very openly how they were going to vote. She also noted that religion, which was formerly a personal matter, now became a more public matter within her family. Borovsky at the NDI observed that election days were a family affair, and that whole families went together to polling stations. Medien differed in this however, because his father did not vote, while he himself was active in voting as well as reporting. He said his father was financially well-off and the revolution did not mean as much to him. Ghiloufi from Fidelity reported that his whole family necessarily got involved in the revolution because he and his neighbors gathered together to defend their homes from the rioters and police. He said that the men would guard, and their wives would bring them couscous during their watch. These reports matched with what our research group was able to observe on 14 January, the anniversary celebration of the departure of Ben Ali. People took to the streets, including young children with their families. Parents were carrying their children on their shoulders, and kids were proudly waving Tunisian flags.

## Conclusions on Tunisia

The progression of the Tunisian revolution from Bouazizi's protest to the students reading in the street demonstrates the important role of education in building the new democratic state of Tunisia. While we see that there are still some barriers to access, such as regional location and financial means, Tunisia clearly values equal access. The inclusion of females at schools reflects the importance Tunisians place on gender equality in schools and in society since Bourguiba was in power. Even more important than its current state, Tunisians are concerned with the future of education, and, especially after the revolution, are undertaking many reforms to make education more accessible to all. Not only does this reflect attitudes of egalitarianism, it also empowers all people to become active citizens.

While there are many barriers to quality education in Tunisia, citizens are aware of the challenges and seem ready and hopeful for reform. Challenges range from basic structural problems to teaching methods and teachers. Debate skills and critical thinking are neglected in most classrooms, but as students move forward and become more active in this transitional country, they seem aware of the need to develop these skills in order to become effective citizens.

Tunisians are aware of the need to develop skills that can be beneficial

to a democracy. Most notably they spoke about developing a democratic mindset, but also thought it important to maintain their already tolerant attitude, to develop patience, to be able to admit wrongs, to learn about human rights, and to participate in civil society. It is already apparent that civil society is developing and that students are taking many opportunities to get involved outside the classroom. These practices began before and helped form the revolution, and continue to thrive after it. It is unclear whether formal schooling can help develop things like patience for democracy or a democratic mindset, but the school can serve as an instrument of civic society where clubs form and students meet. Furthermore, some other democratic values, such as critical thinking, tolerance, and human rights could certainly be taught in schools.

It is difficult to say what role identity has or should have in Tunisian culture. One thing we can say is that it seems to be a new question that will undergo thorough examination in the future. Because of the homogenous nature of Tunisian society, it will hopefully avoid the civil strife seen in other countries of the Arab Spring, such as Syria and Egypt.

It appears that Tunisians were barred from various kinds of information prior to the revolution; however, enough information was available in order to make a revolution possible. Internet access undoubtedly played a great role in this, and it also points to a state whose security apparatus is not strong enough to fully squash revolution-inducing information. This may also evince a state lacking the totalitarian mindset and will to squash other forms of political protest.

Islamism in Tunisia is a powerful force, and also a polarizing one. While I do not dismiss the possibility of a democratic Islamist government, our interviewees raised a few concerns about it. One major consideration going forward will be the extent to which the government uses religion and values to limit information access. Nevertheless, Tunisian religious identity is important to many citizens, and especially after being suppressed for years under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, one would hope the freedom of religious belief and practice will overcome value-based censorship. It would be interesting to see if an education could take place in which overlapping Islamic and democratic ideas are taught.

As the chronological leader of the Arab Springs, Tunisia has sustained a fairly peaceful and effective transition to democracy. It has prioritized civil society institutions and values education as a component of this civil society, building what we can hope is a solid foundation for the future state. Perhaps,



then, it will remain a leader not only in the chronological sense, but also in the practical sense, serving as an example of a country that builds democracy from the ground up.

## Endnotes

- 1 Ghribia, A. (2012, April 18) Book-Loving Tunisians Occupy Habib Bourguiba Avenue. *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/18/book-loving-tunisians-occupy-habib-bourguiba-avenue/>. P. 1
- 2 Allman, J. (1979) *Social Mobility, Education and Development in Tunisia*. The Netherlands: E.J. Brill. P. 60
- 3 Allman, p. 60
- 4 Sadiki, L. (2002). Bin-Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. p. 58
- 5 Sadiki, p. 58-59
- 6 Sadiki, p. 62-64
- 7 Sadiki, p. 71
- 8 Human Rights Watch (2010) Tunisia: Union Voices Silenced. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/10/21/tunisia-union-voices-silenced-0> p. 2
- 9 Human Rights Watch (2000) Tunisia: Trial of Professor Condemned. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2000/12/28/tunisia-trial-professor-condemned>
- 10 Butler, D. (January 2011). Revolution may end repression of academic freedom in Tunisia. *Nature International Weekly Journal of Science*.
- 11 World Bank (2008). *The road not traveled: Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. p. 195
- 12 Tunisia Constitution, Oceana Law. Ch. IX, Article 72)
- 13 World Bank, p. 195
- 14 Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Education and Ministry. (2008) *The Development of Education: National Report, 2004-2008*. p. 10
- 15 Republic, p. 8
- 16 Republic, p. 22
- 17 The Polity IV rating is a widely-used score of democracy, with positive points for democratic elements and negative points for autocratic elements, the overall score on a scale of -10 to 10, with 10 being the most democratic.
- 18 Marshall, M. G. (2010-2011) Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2010. *Center for Systemic Peace*. Retrieved from <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>
- 19 Carter Center (2011, Oct. 25) Carter Center Reports Peaceful and Enthusiastic Participation in Tunisia's Landmark Elections. Retrieved from [http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/tunisia-prelim-102511.pdf](http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/tunisia-prelim-102511.pdf). P. 15. It should be noted, however, that only 55% of the estimated voter-age population registered to vote.
- 20 The net intake rate is measured as the percentage of children who are the appropriate age to start school who enroll in the first year of primary school.
- 21 UNESCO (2000-2011). UIS Statistics in Brief: Education (all levels) profile – Tunisia. Retrieved from [http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF\\_Language=eng&BR\\_Topic=0](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF_Language=eng&BR_Topic=0)
- 22 Personal interview, January 2012

- 23 American Corner, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 24 Panel, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 25 TIMSS stands for “Trends in International Math and Science Study.” It is an international standardized test given in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. 500 is the average score internationally.
- 26 Melki, W. (2011, Oct. 13) Two-Day Sit-In at FSHST University. *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/13/two-day-sit-in-at-fshst-university/>
- 27 American Corner, personal interview, Jan. 2012, and T. Abdessalem, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 28 C. Ghazouani, personal interview, Jan. 2012, and K. Ghiloufi, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 29 A. Besbes, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 30 R. Sioua, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 31 Medien, A. (2011, Oct. 21) Tim Sebastian Launches “New Arab Debates.” *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/21/tim-sebastian-launches-new-arab-debates/>
- 32 Declan, 2001.
- 33 MSB Professors, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 34 Collins, N. (2011) Voices of a Revolution: Conversations with Tunisia’s Youth: Findings from focus groups with young Tunisian men and women conducted March 11 to March 24, 2011. *National Democratic Institute*. p. 6
- 35 B. Azizi and S. Khammar, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 36 H. Ben Salem, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 37 S. Khammar, personal interview, Jan. 2012
- 38 G. Borovsky, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 39 H. Ben Salem and C. Ghazouani, Jan. 2012.
- 40 American Corner, personal interview 2012.
- 41 UGTT, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 42 Global Competitiveness Report, 2009.
- 43 UGTT, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 44 T. Abelssalem, personal interview, Jan. 2012.
- 45 CIA World Factbook, 2012.
- 46 El Amrani, I. and Lindsey U. (2011 Nov. 8) Tunisia Moves to the Next Stage. *All Africa*, The Carter Center (2011) National Constituent Assembly Elections in Tunisia, Final Report.
- 47 Byrne, E. (2012, Feb. 19) Conflicting Freedoms – Campus stalemate in controversy over niqab. *University World News*.

## References

- Al Jazeera (2012, May 10) Tunisia’s Multiplying Media. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2012/05/201254131620947297.html>
- Allman, J. (1979) Social Mobility, Education and Development in Tunisia. The Netherlands: E.J. Brill.
- Butler, D. (January 2011). Revolution may end repression of academic freedom in Tunisia. *Nature International Weekly Journal of Science*.
- Byrne, E. (2012, Feb. 19) Conflicting Freedoms – Campus stalemate in controversy over niqab. *University World News*. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120215164052541>.
- Carter Center (2011, Oct. 25) Carter Center Reports Peaceful and Enthusiastic Participation in Tunisia’s Landmark Elections. Retrieved from [http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/tunisia-prelim-102511.pdf](http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/tunisia-prelim-102511.pdf)
- Carter Center (2011) National Constituent Assembly Elections in Tunisia, Final Report. Retrieved from [http://cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/tunisia-final-Oct2011.pdf](http://cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/tunisia-final-Oct2011.pdf)
- CIA Central Intelligence Agency (2012) World Factbook: Tunisia. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>
- Collins, N. (2011) Voices of a Revolution: Conversations with Tunisia’s Youth: Findings from focus groups with young Tunisian men and women conducted March 11 to March 24, 2011. *National Democratic Institute*. p. 6
- Dutta, S. & Mia, I. Global Information Technology Report 209-2010: ICT for Sustainability. Retrieved

- from [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GITR\\_Report\\_2010.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GITR_Report_2010.pdf)
- El Amrani, I. and Lindsey U. (2011 Nov. 8) Tunisia Moves to the Next Stage. *All Africa*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201111101618.html>.
- Freedom House (2010-2012). Freedom in the World. Retrieved from <http://www.freedomhouse.org>
- Ghribia, A. (2012, April 18) Book-Loving Tunisians Occupy Habib Bourguiba Avenue. *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/18/book-loving-tunisians-occupy-habib-bourguiba-avenue/>
- Human Rights Watch (2000) Tunisia: Trial of Professor Condemned. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2000/12/28/tunisia-trial-professor-condemned>
- Human Rights Watch (2010) Tunisia: Union Voices Silenced. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/10/21/tunisia-union-voices-silenced-0>
- Marshall, M. G. (2010-2011) Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2010. *Center for Systemic Peace*. Retrieved from <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>
- Medien, A. (2011, Oct. 21) Tim Sebastian Launches “New Arab Debates.” *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/21/tim-sebastian-launches-new-arab-debates/>
- Melki, W. (2011, Oct. 13) Two-Day Sit-In at FSHST University. *Tunisia Live*. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/13/two-day-sit-in-at-fshst-university/>
- Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., & Foy, P. (with Olson, J.F., Preuschoff, C., Erberber, E., Arora, A., & Galia, J.). (2008) TIMSS 2007 International Mathematics Report. Retrieved from <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/TIMSS2007/mathreport.html>
- Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., & Foy, P. (with Olson, J.F., Preuschoff, C., Erberber, E., Arora, A., & Galia, J.). (2008) TIMSS 2007 International Science Report. Retrieved from <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/TIMSS2007/sciencereport.html>
- Perkins, K. (2004) *A History of Modern Tunisia*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Ryan, Y. (2011, 20 January). The tragic life of a street vendor. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html>
- Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Education and Ministry. (2008) *The Development of Education: National Report, 2004-2008*.
- Sadiki, L. (2002). Bin-Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.
- Tunisia Constitution. Oceana Law.
- UNESCO (2000-2011). UIS Statistics in Brief: Education (all levels) profile – Tunisia. Retrieved from [http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF\\_Language=eng&BR\\_Topic=0](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=136&IF_Language=eng&BR_Topic=0)
- World Bank (2008). The road not traveled: Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

# Snapshots of Tunisia

by Jessica Kulig

Economics '12



A view from atop a building in the Kasbah of Tunis.





A woman walks down the street in city of Kairouan, considered the third holiest city in Islam after Mecca and Medina.





Two doors in Kairouan (this page and the next), examples of the vibrant and colorful architecture in Tunisia.







A nun walks into the kitchen of a convent in Tunis, which serves Tunisia's small, 20,000-strong Catholic population and also doubles as a temporary residence for travelers to the country.







A statue displayed at a museum in Carthage, once the center of the Carthaginian Empire and now a popular tourist attraction for its Roman ruins.





A view from the edge of a large Roman amphitheater, located in the Tunisian city of El Djem.



Inside the Great Mosque of Sidi-Uqba, located in the city of Kairouan.





St. Louis Cathedral, an old Roman Catholic cathedral in Carthage.



Another view of the cathedral, which was built under the French protectorate between 1884 and 1890.





Lamps hang from a chandelier in Kairouan.





A street scene in Kairouan.

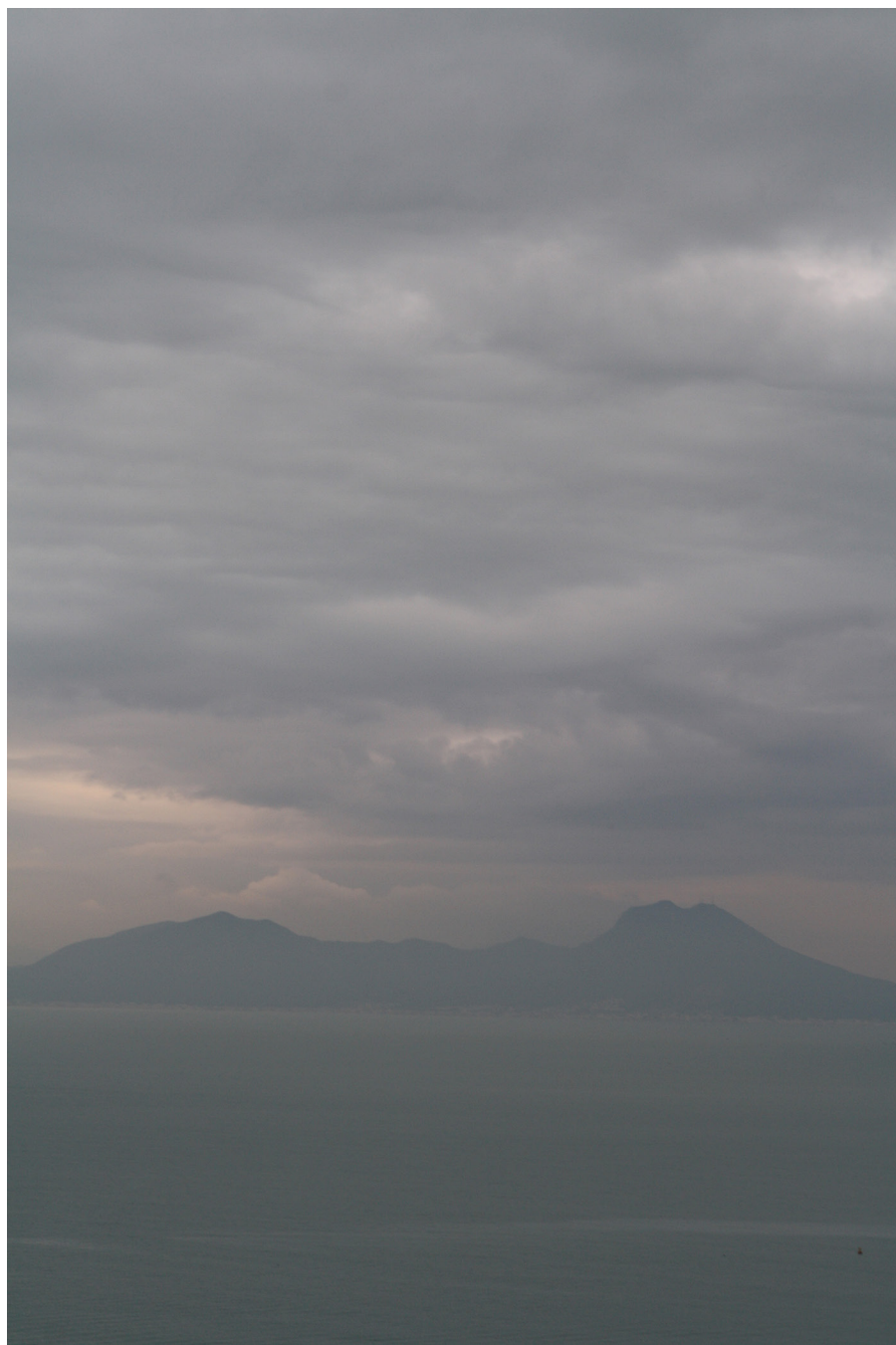


Remnants of the Roman presence in Tunisia against a cloudy Carthage backdrop.





Café des Delices, a café in the tourist destination of Sidi Bou Said popularized by Patrick Bruel, a Franco-Tunisian singer, overlooks the Mediterranean Sea.



A foggy view of the Mediterranean Sea and Mount Bou Kornine from the village of Sidi Bou Said.





Tunis at night, as seen from Sidi Bou Said.



# Tunisian Higher Education: Revolution Not Reform

by Alice E. Pang  
Philosophy and Political Science '13

## Introduction

*“The Arab Spring is possibly the best thing that could have happened for educational reform in the Arab world.”*

- Tarik Yousef, a former professor of Arab studies at  
Georgetown University<sup>1</sup>

The population of youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the fastest growing in the world, yet the current educational system has not been able to keep up with the demands of infrastructure and the economy. The IMF has stated, “Unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa region tends to increase with schooling.”<sup>2</sup> The irony of the situation, of more education leading to unemployment because of the lack of jobs befitting higher skilled workers, has led to widespread frustration. This is arguably one of the central reasons for the Tunisian Revolution of January 2011 that sparked the Arab Spring movement and it is crucial to study this for the restoration and future development in the Middle East.

Although the Tunisian Revolution cannot be reduced to a singular reason, youth unemployment has arguably fuelled the most anger. Young people’s indignation over their meager opportunities contributed to the revolts and protests that expanded across MENA. Now the governments in power and in transition are suddenly faced with populations with high expectations and demands as to what needs to change.<sup>3</sup> Improvement in higher education to tailor curriculum and equip students with skills necessary for the current job market, not only in the Middle East but worldwide, could lead to more jobs for students. Most would agree that there is a direct correlation between development and education. When knowledge is produced, new skills are honed, which induce economic productivity. In spite of the amount of monetary funds per capita that is poured into education in MENA, the results have not correlated with the investment. In Tunisia, public universities have had more students than the system could handle which has resulted in university

graduates who are not necessarily equipped for jobs in contemporary contexts. This situation, along with budgetary constraints, demands that Tunisia reforms its higher education institutions so that graduates are more employable, and its investments in higher education are relevant to its population, not just propagating higher education for its own sake.

Poor quality higher education is a significant challenge for the MENA states. They face a gap between the needs of the competitive open labor market and the skills students attain in universities. Experts predict that recent events will demand reform in higher education. “It is likely that the Arab Spring will certainly affect the governance system of higher education, probably in the direction of more independence, participation and partnerships,” said Rajika Bhandari, who is the deputy vice president of research and evaluation at the Institute of International Education this past year.<sup>4</sup>

Tunisia has come to the world’s stage in the past year, as it ignited change across the Arab world. Tunisia is the ideal place to study higher education reforms in light of the Arab Spring as a nation that has had a relatively stable democratic transition. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said, “People look to Tunisia to continue to demonstrate how one does democracy in this region.”<sup>5</sup> The implications of educational reform in Tunisia will have direct repercussions in the way other MENA societies will engage and view higher education. However, the future of higher education in Tunisia is still very uncertain and change will inevitably be slow. There is a unanimous sentiment that the current system of education must be overhauled completely and that higher education should build global citizens, yet there is no concrete plan for how this should be done. This is partially because Tunisia has not yet established a constitution or a more permanent form of government. (As of this 2012 publication, there has only been a constituent assembly in place which is currently drafting a constitution.) Only when there is a stable government in place with a written constitution can permanent change be made in the higher education sector. The current government has no mandate to make permanent change.

Tunisian scholars, students, government officials and teachers have many opinions as to how to approach higher education, and what role higher education will have in the context of other reforms Tunisia will undertake. Among the difficulties will be identifying which among the different ideas of higher education will be most relevant to address the formidable problems that the current higher education system faces.

## History of Higher Education in Tunisia

The al-Zaitouna mosque college, or madrasa, is the oldest higher education institution in Tunisia. These madrasas were the center of higher education in the mid-1800s, but in the early 1900s, they went through transformations in response to student demands from colonial pressure for a more secular system of education. Following Tunisian independence in 1956, the madrasa was forced to undergo major changes and much of its influence was relegated to primary and secondary level functions.<sup>6</sup> Tunisian independence changed everything related to education in Tunisia, because the nationalists placed the entire future of their country on the ideals of a secular and Western education.<sup>7</sup>

Since gaining independence from France in 1956, Tunisian education officials have been working to develop an education system that is responsive to the needs of a rapidly developing country, while also emphasizing the need to develop a distinct national and regional identity. Although building on the French model, the focus of education reformers has been to return to an Arabic speaking curriculum and faculty at the nation's schools and universities while producing a skilled Tunisian workforce that is able to build and manage a modern economy.<sup>8</sup>

The first university established in Tunisia was the University of Tunis in 1961. The university hosted five different schools: letters, sciences, law, economics and politics, theology and religious sciences, and medicine.<sup>9</sup> The language of instruction at the University of Tunis was French and the university followed the French system very closely. The Tunisian government-supported education system still upholds many of the principle structures of the French educational system. However, with Arabic the official language of government, Arabic is now the primary language of instruction in public schools.

## Current Structure of Higher Education

Today there are 43 public university-level institutions in Tunisia (13 universities, 24 higher institutes of technological studies and 6 higher institutes of teacher training.)<sup>10</sup> Access to postsecondary studies is guaranteed to all students holding the *Diplôme du Baccalauréat* (BAC). The admission process is centrally controlled through the National University Orientation system, which selects students based on an algorithm that computes student preference, scores, program of instruction at the secondary level, and the ministry-set quota for each field of study and institution.<sup>11</sup> Because the BAC ex-

amination acts as both a high school completion examination and a university entrance examination, pass rates are considerably lower than for many other national school leaving examinations. On average, 60 percent of students fail the Baccalauréat each year.

## Public Funding in Higher Education

“Higher Education in Tunisia, an overwhelmingly state-owned, state-operated and state-funded sector, is currently relatively well organized, well staffed and oriented towards quality. However, the combined effect of demographic pressure, increased internal efficiency at pre-university level, and automatic access for all secondary education graduates to higher education will result in the doubling of enrollments within the next 10 years; such an expansion will create a considerable strain under current financial, managerial and pedagogical conditions.”

– The World Bank<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned above, President Bourguiba made education a key priority in modernizing Tunisia. Education has been state-sponsored. Although private institutions do exist, higher education is primarily public. Only approximately 1.7% of students are enrolled in private institutions.<sup>13</sup> Arguments in support of public financing for higher education are that the benefits from educating individuals affect all of society. Additionally, public education contributes to less inequality of income distribution. Government support is necessary to enhance access to education for all, including the poor.

Spending on higher education and education in general has grown in relation to its importance in government policy. Currently, over 7% of the national budget goes into education as whole, with 2% going to higher education.

Ratios of public higher education spending and total public education spending, 1998–2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Public higher education spending as % of GDP	1.30	1.32	1.43	1.55	1.62	1.64	2.01	2.01	2.01	2.04	2.04
Public higher education spending as % of total public expenditures	3.37	3.49	3.59	4.16	4.25	4.84	5.44	5.81	5.97	6.10	6.45
Total public spending on education as % of GDP	6.70	6.58	6.67	6.79	7.03	6.45	7.30	7.39	7.43	7.46	7.39
Total public spending on education as % of total public expenditures	17.4	17.4	16.8	18.3	18.5	19.1	19.8	21.4	22.0	22.3	23.4

Rapid growth in enrollment has occurred since independence and has posed a challenge to the education administrators in the government whose role is to satisfy the demands of the labor market. The job market has not grown as fast as the number of students educated. Enrollment over a 25 year time period was more than ten-fold. In 1970, there were approximately 10,350 students enrolled and this jumped to 112,630 students by 1995.<sup>15</sup>

## The Problems of Efficiency in Higher Education

Because Tunisian higher education shows that public expenditures on education do not necessarily lead to economic growth and stability, its efficiency must be questioned. This is evident in the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, which began as a result of the lack of jobs for college graduates. Effective institutions of higher education require a comprehensive approach in providing quality outcomes of higher education in relation to student learning as well as systematic issues. Issues of adequacy and efficiency must be addressed to improve employability in the local and global markets. The World Bank’s report on MENA educational systems has stated that these countries are unprepared to face economic and financial challenges of the current state of the world, despite tremendous efforts. They also state that there needs to be a “readiness to deal with globalization and the increasing emphasis on knowledge in the development process, the region’s enormous youth bulge, and the additional financial resources required to expand higher levels of instruction.”<sup>16</sup>

This lack of preparation can be seen in the employment statistics of Tunisia. The irony is that the level of unemployment increases with educational level: people with less than a primary education are most likely to be employed, and higher education graduates are less likely to find relevant employment.

Unemployment rate by educational level, 1994, 2000-2007, %

Educational level	1994	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Less than primary	17.6	9.8	10.1	12.8	11.3	12.7	7.8	8	5.9
Primary	18.3	17.3	17.1	16.6	15.8	15.7	15.7	15.2	13.5
Secondary	13.1	18	16.4	15.9	15.3	14.7	14.9	14.3	15.4
Higher	3.8	10.9	10.4	11.6	11.7	10.2	14.8	17.5	19
Overall	15.6	15.7	15.1	15.3	14.5	14.2	14.2	14.3	14.1



The rate of unemployment for higher education graduates has increased over the past 10 years as seen in this chart:

**Unemployment rate for higher education graduates, by year of graduation, 1999–2006, %**

Before 1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average
2.9	13.0	19.7	22.5	29.8	37.5	43.7	61.7	19.3

18

This shows that there is clearly an increasing disjunction between the demands of the labor market and the skills of higher education graduates. It is arguable that the rigid educational system seen in Tunisia keeps their higher institutions from adjusting to the demands of industry and business. The growing unemployment in higher education graduates is evidence of a fundamental problem in the way higher education is perceived and received.

## Considerations for the Future

The current system of higher education is insufficient and must be evaluated and changed to better fit the needs of Tunisia and its people. Following are several considerations for the future:

### Admission to University

It is clear that for the time being, the Tunisian economy cannot support the number of college graduates completing higher education in Tunisia. The former Minister of Education, Hatem Ben Salam, has proposed that the higher achieving students graduating from secondary school be sent to university, while the other half be sent to vocational school.<sup>19</sup> Currently, there are few schools or institutions that provide basic training in vocational skills, leaving many much needed occupations vacant due to the lack of people trained or willing to take these jobs, such as electricians and plumbers. This, of course, has inherent issues of inequality and choice, and is unpopular but may be the only way to address the demands of the economy while curbing the number of unemployed college graduates until the nation stabilizes and rebuilds its economy.

Currently, the admissions system to enter university contains inherent problems in that there is a high level of inflexibility and centralization that leaves many students unsatisfied with whichever discipline they have been placed into; this directly affects the performance of the student. Many times, students are denied their choice of subject area or school.<sup>20</sup> This problem is compounded since the system prevents students from changing disci-

plines over the course of their studies. Ultimately, a centrally controlled and implemented algorithm determines the educational path of many students, stripping them of choice and independence to pursue a particular course of study, rendering them powerless in forging their own lives. One engineering student at the University of Sfax shared that her passion was in reading literature and philosophy, yet she had no choice but to study mechanical engineering (a major in which there is an overabundance of students in the first place.)<sup>21</sup> This is not only frustrating to the students, but also to faculty and professors who end up teaching students who are not engaged with the subject. The presence of unmotivated students in turn affects the classroom environment.

The admissions system should be changed so students are able to apply to the fields they want to pursue as well as to the university they attend. An application process that is not determined by a score on a computer, but one that values individual preference, even if as related to scores in specific fields of study, could greatly improve the academic learning experience as well as produce more fulfilled students and citizens.

## Structure of the University System

As mentioned earlier, higher education in Tunisia is publically funded within the frame of a highly centralized bureaucracy. Although officials under the Ben Ali regime claimed that this is the most efficient way of managing higher education, the current bureaucratic system gets in the way of universities functioning on a basic level. The administration of the university is not actually a part of the institution but rather a body that supervises it and all other institutes of higher education in the area. There is a faculty council at each school that reports to them. Then the administrative body directly accounts to a branch of the Ministry of Education called the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.<sup>22</sup> This creates problems because those who make the decisions about what is allocated and what changes should be made are far removed from the university and are unaware of exactly what the needs and issues of the school are. All decisions, minor or major, must go through this bureaucratic system laden with heavy procedures that often take an extended period of time. For example, if a professor proposes a minor change in a syllabus for a class or there is demand for a new class to be introduced, the proposed changes must go through the faculty council, the administration, then the Ministry of Higher Education. This process could take up to three years.<sup>23</sup>

This system does not give professors the freedom to change, adapt and make their courses better. Additionally, each university should be given their own autonomy through a democratically elected administration per university in relation to research, administration and budgetary matters. Departments should report directly to the university and not the national board of administrators. This will allow for the university's needs to be met, rather than some overarching principles that are applied to all the schools. Each school is different and has its own specialization and needs. One school may need more study space whereas another may need a change in courses. This system will allow for more flexibility and allow for professors to improve their curricula. With greater participation and accountability as a priority for the interim government, many of the university leaders have been replaced because Ben Ali directly appointed them to their positions.<sup>24</sup> Under his regime, administrators were always vetted by the intelligence service and often collaborated with them to keep universities politically inactive. Although this more democratic system has been attempted in the past year, it has failed due to the lack of direct involvement by faculty and staff, as well as the unstable nature of the current government.

### Teachers in Higher Education

The quality of teachers is both a qualitative and quantitative problem in the Tunisian higher education system. In sheer numbers, the quickly growing student population means that there are not enough professors or teachers to keep a low student-to-faculty ratio. Fifty-percent of all classes are not taught by a full-time faculty member, rather by a teacher's assistant or a graduate student. Even when the class is taught by full-time faculty, quality teaching is not guaranteed. For example a professor may have been trained in a specific field, yet because of his or her insufficient education, their understanding and knowledge of that topic is also limited, leading to poor teaching. And when limited knowledge is passed on as complete knowledge, the cycle of bad education is inevitably perpetuated. Hatam Ben Salem noted, "I've been in university classrooms where the French professor cannot properly speak and write French."<sup>25</sup> Unprepared professors however, cannot simply be removed. They are protected by unions, which are widely known to be corrupt. Those wanting to be a teacher or to keep their position can do so under the unions, which can be bribed. Additionally, most teachers are under contractual agreements rather than on a tenure-track system. This means that there is no formal way to evaluate teachers or a way to motivate them to keep doing research to expand their repertoire. Tunisia must commit to good teacher education, allowing only those qualified to become professors.

Professor Tahar Abdessalem, Professor at Tunisia Polytechnic School, points to the need for “a pedagogical shift in Tunisian education.”<sup>26</sup> This means that Tunisia cannot continue relying on the status quo of the banking style of education: one where the teacher speaks and the students only listen. He asserts that students must learn how to think for themselves. He argues that instead of forcing a student into a single discipline, there needs to be a balance between specialization and general studies in order to foster critical thinking. This, of course, begins with good teachers. However, the reality of the situation is that preparing *quality* professors at the same rate of the growing number of students is impossible.

A way to temporarily address this issue is to fill universities with more foreign professors and instructors through hiring foreign teachers. Currently, there are very few foreign professors teaching in Tunisian universities. By recruiting abroad, they will be able to fill the positions needed, hire more specialized and experienced professors, and bring a more global dimension to the classroom until Tunisian teachers have had adequate training. However, there is an ideological argument against the hiring of foreign teachers in Tunisia, stating that Tunisian education should be strictly Tunisian. However, this paradigm must change in order to prepare students for the current global world they must engage with. This shift is becoming more visible: Tunisian students want foreign professors and want to learn new languages. The Tunisian government has acknowledged this in some way, through the reestablishment of the United States Peace Corps in Tunisia, allowing for English language exchange.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, students are calling the government to build partnerships, such as the one between the University of Georgia and Tunisia that strives to have academic exchanges<sup>28</sup> with universities in the United States and elsewhere to be able to benefit from different languages and cultures. The United States has intentions to expand exchange programs between the U.S.A and Tunisia, through building links with businesses and schools as well as in other sectors in health, investment, trade, etc.<sup>29</sup>

## Resource Allocation

The lack of resources in Tunisia comes in two forms: where resources are available and what is available. In Tunisia, there is a huge disparity between the exterior or coastal areas and the interior of the country in relation to higher educational institutions. This is a problem of equality. The interior regions of Tunisia tend to have a smaller income than the coastal areas and often do not have higher education institutions. For example, Sidi Bouzid, the region where Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolated, does not currently have a university or college. If students want to attend university, they must move

to a different region, adding additional expenses that their families cannot provide. Tunisia must make a commitment to establishing new universities or relocating other ones to these regions to give all regions equal access to success. Because these regions are so poor, their standards of education have become lower than those regions in the coastal areas. Raising the standards by providing good teachers on all levels of education will change this, bringing more opportunity for prosperity to the interior regions.<sup>30</sup>

As a whole, very little money is committed to necessary resources in a university that serves student needs. For example, Internet connection across all the universities in Tunisia is not consistent. To continually access new information, this is necessary for expanding student knowledge and keeping students connected to the world. Although there was a plan to implement more connectivity in 1997, it only had limited impact on about 15 institutions.<sup>31</sup> Because libraries are either non-existent or very small, the need for consistent internet connection which allows students to access the widely available resources available online take on even more importance. In conjunction with an expanded wireless network, universities should put up all necessary information about school policies, syllabus, courses, professors and events online so that students will understand what is going on. Currently, no such system of informing students exists, causing some chaos and inefficiency within the university. Also, there should be study spaces available for students along with a stronger student services program. This should be where students can find out how to find jobs, write a resume, conduct an interview, etc. as well as find tutors and resources to help them study better which would in turn foster outside, independent learning.

## Economic Development and Higher Education

Lahcen Achy, a resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center, in Beirut, who is an expert on development and labor markets in the Middle East and North Africa said:

“Students need jobs once they graduate... In the past, the public sector was a large provider of jobs for university graduates. But with the public sector shrinking in all these countries... there is a need to have a private sector.”<sup>32</sup>

The absence of a strong private sector is due to the business environment, institutions, corruption, and the lack of incentives for entrepreneurs. Achy is pointing to the integral relationship between higher education and a healthy, vibrant private sector that can employ bright, young graduates. Its role is crucial in fostering the kind of economic growth championed by edu-



cational experts and economists. They have consistently stated that there is a direct correlation between education and the enhancement of economic growth and development. These two factors relate to each other: a stronger economy will lead to better education and vice versa. New economic reforms, although uncertain, will most likely include diversification of markets, encouragement of a private sector and the co-habitation between tourism, agriculture and services sectors.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, more partnerships must be established between the private sector (local and foreign companies) and universities to better equip students for the private sector. This is very rare in Tunisia but it is necessary to train students to be ready for the business world. For example, Cisco and Microsoft have training programs for university graduates in order to teach them management skills and other necessary tools to be a part of an international corporation.<sup>34</sup> Having programs between businesses and universities to offer internship and training programs will not only provide better, local workers for both foreign and local companies, but it will also inspire new entrepreneurship. These things cannot happen until the economy and the country is stable enough to attract international companies not just to invest, but for them to invest in the Tunisian people.

## Considerations for Politics and Higher Education

Professor Raja Bouziri, a professor of sociolinguistics in Tunisia has said, “people want to change the hierarchical relationships within universities to democratize relationships after decades of repression.”<sup>35</sup> The Tunisian uprising has validated the young people’s voices and through the media and Internet, people have cultivated a deeper understanding of politics beyond a single party authoritative regime. However, because a different situation has not been lived, their political understanding is limited still. As the uprising gives way to a new form of nation building after decades of oppression through authoritarian rule, it is evident that society is not well equipped with the values needed for democracy. Generations have allied allegiance to one’s country as if it equated to allegiance to the ruling political party.<sup>36</sup> This understanding of political citizenship is outdated and narrow. Authoritarian Arab governments have used education to carry public loyalty and reflect the state’s non-democratic ideology.<sup>37</sup> The need now is to have education take its place as a central means in creating and understanding citizenship. Although this may have the greatest impact in early and primary education, higher education must be taken into account as well. Students in all age groups must be empowered to think for themselves, to seek knowledge and to have choice in forging their own lives. This will foster a citizenry that will build prosperous

economies and a society that will encourage civil responsibilities and critical thinking.<sup>38</sup>

Citizenship education is defined as opportunities for participating in both civic and civil society, along with knowledge and understanding. It is a way of interacting with and shaping one's own community and society.<sup>39</sup> Education for citizenship should aim to reform the classroom environment - from students being receivers of information to one where students are empowered to seek their own answers. The nature of the political system in Tunisia has been centralized and dominated by an authoritarian regime. Researchers who studied educational systems in Tunisia have concluded that often times, regimes actively produce dependent and submissive students. The students also did not receive tolerance or respect if their opinions differed from their teachers.<sup>40</sup>

Educating to effectively create responsible citizens should reflect a democratic culture in the school, the community and the country. This type of education does not only hold implications for political citizenship but also in creating life long learners – students who are empowered to learn and to actively, positively impact their given communities and the world. To do this, the government must have vision, effective strategic planning, transparent supervision and competent human resources, all within a democratic and open political system.

## **Conclusion: The Future of Higher Education in Tunisia**

The government of Tunisia must pursue a policy of improving the outcomes of higher education to promote stability and economic growth in their country. Additionally, democratic reforms within education must take place in order to establish and maintain a democratic state. These must be the priority of higher education – beyond the number of university graduates. Reforms are not enough. There must be a revolution in the higher education system. There must be an emphasis of quality in relation to the increasing demand for higher education. Improving the quality of education on multiple levels will enable students to effectively participate in the knowledge economy, answer the demands for highly skilled workers and enhance opportunities for economic growth. What is obvious now is that political, cultural and economic roles of higher education institutions cannot be approached separately. Higher education in and of itself is powerless to move countries economically. Tunisia must pursue long-term reform policies that are sup-

ported by strong political will in order to address the major issues higher education faces. It is evident, however, that this will take much planning, resources, and patience.

## Endnotes

- 1 David Matthews, "Arab Spring Shines a Harsh Light on Outdated Systems," *Times Higher Education*, November 10, 2011.
- 2 David Wessel, "Arab World Built Colleges, but Not Jobs," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2011.
- 3 Ursula Lindsey, "Higher-Education Reform Takes Center Stage in Arab Protests," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2011.
- 4 Sara Hamdan, "Arab Spring Spawns Interest in Improving Quality of Higher Education," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2011.
- 5 Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Town Hall With Tunisian Youth," U.S. Department of State (Tunis, 2012).
- 6 Y. G-M. Lulat, *A History of African Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2005), 168.
- 7 James Allman, *Social Mobility, Education and Development in Tunisia* (Brill Academic Publishers, 1979), 87.
- 8 "Tunisia Way," *Education in Tunisia*, <http://tunisia-way.com/index.php/Education-in-Tunisia/Education-in-Tunisia/View-issue.html>.
- 9 Allman, loc.cit., p. 67.
- 10 "Tunisia Way," loc.cit.
- 11 Nick Clark, *Education in Tunisia*, World Education and News Reviews (New York: World Education Services, 2006).
- 12 "Tunisia - Higher Education," 2011, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1554/Tunisia-HIGHER-EDUCATION.html>.
- 13 Tahar Abdessalem, "Scope, relevance, and challenges of financing higher education: The case of Tunisia," United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization IBE (2011).
- 14 Abdessalem, loc.cit.
- 15 "Tunisia - Higher Education," 2011, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1554/Tunisia-HIGHER-EDUCATION.html>.
- 16 World Bank, *The road not travelled: Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2008).
- 17 Tahar Abdessalem, "Scope, relevance, and challenges of financing higher education: The case of Tunisia," United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization IBE (2011).
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ben Salam, Hatem. (2012, January 12). Personal interview.
- 20 Mohamed Talbi, John Innes Clark and Emma Murphy, "Encyclopedia Britannica - Academic Edition," *Tunisia*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/609229/Tunisia/46616/Education>.
- 21 Anonymous student. (2012, January 9.) Personal interview.
- 22 Zack Brisson and Kate Krontiris, "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions," *infoDev*, 2012.
- 23 Abdessalem, Tahar. (2012, January 13). Personal interview.
- 24 Ursula Lindsey, "Back to School," *Foreign Policy* (April 23, 2012).
- 25 Ben Salam, Hatem. (2012, January 12). Personal interview.
- 26 Abdessalem, Tahar. (2012, January 13). Personal interview.
- 27 "Fact Sheet: The President's Framework for Investing in Tunisia," *The White House*, May 19,

- 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/07/fact-sheet-presidents-framework-investing-tunisia>.
- 28 The University of Georgia, *The University of Georgia-Tunisia Educational Partnership*, <http://www.tunisia.uga.edu/>.
- 29 Clinton, loc.cit.
- 30 Maria Cristina Paciello, *Tunisia: Changes and Challenges of Political Transition*, Mediterranean Prospects (Brussels: European Union Seventh Framework Program, 2011).
- 31 Zack Brisson and Kate Krontiris, "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions," *infoDev*, 2012.
- 32 Ursula Lindsey, "Higher-Education Reform Takes Center Stage in Arab Protests," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2011.
- 33 Ahmed Medien, "New Financial Reforms," *Tunisia Live*, August 21, 2011, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/21/new-financial-reforms/>.
- 34 Brisson and Krontiris, loc.cit.
- 35 Lindsey, loc.cit.
- 36 Muhammad Faour and Marwan Muasher, *Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future*, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Papers, 2011).
- 37 Muhammad Faour, "Will the Arab Spring Lead to a Revolution in Education?," *Foreign Policy*, October 31, 2011.
- 38 Faour and Muasher, loc.cit.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.

## Works Cited

- David Matthews, "Arab Spring Shines a Harsh Light on Outdated Systems," *Times Higher Education*, November 10, 2011.
- David Wessel, "Arab World Built Colleges, but Not Jobs," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2011.
- Ursula Lindsey, "Higher-Education Reform Takes Center Stage in Arab Protests," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2011.
- Sara Hamdan, "Arab Spring Spaws Interest in Improving Quality of Higher Education," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2011.
- Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Town Hall With Tunisian Youth," U.S. Department of State (Tunis, 2012).
- World Bank, *The road not travelled: Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2008).
- Tahar Abdessalem, "Scope, relevance, and challenges of financing higher education: The case of Tunisia," United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization IBE (2011).
- Y. G-M. Lulat, *A History of African Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2005), 168.
- James Allman, *Social Mobility, Education and Development in Tunisia* (Brill Academic Publishers, 1979), 87.
- "Tunisia Way," *Education in Tunisia*, <http://tunisia-way.com/index.php/Education-in-Tunisia/Education-in-Tunisia/View-issue.html>.
- Nick Clark, *Education in Tunisia*, World Education and News Reviews (New York: World Education Services, 2006).
- "Tunisia - Higher Education," 2011, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1554/Tunisia-HIGHER-EDUCATION.html>.
- Ben Salam, Hatem. (2012, January 12). Personal interview.
- Mohamed Talbi, John Innes Clark and Emma Murphy, "Encyclopedia Britannica - Academic Edition," *Tunisia*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/609229/Tunisia/46616/Education>.
- Anonymous student. (2012, January 9.) Personal interview.
- Zack Brisson and Kate Krontiris, "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions," *infoDev*, 2012.

- Ursula Lindsey, "Back to School," *Foreign Policy* (April 23, 2012).
- Abdessalem, Tahar. (2012, January 13). Personal interview.
- "Fact Sheet: The President's Framework for Investing in Tunisia," *The White House*, May 19, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/07/fact-sheet-presidents-framework-investing-tunisia>.
- The University of Georgia, *The University of Georgia-Tunisia Educational Partnership*, <http://www.tunisia.uga.edu/>.
- Maria Cristina Paciello, *Tunisia: Changes and Challenges of Political Transition*, Mediterranean Prospects (Brussels: European Union Seventh Framework Program, 2011).
- Ahmed Medien, "New Financial Reforms," *Tunisia Live*, August 21, 2011, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/21/new-financial-reforms/>.
- Muhammad Faour and Marwan Muasher, *Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future*, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Papers, 2011).
- Muhammad Faour, "Will the Arab Spring Lead to a Revolution in Education?," *Foreign Policy*, October 31, 2011.



# An Assessment of U.S. Democracy Assistance Efforts in Tunisia

by Daniel Resnick  
International Relations '12

One of President Obama's first foreign policy decisions after he took office in January 2009 was to de-emphasize the role of democracy promotion in U.S. Middle East policy, at least on the rhetorical level. Though funding for democracy, human rights, and governance did not significantly decline under the new administration, the rhetoric used to support democratization changed. The Obama administration reasoned that the previous administration's efforts to promote democracy while engaging in two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan hurt U.S. credibility and leadership in the region and around the globe. The Obama administration chose not to champion a liberal ideology or act with a sense of superiority, hoping to mend this broken credibility.<sup>1</sup> After the Arab Spring and other democratic crises and breakthroughs around the world, however, the Obama administration re-elevated the concept of democracy assistance, though still using a different language than the Bush administration. With specific regards to Tunisia, the first country to topple its regime during the Arab Spring, the Obama administration jumped on the opportunity to publically congratulate the Tunisian people for its non-violent revolution and dramatically increased U.S. non-security assistance to the country to help its democratic transition. According to a State Department release in February, the U.S. has pledged over \$190 million to Tunisia since the revolution in the form of economic loans and assistance, civil society support, election and political process aid, etc.,<sup>2</sup> and it committed hundreds of million of additional dollars in cash transfers and loan guarantees since March 2012.<sup>3</sup> As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated after the Tunisian elections in October 2011, "The United States remains committed to working with the government and people of Tunisia as they pursue a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic future."<sup>4</sup> The United States has specifically focused on strengthening the capacity and capabilities of international and Tunisian non-state actors working in the country, believing these organizations as potential promoters of economic growth, human rights, and democratic governance.

As the United States prepares to assist the democratic transition in Tunisia, two important questions must be asked. First, can the Obama administration learn from and correct the mistakes of the previous administration's democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East? If the answer to the first question is yes, then the next logical question is whether the current strategies are best suited to increase democratic values and practices in the country. Based on secondary source readings, as well as primary source interviews in the United States and Tunisia, this paper offers a tentative yes to both questions. First, I will trace the two overarching problems of the Bush administration's democracy promotion strategy – a lack of credibility and an ignorance of the particularistic vision of democracy in the Middle East – and argue that the Obama administration has taken important steps to resolve these issues, to the point that U.S. democracy assistance in Tunisia is tolerated by the government and many civil society actors. Second, I will claim that the administration's decision to focus primarily on assisting non-state actors is the most appropriate strategy, despite some of its inherent shortcomings. Ultimately, this paper will recommend a few specific changes to U.S. democracy promotion efforts in Tunisia, while concluding that the administration's broad strategy has been sensible thus far.

## Democracy Promotion under President Bush

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration decided that the U.S. needed a new security policy in the Middle East. Realizing that many of the al-Qaeda terrorists resided in U.S. friendly, authoritarian regimes, a number of scholars and government officials theorized that the U.S. could enhance its security interests in the region by promoting democracy and thus undermining the support base of extremist organizations. Though the U.S. had promoted democracy before 9/11 in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 90s, President Bush directly linked democracy promotion in the Middle East with U.S. security interests under what he called the "Freedom Agenda." According to its archived webpage, the Freedom Agenda aimed to:

"...promote the spread of freedom as the great alternative to the terrorists' ideology of hatred, because expanding liberty and democracy will help defeat extremism and protect the American people...By working to spread liberty in these volatile regions and combating the conditions that can breed extremism, the President has helped make the American people safer."<sup>5</sup>

The president's specific aim in the Middle East was to provoke a democratic transition in one or two Middle Eastern countries, inspiring other countries to follow. Thomas Carothers nicely summarizes this vision, writing:

The core idea of the new approach was to undercut the roots of Islamic extremism by getting serious about promoting democracy in the Arab world, not just as in a slow, gradual way, but with fervor and force... According to this vision, the United States will first promote democracy in the Palestinian territories by linking U.S. support for a Palestinian state with the achievement of a new, more democratic Palestine. Second, the United States will effect regime change in Iraq and help transform that country into a democracy. The establishment of two successful models of Arab democracy will have a powerful demonstration effect, "inspiring reforms throughout the Muslim world," as Bush declared at the United Nations...<sup>6</sup>

Later on, Carothers adds: "but America's new pro-democratic policy toward the Middle East is much broader than the effort in Iraq; it now consists of a host of diplomatic initiatives, aid programs, and other measures aimed at the entire region."<sup>7</sup> In short, after 9/11 the U.S. sought to transform the Middle East, with Iraq and Palestine serving as the cornerstones.

As part of this regional effort, the U.S. increased governance and democracy assistance to Middle Eastern countries and put occasional pressure on authoritarian regimes to reform their actions. For example, measures to motivate democratic transitions during the Bush presidency included: rewarding liberalization in Morocco and Bahrain with economic incentives, establishing a new democracy promotion office called the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and scolding former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for selective human rights violations.<sup>8</sup> For a few years after 9/11, the United States' policies appeared effective. Even Bush's biggest critics admit that his focus on democracy in the Middle East between 2002 and 2005 motivated Arab reformists and activists from all levels of society to begin to seriously talk about the benefits of democracy. In an article critiquing U.S. democracy promotion in the region, professor Katerina Dalacoura states:

However, on the positive side MEPI and the BMENA<sup>9</sup> Partnership Initiative have combined with the Bush administration's very public encouragement of democracy, and the war in Iraq, to initiate a debate across the Arab world about the need for reform. Indeed, it has been argued, time and again, that the Bush administration's emphasis on democracy has shaken the Arab Middle East out of its apathy and forced reform on to the agenda in an unprecedented way...<sup>10</sup>

However, despite some encouraging signs, these efforts failed to inspire democratic transitions in the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

The reason the Bush administration's efforts in the Middle East failed on a macro and micro scale is because they violated two key principles of democracy promotion: they lacked credibility in the eye of the local population and they largely ignored the local vision of democracy in the Middle East. Carothers notes that people in the target country are naturally suspicious of foreign involvement in their country's affairs, and therefore credibility and trust must slowly be built between both sides.<sup>12</sup> The United States never truly developed this credibility in the Middle East because its pro-democracy rhetoric rarely matched its conflicting actions. For example, even though the decision to invade Iraq was marketed by the U.S. as a positive development for the country and the region, many Arabs saw it as an unwarranted attack on Iraq's sovereignty and became frustrated by its ongoing nature. Carnegie Endowment scholar Marina Ottaway claims that most Arabs did not comprehend Bush's "Freedom Agenda" and instead focused on the military aspects of the intervention, "...which has created much resentment and convinced many that the United States would use strong-armed method elsewhere to get rid of regimes it did not like."<sup>13</sup> In fact, in a well-publicized article evaluating the success of USAID's democracy programs, scholars Steven Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell Seligson, and C. Neal Tate find that democracy assistance is less effective in countries that receive a large percentage of U.S. military assistance,<sup>14</sup> leading them to conclude that democracy assistance is less powerful when the overall policy towards the recipient country is driven by security concerns. Many of the Middle Eastern countries that obtained democracy assistance also received a far-greater amount of military aid (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories<sup>15</sup>), so that as the U.S. was equipping reformers to weaken their authoritarian governments, it simultaneously strengthened these governments by contributing to their security forces and legitimizing their rulers.

The U.S. further damaged its credibility by inconsistently condemning democracy abuses in the Middle East, often ignoring the abuses by its security allies. As Dalacoura argues, this mindset led "the U.S. government [to approach] the democracy issue differently with its Arab 'friends' and with its 'foes'. This distinction has given rise to the charge of inconsistency, because it reinforces the appearance that the US will not press friendly regimes too far, lest they be destabilized by democratic reforms..."<sup>16</sup> Of course, many Arabs already viewed U.S. policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as inconsistent and one-sided, so the United States' contradictory democracy promotion policies only confirmed the suspicion that the U.S. cared more about the security of its allies than about democracy and human rights in the region.

One major factor that contributed to this inconsistency was the failure

by U.S. policymakers to understand that democracy in the Middle East may look different than democracy in the United States or Europe, including significant gains by parties associated with Islamists. The Bush administration failed to put the threat of Islamic extremism in proper perspective, not realizing that Islamist organizations exist on a broad spectrum, from moderate organizations that accept political pluralism to extremist groups that promote violent tactics. The U.S. allied itself with authoritarian regimes that also viewed all types of Islamists as an existential threat, and the Bush administration concluded that it would not strongly encourage democratic transition in those countries unless it could assure a secular victory.<sup>17</sup> For example, the administration reduced its criticism of the Mubarak regime in Egypt after the seemingly moderate and Islamist Muslim Brotherhood made steady gains in the 2005 parliamentary elections, staying silent as the government reacted to these gains by arresting hundreds of Brotherhood members, postponing local elections, and passing damaging human rights legislation.<sup>18</sup> By overlooking abuses of Islamic democratic reformers at the hands of secular rulers, the U.S. appeared as a supporter of democracy only if democracy matched its specific security interests, thus leaving many Middle Easterners cynical about the aims of U.S. democracy promotion. In short, U.S. democracy promotion endeavors in the Middle East under the Bush administration failed because the administration violated key democracy promotion principles: it undermined its own credibility, it was not prepared for local realities, and it refused to negotiate with actors outside of its comfort zone.

Before concluding whether these problems have been sufficiently addressed so that democracy support efforts in Tunisia could succeed, it is worth noting that the United States did not aggressively pursue democratic reform in the country before the revolution partly because it was satisfied with the status quo of Tunisia's secular, authoritarian ruler, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. There are two reasons why the U.S. did not attempt more serious efforts in Tunisia. The first is practical: Tunisia's regime was so oppressive that it offered very few opportunities for outside donors to work in the country. Discussing the potential for U.S. democracy promotion in Tunisia, Thomas Carothers writes, "in a small number of Arab states – Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the UAE – the level of political repression is so high that there are few entry points available to the United States for programs to promote democracy."<sup>19</sup> One State Department official I spoke to admitted that engaging with the Ben Ali regime on issues of human rights and democracy was like "hitting a brick wall,"<sup>20</sup> while an EU official stated that the EU delegation consistently complained to the Ben Ali regime about its human rights record, even though the regime chose to ignore many of these complaints.<sup>21</sup> To support democracy under such conditions, Carothers claims that "the United States



could exert diplomatic pressure for political reform... but unless it was willing to back up such actions with more substantial forms of coercive leverage, these dictatorial regimes would be unlikely to loosen their hold on power.”<sup>22</sup> However, the United States did have the ability to exert such leverage, having distributed at least ten million dollars annually in security assistance to the Tunisian government since 2006.<sup>23</sup> And considering that Tunisia contained some positive socioeconomic characteristics for a potential democratic transition, most notably its fairly stable economy and highly educated population,<sup>24</sup> some experts wondered why the U.S. chose not to make greater attempts at pressuring the Ben Ali regime to liberalize politically.

These scholars conclude that U.S. and European policy toward Tunisia suffered the same “Stability Syndrome”<sup>25</sup> that afflicted policies toward the entire Middle East, meaning that the U.S. and EU favored the stability of a secular, authoritarian government over genuine liberal reforms. As discussed earlier, if the U.S. or EU feared that their democratization efforts would lead to an Islamist takeover of the country, then they often overlooked the repressive policies of the authoritarian regimes in favor of guaranteed stability. As such, even though the European Union initiated a number of economic and social programs in Tunisia, it never took the more useful action and implemented the conditionality clauses it placed on its lucrative trade agreements with the country, even though the entire point of the conditionality clause was to force the Tunisian regime to reassess its human rights policy. As Professor Breig Powel writes: “...despite Tunisia’s inclusion in democracy promoting initiatives, material commitments to political reform in Tunisia by the U.S. and the EU have generally failed to match the intensity of their rhetoric.”<sup>26</sup> Professors Durac and Cavatorta echo Powel’s point and dispel the myth that the EU and U.S. possess radically different notions of democracy and democracy promotion, highlighting how both approached Tunisia with the same one-dimensional mindset. They write:

The EU and the US share the same objective and therefore their democracy-promotion strategies are bound to fail. The maintenance of the international status quo, the enforcement of neo-liberal economic arrangements and the absolute control over the definition of what constitutes security make it impossible for these two actors to credibly promote democracy as the probable outcome is likely to throw up parties and movements that would contest precisely such objectives.<sup>27</sup>

The professors then go on to claim that the double talk of the U.S. and EU actually hindered the development of these norms in Tunisia and across the region. For one, democracy promotion rhetoric drives up the hopes of local activists, and its failed implementation then sparks questions about the

credibility of the U.S. and EU as true allies of democracy. More significantly, the EU and United States' relationships with these authoritarian regimes entrenches their position and legitimizes their repressive actions, making actual reform even harder.<sup>28</sup> In conclusion, it appears to me that the U.S. and EU preferred Tunisia's stability rather than promote democracy in the country, cementing the position and policies of the regime.

## Rectifying past mistakes?

As stated in the introduction, President Obama has sought to increase U.S. credibility in the Middle East by engaging with the Arab world with modesty and humility. Carothers points out in his assessment of Obama's democracy promotion strategy that "[Obama and Secretary Clinton initially] stressed that under their watch the United States would not seek to impose its form of government on other countries by force, not promote U.S.-style democracy but instead emphasize universal rights and principles, and not treat democracy as being just about freedom and election."<sup>29</sup> For example, in his seminal speech in Cairo University, Obama spoke of seeking "... a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect."<sup>30</sup> Early on in his presidency Obama also promised to shut down the military detention camp in Guantanamo Bay and put large diplomatic efforts into resolving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, which initially increased American favorability in the Muslim World.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, the Obama administration has faced similar problems to the Bush administration, failing to back-up its rhetoric with concrete action. Obama has not closed Guantanamo Bay, advanced the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or disengaged with numerous authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Commenting on Obama's falling approval rating in the Middle East, professors John Esposito and Jonathan Githens-Mazer write that "The [Obama] administration needs to make clear whether they are willing to make the hard choices required to support democratization in the Arab world and to move the peace process forward, or recognize that no amount of positive rhetoric will mask failure to do so."<sup>32</sup>

However, the United States did and continues to support a number of Arab transitions, albeit inconsistently from country to country. For example, while the U.S. did not immediately withdraw its alliance with the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, it quickly congratulated the Tunisian people for their struggle against authoritarianism, with President Obama stating in his "State of the Union" just days after Ben Ali fled Tunisia that the "United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia, and supports the democratic aspirations of all people."<sup>33</sup> This support stood in sharp contrast to the more

tepid response to the revolution by Tunisia's main western ally, France, which continued to provide equipment to the repressive Tunisian police days before Ben Ali's departure. In fact, one Arab public opinion poll from the fall of 2011 reveals that American credibility has increased slightly in the Middle East partly because of the United States' general acceptance and encouragement of the Arab Spring.<sup>34</sup> And even as the United States moved to assist these democratic transitions, it continues to avoid high-minded rhetoric with regards to democracy promotion, acknowledging that democracy promotion is only one of many U.S. interests in the Middle East.

In addition to these attempts to restore its credibility in the region, there has been a growing realization in the U.S. (and not just within the Obama administration) that moderate Islamic groups and parties in the Middle East could serve as facilitators of democratic transition rather than obstructers to this process. Specifically with respects to Tunisia, the U.S. understood that the moderate Islamic Ennahda party would likely lead Tunisia's new government, so the United States immediately sought to engage with it. On the one hand, statements by Ennahda leader, Rached Ghannouchi, who visited the U.S. after the October 2011 elections, suggested that Ennahda is more moderate than other so-called Islamic parties, making it easier for American policymakers and politicians to accept collaborations with it.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. seems more cognizant of the wide spectrum of Islamist groups and recognizes in particular Ennahda's public, moderate stance. Even the neo-conservative senator, Joseph Lieberman, who visited Tunisia after its elections, stated "When we talk about Islamism in the U.S. and around the western world, we have to be careful, because that covers a wide spectrum... Ennahda can do a tremendous service to the entire world by demonstrating that there is no inconsistency between democracy and Islamism."<sup>36</sup> These moves led Carothers to conclude that "the administration has taken an important step toward overcoming profound Arab skepticism about the sincerity of the U.S. belief in Arab democracy by talking the talk and then in the case of Tunisia walking the walk with regard to accepting the popular will of Arab societies even if it takes the form of Islamist electoral victories."<sup>37</sup>

Based on personal conversations in Tunisia, many Tunisians seem to have a tolerant and even welcoming attitude about certain types of U.S. assistance, despite their frustrations with other parts of U.S. foreign policy. Even more conservative Tunisians realize that their economic problems will require cooperation and assistance from diverse international actors, from the U.S. and Europe to the Gulf States and Turkey, and therefore encourage various forms of economic investment and loans. Other Tunisians are more open to direct forms of governance and democracy assistance. Tunisian human rights

lawyer Chiheb Ghazouani stated that the United States should offer civil society assistance and training and restart academic and business exchange programs, especially since the United States improved its image in Tunisia after the revolution.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, civil society leaders at the American Islamic Congress and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting admitted that while many Tunisians remain suspicious of U.S. aid, these tendencies are often mitigated through greater transparency, noting that the many organizations have cooperated with U.S. donors on specific projects and trainings.<sup>39</sup> Most importantly, though, the new Tunisian government has welcomed various forms of U.S. support, unlike other transition governments in the region. In fact, Gabriella Borovsky, the National Democratic Institute's former Resident Program Officer in Tunisia confirmed that the Islamist Ennahda party openly participated in NDI's political party trainings.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, a U.S. Embassy Staffer in Tunisia concluded that so far there has been very little push back from the government, as the embassy works to increase U.S. programs in the country.<sup>41</sup> As such, it seems as though the U.S. developed enough credibility in Tunisia to offer some types of assistance to the country's democratic transition.

## **Non-state actors as the focus of the transition**

Once the U.S. realized that Tunisia was open to receiving outside assistance, it then had to decide what form of aid could be most effective in Tunisia. This question was especially difficult considering that “[Tunisia] was one of the most politically closed environments [under Ben Ali] with almost no independent media, political parties, or civil society,” according to the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).<sup>42</sup> Though answering what constitutes a successful democracy is a widely contested academic issue, Secretary of State Clinton summarized the U.S. government's approach during a town hall with Tunisian students and activists, stating:

When you think about a democratic society, it's like a three-legged stool. You need an accountable, responsible, effective government. And it's up to the citizens to hold that government accountable. You need a well-functioning and efficient business sector to create jobs, create wealth, give people opportunities. And you need a strong civil society to speak out on behalf of the needs of people – homeless people, uneducated people, discriminated-against people – and to stand up for the rights of all people against both business and the government. So if you remove one of those legs of the stool, the stool falls over.<sup>43</sup>

Secretary Clinton then concluded by emphasizing that “[The United States] wants to work with all three legs of the Tunisian stool...”<sup>44</sup> In this paper

I evaluate the strategy behind U.S. efforts to strengthen Tunisia's first and third legs (the government and civil society).<sup>45</sup> I will show that to support government accountability (leg one) and a strong civil society (leg three), the United States chose to empower local and international non-governmental organizations – the non-state actors – hoping that these organizations could address Tunisia's deficits, while avoiding the perception that the U.S. is directly interfering with the political process. MEPI, the principle contributor of non-security aid to Tunisia, for instance, has awarded dozens of grants to local civil society organizations to strengthen political engagement, particularly among the youth and women, while international NGOs such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the American Bar Association (ABA), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) worked with legal and political actors, which helped Tunisia prepare for its first, democratic elections back in October 2011.

The use of local and international non-governmental organizations is grounded in pre-existing State Department policy that seeks to engage non-governmental actors in support of U.S. foreign policy goals. The State Department's first *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* in 2010 specifically highlights "engaging beyond the state" as a key policy goal, since "Non-state actors bring considerable political and financial resources to bear on collective challenges. They mobilize populations within and across states to promote growth, fundamental human values, and effective democratic government."<sup>46</sup> As such, though the United States will surely continue to communicate with the Tunisian government to strengthen its accountability, effectiveness and responsibility, it may do so indirectly through organizations that would fall under the category of non-state actors, whether locally established or foreign based.

Democracy scholars have long documented the potential benefits of the non-state sector, and especially of a locally developed civil society, to a country's democratic consolidation. Though definitions vary, civil society is typically characterized as a voluntary and self-generated organized sector of social life that does not seek elected power in government.<sup>47</sup> Civil society organizations run the gamut from advocacy NGOs to local sports clubs to separatist groups, and even though international NGOs like IFES and NDI did not originate locally, they may be considered quasi-civil-society-organizations, since the local organizations with the same functions are still weak in Tunisia. Under ideal circumstances, an active civil society can greatly contribute to democratic consolidation and development. Democracy scholar Larry Diamond holds that civil society can serve as a check on government power,



providing unbiased information to the public and representing the rights of minority and indigenous groups.<sup>48</sup> At other times, civil society may contribute to the state's democratic process, by stimulating popular participation, training future political leaders, and undertaking election monitoring activities. Equally, Diamond notes that civil society can foster democratic values such as trust and tolerance, while also depolarizing socioeconomic division within society by uniting diverse organizations for a common cause. Lastly, Diamond emphasizes civil society's ability to strengthen and legitimize the government and political system by increasing public confidence in the accountability, representativeness, and responsiveness of the state.<sup>49</sup> By supporting organizations that try to perform the above functions, the United States hopes to help Tunisians develop norms and practices that will legitimize the new democratic system, rather than dictating the exact steps Tunisia must take to become a democracy.

Despite its potential advantages, many democracy promotion scholars have also identified numerous shortcomings with civil society aid, many of which are applicable to Tunisia's situation. Skepticism of civil society expanded in the late 1990s, as scholars noticed that civil society aid to Latin America and post-Soviet Eastern Europe did not significantly improve governance or mobilize the population. The first issue is that no single type of organization can deliver the wide-ranging benefits associated with civil society. For example, providing technical and financial assistance to advocacy organizations may increase government accountability, but it will not lead to a greater commitment to dialogue and compromise among the public. However, because of the familiarity of outside donors with policy focused NGOs, as opposed to more embedded, societal groups, democracy promotion practitioners Alina Menocal, Verena Fritz and Lise Rakner have accused donors of "rely[ing] on a rather limited definition of civil society, equating it with Western-style advocacy groups or NGOs. This has led them to concentrate their assistance on a narrow set of organizations which mostly include urban-based advocacy and civic education groups and to marginalize more 'rooted' organizations, such as trade unions, church groups, etc."<sup>50</sup> While donors prefer supporting policy NGOs, these organizations are often disconnected from the non-urban population, and if they cannot show that they truly represent the desires of the people, the government will have grounds to ignore them. One relevant example from Tunisia is the debate over censorship surrounding the portrayal of Islam in the media. Following two very public incidences in which a TV station owner was charged with insulting sacred values by showing the film *Persepolis* and two journalists were arrested for publishing a nude photograph of the girlfriend of Sami Khedira, a German soccer player with Tunisian roots, journalists and media activists such as the Marwan Maalouf

from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting have intensely lobbied the government to drop its accusations and commit itself to a completely free media in Tunisia. These efforts failed, however, and in May 2012 the head of the television station that screened *Persepolis* was convicted and fined for his action. In a certain sense, this ruling is not terribly surprising, considering the traditional values espoused by much of Tunisian society, especially outside of the capital. For example, during my meeting with an Ennahda regional official in Sfax, Tunisia's second largest city, he expressed reservations about a completely open media, while still opposing media censorship in general.<sup>51</sup> This is not to say that Dr. Maalej agreed with the journalists' arrests or that a majority of Tunisians want the government to censor the media's treatment of Islam; however, if the advocacy organizations supported by U.S. grants and training wish to prevent similar incidences from occurring in the future, they must demonstrate that their campaign is supported by the general public and not merely a handful of elites in Tunis.

Meanwhile, MEPI has tried to expand the scope of its civil society aid by requiring all of its grantees to demonstrate their impact beyond the capital Tunis, according to former Foreign Service Office, Rachel Brandenburg.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, its nature as a grant-seeking organization means that organizations in the periphery may have a harder time accessing its application or understanding the role of MEPI in Tunisia's democratic transition, since there is a higher degree of skepticism of the U.S. outside of Tunis.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, because so much of the country's resources are centralized in the capital, it is logistically difficult for western-supported organizations to penetrate into the periphery. As such, a majority of organizations listed in MEPI's Tunisia factsheet are international organization that opened offices in Tunisia or have partnered with local Tunisian organizations.<sup>54</sup> One recommendation for MEPI is to transfer greater resources toward their "local grants program," which empowers embassy staff to award grants to applicant organizations, rather than on general MEPI grants, whose funding decisions are made in Washington.

Another criticism of civil society is that rather than strengthening democratic values in a transitioning country, some civil society organizations actually undermine the process by placing their particularistic interest above the needs of the state. In an appropriately titled article named "Bad Civil Society" professors Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein argue that poor socioeconomic conditions lead people to join "bad" civil society groups that use their freedom to associate to weaken a country's democratic process.<sup>55</sup> While Chambers and Kopstein point to fascist and proto-fascist groups in former Soviet Eastern Europe as their examples, even non-malicious organizations

can hinder democratic consolidation. For example, despite the UGTT's success in mobilizing citizens against Ben Ali during the Arab Spring protests, Tunisia's largest and most powerful union may now be hindering the transition in Tunisia by consistently protesting against the Ennahda government and organizing strikes around the country.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, not only do democracy promoters have to find ways to engage civil society organizations in the periphery, they must also accept that non-governmental organizations may have specific interests that are at odds with the general goal of democratic consolidation.

Another limiting factor for civil society organizations is that they depend on cooperation and protection from the government, despite being independent entities. Delhi University professor Neera Chadhoke writes that the state can shape the civil society within its borders by establishing laws that restrict certain types of civil society organization and by limiting the appropriate topics that civil society can address.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, an effective civil society depends on the state's ability to listen to its recommendations and cooperate with its initiatives. On the one hand, the new Tunisian government appears open to cooperating with the newly established advocacy NGOs on a variety of issues, and Mr. Maalouf told me that Tunisia's Constituent National Assembly has solicited advice from civil society activists, even hosting a shadow session with civil society organizations.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Tunisian media unions and organizations have aggressively combated the freedom of the press violations described earlier in the paper. However, the government and judiciary continue to send mixed signals regarding the future of censorship in Tunisia, which indicates that despite pressure from media and civil society activists, the state still has enormous power in defining the space for liberal values within the country. Foreign governments may have to work within the Tunisian government to lobby for freedom of the press, or the advocacy NGOs would have to find a way to prove to the government that the public opposes all restrictive policies on the media.

One last weakness of promoting civil society is that recipient organizations are likely to face questions of credibility. The issue of U.S. credibility in Tunisia was already addressed in this paper, and I argued that the United States' softened rhetoric and quick acceptance of the revolution and the Ennahda victory has allowed it to pursue a variety of assistance programs in Tunisia. Nevertheless, individual organizations that are exclusively linked to foreign aid still encounter questions about the purpose of their work. In talking to civil society leaders in Tunisia, some reported very minimal problems with regards to receiving U.S. aid, while others acknowledged that working with U.S. funding could be problematic. One activist in particular admitted that

he only cooperates with the U.S. on specific projects, rather than accepting constant assistance for his group. Nonetheless, these leaders also mentioned that if they remained transparent and honest about their organizations' work, then the public became less suspicious about associating themselves with the organizations. In addition, NGOs may feel obligated to adapt their missions to attract outside funding, in lieu of focusing on what is actually needed in the country or region.<sup>59</sup> Even though MEPI emphasizes that its relationship with its grantees is a "partnership," it is inevitable that organizations may tailor their mission to fit one of MEPI's core areas. Therefore, donor organizations must continuously conduct extensive research about the local conditions and permit potential grantees to identify their own issue areas and priorities.

In short, the United States' decision to empower local and international non-state organizations to lead its democracy promotion efforts in Tunisia is consistent with previous State Department policies and a well-developed academic study of this sector. While this argument has been criticized by academics and practitioners alike, it has proven somewhat successful in some countries, most notably, the Philippines. Local civil society was extremely helpful in consolidating democracy in the Philippines, because the grassroots groups that catered to the immediate concerns of the local population were able to build coalitions with the policy-oriented organization, thereby magnifying their potential impact. As such, the Filipino government had to account for the recommendations of the policy NGOs, since it knew that the recommendations had wider societal support. These coalitions proved effective not only in undermining authoritarian rule in the Philippines in the 1980s, but also in continuing to raise legitimate concerns during the 1990s; for example, these coalitions strongly resisted President Fidel Ramos' attempt to banish the six year term limit on the presidency, forcing him to back down.<sup>60</sup> The United States was able to support this civil society because it remained sensitive to the local realities by assisting a wide variety of organizations, including development NGOs that only indirectly promoted democracy. This trend leads scholars Mary Racelis and Stephen Golub to state that Western support has contributed considerably to the expansion of a democratic civil society in the country.<sup>61</sup> In the final section of the paper, I examine whether any of the lessons of democracy promotion as non-state assistance are relevant to Tunisia's democratic transition.

## Conclusions and recommendations

On the one hand, unfortunately, it is unlikely that the U.S. would be able to cultivate Tunisian civil society to be as effective as the Filipino civil society, where broad coalitions of groups came together to protect citizen

interests and hold the government accountable. In order to help Tunisian civil society form broad coalitions between organizations in Tunis and in the periphery, the U.S. would have to cultivate relationships with the more grassroots based groups outside of the capital, and as I already discussed, the U.S. has had a difficult time reaching out to these groups. Moreover, some established grassroots organizations such as the UGTT simply do not want any outside influence in the country, whether from the United States or other international actors. During a rally hosted by the UGTT, demonstrators repeatedly chanted “The Tunisian people are free, No America, No Qatar,<sup>62</sup>” calls which were later repeated by the rally’s organizers. It therefore appears that the United States (and outside actors, in general) still faces a large credibility hurdle with much of the population, even though Tunisia’s political and civil society elite appreciates its efforts.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the United States does not seem to be in the position to facilitate partnerships between Tunisia’s civil society sectors, since it is not yet a trusted actor throughout society.

Meanwhile, I am not confident that these partnerships are possible at the moment, even if the U.S. were in a position to facilitate their development. Although Tunisia is a fairly homogenous country that lacks the sectarian conflicts of other countries in the region, there has been growing polarization between the wealthy elites in the major cities and the still-struggling periphery, which at times overlaps with another escalating divide in the country between the secularists and the Islamists. Even though the chief issue that sparked the 2011 revolution was Tunisia’s struggling economy, the situation has only worsened since the revolution, both by empirical data<sup>64</sup> and in the public’s perception.<sup>65</sup> This persistent economic struggle has inspired continuing protests, strikes, and sit-ins by leading labor activists,<sup>66</sup> though the government argues that these labor actions only delay the potential for economic recovery. For example, when asked to comment about polls expressing disapproval with the government’s economic agenda, a government spokesperson replied, “We understand the demands of the people, but at the same time they have to understand that we were working in exceptional conditions. We were under pressure.<sup>67</sup>”

In addition to the tensions over the country’s economic conditions, there has been a growing mistrust between secular, Islamist, and Salafist Tunisians. After over 50 years of secular rule, many secular Tunisians were concerned by the prospect of a moderate, Islamist party (Ennahda) leading the government coalition; and while Ennahda alleviated some fears by declaring that the *shari’a* (Islamic law) will not serve as the sole source of the new legal code in Tunisia,<sup>68</sup> the arrests of journalists and TV station owners for two separate violations of offending Islam in the media have caused secular activ-



ists to question whether Ennahda plans to limit freedom of expression in the future. At the other end of the spectrum, the more religiously conservative Salafists have utilized the new openness in Tunisia to promote their particularistic agenda, for example locking themselves in Manouba University and shutting down the school after the university banned its female students from wearing the full head veil (the niqab). This conflict has placed Ennahda in an awkward position, having to determine at what point do Salafist actions cross an acceptable line of public discourse.<sup>69</sup> The problem that these tensions posit for civil society is that civil society organizations may actually increase societal polarization with their statements and actions, rather than help to alleviate it. The UGTT, for instance, has hardly mitigated tensions in Tunisia by actively opposing the government on secular and economic grounds.<sup>70</sup> It is doubtful that the United States could do much to reduce these tensions through its civil society assistance, and other forms of support – such as foreign direct investment in Tunisian businesses – may be more impactful in this regard.

Nonetheless, the story is not entirely pessimistic in regards to democracy assistance in Tunisia. Despite the fact the U.S. civil society aid might predominantly reach the policy NGOs in the capital, these NGOs are still playing an important role in Tunisia's transition. As the majority of the population concerns itself with Tunisia's economic recovery, these NGOs have been the main voice still lobbying for freedom of expression and other democratic rights, according to Tunisian activist Chiheb Ghazouani.<sup>71</sup> As I discussed earlier, this may be a problem if the government chooses to ignore these member-less groups, but fortunately, the Tunisia government appears open to cooperating with the newly established advocacy NGOs on a variety of issues. Even a conservative Ennahda official in Sfax confirmed that political and social cooperation with American institutions helped Tunisian organizations mature and develop, and he welcomed further cooperation in the form of trainings and seminars.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, the trainings of Tunisian parties, rule of law groups, media organizations, and civil society activists by American NGOs have been well received by these actors. For example, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republic Institute hosted numerous trainings for political parties attended by most of Tunisia's largest parties, including Ennahda. IRI's recent poll shows that Tunisians see the biggest improvements since the revolution in the areas of political reform, an independent media, and civil society, which are three areas that the U.S. has actively assisted.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, the United States has wisely used international and local NGOs groups to address a wide range of issues, such as the political process, rule of law, and entrepreneurship.

In addition to the political process trainings by NDI and IRI, MEPI helped connect the American Bar Association with its Tunisian counterpart as Tunisian lawyers work to reform the country's legal code, partnered with both western and Arab organizations to increase economic opportunities for Tunisia's youth, and worked with media organizations and watchdog groups to increase accuracy and accountability in political reporting.<sup>74</sup> As such, the U.S. has touched on most of its democracy and governance focus areas (human rights, fair and free elections, civil society, free and independent media, rule of law, and government transparency and accountability), but by promoting these objectives through local and international NGOs, the U.S. has avoided the impression that it was directly meddling in and shaping Tunisia's transition.

Furthermore, this indirect approach to democracy promotion may be the most appropriate form of democracy assistance considering that Tunisia is in the process of consolidation. For one, according to professor Stephen Collins,

Support to civil society and to elections—democracy promotion from the bottom-up—has demonstrated to be the most effective approach to fostering democratic change. Bottom-up democracy promotion works most effectively because the emergence of authentic elections and vigorous civic organizations empowers mass publics to compel democratic change and to consolidate democratic progress.<sup>75</sup>

This success contrasts the relative ineffectiveness of top-down efforts to convince the target country's government to democratize and "democracy from within" efforts that work directly with government institutions to decrease executive dominance.<sup>76</sup> Collins' conclusion is supported by empirical data by Finkel and co. that suggest that USAID's civil society and media programs had statistically significant positive impact on their respective sector.<sup>77</sup> More importantly, this indirect approach best fits with Tunisia's current status as a consolidating democracy, rather than as a country attempting to initiate a democratic revolution. As Carothers writes, "efforts to improve governance and to broaden civil society work best in countries that are actually attempting to democratize— that is, where an authoritarian government has been replaced with a new elected government... these efforts are designed as ways to *further* democratic consolidation, *not* as the fundamental drives of democratization itself."<sup>78</sup>

Lastly, these indirect methods are appropriate in Tunisia because they somewhat mitigate the fear of an outside power forcing certain reforms and re-shaping institutions in its own image. One criticism Carothers raises

for indirect methods is that they are too weak to provoke democratic change in an authoritarian country, since they avoid stepping on the toes of the influential government officials in the target country.<sup>79</sup> However, in the case of a democratizing country like Tunisia, an outside donor should not step on the toes of actors that are legitimately committed to democratic reform, even if the United States disapproves of the decisions that emerge from the democratic process. In other words, these indirect methods allow Tunisians to sit in the driver seat, with the U.S. offering assistance in specific areas identified in collaboration with local activists and politicians. One common statement I heard frequently in Tunisia is that the U.S. should “cooperate” rather than “help” Tunisia. These activists perceived “help” as both a patronizing concept and as something that will leave Tunisians indebted to the U.S. Instead, these activists wanted local Tunisians to identify the most pressing issues in the country’s democratic transition, and then to work with the U.S. to correct these issues. Relying predominantly on institutions like MEPI, which claims that partnership is “a foundational principle of U.S. diplomacy,”<sup>80</sup> is the best way the U.S. can contribute to democracy in Tunisia.

## Endnotes

1. P. 12. Carothers, Thomas. *Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Revitalization or Retreat?* Rep. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. Web.
2. U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. *Overview of U.S. Economic Assistance to Tunisia. U.S. Department of State: Diplomacy in Action.* 25 Feb. 2012. Web. <<http://www.state.gov/x/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184649.htm>>.
3. Gray, Gordon. “U.S. Assistance for Tunisia’s Transition.” Speech. U.S. Assistance for Tunisia’s Transition. The Mediterranean School of Business, Tunis. 29 Mar. 2012. Web. <http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/u.s.-assistance-for-tunisia-transition.html> and Palmer, Doug. “U.S. to Guarantee Loans to Help Tunisia Transition.” *Reuters USA.* 20 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/20/us-usa-tunisia-loans-idUSBRE83J1HM20120420>>.
4. Gordon, Gary.
5. “Freedom Agenda.” *The George Bush White House.* The White House. Web. 26 Dec. 2011. <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/freedomagenda/>>.
6. P. 69. Carothers, Thomas. *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion.* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004. Print.
7. P. 228, *ibid*
8. Carothers, Thomas. *U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007. Web. <[www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs](http://www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs)>.
9. To clarify, the BMENA (Broader Middle East and North Africa) Initiative was a partnership between the G8 countries, the European nations, and the political and civil society leaders of the Middle East to craft a blueprint for democratic change in the region. MEPI has invested millions of dollars to support projects inspired by BMENA Initiative meetings. See <http://bmena.state.gov/> and <http://mepi.state.gov/about-faq.html#a3> for more details
10. P. 967. Dalacoura, Katerina. “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a Critique.” *International Affairs* 81.5 (2005): 963-79. Print.

11. For confirmation of this failure see (Dalacoura 2005, 968), (Dunne 2009, 129), (Powell 2009, 59) among others
12. P. 4; Carothers, 2004
13. P. 2. Ottaway, Marina. *Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility*. Rep. no. 60. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008. Print.
14. P. 5. United States of America. USAID. *Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building Final Report*. By Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Perez-Linan, Mitchell Seligson, and C. Neal Tate. [Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2008. Print.
15. For exact figures see Mcinerney, Stephen. *The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2011. Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights in the Middle East*. Project on Middle East Democracy, Apr. 2010. Web.
16. P. 972. Dalacoura, 2005
17. P. 3; Ottaway, 2008
18. P. 133. Dunne, Michelle. "The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Freedom Agenda in the Middle East." *The Washington Quarterly* 32.1 (2009): 129-41. Print.
19. P. 238. Carothers, 2004
20. Anonymous source, personal interview, 1/13/2012
21. Lorenzo Kluzer, personal interview, 1/13/2012
22. P. 238. Carothers, 2004
23. P. 46. Mcinerney, 2010.
24. P. 14 Durac, Vincent, and Francesco Cavatorta. "Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion? Examining the Paradox of the US and EU Security Strategies: The Case of Bin Ali's Tunisia." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36.1 (2009): 3-19. Print.
25. Powel, Brieg Tomos. "The Stability Syndrome: US and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14.1 (2009): 57-73. Print.
26. P. 65. Ibid
27. P. 18 Durac and Cavatorta, 2009
28. P. 19. Ibid
29. P. 9. Carothers, 2012
30. Obama, Barack. "Remarks By the President on a New Beginning." Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt. 4 June 2009. Speech.
31. Zogby, James. "Arab Attitudes: 2011." The Arab American Institute, 2011. Web. <<http://www.aaiusa.org/reports/arab-attitudes-2011>>.
32. Esposito, John L., and Jonathan Githens-Mazer. "Rhetoric vs. Action in American Diplomacy." *Huffington Post*. 25 July 2011. Web. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-l-esposito/when-words-fail-rhetoric-\\_b\\_907642.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-l-esposito/when-words-fail-rhetoric-_b_907642.html)>.
33. Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in State of Union Address." State of the Union Address. United States Capitol, Washington, DC. 25 Jan. 2011. Speech.
34. Telhami, Shibley. "The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll - Brookings Institution." Brookings Institute, 21 Nov. 2011. Web. 24 Dec. 2011. <[http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/11/21\\_arab\\_public\\_opinion\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/11/21_arab_public_opinion_telhami.aspx)>.
35. Stating for example: "And he said if we had any intention to export something, we would export a working -- successful working model, a model that reconciles between modernity in Islam, a model that reconciles between Islam and democracy. That's what we are interested to export to the world" (CFR.org, 11/30/2011), and "We wanted the dividing lines in society not to be along religion lines, so we don't want to divide the society into believers and disbelievers, into pious and non-pious. The real competition should be -- the real division should be between forces that are pro-democratic and that are for democracy and those who are not, who would like to bring us back to dictatorship" (ibid)
36. Shirayanagi, Kouichi. "Senator Joe Lieberman: United States Supports New Government in Tunisia." *TunisiaLive*. 29 Dec. 2011. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/12/29/senator-joe-lieberman-united-states-supports-new-government-in-tunisia/>>.
37. P. 35. Carothers, 2012
38. Chiheb Ghazouani, personal interview, 1/5/2012
39. Sofiane Khammar and Basma Azizi, personal interview, 1/5/2012; Marwan Maalouf, personal interview, 1/11/2012

40. Gabriella Borovsky, personal interview, 1/6/2012
41. Anonymous, personal interview, 1/13/2012
42. P. 23. McInerney, Stephen, 2010.
43. Clinton, Hillary R. "Town Hall With Tunisian Youth." Lecture. Palais Du Baron D'Erlanger, Tunis. 25 Feb. 2012. U.S. Department of State. Web. <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/02/184656.htm>>.
44. ibid
45. I chose not to discuss economic aid in this paper because, despite its importance to building a democratic society, it falls outside of the purview of democracy assistance, since democracy is not necessarily the primary focus of this aid (see Carothers 2000 for further clarification). I would encourage every reader to read Seth Rau's paper in this volume to gain a better understanding of the role of foreign actors in Tunisia's economic recovery.
46. P. 14. U.S. Department of State. *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. Rep. Washington DC, 2010. Print.
47. P. 5. Diamond, Larry J. "Toward Democratic Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 5.3 (1994): 4-17. *Project Muse*. Web
48. Ibid
49. Ibid
50. P. 9-10. Ireland. Irish Aid. *Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned: How Can Donors Better Support Democratic Process?* By Alina R. Menocal, Verena Fritz, and Lise Rakner. Wilton Park Conference on Democracy and Development, 2007. Print.
51. Interview with Dr. Aref Maalej, 1/9/2012
52. Rachel Brandenburg, personal interview, 3/16/2012
53. Gabriella Borovsky, National Democratic Institute Resident Program Officer, personal interview, 4/19/2012
54. The Middle East Partnership Initiative. *The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) "Supporting the Democratic Aspirations of the Tunisian People"*. Rep. 2011. Print.
55. Chambers, Simone, and Jeffrey Kopstein. "Bad Civil Society." *Political Theory* 29.6 (2001): 837-65. *JSTOR*. Web.
56. See POMED Wire. "Thousands Demonstrate In Tunis Against Government." 27 Feb. 2012 for one example
57. Chandhoke, Neera. "The 'Civil' and the 'Political' in Civil Society." *Democratization* 8.2 (2001): 1-24. Web.
58. Marwan Maalouf, personal interview, 1/11/2012
59. P. 214. Parks, Thomas. "The Rise and Fall of Donor Funding for Advocacy NGOs: Understanding the Impact." *Development in Practice* 18.2 (2008): 213-22. Web.
60. Pg. 177; Racelis, Mary. "New Visions and Storng Actions: Civil Society in the Philippines." *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000. 159-187. Print
61. Pg. 302; quoted in Ottaway, Marina, and Thomas Carothers. "Toward Civil Society Realism." *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000(B). 293-310. Print.
62. Keskes, Hanen. "Tunisian Union Commemorates January 14th Amidst Criticism of Government's Foreign Policy." *TunisiaLive*. 14 Jan. 2012. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/14/tunisian-union-commemorates-january-14th-amidst-criticism-of-governments-foreign-policy/>>.
63. This is according to personal interviews with U.S. foreign service officers, two staff members at American democracy promotion organizations, a number of Tunisian activists, and one Ennahda regional official.
64. Wolfe, Anne, and Raphael Lefevre. "Tunisia: A Revolution at Risk." *The Guardian*. 18 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/18/tunisia-revolution-at-risk>>.
65. In a recent poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute 75% of those questioned answered that unemployment is worse now than before the revolution and 64% said living standards are worse now than before. International Republican Institute. *Survey of*



- Tunisian Public Opinion*. Rep. International Republican Institute, 8 Mar. 2012. Web. <<http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-releases-first-post-election-poll-tunisia>>.
66. See note 56
67. Ghribi, Asma. "100 Day Poll Shows Growing Discontent with Government Performance." *TunisiaLive*. 4 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/04/100-day-poll-shows-growing-discontent-with-government-performance/>>.
68. Churchill, Erik, and Aaron Zelin. "A Balancing Act: Ennahda's Struggle with Salafis." *Sada: Analysis on Arab Reform*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/19/balancing-act-ennahda-s-struggle-with-salafis/acsc>>.
69. *ibid*
70. See note 56
71. Ghazouani, Chiheb. "Freedom of Expression in Tunisia." *Fikra Forum*. 12 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2145>>.
72. Personal interview with Aref Maalej, Sfax Ennahda Representative, 1/9/2012
73. See note 71
74. The Middle East Partnership Initiative fact sheet
75. P. 384-5. Collins, Stephen D. "Can America Finance Freedom? Assessing U.S. Democracy Promotion via Economic Statecraft." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5 (2009): 367-89. Print.
76. *Ibid*
77. P. 5. USAID, 2008
78. P. 244-5. Carothers, 2004.
79. *Ibid*
80. The Middle East partnership Initiative. "MEPI Mission." *MEPI Program Areas*. Middle East Partnership Initiative. Web. <<http://www.medregion.mepi.state.gov/mepi/program-areas.html>>.

## Personal Interviews

- Gabriella Borovsky, former Tunisia National Democratic Institute Resident Program Officer, 1/6/2012
- Gabriella Borovsky, former Tunisia National Democratic Institute Resident Program Officer, 4/19/2012
- Rachel Brandenburg, Program Officer for Iraq and North Africa at the U.S. Institute of Peace, 3/16/2012
- Chiheb Ghazouani, Attorney at Law and Vice President of the Tunisian nongovernmental organization Afkar, 1/5/2012
- Sofiane Khammar and Basma Azizi, Tunisia Director and Tunisia Program Coordinator, American Islamic Congress, 1/5/2012
- Lorenzo Kluzer, Chef de la Section Politique -European Commission in Tunis, 1/13/2012
- Dr. Aref Maalej, Sfax Ennahda Representative, 1/9/2012
- Marwan Maalouf, Institute for War and Peace Reporting Tunisia Program Director, 1/11/2012

## Works Cited

- Carothers, Thomas. *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004. Print.
- Carothers, Thomas. *Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Revitalization or Retreat?* Rep. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. Web.
- Carothers, Thomas. *U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007. Web. <[www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs](http://www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs)>.
- Chambers, Simone, and Jeffrey Kopstein. "Bad Civil Society." *Political Theory* 29.6 (2001): 837-65. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Chandhoke, Neera. "The 'Civil' and the 'Political' in Civil Society." *Democratization* 8.2 (2001): 1-24. Web

Churchill, Erik, and Aaron Zelin. "A Balancing Act: Ennahda's Struggle with Salafis." *Sada: Analysis on Arab Reform*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/19/balancing-act-ennahda-s-struggle-with-salafis/acsc>>.

Clinton, Hillary R. "Town Hall With Tunisian Youth." Lecture. Palais Du Baron D'Erlanger, Tunis. 25 Feb. 2012. U.S. Department of State. Web. <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/02/184656.htm>>.

Collins, Stephen D. "Can America Finance Freedom? Assessing U.S. Democracy Promotion via Economic Statecraft." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5 (2009): 367-89. Print.

Dalacoura, Katerina. "US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a Critique." *International Affairs* 81.5 (2005): 963-79. Print.

Diamond, Larry J. "Toward Democratic Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 5.3 (1994): 4-17. Project Muse. Web

Dunne, Michelle. "The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Freedom Agenda in the Middle East." *The Washington Quarterly* 32.1 (2009): 129-41. Print.

Durac, Vincent, and Francesco Cavatorta. "Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion? Examining the Paradox of the US and EU Security Strategies: The Case of Bin Ali's Tunisia." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36.1 (2009): 3- 19. Print.

Eposito, John L., and Jonathan Githens-Mazer. "Rhetoric vs. Action in American Diplomacy." *Huffington Post*. 25 July 2011. Web. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-l-esposito/when-words-fail-rhetoric-\\_b\\_907642.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-l-esposito/when-words-fail-rhetoric-_b_907642.html)>.

"Freedom Agenda." *The George Bush White House*. The White House. Web. 26 Dec. 2011. <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/freedomagenda/>>.

Ghazouani, Chiheb. "Freedom of Expression in Tunisia." *Fikra Forum*. 12 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2145>>.

Ghribi, Asma. "100 Day Poll Shows Growing Discontent with Government Performance." *TunisiaLive*. 4 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/04/100-day-poll-shows-growing-discontent-with-government-performance/>>.

Gray, Gordon. "U.S. Assistance for Tunisia's Transition." Speech. U.S. Assistance for Tunisia's Transition. The Mediterranean School of Business, Tunis. 29 Mar. 2012. Web. <http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/u.s.-assistance-for-tunisia-transition.html>

International Republican Institute. *Survey of Tunisian Public Opinion*. Rep. International Republican Institute, 8 Mar. 2012. Web. <<http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-releases-first-post-election-poll-tunisia>>.

Ireland. Irish Aid. *Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned: How Can Donors Better Support Democratic Process?* By Alina R. Menocal, Verena Fritz, and Lise Rakner. Wilton Park Conference on Democracy and Development, 2007. Print.

Keskes, Hanen. "Tunisian Union Commemorates January 14th Amidst Criticism of Government's Foreign Policy." *TunisiaLive*. 14 Jan. 2012. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/14/tunisian-union-commemorates-january-14th-amidst-criticism-of-governments-foreign-policy/>>.

McInerney, Stephen. *The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2011. Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights in the Middle East*. Project on Middle East Democracy, Apr. 2010. Web.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative. *The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) "Supporting the Democratic Aspirations of the Tunisian People"*. Rep. 2011. Print.

The Middle East partnership Initiative. "MEPI Mission." *MEPI Program Areas*. Middle East Partnership Initiative. Web. <<http://www.medregion.mepi.state.gov/mepi/program-areas.html>>.

Obama, Barack. "Remarks By the President on a New Beginning." Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt. 4 June 2009. Speech.

Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in State of Union Address." State of the Union Address. United States Capitol, Washington, DC. 25 Jan. 2011. Speech.

Ottaway, Marina. *Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility*. Rep. no. 60. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008. Print.

Ottaway, Marina, and Thomas Carothers. "Toward Civil Society Realism." *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000(B). 293-310. Print.

Palmer, Doug. "U.S. to Guarantee Loans to Help Tunisian Transition." *Reuters USA*. 20 Apr. 2012. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/20/us-usa-tunisia-loans-idUSBRE>-

83J1HM20120420>.

Parks, Thomas. "The Rise and Fall of Donor Funding for Advocacy NGOs: Understanding the Impact." *Development in Practice* 18.2 (2008): 213-22. Web.

POMED Wire. "Thousands Demonstrate In Tunis Against Government." 27 Feb. 2012. Web

Powel, Brieg Tomos. "The Stability Syndrome: US and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14.1 (2009): 57-73. Print.

Racelis, Mary. "New Visions and Stong Actions: Civil Society in the Philippines." *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000. 159-187. Print

Shirayanagi, Kouichi. "Senator Joe Lieberman: United States Supports New Government in Tunisia." *TunisiaLive*. 29 Dec. 2011. Web. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/12/29/senator-joe-lieberman-united-states-supports-new-government-in-tunisia/>>.

Telhami, Shibley. "The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll - Brookings Institution." Brookings Institute, 21 Nov. 2011. Web. 24 Dec. 2011. <[http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/1121\\_arab\\_public\\_opinion\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/1121_arab_public_opinion_telhami.aspx)>.

United States of America. USAID. *Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building Final Report*. By Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Perez-Linan, Mitchell Seligson, and C. Neal Tate. [Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2008. Print.

U.S. Department of State. *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. Rep. Washington DC, 2010. Print.

U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. *Overview of U.S. Economic Assistance to Tunisia*. U.S. Department of State: *Diplomacy in Action*. 25 Feb. 2012. Web. <<http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2012/02/184649.htm>>.

Wolfe, Anne, and Raphael Lefevre. "Tunisia: A Revolution at Risk." *The Guardian*. 18 Apr.

2012. Web. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/18/tunisia-revolution-at-risk>>.

Zogby, James. "Arab Attitudes: 2011." The Arab American Institute, 2011. Web. <<http://www.aaiusa.org/reports/arab-attitudes-2011>>.

# The Foreign Key to Tunisia's Economic Recovery

by Seth Rau

International Relations and Political Science '12

## Introduction

When Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali left Tunisia for Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011, most Tunisians thought that the days ahead would be far brighter. Without a dictator who had denied freedom to the Tunisian people for the past 24 years, there was an initial sense of optimism throughout the nation. However the economic reality fifteen months after the departure of Ben Ali does not portray this same optimism. After twenty-four consecutive years of economic growth under Ben Ali<sup>1</sup>, the Tunisian economy contracted by 1.85 percent in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Due to its youth bulge and an education system that does not properly prepare its graduates for the actual workforce, the Tunisian economy had previously needed 5 percent economic growth just to maintain its economic standards much less improve them.<sup>3</sup> Since high unemployment and a lack of economic opportunity were two of the main causes of the 2011 Revolution, the Constituent National Assembly (CNA) is trying to address these challenges while drafting Tunisia's new constitution. The CNA is led by a coalition of the Islamist party Ennahda, and joined by two secular parties, the party of human-rights activist and now President Moncef Marzouki, CPR, and a secular party named Ettaktol. The economic challenges they face range from building infrastructure to attracting foreign investors and tourists to most importantly finding jobs for millions of Tunisians. Technically, the only actual duty of the CNA is to write Tunisia's new constitution. While the goal of the CNA was to write a constitution in 2012, it appears as though that goal will not be completed until 2013. In the interim, Tunisia needs a real government that can help turn around its economy.

In this paper, I will present a number of straightforward suggestions for how to improve Tunisia's economy in both the short-term and long-term. Section II begins by focusing on the history and current state of multinational corporations investing in Tunisia with a focus on French and American investments. Then I will examine the growth prospects for these foreign

investors in the private sector in the area around Tunis, the rest of coastal Tunisia, and finally in the nation's interior regions. Section III looks at the promises of governmental foreign aid from the European Union, the African Development Bank, United States, and the World Bank to see if these projects will actually materialize and create jobs in Tunisia. Section IV details the tourism sector to demonstrate Tunisia's potential for economic growth in the years ahead. Finally, Section V concludes the paper by tying together these arguments to suggest that Tunisia should set modest, achievable goals moving forward to win the support of both its citizens and foreign investors. It will also elucidate the role of entrepreneurship in the new Tunisian economy as foreign support for these start ups will be important in Tunisia's economic recovery.

## Multinational Corporate Investment

While foreign governments are promising billions in aid to help Tunisia's democratic transition, a full recovery will not be possible without investment from the private sector. Under Ben Ali, Tunisia had attracted 32.51 billion dollars of Foreign Direct Investment, which made up 70.92 percent of Tunisia's annual GDP in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Considering its population, this level of investment was impressive. When compared to Morocco, a country whose population is triple that of Tunisia's, foreign investments were only 38.51 percent larger in Morocco.<sup>5</sup> However, Tunisia is now losing its comparative advantage in the Maghreb. Under Ben Ali, Tunisia was seen as a stable country for foreign investment. Unlike many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, there was no serious threat to the stability of the pro-business autocratic regime. With a location that was in the same time zone as most of Europe, a work force that spoke French, and cheaper wages, Tunisia was a natural spot for outsourcing. Currently, about 1,250 French companies have invested in Tunisia creating at least 110,000 jobs.<sup>6</sup> However, the continuation of outsourcing from France and other EU nations to Tunisia is in doubt due to the government's instability and inaction. In 2011 alone, 170 of the 3,135 foreign companies registered in Tunisia left the country.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Tunisia's rank in the 2012 "Ease of Doing Business Report" decreased from 40 to 46 in the world with almost every indicator falling in comparison to the world.<sup>8</sup> There are fears that far more companies will leave Tunisia in 2012 if law and order is not restored.<sup>9</sup>

The rest of Section II focuses on how the government can convince foreign corporations already in Tunisia not only to stay but also expand their operations. The government must recruit new corporations to enter the Tunisian market for the first time. There should be additional incentives for



any corporation that is willing to locate their factories or bases of operation outside of the Tunis metro area. While foreign investment is a priority in all of Tunisia, there is a much greater need for it in the interior regions of the country like Kasserine, Gafsa, and Sidi Bouzid where poverty and unemployment are at their highest. By encouraging investment in these regions, the Tunisian government will be forced to upgrade the regional infrastructure both in terms of transportation and education. As a result, foreign investment is key to Tunisia's growth in both the short-term and the long-term.

## I: Investment in Greater Tunis

In the short term, Tunisia must create jobs and government expansion is not a viable option; therefore, the private sector must create these jobs. While there is a credible emerging entrepreneurship market in Tunisia, it cannot create jobs fast enough to alleviate the current unemployment situation. Therefore, it is necessary for multinational firms already in Tunisia to expand their operations in order to help stabilize the country. An initial success for the Tunisian government has come from Airbus. The French airline company is expanding their operations, which is expected to create 1500 new jobs by 2015.<sup>10</sup> Airbus already owns a productive factory in the Tunis suburbs, but now wants to expand from one factory to a full aerospace park.<sup>11</sup> By creating jobs in a skilled service sector, this partnership makes sense for both Tunisia and Airbus. Airbus gains cheap, skilled labor in Tunisia who already speaks French, the language of their business. For Tunisia, Airbus not only brings 1500 jobs to the country, it enhances Tunisia's image as a prime destination for foreign investment just one year after the Revolution. Assuming this transaction continues successful, Airbus is sending a strong signal to the business community that Tunisia is ripe for investment opportunities.

Airbus is not the only company that is currently expanding their presence in Tunisia. Through its Devonshire Investors branch, Fidelity is launching a new company called DI Tunisia in order to build a full corporate campus for Fidelity in Tunisia. Fidelity first entered Tunisia in 2006 by opening a branch of one of its startups called HR Access Solutions. Now, HR Access Solutions is a well-established Tunisian affiliate of the larger company employing 380 workers who are mostly Tunisian.<sup>12</sup> According to Kathleen Bolen, a Vice President of Devonshire Investors based in Tunis, the short-term goal of Fidelity in Tunisia is to start up companies with a mix of ex-patriots and Tunisians.<sup>13</sup> The long-term goal is to transition to an almost exclusively Tunisian labor force at all of the Fidelity affiliates for a number of reasons. First, native Tunisians know the business climate better than foreigners. Second, they are cheaper to employ than ex-patriots. Third and

finally, Fidelity is creating jobs for the local economy, which will help make the overall Tunisian economy more productive. Assuming these conditions hold true, Fidelity will go through with building its new campus in the posh Tunis suburb of Les Berges du Lac II. This type of development is useful for Tunisia, but it is not a silver bullet to the country's economic woes. Outside of construction, most of the jobs from Fidelity will be for high-skilled upper-middle class, well-educated employees. While there are unemployed people who Fidelity could put to work through these new jobs, Tunisia needs foreign companies creating low-skilled jobs away from the corporate zones of Tunis.

## II: Investment in Coastal Tunisia

Creating jobs away from Tunis in the coastal region poses numerous challenges for foreign corporations, but they are not as daunting as the challenges to creating jobs in Tunisia's interior. Along the rest of the Tunisian coast in cities like Sousse, Nabeul, and Sfax, there is a relatively educated work force and adequate infrastructure. These cities are not as developed as Tunis, but they possess enough assets such as ports, railroads, and hotels to be suitable to some foreign investors. However, there is not a critical mass of foreign corporations already located in these cities. Therefore, the best students, especially engineering students, in these cities feel the impulse to move to Tunis in search of a better life.<sup>14</sup> During my time in Tunisia, I met a number of students and a vast majority of whom were not originally from Tunis, but they assume that Tunis will become their professional home. There are qualified students throughout the coastal cities, and many would prefer to stay at home for their professional careers. These cities can be suitable for additional foreign investment. As the government is trying to reduce the disparities between Tunis and the rest of Tunisia, they must make promoting investment for high-skilled jobs throughout coastal Tunisia a priority. Without these future investments in coastal Tunisia, the disparity will grow between Tunis and other coastal regions.

## III: Investment in Tunisia's Interior

The challenges facing coastal Tunisia are relatively minor to those facing the interior of Tunisia where the 2010 revolution began. Starting with education, there is a large gap in the quality of education between the universities in Tunis and Sfax and those in Gabés and Jendouba.<sup>15</sup> The larger cities have the best schools, which is logical. The real problem is that each region does not have an education system that meets its needs. The lesser-quality universities in the nation's interior are producing university graduates expecting high paying high-skilled jobs when there is no demand for these jobs

in the nation's interior. This education standard is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the students did not receive a strong enough education in practice to be classified as high-skilled labor. Second, a company like Airbus is going to build a plant near Tunis rather than in the nation's interior since they know there is superior labor and infrastructure in that part of the country. Instead of having an education system focused on creating high-skilled jobs in this part of the country, a further emphasis should be on vocational training.

Along with a misguided education system, the Tunisian government knows that poor infrastructure is a barrier to investment in the nation's interior. One of the first acts of the 2011 transition government was to invest 150 million dinars (100 million dollars) into rural road development.<sup>16</sup> Rural road development is a significant initiative for the African Development Bank and the European Union. Beyond road development, it is very difficult for foreigners to acquire land in Tunisia outside of specific industrial zones, most of which are located near Tunis.<sup>17</sup> To expedite the process of foreign investment, the government should encourage more zones available to foreign investors in the major interior cities. Another barrier is that once foreigners acquire land or office space, there is a very complicated bureaucratic process through the Agency of Industrial Promotion (API).<sup>18</sup> This process must be streamlined in order to encourage more investors to take a risk and invest in Tunisia's interior region. With a simpler regulatory system, free from corruption, the development of infrastructure in the interior will proceed more rapidly with international public and private sector support.

Investing in the interior of Tunisia is a risk for foreign investors, but it is a risk worth taking in certain low-skill industries. Due to the educational and infrastructural realities mentioned above, it is not practical for manufacturing to be the base of economic activity in Tunisia's interior. Instead there should be an emphasis on finding industries that match the region's skill-set. For example, there is an emphasis on teaching both Arabic and French in Tunisian schools. Therefore, rural Tunisia could be a natural outsourcing location for French customer service firms. The infrastructure already exists as 3G wireless service now covers all of the major cities in Tunisia and broadband Internet use is widespread.<sup>19</sup> While the jobs produced from call centers or other type of low-skill ICT (Information, Communication, and Technology) industries will likely not pay the same wages as manufacturing jobs, these jobs would be more coveted than being a fruit seller like Mohammed Bouazizi before his self-immolation. By examining the comparative advantages of specific interior cities and provinces in Tunisia, opportunistic foreign investors will seize upon the newfound opportunities in these regions to make a profit

off the low cost of labor. However, before any investment is launched, one other major barrier must be addressed and that is the UGTT, or the Tunisian General Labor Union.

#### IV: The UGTT

Since the Revolution and especially since the October 23<sup>rd</sup> elections, the UGTT has become the largest opponent to the government, and their strikes have threatened the status of law and order of Tunisia. The UGTT has a long history of activism in Tunisia that dates to French colonialism. In 1944, Farhat Hached founded a specific Tunisian workers' trade union, the UGTT.<sup>20</sup> The UGTT worked together with Tunisia's First President Habib Bourguiba to achieve Tunisian independence through both violent and non-violent measures against the French. After Tunisia became independent, the UGTT was very influential in initially moving Tunisia towards a planned socialist economy. With the support of Bourguiba, the government and UGTT planned an economy that nationalized all key industries.<sup>21</sup> This plan had some achievements in improving Tunisia's economy, but it did not produce enough jobs.<sup>22</sup> The collectivization of agriculture failed, and real income fell in the interior communities leading many people to move to the major coastal cities.<sup>23</sup> Along with failures in his plans for industrialization, Bourguiba decided to abandon socialism in favor of a free-market economy much to the dismay of the UGTT. Under Ben Ali, the state took control of the UGTT, thus denying its ability to act as an independent change agent in both Tunisia's economy and politics.<sup>24</sup> While the state maintained control over the UGTT, its organizational structure was not dismantled like other potential forms of opposition to the Ben Ali regime.

Since the Revolution, the UGTT has reasserted itself as a major actor in Tunisian politics with frequent strikes demanding better working conditions from the government. Under Ben Ali's regime, the UGTT was the only national organization that was legally allowed to organize strikes.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the government placated enough of the UGTT's demands to prevent any national strikes. With the return of civil liberties, including the right to strike, there have been many strikes throughout the country with the UGTT organizing the largest general strikes from a wide segment of the Tunisian population.<sup>26</sup>

This culture of protesting has only increased Tunisia's economic woes in the short-term. While general strikes arranged by the UGTT only occur after failed negotiations,<sup>27</sup> the strikes have been so frequent that they are hurting the economic productivity of the country and the chances for

recovery. As a labor union, the UGTT represents the interests of employed Tunisians that are demanding better working conditions and higher pay as a result of rising inflation.<sup>28</sup> However, these interests are at odds with the current government that is focusing on finding new jobs for the unemployed.<sup>29</sup> It is also important to note that many unemployed Tunisians have joined the protests since they believe they are in their best interest. While there is some overlap between Ennahda and the UGTT, for the most part these groups appeal to different constituencies within Tunisia. Following the principles of macroeconomics, it is difficult to increase wages while trying to expand employment without a shock to the economy. With no large shocks on the horizon for the Tunisian economy (the foreign aid discussed in Section III is not a shock), the demands of the UGTT are unrealistic. While the UGTT is trying to achieve its goals in demanding better conditions for its members, these goals are not compatible with the larger economic realities of Tunisia.

Therefore, it would be prudent for the government to reach a compromise with the UGTT that meets some of their demands in exchange for ending their general strikes. By ending the strikes, the government would be able to prove that Tunisia is a country where law and order is established, ensuring the country's stability. For foreign investors, political, legal and economic stability are key concerns. Without stability, foreign companies that are in Tunisia will leave in larger numbers than in 2011 and new investors will be reluctant to enter the market. To ensure that foreign investors continue to play an essential role in the Tunisian economy, a compromise between the UGTT and the government must be struck in the coming months. The recent government actions in banning protests on Avenue Habib Bourguiba in downtown Tunis is not assisting their cause since it is just begetting more protests and violence.<sup>30</sup> The strikes will only end with an agreement where both sides will have gained a tangible goal; security and stability for the government and higher wages for the UGTT members. It is a necessary prerequisite to economic recovery in all parts of Tunisia as both the UGTT and the government are influential in all of Tunisia's twenty-four provinces. Without corporate foreign investment it will be impossible for Tunisia to make a significant dent in the unemployment problems plaguing the country so the instability caused by the UGTT and the government being at cross-purposes must be solved immediately.

## Foreign Government Investment

In addition to corporate investment from the private sector, Tunisia is also actively seeking aid from government and other development institutions around the world. Initially, after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, governments



across the world from the U.S. to France to Qatar committed millions of dollars of aid to support Tunisia's transition to democracy. Instead of giving military aid, these donor states are focused on building up civil society programs to help develop Tunisian social capital along with infrastructure projects. These projects will help alleviate the high unemployment with stable jobs that pay a living wage. The following section will examine the various approaches of the European Union and its member states, individual foreign governments outside of Europe including the United States and Qatar, and global government development institutions such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank.

## I: The European Union

The twenty-seven member states of the EU together serve as the primary trading partner of Tunisia. As a body that promotes democratization, human rights, and economic competition, it was natural that the EU was ready to support an emerging democracy in Tunisia. Due to Tunisia's proximity to Europe, the EU had a significant interest in building a strong relationship with Tunisia before the revolution. Along with France and Italy, the 25 other member states of the EU have a total of 800,000 citizens living in Tunisia. The EU accounts for 75 percent of Tunisia's foreign trade, 80 percent of its foreign direct investment, and 90 percent of its tourists.<sup>31</sup> As a result, Tunisia has had formal relations with the EU since 1969 when the first trade agreement between the entities was signed.<sup>32</sup> In 1976, a further cooperation agreement was signed that allowed for EU funds to be spent on foreign aid and investment in Tunisia's agricultural and environmental industries.<sup>33</sup> These funds supplied the equivalent of 421 millions Euros between 1976 and 1996.<sup>34</sup> In 1995, Tunisia became the first North African state to sign an association agreement with the EU that allowed for the progressive introduction of Tunisia into the EU's free trade zone.<sup>35</sup> In order for Tunisia to be included in this free trade zone, the EU invested significant funds in Tunisia between 1995 and 2007. These funds totaling 961 million Euros focused on economic reform, support for the private sector, environmental programs, and reducing socio-economic inequality.<sup>36</sup> In addition, to these direct grants, the European Investment Bank loaned 3.4 billion Euros to Tunisia between 1996 and 2010. These funds were aimed at the goals mentioned above, and they included building new infrastructure and expanding credit lines.<sup>37</sup> Also, Tunisia became a member of the Barcelona Process in 2005, which is now the Union for the Mediterranean. This partnership is supposed to promote greater ties with Europe, but it has not lived up to its promise so far since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has impeded nearly every meeting.<sup>38</sup> It was also supposed to promote greater cooperation with Tunisia's Maghreb neighbors,

but the borders with Algeria and Libya remain closed despite EU efforts to open them.<sup>39</sup> Overall, the EU was already a large investor in the Tunisian economy before the recent revolution, and it is looking to increase its foothold in the coming years.

Following Ben Ali's departure from Tunisia, the EU responded quickly in supporting democracy in Tunisia through increased economic aid. At first, the EU was hesitant to take sides in the revolution since France and Italy had strong economic relations with the Ben Ali regime.<sup>40</sup> After Ben Ali went into exile, the EU sent a delegation from the European External Action Service (EEAS) to aid with the transition to democracy. This mission was both to ensure peaceful, democratic elections and to lay the foundation for an economic recovery from the revolution.<sup>41</sup> After the first EEAS mission, a 1.87 billion Euro loan from the European Investment Bank was secured to speed up in-progress projects to provide more jobs for Tunisians.<sup>42</sup> To ensure an improved economy, Tunisia and the EU have worked together to establish the EU-Tunisia Task Force. This Task Force aims to find additional ways to stimulate the Tunisian economy in the next five years.<sup>43</sup> This Task Force met in Tunis in September 2011 to unveil the Jasmine Plan, which is Tunisia's ambitious plan for economic growth. The Jasmine Plan shows how Tunisia can grow in the next five years by overhauling its financial regulation system. The plan encourages the development of new public-private partnerships, small businesses, especially in the interior, and increased microfinance lending throughout the country.<sup>44</sup> With these changes to the economy, Tunisia believes that there can be 5 percent economic growth in 2012 and 2013.<sup>45</sup> Recently, these numbers have been revised down to the 3 to 4 percent range due to the European debt crisis and slow progress in establishing new national and regional institutions.<sup>46</sup> The plan aims for 7 percent growth between 2013 and 2016 so Tunisia will converge with the lower end of EU member states.<sup>47</sup> At this moment, that goal is unlikely due to the global economy, but this level of growth will be needed for Tunisia to reach full employment within the next decade.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond this immediate aid, the EU has encouraged its member states to increase their commitments towards projects in Tunisia.<sup>49</sup> Other new projects from the EU focus more specifically on creating jobs. For example, the EU is spending 65 million Euros on a vocational program, and it expects that the previously mentioned EIB loan will create 20,000 jobs in 2012.<sup>50</sup> To supplement these programs, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development<sup>51</sup> will expand its program to Tunisia for the first time ever in 2012.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the EU will extend some Erasmus programs to Tunisia in order to allow for top Tunisian students to study in top European universities.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the European debt crisis, the EU's financial commitment to Tunisia has increased in the past year. As a result of these efforts, it is clear that the EU is placing a large commitment towards building up the economic foundations for a successful transition to democracy in Tunisia.

## II: Other Foreign Governments

It is not just the EU and the governments of Europe that are supporting Tunisia's transition to democracy. The United States and the Arabian Gulf nations have begun to invest in Tunisia since the Revolution for both geopolitical and economic reasons. Unlike France and Italy, the U.S. has been eager to support the emerging democracy in both Tunisia from a relatively early point in the revolution. Both President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have affirmed their support for Tunisia on multiple occasions. These statements have been backed up by significant financial aid to the state's civil society, totaling 53 million dollars in 2011.<sup>54</sup> During her visit to Tunis in February 2012, Hillary Clinton increased this commitment to 190 million dollars along with 30 million dollars in loan guarantees.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the credibility of the U.S. has increased in the past year among a majority of Tunisians.<sup>56</sup>

The more controversial foreign support for Tunisia has been coming from the Arabian Gulf states, most notably the Emirate of Qatar. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the chant from the protesters was "Degage Ben Ali", a call for Ben Ali to leave office. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, a vocal minority of the protestors chanted "Degage Qatar" since much of the opposition to the government sees Qatar's financial support as the key reason for Ennahda's victory in the October 2011 elections. There are no public documents demonstrating this financial support, but this information is assumed to be a widely known fact on the streets of Tunis. The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, was the most prominent foreign dignitary to come to Tunis to participate in the one-year anniversary celebration of the revolution. During his visit, he signed eight memorandums of understanding that will allow both Qatari state institutions and private companies to invest in Tunisia's infrastructure.<sup>57</sup> These agreements are another sign that the Tunisian government is not just concentrating on its traditional European partners. Ajmi Lourimi, a member of the executive office of Ennahda in Tunis, said that, "we need to create the appropriate environment for new investors to come to Tunisia, and Qatar displayed its enthusiasm in investing in Tunisia and helping the Tunisian economy."<sup>58</sup>

Various members of the opposition have claimed that they are against

any foreign intervention in Tunisia's future.<sup>59</sup> I believe the opposition's sentiment against foreign government intervention in Tunisia is naïve and counterproductive when considering the current unemployment crisis. The reality of the situation is that Tunisia needs help right now in turning around its economy, and it should probably accept most sources of foreign funding, assuming the proposed programs would actually put Tunisians back to work. The 500 million dollars proposed by Qatar meets these standards.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Qatar's support of Tunisia should be welcomed with open arms since it will aid Tunisia's economic recovery. Foreign state investors do have an agenda in Tunisia. However, at this time, the agenda of the U.S and Qatar aligns with Tunisia's needs. Accepting this aid is a critical step towards moving Tunisia back towards positive economic growth.

### III: Development Institutions:

Aside from direct state investment, Tunisia has been the recipient of aid from the international development community, most notably from the African Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank. Due to the civil strife in the Côte d'Ivoire, the ADB has relocated its headquarters to Tunis. As part of this relocation and due to its needs after the Revolution, the ADB has significantly increased its investments in Tunisia. The African Development Bank took a specific diagnosis of Tunisia's economic problems when it distributed its grants. Its report focuses heavily upon programs to expand youth employment, reduce illiteracy and poverty in the nation's interior, and encouraging foreign investment away from Tunis.<sup>61</sup> The report also examines the specific economic challenges posed by the revolution such as improving the tourism sector, which I will address in Section IV.

In contrast, the World Bank tends to view Tunisia's recent problems on the macroeconomic scale when compared to the micro-level approach of the ADB. In June 2011, the World Bank announced that its 500 million dollar grant would focus on "Strengthen[ing] governance, transparency and accountability, with the aim of jump starting economic growth and increasing economic and social opportunities for Tunisians."<sup>62</sup> Since this promise in June 2011, the World Bank has focused more specifically on aid towards building democratic, capitalist institutions throughout the country. For example, their March 2012 report entitled, "Tunisia: from Revolutions to Institutions" focuses on Tunisia's progress in building up an ICT sector along with the problems in creating institutions that respond to a dynamic civil society.<sup>63</sup> The authors of this report believe that Tunisia has a comparative advantage in the ICT sector, and that the World Bank should heavily support this sector. My observations in Tunisia confirm this analysis. While the technological

resources are not as impressive as they are in the U.S., some Tunisian students have come up with creative ways to utilize technology through social media and pirating endless terabytes of music and movies. Instead of focusing these skills on illicit activities, the World Bank should support the Tunisian private sector to create more jobs in the ICT sector since many Tunisians have the skills to excel in this part of the economy. By also providing funds to reform education to better train students in the emerging ICT fields, the World Bank can encourage real, productive reform in Tunisia.<sup>64</sup> As long as development institutions like the World Bank and the ADB target tangible goals that lead to economic growth rather than dependency or corruption, then their presence should be welcomed and encouraged in Tunisia. In addition to the aforementioned ADB and the World Bank, there are many other multinational development agencies working in Tunisia from the United Nations down to small NGOs. While not every project will be successful, these organizations are playing a role in helping to create a better future for Tunisia. However, the Tunisian government must ensure that these well-intentioned efforts are directed towards the areas of greatest need rather than what sounds best for the international donor community. This process will truly support the economic framework of Tunisia's democratic transition.

## Tourism

This analysis would not be complete without studying the key tourism sector in Tunisia. Before the Revolution, tourism was 7 percent of Tunisia's GDP and employed 12 percent of Tunisia's employees.<sup>65</sup> This article, from footnote 63, states, "according to the head of the National Office of Tunisian Tourism, Habib Ammar, the number of tourists visiting Tunisia declined by 34.4% and the income generated by tourism dropped by 38.5%"<sup>66</sup>, which constitutes a serious crisis for the Tunisian tourist industry. During our delegation's trip to Tunisia in January, I went to El Djem, which has one of the largest remaining Roman Coliseums in the world, and there were less than 40 people in the entire stadium on a pleasant weekday afternoon. Similar tourist attractions in Carthage and Kairouan were just as empty as El Djem. Staying in Sousse and Sfax it was quite clear that the hotels were under occupancy and that the tourism industry in Tunisia was suffering. Therefore, the government must find ways to revive this key Tunisian industry.

Ennahda must convince tourists that Tunisia is a safe and secure destination where they can continue to drink and wear bikinis along with promoting a plan that develops a wider range of tourism options to accommodate both budget and luxury demands. Most of Tunisia's tourists come from Europe with France, Germany, Italy, and the UK being the four most popular



nations.<sup>67</sup> These countries all have liberal social values, and their tourists want to travel a location whether they can maintain their societal norms. For example, if alcohol becomes more restricted, along the lines of the UAE, then more tourists would pass over Tunisia in favor of a more hospitable location. While Ennahda may not approve of what tourists are doing in Tunisia, they are clearly benefitting the Tunisian economy. In a time of economic crisis, Tunisia needs the tourist revenue, and it should be doing everything in its power to support the tourist industry. It appears as though Ennahda is heeding this message. The transitional government launched a risqué advertising campaign in June,<sup>68</sup> and it has continued that campaign into 2012.<sup>69</sup> In recent constitutional negotiations, they appear to have listened to these demands as well by having no reference to shari'a included in their constitutional drafts.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to creating a proper advertising message, Tunisia needs to cater to more diverse tourist interests. Historically, most European tourists have come to Tunisia on pre-packaged, all-inclusive tours.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, these tourists mostly went to specific resorts or attractions where everything was pre-arranged. These make independent travelling throughout the country rather difficult. The nation's infrastructure makes it difficult for tourists to travel without renting a car. It is possible to take trains to reach some destinations and to use louages to reach other destinations. However, traveling in a louage is not ideal for promoting tourism for independent travelers outside of Tunis. In addition to its infrastructure problems, Tunisia does not have a very developed restaurant industry. Outside of a few hotel and top-tier restaurants that cater specifically to tourists (and are included in many package tours), there are few decent mid-range restaurant options around the country. For independent tourists that are not looking for an ornate meal every night, this lack of a diverse restaurant culture is a barrier to increasing tourism. While cheap prices and a close location to Europe may get tourists to Tunisia for a first trip, a positive experience with restaurants and the service culture, which is sorely lacking, is necessary to entice repeat visitors to the country whether they are all-inclusive or independent tourists. Overall, Tunisia must focus on improving its tourist industry since it has a comparative advantage in this labor-intensive sector with Roman ruins, beaches, cheap prices, and proximity to Europe.

## Conclusion

As the past three sections of this paper have shown, there is no magic bullet to cure Tunisia's economic and employment situation in the short-term; however, there are fixes that can be made in the short-term that will lead to long-term economic growth.

Before I conclude this paper, however, I wanted to elaborate on another concept, Tunisian domestic entrepreneurship. During my visit to Tunisia in January, I had the chance to meet with the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers in Tunis. This emerging group of young Tunisian professionals was abuzz over their various startups. In the U.S., startups are usually viewed only in the light of the ICT sector. However, in Tunisia, this term was used to describe not just start up ventures in the ICT sector but also in starting up new NGOs and civil society organizations. Youssef Cherif, an employee at the Carter Center in Tunis, explained to me that there is an attitude among young professionals in Tunisia that they need to be the ones creating the civil society.<sup>72</sup> However, they cannot create this civil society by themselves. They need foreign assistance in gaining capital to start up many of these innovative enterprises that range from debate societies to micro-lending programs. If Tunisia is going to be a nation with a significant number of start-ups, the foreign investment community must provide the necessary capital to fund these start-ups. Otherwise, these start-ups will be unsuccessful, which will both hurt the Tunisian economy in terms of unemployment and may encourage many of the brightest minds in Tunisia to leave the country to take their talents elsewhere to a better environment for start-ups. For a successful transition to democracy, domestic entrepreneurship is necessary to compliment the foreign investment, and foreign investment can play a major role in launching these start-ups.

Once factoring in supporting domestic entrepreneurship, this paper has laid out a number of key suggestions for the Ennahda led government moving forward to foster a positive economic relationship between Tunisia and its foreign investors from both the public and private sectors. First, the government must reach an agreement in the immediate future with the UGTT in order to restore both law and order and productivity in the country. An agreement with the UGTT that caves into some of their demands will ultimately be beneficial for the country since such an agreement would end most of the general strikes that have been hurting the national economy as most recently shown by the large protests in downtown Tunis. Second, the government must encourage the correct type of investment per region. It does not matter if these funds come from multinational corporations, foreign governments, or international organization, but in any case, they must be properly suited for their respective region of the country. Finding each region's comparative advantage will be essential in the coming years to solve Tunisia's unemployment crisis. Third, the government must continue to expand on its incentives to recruit more investment in Tunisia. The current ten-year tax holiday is a great start, but expanding land rights for foreigners and streamlining the regulation process will be another key step forward for the

government. Fourth, Tunisia must rebuild its tourism industry to improve on its current offerings. Instead of being a country filled with state-owned hotels that were last refurbished in the 1970s, Tunisia should have an infrastructure that reflects the new ideology of the country. The new public relations campaign shows Tunisia as a fresh, new country, and its overall tourism and infrastructure should reflect this ideal. Fifth, the government should not be overly dependent on any one nation or entity due to the current global financial market. By gaining diverse investment from private companies and governments from around the world, Tunisia should be able to return to substantial economic growth. Overall, this plan should return Tunisia to moderate economic growth in 2012, and it will set up the country for greater long-term economic growth and a potential return to full employment in the next decade.

The transition to democracy has had economic costs for Tunisia as the country is still in the midst of this recession mainly due to its revolution rather than the global economic crisis. As this paper has explained, the short-term barriers to full employment are significant and will not be resolved in at least the next five years. However, in the long run, the revolution will greatly aid Tunisia's economy. For once, political leaders and policy makers will be directly responsible to an informed public looking to hold them accountable for their actions. The pressure on politicians to create jobs through any means will be immense. This pressure should help encourage foreign investment in Tunisia that focuses on key sectors like ICTs and tourism. Assuming the government can restore law and order and conduct stable democratic elections and transitions, the economy of Tunisia appears ready for strong growth in the coming decade. It probably will not reach the 7 percent goal set by the EU-Tunisia Task Force, but the growth will hopefully be enough to limit protests, strikes, and self-immolations throughout the country. However, if this growth is just concentrated in Tunis and coastal Tunisia, then the unrest in the interior will continue. Any true economic recovery for Tunisia must be nationwide. Therefore, the government must encourage foreign investors to examine possibilities in Tunisia's interior with additional incentives such as tax holidays and hiring credits. The goal here is to find employment at a living wage for as many Tunisians as possible rather than increasing the government's surplus. As long as the government thinks of the economy in terms of employment, then they should highly encourage foreign investment to be a large part of the solution to Tunisia's current economic problems.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “GDP growth (annual %).” *The World Bank*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Feb. 2012. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>>.

<sup>2</sup> Amara, Tarek. “Tunisia’s economy still awaits post-revolt bounce.” *Reuters.com*. N.p., 1 Feb. 2012. Web. 11 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/tunisia-economy-idUSL5E8CO1XC20120201>>.

<sup>3</sup> “Economy-Tunisia.” *CIA World Factbook*. N.p., 29 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid and “Economy-Morocco.” *CIA World Factbook*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 12 Feb. 2012. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> “Economic Relations with Tunisie.” *France-Diplomatique*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.diplomatique.gouv.fr/en/country-files/tunisia-286/france-and-tunisia/economic-relations-5170/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Tarek.

<sup>8</sup> “Doing Business in Tunisia.” *Doing Business - Measuring Business Regulations - World Bank Group*. World Bank, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2012. <<http://doingbusiness.org/data/exploreconomies/tunisia>>.

<sup>9</sup> Ghiles, Francis. “Identity Confrontations will not create new Jobs in Tunisia.” *Notes Internationales* 49 (2012): 1-5. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Melki, Wiem. “Airbus to Expand Operations in Tunisia.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 5 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/05/airbus-to-expand-operations-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/05/airbus-to-expand-operations-in-tunisia/)>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Healy, Beth, and Todd Wallack. “Fidelity helps affiliate staff flee Tunisia.” *Boston Globe* 17 Jan. 2011: *boston.com*. Web. 13 Feb. 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Bolen, Kathleen. Personal Interview. 6 Jan. 2012.

<sup>14</sup> El Echi, Oussama. Personal interview. 8 Jan. 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Abdessalem, Tahar. Personal interview. 13 Jan. 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Kalboussi, Rabii. “Projects in Place to Improve Roads in Tunisia.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 30 Aug. 2011. Web. 17 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/30/projects-in-place-to-improve-roads-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/30/projects-in-place-to-improve-roads-in-tunisia/)>.

<sup>17</sup> Yaros, Bernard. “What’s Preventing Foreign Direct Investment in Tunisia?” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 22 Feb. 2012. Web. 17 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/02/22/whats-preventing-foreign-direct-investment-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/02/22/whats-preventing-foreign-direct-investment-in-tunisia/)>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Tunisia - Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband.” *Buddecomm*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <<https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Tunisia-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> Perkins, Kenneth J.. *Tunisia: Crossroads of the Islamic and European worlds*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press; 1986. Print. 88.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander, Christopher. *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge, 2010. Print. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Murphy, Emma. *Economic and political change in Tunisia: from Bourguiba to Ben Ali*. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press in association with University of Durham, 1999. Print. 81-82.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Maalej, Aref. Personal interview. 9 Jan. 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Bett, Jamel. Personal Interview. 21 Jan. 2012.

<sup>26</sup> There have been many groups besides the UGTT striking. However, since the UGTT is the most prominent group that is striking, I am focusing on them in this section. Even if the government were to end these strikes, there would likely be some other strikes as well since they are a legal form of protest. Everyone from journalists to the police to student unions has gone on strike to protest and promote their own individual cause.

<sup>27</sup> Bett.

<sup>28</sup> Ghiles, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ghribi, Asma. “Civilians and Journalists Assaulted by Police.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 9 Apr. 2012. Web. 9 Apr. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/09/civilians-and-journalists-assaulted-by-police/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/09/civilians-and-journalists-assaulted-by-police/)>.

<sup>31</sup> “Cooperation with the European Union.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération Internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=24&L=2>>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>33</sup> “Financial cooperation with the EU.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=66&L=2>>.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> “Tunisia - European Union Association Agreement.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=65&L=2>>.
- <sup>36</sup> Financial cooperation with the EU.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Many of the governments outside of Europe refuse to be at a meeting with Israel and Palestinian Authority Representatives at the same time. These issues have prevented other key issues from being discussed at these meetings thus rendering these conferences effectively useless. The status quo prevails.
- <sup>39</sup> Kruger, Lorenzo. Personal Interview. 13. Jan. 2012.
- <sup>40</sup> “EU’s response to events in Tunisia.” *The Middle East en français*. N.p., 22 Apr. 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <<http://middleeastenfrancais.blogspot.com/2011/04/eus-response-to-events-in-tunisia.html>>.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> “Meeting of the Tunisia – European Union Task Force 28-29 September 2011 Co-Chairs Conclusions.” *The European Union*. 29 Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <[http://ecas.europa.eu/tunisia/docs/20110929\\_taskforce\\_en.pdf](http://ecas.europa.eu/tunisia/docs/20110929_taskforce_en.pdf)>.
- <sup>44</sup> “Economic and Social Program: The Jasmine Plan.” *Tunisian Business News*. Ministry of Finance, Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.businessnews.com.tn/pdf/Jasmine-Plan2011.pdf>>.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> Ghiles.
- <sup>47</sup> Jasmine Plan.
- <sup>48</sup> Cheikh-Rouhou, Moncef. Personal Interview. 26. Mar. 2012.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> This bank was created in 1991 to fund modernization projects after the collapse of the USSR in Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia.
- <sup>52</sup> European Union Task Force.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Hopefully, these students receive skills not available in Tunisia in European universities, and then they will return to Tunisia to make the country more productive. Ideally, this program will focus on lower-income, high-achieving students from the interior instead of rich students from Tunis or coastal Tunisia.
- <sup>54</sup> Arief, Alexis. “Political Transition in Tunisia.” *Congressional Research Services*. Federation of American Scientists, 20 Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011.
- <sup>55</sup> “US Aid for Tunisia.” *North Africa United*. N.p., 25 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.northafricaunited.com/Clinton-Pledges-aid-for-Tunisia\\_a856.html](http://www.northafricaunited.com/Clinton-Pledges-aid-for-Tunisia_a856.html)>.
- <sup>56</sup> Ben-Hafaiedh, Abdelwahab. Personal Interview. 14 Jan. 2012.
- <sup>57</sup> TAP. “Tunisia and Qatar sign a set of co-operation agreements and memorandums of understanding.” *Tunisian News Agency*. N.p., 14 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tap.info.tn/en/en/politics/9262-tunisia-and-qatar-sign-a-set-of-co-operation-agreements-and-memorandums-of-understanding.html](http://www.tap.info.tn/en/en/politics/9262-tunisia-and-qatar-sign-a-set-of-co-operation-agreements-and-memorandums-of-understanding.html)>.
- <sup>58</sup> Ajmi, Sana. “Visit of Qatari Emir Divides Tunisian Political Society.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 15 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/15/visit-of-qatari-emir-divides-tunisian-political-society/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/15/visit-of-qatari-emir-divides-tunisian-political-society/)>.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* along with interviews of bloggers along Avenue Habib Bourguiba on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- <sup>60</sup> Redissi, Hamadi. “Tunisia: The Difficulties of the Coalition.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 3 Mar. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/03/tunisia-the-difficulties-of-the-coalition/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/03/tunisia-the-difficulties-of-the-coalition/)>.
- <sup>61</sup> “The Revolution in Tunisia: Economic Challenges and Prospects.” *African Development Bank*. 11 Mar. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <[http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical%20Anglais%20ok\\_North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical%20Anglais%20ok_North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical.pdf)>.
- <sup>62</sup> Rosen, Esther Lee. “Tunisia - Bank approves US\$500 Million for governance reforms and economic opportunities.” *World Bank Group*. N.p., 21 June 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/TUNISIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22945865~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:310015,00.html>>.
- <sup>63</sup> Brisson, Zack, and Kate Krontiris. “Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions.” *InfoDev*. World Bank, 19 Mar. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1141.html](http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1141.html)>.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



- <sup>65</sup> Gamha , Eymen. "Why is Tunisian Tourism in Crisis?." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/11/hows-out-to-ruin-tunisian-tourism/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/11/hows-out-to-ruin-tunisian-tourism/)>.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> "Tunisia 2010 - Tourism Development in Tunisia - overnight stays 1997-2009 statistics graph." *Tunisia Info 2011* . N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.tunispro.net/tunisia/tunisiastat1.htm>>.
- <sup>68</sup> Chrisafis, Angelique. "Tunisia woos tourists with controversial advertising campaign ." *The Guardian* . N.p., 16 June 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/17/tunisia-tourists-controversial-advertising-campaign>>.
- <sup>69</sup> Ajmi, Sana. "Tunisia Launches Tourism Promotional Campaign in Europe." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 4 Mar. 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/04/tunisia-launches-tourism-promotional-campaign-in-europe/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/04/tunisia-launches-tourism-promotional-campaign-in-europe/)>.
- <sup>70</sup> Reuters. "Tunisia's Ennahda to oppose shari'a in constitution." *Reuters*. N.p., 26 Mar. 2012. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/26/us-tunisia-constitution-idUSBRE82P0E820120326>>.
- <sup>71</sup> Becheur, Mohamed. *The Jasmine Revolution and the Tourism Industry in Tunisia*. Las Vegas: UNLV Press, 2011. Print.
- <sup>72</sup> Cherif, Youssef. Personal Interview. 12. Jan. 2012.

## Works Cited

- Abdessalem, Tahar. Personal interview. 13 Jan. 2012.
- "Agadir Agreements." *European Commission* . N.p., 25 Feb. 2004. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <[trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/march/tradoc\\_127729.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/march/tradoc_127729.pdf)>.
- Ajmi, Sana. "Tunisia Launches Tourism Promotional Campaign in Europe." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 4 Mar. 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/04/tunisia-launches-tourism-promotional-campaign-in-europe/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/04/tunisia-launches-tourism-promotional-campaign-in-europe/)>.
- Ajmi , Sana. "Visit of Qatari Emir Divides Tunisian Political Society." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 15 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/15/visit-of-qatari-emir-divides-tunisian-political-society/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/15/visit-of-qatari-emir-divides-tunisian-political-society/)>.
- Alexander, Christopher. *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Amara, Tarek. "Tunisia's economy still awaits post-revolt bounce." *Reuters.com*. N.p., 1 Feb. 2012. Web. 11 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/tunisia-economy-idUSL5E8CO1XC20120201>>.
- Aré, Lionel , Sami Chabenne, Patrick Dupoux, Lisa Ivers, David C Michael, and Yves Morieux. "The African Challengers: Global Competitors Emerge from the Overlooked Continent." *Boston Consulting Group*. N.p., 1 June 2010. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <[www.bcg.com/documents/file44610.pdf](http://www.bcg.com/documents/file44610.pdf)>.
- Arieff, Alexis. "Political Transition in Tunisia." *Congressional Research Services*. Federation of American Scientists, 20 Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21666.pdf>>.
- Becheur, Mohamed. *The Jasmine Revolution and the Tourism Industry in Tunisia*. Las Vegas: UNLV Press, 2011. Print.
- "Beginning of the Trade Unionist Movement." *Tunisian General Union of Labor*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.ugtt.org.tn/en/presentation3.php>>.
- Ben-Hafaiedh, Abdelwahab. Personal Interview. 14 Jan. 2012.
- Bett, Jamel. Personal Interview. 21 Jan. 2012.
- Bolen, Kathleen. Personal Interview. 6 Jan. 2012
- Brisson, Zack, and Kate Krontiris. "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions." *InfoDev*. World Bank, 19 Mar. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1141.html](http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.1141.html)>.
- Castal, Vincent, Paula Ximana Mejia, Alasanna Diabata, Jacob Kolster, and Nono Matondo-Fundani. "The African Development Bank Group in North Africa-2011." *The African Development Bank*. N.p., 1 Apr. 2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <[www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/RAP%20Afrique%20nord%20Anglais.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/RAP%20Afrique%20nord%20Anglais.pdf)>.
- Cheikh-Rouhou, Moncef. Personal Interview. 26. Mar. 2012.
- Cherif, Youssef. Personal Interview. 12. Jan. 2012.
- Chrisafis, Angelique. "Tunisia woos tourists with controversial advertising campaign ." *The Guardian* . N.p., 16 June 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/17/tunisia->

- tourists-controversial-advertising-campaign>.
- “Cooperation with Italy.” *Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <[www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=47&L=2](http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=47&L=2)>.
- “Cooperation with the European Union.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération Internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=24&L=2>>.
- “Cooperation with The Islamic Development Bank.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=42&L=2>>.
- “COUNTRY COMPARISON :: GDP - PER CAPITA (PPP).” *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 01 July 2011. Web. 26 Nov. 2011. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>>.
- “Doing Business in Tunisia .” *Doing Business - Measuring Business Regulations - World Bank Group*. World Bank, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2012. <<http://doingbusiness.org/data/exploreconomies/tunisia>>.
- “Economic and Social Program: The Jasmin Plan.” *Tunisian Business News*. Ministry of Finance, Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.businessnews.com.tn/pdf/Jasmine-Plan2011.pdf>>
- “Economic Characteristics of the population.” *National Institute of Statistics*. N.p., 9 Feb. 2005. Web. 17 Dec. 2011. <[www.ins.nat.tn/indexen.php](http://www.ins.nat.tn/indexen.php)>
- “Economic Relations with Tunisie.” *France-Diplomatie*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/tunisia-286/france-and-tunisia/economic-relations-5170/>>.
- “Economy-Morocco.” *CIA World Factbook*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 12 Feb. 2012. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>>.
- “Economy-Tunisia.” *CIA World Factbook*. N.p., 29 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>>.
- “Educational characteristics of the population.” *National Institute of Statistics*. N.p., 9 Feb. 2005. Web. 17 Dec. 2011. <[www.ins.nat.tn/indexen.php](http://www.ins.nat.tn/indexen.php)>.
- El Echi, Oussama. Personal interview. 8 Jan. 2012.
- “Employment: Top Priority for the New Tunisia.” *European Training Foundation*. European Union, 29 Mar. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <[http://etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/NEWS\\_8GCFVH\\_EN](http://etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/NEWS_8GCFVH_EN)>.
- “EU’s response to events in Tunisia.” *The Middle East en français*. N.p., 22 Apr. 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <<http://middleeastfrancais.blogspot.com/2011/04/eus-response-to-events-in-tunisia.html>>.
- Fage, J. D., and Roland Anthony Oliver. “Tunisia.” *The Cambridge history of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 180-183. Print.
- “Financial cooperation with the EU.” *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdci.gov.tn/index.php?id=66&L=2>>.
- Gamha, Eymen. “Why is Tunisian Tourism in Crisis?” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 21 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/11/hows-out-to-ruin-tunisian-tourism/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/11/hows-out-to-ruin-tunisian-tourism/)>.
- “GDP growth (annual %).” *The World Bank*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Feb. 2012. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>>.
- Ghiles, Francis. “Identity Confrontations will not create new Jobs in Tunisia.” *Notes Internacionales* 49 (2012): 1-5. Print.
- Ghribi, Asma. “Civilians and Journalists Assaulted by Police.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 9 Apr. 2012. Web. 9 Apr. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/09/civilians-and-journalists-assaulted-by-police/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/09/civilians-and-journalists-assaulted-by-police/)>.
- “GINI Index.” *The World Bank*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Dec. 2011. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?page=2>>
- Giuffrida, Angela. “Tunisian Migrants Open Tensions in Europe.” *The New York Times*. N.p., 6 Apr. 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/world/europe/07iht-m07-migrants.html?pagewanted=all>>.
- Healy, Beth, and Todd Wallack. “Fidelity helps affiliate staff flee Tunisia.” *Boston Globe* 17 Jan. 2011: *boston.com*. Web. 13 Feb. 2012.
- Hourani, Albert Habib. “Tunisia.” *Arabic thought in the Liberal Age: 1798 - 1939*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. 366. Print.
- Jemmali, Montassar. Personal Interview. 28 Feb. 2012.
- Kalboussi, Rabii. “Projects in Place to Improve Roads in Tunisia.” *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 30 Aug. 2011. Web. 17 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/30/projects-in-place-to-improve-roads-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/08/30/projects-in-place-to-improve-roads-in-tunisia/)>.
- Kruzer, Lorenzo. Personal Interview. 13. Jan. 2012.

- Maalej, Aref. Personal interview. 9 Jan. 2012
- "Meeting of the Tunisia – European Union Task Force 28–29 September 2011 Co-Chairs Conclusions." *The European Union*. 29 Sept. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <[http://ceas.europa.eu/tunisia/docs/20110929\\_taskforce\\_en.pdf](http://ceas.europa.eu/tunisia/docs/20110929_taskforce_en.pdf)>.
- Melki, Wiem. "Airbus to Expand Operations in Tunisia." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 5 Jan. 2012. Web. 13 Feb. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/05/airbus-to-expand-operations-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/01/05/airbus-to-expand-operations-in-tunisia/)>.
- Mhirsi, Zied. Personal Interview. 5 Jan. 2012.
- Moyo, Thoko. "Tunisia – Country Brief." *World Bank Group*. N.p., 10 Apr. 2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/TUNISIAEXTN/0,,menuPK:310024~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:310015,00.html>>.
- Murphy, Emma. *Economic and political change in Tunisia: from Bourguiba to Ben Ali*. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press in association with University of Durham, 1999. Print.
- Ounaïes, Ahmed. "Europe and the New Middle East." *Tunisia Live*. Ed. Allan Bradley. 31 Oct. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/31/europe-and-the-new-middle-east/>>
- Perkins, Kenneth J.. *A History of modern Tunisia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Perkins, Kenneth J.. *Tunisia: Crossroads of the Islamic and European worlds*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986. Print.
- Qattous, Mahmoud, and Terry McCallin. "Final Report." *Agadir Agreements*. N.p., 15 Sept. 2009. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <[www.agadiragreement.org/CMS/UploadedFiles/Shoes%20&%20Leather\\_2010\\_English.pdf](http://www.agadiragreement.org/CMS/UploadedFiles/Shoes%20&%20Leather_2010_English.pdf)>.
- Redissi, Hamadi. "Tunisia: The Difficulties of the Coalition." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 3 Mar. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/03/tunisia-the-difficulties-of-the-coalition/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/03/tunisia-the-difficulties-of-the-coalition/)>.
- Reuters. "Tunisia's Ennahda to oppose shari'a in constitution." *Reuters*. N.p., 26 Mar. 2012. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/26/us-tunisia-constitution-idUSBRE82P0E820120326>>.
- Rosen, Esther Lee. "Tunisia – Bank approves US\$500 Million for governance reforms and economic opportunities." *World Bank Group*. N.p., 21 June 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/TUNISIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22945865~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:310015,00.html>>
- TAP. "Tunisia and Qatar sign a set of co-operation agreements and memorandums of understanding." *Tunisian News Agency*. N.p., 14 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[www.tap.info.tn/en/en/politics/9262-tunisia-and-qatar-sign-a-set-of-co-operation-agreements-and-memorandums-of-understanding.html](http://www.tap.info.tn/en/en/politics/9262-tunisia-and-qatar-sign-a-set-of-co-operation-agreements-and-memorandums-of-understanding.html)>.
- "The Revolution in Tunisia: Economic Challenges and Prospects." *African Development Bank*. 11 Mar. 2011. Web. 22 Nov. 2011. <[http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical%20Anglais%20ook\\_North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical%20Anglais%20ook_North%20Africa%20Quarterly%20Analytical.pdf)>.
- Toujas-Bernaté, Joël, Boileau Loko, and Dominique Simard. "Tunisia: Selected Issues ." *International Monetary Fund*. N.p., 12 Aug. 2009. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <[www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10109.pdf](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10109.pdf)>.
- "Tunisia – European Union Association Agreement." *Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération internationale*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.mdc.gov.tn/index.php?id=65&L=2>>.
- "Tunisia – Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband." *Buddecomm*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <<https://www.buddecomm.au/Research/Tunisia-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband.html>>.
- "Tunisia 2010 – Tourism Development in Tunisia – overnight stays 1997–2009 statistics graph." *Tunisia Info 2011*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.tunispro.net/tunisia/tunisiastat1.htm>>
- "UNData–Country Profile–Tunisia." *UNData*. United Nations. Web. 26 Nov. 2011. <<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=TUNISIA>>.
- "US Aid for Tunisia." *North Africa United*. N.p., 25 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.northafricaunited.com/Clinton-Pledges-aid-for-Tunisia\\_a856.html](http://www.northafricaunited.com/Clinton-Pledges-aid-for-Tunisia_a856.html)>.
- Wesseling, H. L.. *Divide and rule: The partition of Africa, 1880–1914*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. Print.
- Yaros, Bernard. "What's Preventing Foreign Direct Investment in Tunisia?." *Tunisia Live*. N.p., 22 Feb. 2012. Web. 17 Mar. 2012. <[www.tunisia-live.net/2012/02/22/whats-preventing-foreign-direct-investment-in-tunisia/](http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/02/22/whats-preventing-foreign-direct-investment-in-tunisia/)>.



**NIMEP Tunisia 2012**