On December 17, 2010, the day that sudden protests for economic dignity and antiregime calls began snowballing across Tunisia, the World Bank released a competitiveness and integration report on the Tunisian economy. The report underscored the long-time portrayal of Tunisia as bon élève, or good pupil, while underscoring the need to continue along the path of economic liberalization and reform: “The global integration strategy has allowed it to gradually become a fairly diversified and open economy. The development model that Tunisia pursued over the past two decades has served the country well, but it has shown to be increasingly inadequate to reduce unemployment and promote growth of high value-added sectors.”

That same day, in the South-Central town of Sidi Bouzid, a young produce vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire after a local police officer confiscated his produce, cart, and scales. The dramatic and public suicidal act represented Bouazizi’s personal frustration with the lack of possibilities for socio-economic advancement or basic economic sustainability, while symbolizing broader dissent of corruption among the country’s economic and political elite centered on a powerful network of privileged families. Mohamed Bouazizi, who quickly became the face of the revolution, thus represented the plight of millions of Tunisians, especially the unemployed and largely educated youth, who were excluded from economic advancement and denied political expression by the repressive and corrupt policies of ex-President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and his small clan of powerful families.

Within hours, Bouazizi’s self-immolation unleashed waves of protest, first in Sidi Bouzid, then across Tunisia’s interior where the regime frequently repressed protest movements, eventually culminating into a nationwide campaign by early January that called for social justice, dignity, equality, and the removal of the ancient regime. January 14, 2011, marked the spectacular Revolution, the immediate flight of President Ben Ali and the collapse of his single-party regime.

The rupture broke apart many of the mechanisms of a fifty-four-year-old authoritarian state, but the dynamics of post-Revolution change and resultant institutions reflect the nature of Tunisia’s society, history of state building and social change, extant political institutions, modernization programs, resistance movements, and position in the regional and global economy. This chapter begins with an overview of post-Revolution politics, highlighting major developments from January 14, 2011, the day Ben Ali fled the country, to December 21, 2014, the day of the second round of Tunisian presidential elections, won by Beji Caid Essebsi. Subsequent sections focus
on state building and social change, state institutions and government, political actors and participation, Islam and politics, and underscore long-standing tensions around the methods and mechanisms of modernization and reform in the country.

Overview of Tunisia's Transition

Nature abhors a vacuum, and over the following months, in the attempt to restore political order, Tunisia's government would go through several permutations. Ben Ali-appointed Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi declared himself interim president on January 15, 2011, only to be replaced the following day by then-Speaker of the Parliament Fouad Mebazza, following a ruling of the Constitutional Council, which itself was dissolved in March 2011. Mebazza promptly named Ghannouchi his prime minister, who formed a national unity government and promised elections within six months, pledging to retire from the political scene once his short mandate was completed. Despite Ghannouchi's promises, a series of massive public demonstrations referred to as the Casbah protests, calling for the demission of his government and the dissolution of the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), tipped Mebazza's hand. On February 27, he appointed a new interim government led by Beji Caid Essebsi, a long-time minister of Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first president.5

Among Essebsi's first actions was the nomination of lawyer and legal scholar Yadh Ben Achour to head the newly created High Authority for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (referred to as the Ben Achour Commission), a fluid body of legal experts, scholars, and representatives of previously legal...
and illegal civic associations and political parties. On March 29, 2015, the Ben Achour Commission expanded to 159 members. Less than a month after its creation, the Ben Achour Commission announced the rules and procedures that would frame anticipated elections for a National Constituent Assembly (NCA), which would be organized under the auspice of the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) established on April 7, 2015, and headed by former human rights activist Kamel Jendoubi. As the election date grew closer, the purpose and role of the new NCA preoccupied public dialogue: Would it be limited to drafting the constitution, or would it be allowed to propose and draft law as well? What would be the duration of the NCA’s mandate? What would the relationship of the NCA and government look like? In an effort to address these questions, Yadh Ben Achour began informal discussion with political parties in August 2011, reaching a nonbinding compromise agreement on September 15, 2011. Represented by eleven political parties, signatory groups pledged to limit the NCA’s mandate to one year, though an agreement on the precise role of the division of labor and power within the NCA and emanating institutions was not reached.6

On October 23, 2011, Tunisians voted for the 217-seat NCA, a body tasked with drafting a new, democratic Tunisian constitution within one year, while overseeing the work of an interim government formed by the prime minister. With a 51.97 percent turnout,7 election results stunned many: the previously banned Islamist Ennahdha party, led by Rachid Ghannouchi, the Congress for the Republic (CPR), led by long-time Ben Ali opponent Moncef Marzouki,8 won between them a parliamentary majority. The Ennahdha party won a large plurality, with 37.04 percent of the vote, translating into eighty-nine NCA seats, or just over 41 percent. Marzouki’s CPR won twenty-nine seats, with 8.71 percent of the vote. They were followed by the surprise turnout for Hechmi Hamdi’s recently created populist Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice and Development party (PP), with twenty-six seats and 6.74 percent of the vote, and long-time reformist opposition leader Mustapha Ben Jafar’s Ettakatol party won another twenty seats, with 7.03 percent of the vote. Ben Ali-era reformist Nejib Chebbi’s Progressive Democratic Party, which had consistently polled as the second most popular party in the lead-up to the elections, was the big loser, capturing only 3.94 percent of the vote and sixteen parliamentary seats.

With a combined 130 seats and thus a parliamentary majority, Ennahdha, CPR, and Ettakatol, parties either banned or in the opposition during the Ben Ali era, began negotiations to form a unity government. The Troika, as the coalition would be called, supported the candidacy of Ettakatol leader Mustapha Ben Jafar for Speaker of Parliament, on November 22, 2011, the day the NCA convened. Under Ben Jafar’s leadership, on December 10, 2011, the Troika-dominated NCA adopted the “Law on the Interim Organization of Public Powers,” which was to replace constitutional authority while the NCA drafted a new, democratic constitution. Among other things, the law defined the prerogatives and limitations on executive, government, and parliamentary authority. Two days after the law was passed, the Troika-dominated NCA elected CPR head Moncef Marzouki interim president, who in turn nominated Ennahdha executive committee member Hamadi Jebali as Prime Minister, tasking him to form a government to run day-to-day affairs, while the NCA drafted the constitution.

To many, the NCA elections, formation of the Troika, and nomination of president and prime minister marked the natural evolution and development of Tunisian democracy. With better governance, it was thought, Tunisia could harness its place in history as a pilot country of democracy in the region.

Interim Tensions

Though Tunisia’s first fair and free election since independence was met with much fanfare, the interim government was immediately confronted
with problems that could not be resolved through the vote. By the time the NCA assiduously began to draft a new constitution, the economy had been in contraction for a year, assuming Ben Ali-era figures were reliable. According to the World Bank, 2011 GDP growth fell to 1.6 percent, while unemployment spiked to a national aggregate of 18.1 percent—up from 13 percent the previous year. Alarming, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that unemployment among Tunisians between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five years old—the age group most invested in taking to the streets during the revolution—increased from 29.4 percent in 2010 to 42.3 percent in 2011, reflecting both an increased stress on the economy and politicized bookkeeping under the previous regime. According to the World Bank, foreign direct investment (FDI) in manufacturing and agro-business and tourism receipts plummeted as foreign investors and potential visitors shied from the aftershocks of revolution. FDI fell from $US 1.3 billion in 2010 to just over $US 400 million in 2011, and Tunisia received close to two million fewer tourists in 2011 than it did in 2010.

As the economy contracted, labor unrest spiked. Immediately touched by the economic context, workers demanded swift action to increase employment options and salaries. Worker movements too had been at the forefront of resistance to the Ben Ali regime, most notably during the 2008 Gafsa Mining Basin rebellion. While the peak union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT) joined the anti-Ben Ali protest movement calling for a general strike on January 13, 2011, the day before the former president fled the country, local union branches had effectively mobilized membership to join anti-Ben Ali protests from the start of the uprising and have continued to voice their demands for a more proactive employment policy during the post-revolution period. In such a context, the UGTT has been unable to control worker activities. According to one estimate, in 2011, the number of strike movements increased by 122 percent in relation to 2010, involving 340 companies and over 140,000 workers. This has had a major effect on manufacturing and extractive industries, which saw a reduction of 40 percent of value added in mining, primarily due to labor unrest in the phosphate sector. Phosphate production, 8 million tons in 2010, fell to 2.5 million tons in 2011.

While 2012, the first year of the NCA, was marked by a slight upturn in economic growth, none of Tunisia’s economic sectors had rebounded to 2010 levels. In the context of prolonged economic contraction, and the effervescence of revolutionary sentiment, social and political unrest continued, increasing societal tension. During this period, the three parties that made up the Troika witnessed a series of political defections in the NCA. Some of these defections occurred just a few weeks following the announcement of the Troika government, reflecting personal rejections with the alliance, while others occurred progressively as a result of personal rivalries or the creation of new political factions. For a variety of reasons, Ennahdha witnessed the defection of four of its parliamentarians, Ettakatol lost eight of its twenty members, and CPR lost seventeen of its twenty-nine elected seats. The bulk of Ettakatol defections were in response to its alliance with Ennahdha, whereas the CPR frayed following a series of internal leadership disputes centered on who would lead the party following Marzouki’s appointment to the presidency.

In addition to a sagging economy, the Troika government had to contend with a rise in radical social movements and political violence. Accredited immediately after the Revolution, Ansar Sharia and Hizb Tahrir are two distinct Salafi movements that created much confusion among the political class, especially among secular-leaning elites and staunch leftists. Anti-Nahda opponents to the Troika government quickly painted the rise of Salafism as part and parcel of Ennahdha’s long-term strategy for the Islamization of the country, fears that were largely unfounded given the many Ennahdha
public statements on the movements’ and party’s commitment to democracy and pluralism. Ennahdha, on the other hand, initially tried to dialogue with some Salafi movements in order to integrate them into Tunisia’s burgeoning pluralistic democracy. Hizb Tahrir sought and eventually won accreditation as a political party in July 2012, whereas Ansar Sharia rejected political overtures and publicly opposed Tunisian political institutions, including the NCA and future constitution. In September 2012, Ansar Sharia received authorization to organize a protest in front of the US Embassy in Tunis, in response to a homemade YouTube video that allegedly insulted the Prophet Mohamed. Turnout was larger than authorities expected and quickly turned violent as attendees stormed the Embassy walls, setting fire to the structure and ransacking the nearby American School. While its leader, Abu Iyad, who had founded the Tunisian Combat Group in the early 2000 (which claimed responsibility for the deadly 2002 attacks on a synagogue in Djerba), went underground, no official sanctions were taken against the movement, infuriating much of the Tunisian political class. Nonetheless, Moncef Marzouki, Tunisian president at the time, condemned the attacks and called them “unacceptable, considering its implication on our relations with Washington.”

The attacks on the US embassy marked the beginning of a political crisis that would last for an entire year, stalling the constitution-drafting process, inciting political infighting, and blocking important political reform agendas around transitional justice and judicial reform. While the National Constituent Assembly and Troika government worked diligently to keep Tunisia on its path to democracy, public criticism and disappointment with the postrevolutionary environment was coopted by a rising political opposition, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia) formed of long-standing secularists, former leftists, secular-leaning intellectuals, labor representatives, industrialists, big-business interests, former regime elements, and like-minded civil society. Supporters of the Troika government blamed the opposition for purposefully obstructing the work of the government and the assembly for its own political gains. Some of the Troika’s most ardent critics used this occasion for a campaign to publically question a democratic future that accommodates both religious beliefs and the rights paradigm of secularists under legitimate rule of law.

On February 6, 2013, just five months after the US embassy attacks, Chokri Belaid, a leftist Tunisian politician, lawyer, and vocal critic of the Ben Ali regime and the Ennahdha-led government, was assassinated in front of his home in El-Menzah, a suburb of Tunis. The assassination spiraled the country into a deep crisis, underscoring existing political tensions. Tens of thousands of Tunisians turned out at the Belaid funeral and the national labor union, the UGTT, called for a national strike, as funeral goers criticized the government for its inability to curb political violence and conduct successful investigations. In response, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, former Ennahdha political prisoner under the Ben Ali government, proposed to dissolve the coalition government, form a temporary technocratic government, and schedule elections to weather the deepening political crisis. Jebali’s plan was rejected by both Ennahdha and Ennahdha party militants, who took to the streets to protest the Jebali plan. Faced by rebellion from his own party, Jebali quit office, stating, “I promised if my initiative did not succeed I would resign as head of the government, and this is what I am doing following my meeting with the president. Today there is a great disappointment among the people and we must regain their trust and this resignation is a first step.”

Deepening political tensions provided an opportunity for the rise of the anti-Ennahdha, secular-leaning Nidaa Tounes movement, led by former interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi. Building a platform that criticized postrevolution security, Nidaa Tounes’s popularity was amplified following the country’s second political assassination since the Revolution. On July 25, 2013, Mohamed Brahmi was murdered in front of his family while leaving his home. Brahmi
was a member of the same leftist coalition as Chokri Belaid, and his assassination during the holy month of Ramadan gave rise to the *Rahil* (Departure) movement, which convened daily in front of the Bardo parliament building. The *Rahil* movement was supported across the country in smaller protests that called for the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly. The leftist coalition *Jabha Shaabia* (Popular Front), led by long-standing dissident and leftist Hamma Hammami, joined forces with Nidaa Tounes to form the National Salvation Front (NSF). Oppositional parties represented in parliament joined the ranks of the NSF and their deputies withdrew from parliament. Lawyers, judges, intellectuals, revolutionary activists, and civil society organizations joined the movements. The constitutional process was thus on the brink. *Rahil* expanded to include members of UGTT labor union, the influential business association UTICA, and consisted of daily sit-ins and demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the assembly. Within two weeks, the daily sit-ins were gathering more than 150,000 protesters, which the NSF claimed represented a “national consensus” stronger than the electoral legitimacy of the Ennahdha-led government. Troika supporters responded with a movement calling the National Salvation Front un-democratic and detrimental to Tunisia’s political transition. Some analytical accounts have urged for a more careful analysis of the political assassinations and political violence more generally, and to move away from the detrimental categorizations of Islamist terrorism. Such analytical responses have been especially important in light of the violent repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt following the removal of President Morsi that same summer.

The culmination of the street-based *Rahil* protests, the neighboring “Egypt scenario,” and the NSF’s widespread support across political ideology and economic interests coupled with a powerful media sector pushed Ennahdha and the opposition to negotiate a political compromise. A national dialogue (*hiwar watani*) led by the quartet of UGTT, UTICA, the Lawyer’s Union, and the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, brought the Troika and its opponents to reach a consensus in October 2013: The NCA would complete the Constitution by early 2014; upon its completion, the Troika government would step down to be replaced by a technocratic government that would organize legislative and presidential elections within a reasonable time frame. The national dialogue was hailed by many observers as a key moment that led Tunisia out of political deadlock, while laying the groundwork for Tunisia’s first postauthoritarian parliamentary and presidential elections.

Despite continued protests, the NCA worked relentlessly to complete an acceptable draft, which was unanimously approved on January 26, 2014: Two hundred deputies voted for the Constitution, twelve against, while four abstained. Amid nationwide celebration, on July 27, 2014, interim president Moncef Marzouki, NCA President Mustapha Ben Jaafar, and head of government Ali Larayedh signed the document. Observers hailed the landmark Tunisian Constitution as a successful result of a compromise between Ennahdha and the oppositional forces. The Constitution mandates shared power along a dual executive, strengthens the legislature, and for the first time in the history of the Arab world, requires gender parity in elected bodies.

Just two days after the signing of the Constitution, the Troika ceded power to a technocratic government, led by former Minister of Industry Mehdi Jomaa. At the time, NCA President Ben Jaafar declared, “The peaceful transfer of power has occurred in an extraordinary way that history will not forget.” Ennahdha deputies and supporters defended their party’s performance in light of fierce attacks by religious extremists as well as relentless protests by leftists and the secular-leaning anti-Ennahdha front. Deep-seated prejudices against the moderate Islamist party and open statements that all Islamists were terrorists continued into the October 2014 legislative elections and the December 2014 presidential polls. At the same time, the secular opposition was painted immediately as a resurgence of the Ben Ali regime, despite its great internal ideological diversity.
Nidaa Tounes swept the legislative vote and Beji Caid Essebsi unseated Moncef Marzouki as head of state. Though many journalists and international observers characterized the victory as the triumph of secularism over Islamism, important scores by smaller parties indicate a shift of politics beyond the religion-secularism divide that is currently taking shape: Free Patriotic Union (UPL) led by Tunisian business man and soccer club owner Slim Riahi, the leftist umbrella faction Jabha Shaabia led by longstanding and popular leftist-communist Hamma Hammami, and the liberal Afeq Tounes constituted the runner-up parties. The surprise performance of the populist UPL party mirrored the performance of Hechmi Hamdi’s populist Aa'rida Chaabia in the 2011 NCA elections, underscoring the continued salience of populism among the Tunisian electorate.

Since the elections, Tunisia’s democratic transition has once again been shaken by two devastating events: deadly attacks on tourists at the National Bardo museum in Tunis on March 18, 2015, as well a deadly attack at a tourist beach in Port El Kantaoui (Sousse) on June 26, 2015. President Beji Caid Essebsi has declared a state of national emergency following the attacks with increased security services visible in public and tourist spaces, while human rights activists have criticized the government for reversing freedoms, stalling transitional justice, and derailing advances made toward a democratic Tunisia.

History of State-Building

Tunisian society has been influenced by the country’s geostrategic position on the Mediterranean at the Strait of Sicily. From prehistory to the contemporary period, the territory comprising modern Tunisia has been ruled by urban settlements, running from ancient Utica\(^2\) (near modern Bizerte) to Carthage, Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax. In those urban areas, rulers governed in alliance with notable religious and commercial families. Whereas direct, urban control penetrated no more than 100 km into the interior, outlying rural areas in the Northeast have been historically governed in alliance with large land-owning rural families often dependent on urban military force to maintain their privileged position. Political power and authority in the hinterlands to the west and south of the northeastern capitals, similarly, was projected via rural garrison towns that served as local commercial and religious hubs, in alliance with networks of tribal confederations from surrounding regions. As often as not, tribal authority did not always recognize central urban power throughout history; tribal leaders often escaped taxation and other state impositions (conscription) by relocating to adjacent territories, if not by challenging authority directly.

Social Stratification during the Ottoman Period (1574–1881)

Urban power was highly stratified prior to French occupation in 1881—structured on an aristocratic
sociopolitical order that relied on religious and mercantile classes to adjudicate commercial, legal, and religious day-to-day governance. Under the Beys of the Hussaynid Dynasty22 (1705–1957), for example, society was stratified with Hussaynid and Turkish ruling families at the apex, followed by the commercial and urban bourgeoisie (beldi23) of middle status, and finally, provincial families (’afaqi) drawing their livelihoods from agriculture as well as local legal scholars and judges (cadi).

The Hussaynid court at the Bardo in Tunis (currently Tunisia's national museum, which abuts the site of the Tunisian parliament) consisted of Turks and Mamluks before reformist minister Khayr Al-Din replaced them with Tunisians after popular revolts in the 1860s. The religious ‘ulama, located in Qayrawan and Tunis, were supplemented by shaykhs of the super-tribal Sufi organizations (zawaya) and prominent Malikis and Hanafis jurists. The ‘ulama often originated from prominent aristocratic, beldi, and ’afaqi families, so distinctions between strata became blurred. Prominent beldi families such as the Ben Achour, Jait, and Bayram, and ’afaqi families such as the Ben Amor Jellouli, Ben Farhat, and the Bouhajeb, had ‘ulama family members and were agricultural landowners. On coastal plains and central valleys in the northeast, urban and provincial elites were large landowners, and often trustees of lands placed in religious endowments (habous or waqf), from which they earned income.

Nonelites included state administrators, small merchants, military and lower-level ‘ulama, and wealthier artisans, followed by farmers and various strata of artisans, fishermen, laborers, sharecroppers, peasants, freed slaves (ca. 1846), and the poor. The bottom stratum constituted of ’al-amma—the urban masses. Tunisia’s cities and coastal plains were organized by the state, its elites, and communities, with respect to customary property rights, licensing, taxation, and the commercialization of agricultural produce, such as olives and wheat. Diversity within strata was great, owing to differences in property, livelihood, and familial proximity to power and authority. As the prestige and authority of the aristocracy declined, intermarriages increased between them and the beldi urban bourgeoisie. Patronage, contracts, and property rights bound beldi to sharecropping families, the ‘ulama to beldi managers of religious endowments and land, and provincial elites and beldi to artisanal groups producing goods for market and export.

In the western highlands and southern Saharan regions, tribal society was predicated on vertical patriarchal relations between tribes of greater and lesser status, which too possessed strata of tribal leaders and qa’ids who were separated from leaders of lesser clans and auxiliary tribes enjoying fewer rights to wells, pastures, and oases. Large families were the lynchpin of cooperation between the central government and other transhumant groups. A tribe or clan’s political decisions regarding war, taxation, circumscription, migration, and so on, put the fate of the “organizational body” (mushayakh) at stake.24

As the Hussaynid dynasty adopted new techniques of power and governance in these rural hinterlands, patriarchy and patronage increasingly were not the sole bases of tribal governance and leadership selection. By the mid-nineteenth century, Tunis increasingly either directly controlled or shared governance of the rural periphery.

Sparked by several sustained droughts, urban migration accelerated during the mid-nineteenth century, and cities were increasingly home to people without family and affiliation. Poor migrants no longer fit into the societal order of the tribe, nor were they firmly integrated within the established political or economic urban social order. Extended rural segmentary and urban cooperate affiliations deteriorated, giving rise to smaller, atomized households.

Colonialism and French Rule (1881–1956)

In 1881, under the pretext of suppressing cross-border tribal incursions into Algeria, French troops crossed into northwest Tunisia. French troops continued to
Tunis, and in less than a month had forced the ruling Hussaynid ruler, Sadok Bey, to sign the Bardo Treaty, placing the country under French protection. The treaty ceded France control over defense and taxation policy, as well as control of many day-to-day governance functions, while attempting to keep minimum costs to the French Republic.

With the establishment of the French protectorate of Tunisia, the political-economic order changed, with accelerated formation of social classes and political strata. To bolster French territorial claims, the Protectorate enticed French farmers, merchants, and administrators to immigrate. In 1892, the French mandated the annual transfer of two thousand hectares (4,942 acres) of religious endowment land (habous\textsuperscript{25}) to a central commission set up to encourage colonization. By 1915, close to one-fifth of arable land had been transferred to French settlers and colonial agro-business. In a process similar to the effect of the English Enclosure laws, these transfers encouraged rural migration to Tunisia's major cities. The French imposed military conscription of Tunisian men in the 1800s. These men were predominantly rural nonelites and poor, and represented 4 percent of the population, and their experiences, as elsewhere in colonial empires, served to politicize them. Similarly, Tunisian laborers in industry and infrastructure developed a class and nationalist consciousness, working alongside French and Italian laborers who excluded them from their unions. French control of territorial administration extended to technical ministries responsible for public services, infrastructure, and industry in the 1890s. These independent, technical bureaucracies excluded Tunisians. By 1939, only 5,500 of the 14,000 administrative posts were held by Tunisians. Public education only reached about 20 percent of citizens by 1955.

**The Rise of the National Movement:**

*Toward Independence*

The Tunisian nationalist movement evolved in three stages, often with overlapping membership, in a process Clement M. Henry has called the “colonial dialectic.”\textsuperscript{26} Led by Ali Bash Hamba and 'Abd al-Aziz al-Tha'ali, in 1907, the Young Tunisians founded Tunisia's first Muslim-owned newspaper, *Le Tunisien*. A mix of bilingual urban lawyers of aristocratic and bourgeois origins, and with religious leaders linked to the Zaytouna mosque, the Young Tunisians never numbered more than two thousand. The group organized debates and discussions on topics related to Tunisia's reform, but neither openly called for independence. A discussion group more than a mobilizer of social forces, they were nonetheless banned in 1912, following 1911 riots in response to French designs on the Islamic Djellaz cemetery in Tunis, and a tramway boycott that year.

Founded a decade later, the Destour movement started as a Tunis-based organization, composed of 'ulama, qa'ids, other religious administrators, leaders of artisanal guilds, and heads of urban quarters. An insular group with limited exposure to Western influence, the movement's leadership came from the Young Tunisians, including the group's leader, Al-Tha'ali. The Destour platform focused on two main political points: the reinstatement of the 1861 constitution (*Destour*) and independence from France. Al-Tha'ali authored *La Tunisie Martyr* in 1923, in which he criticized French “pollution” of national identity and called for the restoration of Islamic jurisprudence and education. The Destour protested the appointment of French judges to local law courts in the 1930s. Destour remained active before being banned in 1933 and was overshadowed by the Neo-Destour party, which split from the movement in 1934.

Similar to the Destour movement, which emerged from the Young Tunisians, the Neo-Destour party was founded as a schism from the Destour movement in 1934. Founded by Habib Bourguiba, Bahri Guiga, Mahmoud Materi\textsuperscript{27}, Tahar Sfar, and Salah Ben Youssef, the Neo-Destour party attracted young men who received their secondary education at the Sadiki College in Tunis, and who went on to postgraduate studies in France. Unlike both the Young
Tunisians and the Destour movement, the Neo-Destour’s founding leadership emerged from modest origins, predominantly from the Sahel region. Unlike the Destour movement, the Neo-Destour leadership believed that only mass mobilization could ensure economic and social development in preparation for an independent Tunisia. In line with these progressive views, the Neo-Destour party supported women’s rights, modern education, and a secular state, enshrined in a liberal constitution.

Neo-Destourians successfully mobilized most segments of Tunisian society—artisans, day laborers, farmers, merchants, and workers—and actively worked with Tunisia’s nascent sectoral organizations, including the Tunisian General Labor (ca. 1946); the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie, du Commerce et de l’Artisanat, UTICA; ca. 1947); the General Union of Tunisian Farmers (Union Générale des Agriculteurs Tunisiens, UGAT; ca. 1949); and the General Union of Tunisian Students (Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie, UGET; ca. 1952). Founded by Farhat Hached in 1946, the UGTT is the oldest labor union in the Arab world and played a major role in mobilizing workers in support of the Neo-Destour party and the independence movement. Independence sentiments promoted by the Neo-Destour, the UGTT, and other sectorial movements forged national unity among rich and poor, bourgeoisie and peasant alike during French occupation.

Radical Transformation and Mass Mobilization

Discussions over independence divided the Neo-Destour movement between followers of two of its historical leaders, Habib Bourguiba and Salah Ben Youssef, leading to intraparty violence in 1955. Inasmuch as the crisis pitted supporters against opponents of France’s limited autonomy proposal—supported by Bourguiba and opposed by Ben Youssef—the conflict, too, was over who would lead the Neo-Destour and was profoundly personal. A founding member of the party and good friend of Bourguiba’s, Ben Youssef, had served as the party’s second secretary general from 1948 to 1955, during Bourguiba’s years of exile and prison, and forged his own popularity during this period by expanding the ranks of the party. Though both Bourguiba and Ben Youssef were popular throughout the country, the former gathered his strength from the northeast, whereas the latter from the west and southern Saharan regions. Bourguiba and his supporters prevailed in late 1955; Ben Youssef fled the country, and many of his supporters jailed. Ben Youssef was assassinated in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1961.

Shortly after independence, Bourguiba further strengthened his hold over the Neo-Destour Party, and the party’s hold over the administration through a series of administrative and party reforms. The 1957 Municipal Law curtailed town hall prerogatives, reassigning taxation and many general governance provisions to regional governors, who were themselves party members handpicked by the president. Similarly, in 1958, the regime dissolved regional party delegations, which had previously served to articulate militant interests at the national level. Regional officers led by centrally nominated party commissioners replaced them. Both reforms weakened the power of local-level politics on the national level, while reinforcing the Neo-Destour party leadership, which itself was increasingly dependent on the presidency.28

The party leadership became entwined with societal organizations (discussed above), though did not attempt to fully co-opt them, as did the single party regime in neighboring Algeria (see chapter 10 on Algeria) or dissolve them altogether as in al-Qadhafi’s Libya. While the party consulted societal organization on policy matters, such organizations did not deliberate policy. And with the exception of the UGTT, such organizations did not act jointly with the state as corporatist entities.

Bourguiba justified these political changes by the need to rapidly modernize the country, and resistance the Neo-Destour encountered along the way. Indeed, Bourguiba ran into much opposition surrounding his
progressive family-code reforms and efforts to curtail the lingering strength of traditional institutions that resisted his modernizing efforts (below). Shortly after independence, for example, the Bourguiba government enacted the 1957 Personal Status Code, which granted expanded rights to women. The new code abolished polygamy, provided equal rules for divorce, fixed a minimum age for marriage, while acknowledging a near equality of women in providing for the family. The code changes involved the state directly in household affairs and vastly increased its societal reach. The new regime also sought to reduce the power of religious institutions in both the rural and urban milieu. In 1956 and 1957, the regime dissolved religious endowments (habous), which prevented up to a fifth of Tunisian land from being used in commercial transactions. More than just an attack on traditional property mechanisms, the reforms undermined the authority of religious leaders, who had managed this land in parallel to state social welfare institutions. Similarly, Bourguiba integrated the Zaytouna mosque—the Maghreb’s premier site of Islamic learning—into the national education system. Finally, on July 25, 1957, Bourguiba deposed the Hussaynid rulers, who had ruled (if only increasingly symbolically) since 1705, and declared Tunisia a republic.

Forging National Unity through Economic Centralization and Repression

Having successfully rerouted traditional institutions, the state sought to reform the agriculture sector to boost economic production. The regime’s new enthusiasm for state-led development was reflected in the party’s name, which was changed to the Socialist Destourian Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien, PSD) at the 1964 party congress, “The Congress of Destiny.” That year, the Tunisian state had recuperated all of the nearly one-fifth of arable land ceded to French interests during the protectorate. Lacking a robust Tunisian agriculture sector that employed modern farming techniques, in 1965, former head of the UGTT and Minister of Agriculture Ahmed Ben Salah announced the integration these and all other state-owned lands into cooperative production units (CPU). CPUs united workers on colonial farms and small farmers of abutting plots of private land into administrations run by elected council, which would run the CPU along rational, modern techniques, overseen by a delegate from the Ministry of Agriculture. Despite complaints from workers and small farmers who had been forced to join the program, the program continued to expand, and by 1968, close to 1.8 million hectares of land were integrated into the program. In March 1969, Ben Salah announced plans to incorporate all Tunisian land into the cooperative movement. In April, opponents of Ben Salah and the cooperative project alike rallied around a Central Bank report that revealed the CPUs were on the verge of bankruptcy. Having received significant pressure from his PSD allies, Bourguiba announced the end of forced collectivization in September 1969. In May 1970, four million hectares of private land were restituted to its owners, and Ahmed Ben Salah, visionary of the state-led experiment, arrested and charged with treason.

The failed cooperative movement revealed to many the limits of a single-party system that required Bourguiba as a source of arbitrage. These tensions came to a head at the 1971 PSD party congress, “The Congress of Take-Off.” During the congress, Minister of Interior Ahmed Mestiri and a group of political liberals, which included current President Beji Caïd Essebsi, called for a political opening. While the effort was unsuccessful, and both men were excluded from the party, the regime agreed in 1981 on a limited political opening, allowed Mestiri’s Socialist Democratic Movement (Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes, MDS) and the Tunisian Communist Party (Parti Communiste Tunisien, PCT) to participate in elections.

While it took the regime a decade to move to a more liberal political system, its economic policy, under the watch of Prime Minister Hedi Nouira (1970–1980), considerably liberalized and actively
promoted private investments in agriculture, agro-industry, light industry, and tourism. Fostering private sector development, the PSD renewed its relationship with entrepreneurs, while increasingly isolating the UGTT, which rejected many of the liberal reforms implemented in the 1970s and 1980s. As noted above, while close to the regime, the UGTT, too, maintained its autonomy and actively resisted neo-liberal reform during the 1978 general strike and during the 1984 bread riots. While both acts of defiance were harshly repressed by the regime, they revealed both the degree to which the population did not fully embrace the new economic orientation and the new leadership’s inability to capture the political hearts and minds of an increasingly vocal and young population.

Although accredited in 1981, the MDS and PCT were not allowed to play a significant role in politics. Neither party won a seat during the 1981 legislative elections. As the MDS and PCT—loyal opponents of the Bourguiba system—participated in the system, radical groups had begun to coalesce on university campuses—a good thermometer for the politics of North African countries. Active since the 1960s, in 1981, Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou, currently the Ennahdha president and the deputy speaker of parliament, respectively, requested political accreditation for the Movement of Islamic Tendency (Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami, MTI), a movement that rejected the socialist project in as much as it rejected Bourguiba’s regime, and many of his modernization policies, which they saw as an attack on culture. While its application was rejected, over the next few years, the MTI would exponentially grow into a major political force as the only viable rejectionist political force in Tunisia.

The political arena continued to contract following the 1984 bread riots. The PSD had lost much public support; its leadership was in a protracted succession crisis, while political intrigue blocked significant efforts to push for either greater economic or political reform. A sign of the degree of political fragility, in July Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali (1980–1986) was replaced by rival Rachid Sfar, who proposed a political alliance with the UGTT in the November 1986 elections. While accredited only five years before, both the MDS and PCT chose to boycott the 1986 legislative elections. Sfar was himself replaced by Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in October 1987.

In 1986, a radicalized MTI wing argued that nonpracticing Muslims could be considered *takfir* (unbelievers), and a series of bombings in Sousse was attributed to it. In late 1987, Bourguiba tried to reopen court cases against its leaders, seeking death penalties. Fearing that such actions would plunge Tunisia into civil war, Ben Ali had Bourguiba declared unfit for rule. The November 7, 1987, bloodless coup d’état was met with shock and hope for an end to autocracy.

Ben Ali came to power with promises of political liberalization. He organized a National Security Council and then took a number of steps to open dialogues with the *‘ulama*, disaffected social groups, opposition parties, Islamists, labor, human rights organizations, and organizations representing the poor. The result of these discussions was the much-touted National Pact of November 1988, which promised pluralism and inclusive state-society engagement. With pact in place, Ben Ali organized his first presidential and parliamentary elections in April 1989. Ben Ali suggested that political parties submit a single, unified list of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. MDS leader Ahmed Mestiri countered the proposal, suggesting separate party lists instead. Ben Ali ran for president largely uncontested, winning 99.27 percent of the popular vote, while the Democratic Constitutional Rally (Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique, RCD)—the revamped PSD—obtained all 141 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Ennahdha candidates participated as independents in the 1989 elections, receiving anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of the vote but no legislative seats. In 1991, the regime cracked down on Ennahdha, arresting thousands of its rank and file and leadership. Imprisoned, many were tortured, while key leaders...
were sentenced to long terms of solitary confinement. Those not arrested, like Ghannouchi, were forced into political exile and would not return to Tunisia until after the 2011 revolution.

Election rigging and winner-take-all fights in 1981, and boycotts in 1986 and 1989, took a toll on the MDS. Mestiri's party suffered schisms, and he resigned party leadership in 1990. His successor, Mohammed Mouiedda, too, faced schism and repression. In 1994, Mustapha Ben Jaafar, who would later participate in the 2011–2014 Troika government as Speaker of Parliament, quit the party, charging it was too close to the presidency. Mouiedda was jailed in 1996 for his open letter to President Ben Ali criticizing the current state of human rights and civil liberties. He lost control of the party in 1997.

Ben Ali tinkered further with the political arena to maintain RCD control. In 1999 and 2004, he decided to apportion a token percentage of parliamentary seats to the “losing” parties in the winner-take-all system: 20 percent in 1999 and 2004, and 25 percent in 2009. In the 2000s, Ben Ali changed the constitution to expand the political elite and RCD patronage to professional associations. A 2002 amendment created a bicameral legislature with an upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, supplementing the lower house, and the Chamber of Deputies. In the 124 seat Chamber of Counselors, 41 directly elected seats represented the governorates; 42 seats represented the agricultural, industrial, and professional sectors; and 42 seats were presidential appointees. Ben Ali also amended constitutional limits on presidential terms and the maximum age of the president so that he could stand for the 2004 elections.

The 2009 Tunisian presidential and legislative elections were held in October, and Ben Ali sought yet a fifth presidential term, inciting an organized oppositional movement, the 18 Octobre Collectif. Prior to campaigns, Nejib Chebbi attempted to unite all opposition parties in a coalition, but the October 18 movement failed to broker unity. Prior to elections, parliament passed a 2008 constitutional amendment that required presidential candidates to receive recommendations from thirty parliamentary members and to have served at least the past two years as party leader. The 2008 law derailed the candidacies of Mustafa Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol) and Nejib Chebbi of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP). The 2009 presidential elections were the last failed elections prior to the revolution. The complete shutdown of the political arena left little room for formal and electoral contestation. However, the opposition grew through informal political spaces and extended to everyday Tunisians disenfranchised with the politics of the Ben Ali regime. That opposition successfully escaped censorship and was able, after maturing over time, to mobilize a nation to stand up against dictatorship and join a movement known as the Tunisian Revolution or the beginning of the Arab Spring.

Social Change in Tunisia

Pays pilot, or model country, Tunisia has always been an early innovator in the Arab world, from the Beylical period to the contemporary era. In 1861, Tunisia’s precolonial government drafted the Arab World’s first constitution. Founded by Farhat Hached in 1946, the UGTT was the Arab world’s first independent labor union. Ordered by Habib Bourguiba and drafted by Ahmed Mestiri, the 1956 Family Code removed the status of the child and family from religious courts, placing it under codified, positive law—the first time ever in an Arab country. Resistance from women opposed to and from within the Ennahda-led Troika government convinced Ennahda to reaffirm its long-standing commitment to not modify the family code during constitutional debates. And while the UGTT was at times co-opted under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, in 2013, the union played a critical role in mediating dialogue between the anti-Troika movement, principally Nidaa Tounes, and the Ennahda-led Troika government as part of the National Dialogue. Those talks set into motion a road map that led to the adoption of the January 2014 Constitution, culminating in the
country’s (and Arab world’s) first democratic legislative and presidential elections, resulting in a rotation of power.

These political innovations both provoked and were inspired by profound societal changes that have occurred in Tunisia over the past century and a half, during the final days of the Beylic, through the colonial period, into the postcolonial era. As discussed in the previous section, colonization spurred urban development, undoing traditional economic institutions and practices, ultimately abetting the creation of the UGTT and rise and consolidation of the Neo Destour Party. Postindependence economic strategies wavered between state-led development in the 1960s, to a mixed economy in the 1970s, to structural adjustment and globalization in the 1980s and 1990s. While these changes have had a profound impact on societal change and the rise of contentious politics, no other political action has had such an important impact on the development of Tunisian society as the 1957 Family Code.

1956 Personal Status Code

Tunisia’s Family Code significantly altered the nation’s social fabric, in ways encountered in no other Arab country. Intellectually inspired by poet Tahar Haddad’s 1930 work, Our Women in Law and Society, the Family Code is in reality a bundle of laws that build from Tunisia’s 1956 Personal Status Code (Code du statut personnel), which transferred law pertaining to personal status from religious courts to positive law. These laws required marriage in civil courts; banned polygamy; gave women the right to divorce, while protecting them from spousal abandonment; defined alimony requirements; and set out a reorganization of inheritance rules and donations, which had a profound impact on religious foundations, or habous, which were liquidated.

Subsequent laws economically and politically emancipated women, giving women the right to vote, guaranteeing access to primary, secondary, and higher education; to work; to open bank accounts; and to move without a tutor’s authorization. Bourguiba tasked the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT, Union nationale des femmes tunisiennes) to educate women of their expanding rights.Founded in 1956, a year before the Code was implemented, by 1960, the UNFT had 14,000 members and 115 branches across Tunisia—attesting to both the popularity of the reforms among women and the degree to which Bourguiba was willing to support his cause.37 While the UNFT continued support, women’s rights throughout both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regime, closely tied to the Neo Destour and later RCD party, by the late 1980s, the union was increasingly instrumentalized to oppose Tunisia’s nascent Islamist movement.38

Though not fitting squarely into the Personal Status Code, equally important reforms were a series of public health laws that gave women control over their body, especially the 1962 laws that gave women access to contraception and 1965 law that allowed access to safe abortion.39 The effects on fertility have been profound. Adolescent fertility rates have fallen from 66 in 1000 (ages 15–19) in 1960 to 7 in 1000 in 2013.40 Overall fertility rates too have declined. Whereas in 1960, fertility rates averaged 7 children per female, they have dropped to 2.25 children per female in 2013.

Expanded Education Opportunities

Educating both male and female Tunisians was a priority for all of Bourguiba’s modernization projects, and Tunisia too has made relatively great strides in education. While in 1971, net primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment was 79 percent, 23 percent, and 2.5 percent, respectively, in 2013 primary enrollment is close to 100 percent, secondary enrollment 90 percent, and 33 percent of Tunisians are currently pursuing higher education. Gains for women have outpaced male enrollment, reflecting the effects of the Family Code across time. Net female primary school enrollment has jumped from 65 percent in 1971 to 98 percent
in 2008, whereas female primary school completion has increased from 43 percent in 1973 to 98 percent in 2013. The degree to which Tunisia has promoted women since independence is most salient in higher education enrollment. In 1971, just over 1 percent of Tunisian women were enrolled at university, compared to 4 percent of Tunisian men. In 2000, for the first time ever, women enrollment at universities surpassed men, and by 2013, 42 percent of Tunisian women are pursuing college educations or postgraduate studies compared to only 26 percent of Tunisian men.

While the Tunisian regime’s commitment to output is uncontested, the quality of Tunisian education can be improved. A 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study survey on fourth- and eighth-grade student mathematics scores, for example, places Tunisia well below the international average, with only 2 and 30 percent of students reaching the intermediate or higher international benchmark, respectively.41

Women in Politics and the Workforce

Tunisia’s government’s proclaimed progressive policy of equity, enshrined in both the 1957 and 2014 Constitutions, and through organic law, has had a major effect on the economic, political, and social rights of women in Tunisia, both inclusive and exclusive. Whereas women only gained the right to vote in 1957, and the right to run for office in 1958, women won close to 27 percent of seats in the NCA elections of 2011. Forty-two of the forty-nine NCA seats won by women were filled by Ennahdha deputies. The percentage of women in the 2014–2019 parliament increased to 31 percent, thanks in part to a quota system in candidate lists. Despite the positive changes since the revolution, only 148 of the 1,500 competing lists in the 2014 legislative elections were headed by a woman, reflecting continued patriarchal biases in Tunisian politics.

While access to education and politics has made Tunisia a model for developing (and many developed) nations, women continue to face discrimination. In 2013, the International Labour Organization estimated female unemployment at 16 percent, compared to 12 percent for men, and a 13 percent national average. Though it is unclear that this necessarily reflects discriminatory hiring practices, the breakdown of active workforce is more revealing. In 2013, the percentage of female labor force participation was only at 25 percent, compared to 71 percent for men. Such variation likely indicates both a reluctance of many women to join the labor force, whether due to personally held conviction or patriarchal constraint.

Many, spurred by Tunisia’s first two governments of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, have hailed Tunisia as ahead of the curve in promoting women’s rights and expanding economic and educative opportunities to much of its population. However successful, the modernization program also excluded vast segments of the country’s population and imposed strict limits on public expression of piety especially among women. Noteworthy examples include the basic right to wear the veil, which was banned during the Bourguiba period and strongly discouraged under Ben Ali. Despite statistical successes, quality of services and opportunities services could be ameliorated. While in the past, authoritarianism and corruption limited both access to and quality of these services, democratization presents new opportunities for new visions of progressive social change through the empowerment of Tunisian citizens via the urn.

State Institutions and Governance

The Tunisian state played an important social and political transformative role during the years of Tunisia’s two autocrats, Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. The consolidation of authority came to an end with the 2011 Revolution, and Tunisia has been governed by four governments since: (1) the transitional government headed by Beji Caid Essebsi until the October 2011 NCA elections, (2) the Troika government led first by Hamadi Jebali and then Ali Layaredh (both Ennahdha), (3) the Mehdi Jomaa
technocratic government, and (4) the 2014-elected Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition led by Prime Minister Habib Essid.

Constitution and Powers

2014 Constitution. Adopted on January 26, 2014, amid much fanfare, excitement, and relief, the 2014 Tunisian Constitution is hailed as the Arab world’s most democratic constitutions. In the weeks leading to vote, the 217-member assembly met daily to debate article by article the country’s draft foundational document. During the drafting process, special constitutional committees were created to debate some of the most controversial articles, while a special consensus committee of twenty-two deputies was established to mediate and reach agreements on contentious articles prior to voting and adaptation. The 2014 Tunisian Constitution is viewed as the most progressive constitution in the Arab world, where parity between men and women in elected assemblies is enshrined in law (Article 45), and executive powers have been reduced as part of a contentious debate on the separation of powers throughout the process (Article 90). While much attention has been focused on elections in Tunisia as indicators for prospects for democracy, it is the constitution that is the foundational platform for democratic consolidation, rule of law, and the protective relationship between citizen and state. The 2014 constitution reflects an impressive consensus between Islamic, liberal, socialist-leftist, and nationalist voices represented in the NCA.

Political Authority prior to the Revolution. Until December 2011, authority was founded upon the original constitution of Tunisia, ratified in 1959 by Habib Bourguiba’s provisional government. The founders established a republic, with Arabo-Islamic foundations (Article 1), vesting sovereignty in the people (Article 3). The constitution founded the republic upon the rule of law and political pluralism, yet it stipulated that state and society strive for “solidarity, mutual assistance and solidarity among individuals, social categories and generations” (Article 5). The 1959 constitution specified rights, liberties, and obligations, and among its freedoms granted press, publication, association, assembly, and labor organization (Article 8). Article 8 as revised in 2002 also stipulated that parties be free of violence and hatred, without organization on exclusionary premises such as religion, race, sex, or region. Subsequent constitutional amendments introduced by Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali qualified or modified the articles, introducing ambiguity and de facto reductions in freedom. Rights of association were subject to contradictory amendments that stipulated that groups be approved by the state, and elsewhere stipulated that all Tunisians respect public order, social progress, and national defense. The state did not apply articles fully, and it rested on a dependent judiciary to rule arbitrarily in its favor.

Transitional Authority Drafting Process. Between December 2011 and the adaption of the 2014 Constitution, in Tunisia, political power was defined by the “Law on the Interim Organization of Public Powers.” Approved by the NCA, the law specified the executive, judicial, and legislative powers of government, dividing responsibilities between the president of the republic and the prime minister: nominal transitional power resided in the premiership and not in the presidency. On the basis of the NCA elections, a tripartite division of power sharing involved the CPR party president Moncef Marzouki serving as president, appointing Ennahda secretary general Hamadi Jebali to serve as prime minister. The fourth-place Ettakol Party agreed to join the Ennahda-led coalition, and Mustapha Ben Jafar was named speaker of the assembly. A constitutional process was established in 2011, with six subcommittees involved in drafting articles—four chaired by Ennahda, and two chaired by the secular CPR and Ettajdid parties. The committees were divided along (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 to deal with media pluralism, financial regulation, politics and religion, and law enforcement and security; and (6) local, regional, and municipal issues.

The articles were submitted to a coordinating committee, on which both the President of the Assembly (Mustapha Ben Jaafar, Ettakatol) and the General Rapporteur (Habib Kheder, Ennahdha) sat. Given the powers vested in the General Rapporteur, Kheder has been described as the chief architect of the Constitution. The Coordinating Committee prepared presentations of the full constitution for consideration to the entire Constituent Assembly. The submission of the first draft to the Coordinating Committee was delivered on August 8, 2012, with an assembly vote scheduled on October 23, 2012, which was delayed until 2014 due to a series of political crises between 2012 and 2014 (see above).

During the drafting process, the main political fault lines fell on (1) whether the sharia would serve as the basis for the constitution; (2) whether the political system will be presidential or parliamentary; and (3) the specification of powers and authorities to guarantee various rights and freedoms. Although the sharia was supported by a small majority of Ennahdha assembly members, Ennahdha’s leadership and all parties supported the 1959 Constitution’s Article 1, which established a republic, with Islam as the national religion and Arabic as the national language.

During the NCA, executive authority was dominated by the premiership. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a former Ennahdha political prisoner, headed Tunisia’s government from October 2011 until March 2013, leading a cabinet of forty-three ministers. President Marzouki set foreign policy in consultation with the prime minister while serving as commander in chief of the armed forces. Jebali resigned in February 2013, following an Ennahdha rebellion against his proposal to dissolve government in favor of technocrats. Jebali’s Minister of Interior, former Ennahdha political prisoner, Ali Larayedh replaced him, announcing a new government in March. While Larayedh announced that his government would prioritize fighting crime and promoting economic growth, the political crisis that followed Mohamed Brahmi’s July 2013 assassination forced the Troika to agree to step down from power following the adoption of the 2014 Constitution. Larayedh was replaced by Mehdi Jomaa, former Troika government Minister of Industry, who appointed a technocratic government to prepare for legislative and presidential elections. Prime Minister Habib Essid has led government since February 2015. He is the first prime minister appointed to lead the Second Tunisian Republic.

Judiciary and Its Independence

The judicial system has not been overhauled since the revolution. Former President Ben Ali appointed the majority of judges currently in office. Under the former constitution, the judiciary was an extension of the presidency. Chapter 5, Section 2 of the new constitution mandates a new Constitutional Court to replace the Ben Ali court, dissolved in March 2011. Unlike the previous court, which functioned as a tool of the executive, the new Constitutional Court reviews proposed laws by lower courts as well as the parliamentary rules of procedure. Though still not named, the court will be comprised of twelve members, appointed by the President, parliament, and Supreme Judicial Council.
Transitional Justice. The first post-Revolution institution of transitional justice was the new Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, led by former Ennahdha political prisoner Samir Dilou, himself a victim of arbitrary arrest, harassment, and torture. On June 9, 2014, the government launched the Truth and Dignity Commission, established by the December 15, 2013, transitional justice law. Headed by human rights activists and oppositional journalist Sihem Ben Sedrine, the Commission will investigate human rights violations committed by the Tunisian state against citizens since independence, providing compensation and rehabilitation for its victims. At the launch, President Marzouki declared, “There can be no sustainable democracy without acknowledging and addressing mistakes of the past.” The Truth and Dignity Commission has been reviewing and hearing cases of past abuses since its creation.

Former President Ben Ali was tried and found guilty by a military court of ordering the death of protesters. Ben Ali received multiple life sentences in absentia and has denied the charges. Shortly after Ben Ali’s ouster, the interim government organized two ad hoc commissions to investigate police abuse and corruption. These commissions filed their final reports in December 2011 and May 2012, but despite more than 10,000 requests, 2,000 examinations, and 300 judicial case transfers, few have been brought to trial and few assets have been returned to Tunisia. The Tunisian state did confiscate $750 million ($1.2 billion) from Ben Ali and from 113 other members of his elite circle.

Military-Civilian Relations and Security

As noted above, while previous regimes operated on a constitutional basis, there was no rule of law. Power was consolidated in the presidency, which modified the constitution when politically expedient. The military and security apparatuses were concentrated in the hands of the presidency, and were themselves divided into multiple institutions in order to maintain civilian authoritarian rule. Whether or not the 2014 Constitution will be protected as the legal framework for post-Ben Ali Tunisian politics, significant changes have been made that formally create a separation of power between the presidency, government, and legislature that affect military-civilian relations and security in Tunisia.

While the Tunisian presidency has fewer powers over the military and security establishment than under the previous two regimes, it nevertheless retains an important degree of power. According to the 2014 Constitution, the Tunisian president is Commander in Chief of the Tunisian Armed Forces, which includes the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and chairs the National Security Council (Article 77). While control of the military and security forces is assured by government via the Minister of Defense and Interior (respectively), who themselves are appointed by the prime minister, the president appoints and dismisses individuals to senior military and police positions, in consultation with the Head of Government (Article 78). The president is required to preside over the Council of Ministers on all issues relating to defense, foreign policy, and national security (Article 93). Article 80, furthermore, mandates the president to take any measures to protect the stability of the republic, and can approve a thirty-day state of emergency, in consultation with the prime minister and Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives.

The Tunisian Armed Forces (TAF) has historically been small—looking toward Algeria and Libya as reference points, neither Bourguiba nor Ben Ali trusted the political neutrality of large military. Domestic spending for the TAF in 2010 was 1.3 percent of GDP, compared to 3.5 percent for both Algeria and Morocco. This figure has increased in the post-revolution period, especially as security threats have multiplied along the Algerian border near Kasserine, and along the Libyan border to the southeast. The military is currently estimated at between forty and sixty-five thousand members, and is being reinforced and professionalized through cooperative agreements with Algeria, the United States, and most recently NATO.
Whereas the TAF have been historically sidelined, the various apparatuses within the Ministry of Interior—including the National Guard, Judicial Police, Presidential Guard, Rapid Intervention Brigades, regular National Police, and General Directorate of Information—were actively used by Ben Ali to identify and punish political opponents through harassment, incarceration, and torture. Violence and deaths during the revolution have been directly attributed to various elements of the Ben Ali police force. Following the Revolution, there has been much discussion around security reform. While the Troika government initially attempted to reform the National Police, naming allies to key positions and promoting younger cadres who had not been linked to the political repression and torture of the Ben Ali era, according to some, those efforts were slowed by inter- and intraparty disagreements within the Troika over the degree to which reform should be carried out, as well as to the nature of that reform. A significant restructuring of the National Police has not occurred. While the exigencies of counterterrorism in the current period make security sector reform both a pressing need and risky endeavor, the July 2015 Anti-Terrorism Law, voted by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, reinforces the government’s ability to gather information on and detain suspected members of terrorist organizations. While reinforcing counterterrorist measures, many view the law as a potential regression for human rights.

Public Administration

While Tunisia’s new elected assembly will write and pass law, its implementation is incumbent on the state administration—the central nervous system of the polity. Adapted from the French model, the Tunisian bureaucracy, or la fonction publique, is composed of state cadres from the various national and regional administrations, ministries, public-sector enterprises, and municipalities, with an estimated 796,000 employees (close to 21 percent of all employment). While under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali the bureaucracy was sometimes used as a form of political patronage, such practices were restricted at the lower levels of employment, where formal entry requirements were nominally based on entrance exams. Further up the hierarchy, however, political patronage, while frequently invoked, was invoked only when a potential candidate, too, had the requisite requirements for the position. The degree of political oversight too varied by ministry and administration; positions linked to sovereign ministries, such as foreign affairs, interior, and central bank, were distributed judiciously and closely followed.

Hiring and recruitment practices changed following the revolution as the new government sought to replace many sitting cadres suspected of working too closely with the Ben Ali regime with their own followers. This policy attracted much criticism based on qualification. According to a 2015 World Bank working paper, performance of the administration has declined. Much of this is likely due to the sharp increase in low-skilled public sector employment, as part of the Troika’s efforts to boost the national economy through public-sector growth—the public sector recruited more than 125,000 low-skilled workers between 2011 and 2014. Employment patterns indicate a mushrooming of unskilled employment without the tandem growth in administrative oversight. The same World Bank working paper, moreover, highlights that much of this hiring has been done in the absence of recruitment exams, expanding opportunities for local-level clientelism. Several members of the Troika government and administration quit in protest over these practices, including Deputy Prime Ministry and CRP political bureau member Mohammed Abdou, in June 2012. A month later, Central Bank Governor Mustapha Nabli and Finance Minister Houcine Dimassi resigned in protest over political control over the Central Bank and politicized public-sector expansion.

The current administration is deconcentrated into 24 governorates and 264 delegations, each
led by a high-ranking cadre from the Ministry of Interior. Currently Tunisia’s 2,073 municipalities are governed by locally co-opted or centrally nominated elites: mayors and city councils, last elected during the Ben Ali era, fell apart following the Revolution. While Articles 14 and 131–142 of the 2014 Tunisian constitution outline the new regime’s commitment to decentralization, the laws governing the powers of new municipal or regional councils and the methods of elections have yet to be defined.

**Actors and Participation**

The Tunisian Revolution successfully overturned a system of controlled contestation within the political arena that had persisted and matured since the early beginning of the Tunisian state. Since independence, Tunisian political space was effectively controlled by a one-party state, despite cosmetic efforts to introduce a multiparty system in 1981, and following Ben Ali’s 1987 constitutional coup. Despite these changes Tunisia continued to operate as a de facto single-party state until the January 14, 2011, Revolution, as indicated in Table 24.1. Bourguiba’s popularity at independence and his perceived benign, patriarchal, fatherly style of rule facilitated the creation of a political machine built upon persona and reputation. Over time, the political arena became less for contests between competing parties and was used more for show of regime support:

The position of the RCD “above” all other parties means that Tunisian elections should be understood not as a competition but rather as a key moment when each Tunisian must choose to stand “for” or “against” the president. The RCD indeed dominates, regulates and controls Tunisian public life, backed by the police (who are intimidating potential boycotters) and civil society (trade unions and 8,500 civic associations—of a total of 9,300 have declared their support for Ben Ali). The RCD counts as many as 2.7 million Tunisians as members, in a country of 5 million voters. The fact that the (unofficial) turnout in elections is around 20 percent, however, reflects the fact that belonging to the party and supporting the president—in a context where other political parties are irrelevant—is the starting-point of access to state services and a certain level of economic welfare.

While the RCD held on to some ministries in the weeks following the departure of Ben Ali, mass protests called for the complete dismantlement of the RCD, which was dissolved on March 9, 2011. The dismantlement of the party apparatus and suspension of its activities opened a political space that was quickly filled with well-established oppositional parties from both the previously loyal and unauthorized opposition, as well as the bourgeoning of dozens of new political parties and thousands of civil society organizations.

**Postrevolution Elections, 2011 and 2014**

**2011 National Constituent Assembly Elections.** One of the lynchpins to widening the political arena was the establishment of the independent High Authority of Elections under the Ben Achour Commission, which organized the 2011 NCA elections, the freest elections held in Tunisian history, marking an institutionalized break from the hegemony of the single-party system.

Of the 8.3 million eligible Tunisian voters at home and overseas, 4.3 million, or 51.7 percent, registered to vote. Representatives of seventeen parties, one coalition list, and thirty-two independent lists were elected. Of the total vote count, 68.2 percent of voters cast ballots for successful parties, revealing that 1.3 million voters cast ballots for small or local parties and lists. Most of the political parties that participated were either not registered or banned during the Ben Ali years. Ennahdha achieved a resounding victory in the elections, capturing 89 of 217 seats, revealing
the density and success of the clandestine network it kept alive under Ben Ali’s repression. This, and the movements’ perceived distance from the single-party state, garnered it popular legitimacy. The top secular parties—one social democratic (Ettakatol) and the other leftist-(Arab) nationalist (CPR), likewise performed well because of long-standing oppositional status. Parties along the liberal-secular lines, including

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### Table 24.1: Political Parties in Tunisia

#### MAIN REGISTERED PARTIES WITH SEATS IN PARLIAMENT

**Governing Coalition**

2. Ennahdha Party (ca. in 2011). President Rachid Ghannouchi. Islamist, economically liberal. (69 seats in 2014 legislature)

**Parliamentary Opposition**

clusters of fractured leftist fringe parties and well-established loyal oppositional parties, such as Nejib Chebbi’s PDP, performed poorly, in part because of their staunch and ill-perceived anti-Islamist rhetoric.

Ennahdha’s victory was vast. It won the majority of seats in all regions of Tunisia, with the exception of Sidi Bouzid, where the Revolution began, which was dominated by Hechemi Hamdi’s (from Sidi Bouzid) populist Popular Petition Party. Tunisia’s hard-core secularists quickly painted the Ennahdha victory as a threat to and setback for secularism, women’s rights, and modern constitutionalism. As they begrudgingly accepted the party’s victory, they were also quick to stress that only 52 percent of potential voters went to the polls; Ennahdha tallied 1.5 million votes, where 1.3 million votes went to parties and lists that failed to gain seats. Overall, some 60 percent of votes went to non-Islamist parties, inciting hope for those secularists who feared Ennahdha and the compatibility between any type of Islam-based political formation and democracy. Ennahdha’s win occurred within a fractured and competitive political environment, which defined the next two years of Tunisia’s difficult road toward democratization.

2014 Assembly of the People’s Representative Legislative Elections. In October 2014, Tunisia organized its first elections under the framework of the new constitution. The elections were viewed as a plebiscite on the Troika government’s performance, and in different ways: While the Troika underscored its success in peacefully transitioning Tunisia from authoritarianism and in drafting of the 2014 Constitution, its opponents ran campaigns highlighting the Troika government’s inability to respond to a wide range of economic, political, social, and security questions. Unlike the 2011 elections, where Ennahdha opponents were largely divided into a coterie of small, disorganized movements and newly accredited political parties, the 2014 elections were marked by recently founded Nidaa Tounes’s campaign to “vote strategically.” The slogan set out to remind voters of the futility of voting for small parties, while underscoring the party’s own campaign promises to competently run government.

With a relatively high 66 percent turnout, the October 26 legislative elections reconfigured the political landscape in a number of ways—with both Tunisian and regionwide significance. First, the results showed that political Islam could be defeated at the polls. Nidaa Tounes, a big-tent, anti-Ennahdha party, carried the election, with close to 38 percent of the vote, translating into eighty-six seats. Though coming in second, Ennahdha received 10 percent fewer votes that its rival, with close to 28 percent of the ballots and sixty-nine seats. Ennahdha’s defeat marked the first time, in the history of the Arab world, that an Islamist political party lost power in a free and fair election. Second, the election results revealed the continued salience of populism and workers issues in postauthoritarian Tunisia. A populist party, the Free Patriotic Union, which ran on money and soccer, came in third, with 4 percent of the vote and sixteen seats (mirroring the Popular Petition’s 2011 results), closely followed by the Popular Front, a party that combined multiple schisms of the former Tunisian Communist Party, and which received close to 4 percent and fifteen seats. Finally, and linked to the first point, the incumbent Troika government was punished for transitional instability. Speaker of Parliament Mustapha Ben Jaafar’s Ettakatol failed to win a single seat, while the Congress for the Republic, of which President Marzouki was the founder, garnered just over 2 percent of the vote, securing only four seats.

2014 Presidential Elections. A month later, Tunisia organized its first postauthoritarian presidential elections. Though the presidency had been relegated to a largely symbolic post by the 2014 Constitution, the presidential elections nevertheless underscore the continuously dynamic Tunisian political landscape. A number of noteworthy observations, taken in conjunction with the October legislative elections, can be taken from these polls. First, Tunisians did not shy from voting for a candidate with links to the authoritarian era. In the first round of elections, 39 percent of Tunisians voted...
for former interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, six points ahead of incumbent President Moncef Marzouki, who won 33 percent. The gap widened in the second round where Essebsi won close to 56 percent of the vote compared to Marzouki’s 44 percent. In this sense, the return of an old-regime player mirrors similar postrevolution elections in Eastern Europe in the mid-1990s. Second, the 2014 presidential elections splintered the Troika, revealing the extent to which Ennahdha was willing to reconfigure its own positions to reflect current political trends: Having evaluated the causes (and possible effects) of the Nidaa Tounes legislative victory, Ennahdha refused to publicly support incumbent Marzouki’s presidential bid, and later joined Nidaa Tounes in a coalition National Unity government. Third, and reaffirming legislative elections results, Hamma Hammami, leader of the leftist Popular Front, won close to 8 percent of the vote, underscoring the importance of worker’s issues. Finally, taken together, the legislative and presidential elections reveal a significant cleavage in Tunisia, separating voters in the north from the south, coincidentally paralleling of earlier divided between centralized Hussaynid authorities and transhumant groups during the precolonial era, and the geographic cleavage that emerged during the Bourguiba-Ben Youssef showdown in 1955. Whereas Beji Caid Essebsi swept the north of the country, Moncef Marzouki swept the south. Having campaigned on opposed messages of liberal economic reform, on the one hand, and social justice and redistribution, on the other, the electoral results reveal a deeper malaise in the country, a cleavage that transcends the more mundane debates between Islamism and secularism.

Opening and Contraction of the Political Spectrum: Civil Society and Religion in Public Space

Prior to and following the elections, the electoral commission opened party registration to the full spectrum of political parties—over 110 parties and independent lists, and one coalition registered for the October 23, 2011, elections of the Constituent Assembly. Between the elections and September 2012, Salafi and other religion-based parties registered, along with the Tunisian Ba’th Party, environmental parties, and small parties such as the Pirate Party (member of the global Pirate movement), which was formed by young antiregime activists and bloggers in 2010 who were instrumental in sharing regime and human rights abuses during the December 2010–January 2011 uprisings. Around the 2011 election period, the political spectrum was broadly divided along two broad dimensions: Islamist-secular and liberal-socialist. Following the 2011 electoral outcomes and preceding the 2014 legislative and Presidential elections, the political field was largely represented as a more simplistic Islamist versus secularist axis, though some observers examined more complex political configurations along policy, region, and ideology.

In the religion-based political sphere, there are fifteen parties, dominated by Ennahdha in the center, with three Salafist parties and the Liberation Party to the extreme right, and one party to the left of Ennahdha. Ennahdha is largely centrist and moderate but also comprises adherents of more right-wing and left-wing ideological commitments, while espousing an overall liberal economic agenda. Following the 2011 elections, there has been much splintering and consolidation among parties in four main poles of the secularist pole: a left-center pole comprised of the CPR, Ettakatol, and the new CPR splinter party, the Independent Democratic Congress (IDC); a centrist-secular pole consisting of Nidaa Tounes, headed by Beji Caid Essebsi; a right-leaning and economically liberal pole of the Republican Party with minor parties of former RCD loyalists; and twelve radical parties (Nationalists, Leftists, Greens, and Socialists) that have joined in a coalition called the Popular Front.
Communist Party (three seats), failed to capture much of the popular vote in 2011. The secularists minus CPR and Ettakatol and eventually morphed into a larger movement, headed by Beji Caid Essebsi, called Nidaa Tounes, comprised of big business, unionists, leftists, secular academics, and former RCD elements. Nidaa Tounes won the 2014 legislative elections, while Beji Caid Essebsi was elected president of the Republic in January of 2015. In sum, Tunisia’s political spectrum swayed from a secular-Islamist coalition formed by long-standing oppositional movements and actors, to a secular-liberal consortium, over a two-year period of massive fragmentation and coalition building.

Civil Society. Since independence in 1956, the Tunisian state shaped social organization rather than integrating independent societal interests. Civil society was thus a tool of Tunisian state-building following independence from France. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state created institutions and policies that lent themselves to creating organizations and shaping associational interests. Two cases of state-sponsored development are most often cited and are not dissimilar from other postcolonial state building projects in the Arab world: women’s organizations following the Personal Status Code revisions at independence, and the rise of a Tunisian business-entrepreneurial class that benefited from private-sector promotion policies since the 1970s. In both cases, demands for policies and institutions originated within the state and did not emanate from society. The Neo-Destour party specifically dominated social organizations with overlapping leadership in both state positions and societal organizations. The state otherwise destroyed and resuscitated groups, such as the UGTT in the 1980s.

Under Ben Ali, civil society was largely state-sponsored and co-opted. Few associations enjoyed any distance or autonomy from the regime, and many became co-opted over time at different political moments, exemplified in the relationship between the UGTT and the Tunisian state. The corporatist, co-optive and repressive response of the state to associational life was marked by state-security infiltration and surveillance to control criticism and contestation within Tunisia’s civil society. Direct and indirect critiques of the Ben Ali regime led to the harassment, arrest, trials, jailing, and torture of oppositional leaders and followers, of which Ennahdha was one of the largest victims. For civil society organizations attempting to establish legal status, patronage resources, revenue-raising instruments, organizational rights, and charters were often adjusted, withdrawn, and denied. Only state-sanctioned organizations would qualify for financial and other state support, and with a restricted NGO space and control over international finances flowing to civil society, opponents within civil society had few means to form an independent and multilayered civil society that stood as a buffer between the state and society.

The state’s approach to civil society became more repressive over time, both under Bourguiba’s rule and under Ben Ali. Shortly after coming to power in 1987, Ben Ali attempted to shut down civil society; human rights and freedom-oriented groups formed to fight repression, injustice, and nontransparency. Nevertheless, some groups were able to maintain cohesion. Noteworthy are the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) and the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT), which placed pressure on Ben Ali’s international image by defending the rights of more than eight thousand leftist and Islamist activists who had been arrested and imprisoned in the early 1990s. More mature in its dealing with the repressive regime, by the 2000s, the opposition used political opportunities to mobilize against the Ben Ali regime, including opposition to the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (organized in Tunis), the jailing of a group of young Zarzis youth accessing the Internet, and the six-month 2008 rebellion in the Gafsa mining region, in which citizens took to the streets to protest state neglect, corruption, and repression in central and southern Tunisia. Violent confrontations between state security and protesters resulted in two deaths and negative, though limited, international coverage. Where the regime could get away with it, opponents were
labeled terrorists by the state. During the 2000s, political and social activists converged on the unifying theme of human rights, as nonpartisan, social, and political alliances opposing extrajudicial, extraconstitutional, and repressive practices of the state and security apparatus.

The culture of opposition and independent associational life that developed in Tunisia despite heavy state repression have played an important role in mobilizing the masses and orienting political discussion during and after the Revolution.

Since the fall of Ben Ali and the single-party state of the RCD, civil society has played a crucial role in shaping Tunisia’s political future. During the March–October 2011 period preceding NCA elections, the number of civil society organizations increased exponentially. Highlighting this is the fact that eighteen associations participated as members of the Higher Commission for the Fulfillment of the Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition. This body determined the direction of the constitutional process, the interim government, and its authorities. A principal explanation for the radical increase in civil society organizations was the relaxation of laws governing the registration and legalization of organizations. While previously organizations had to apply for authorization via the Ministry of the Interior, a process that could take years, postrevolutionary regulations simply required organizations to register with their respective municipalities. The surge in organizational activity and freedom of expression, however, came at a price: previously banned violent and terrorist groups were also able to operate more freely, contributing to a deterioration of Tunisia’s security environment and a series of incidents shaking political stability. The most noteworthy examples are the attacks on the US embassy in September of 2012, two political assassinations of leftist leaders, continued attacks against security forces in the regions abutting Algeria, and, in 2015, attacks on European tourists at a museum and beach. These events resulted in hefty criticism of and pressure on the Ennahdha-led government, and the rise of a secularist security-oriented political bloc that is currently in power. The Ennahdha-led government, the short-term technocratic government preceding the 2014 legislative and presidential elections, and the current secularist government have all been criticized by its respective supporters for curbing freedoms of expression and associational activity.

**Expanded Civil Society.** Following the Revolution, the European Union (EU) issued a report on Tunisian civil society citing the registration of 2,700 new associations, many of which were working in the areas of democratic transition, the environment, culture, and women’s rights. The report characterized civil society as fragmented, split along ideological lines, lacking deep roots in popular sectors of society, and yet establishing a cogovernance with the state in extending or deepening necessary services and service-capacity to citizens. Alarmingly, the report characterized civil-society–state relations as defined by distrust and nonconsultation on a majority of policy issues, claiming that the connective tissue linking local government and community organizations does not “stretch” and “deepen” capacity for service provision.

Four years into the country’s democratic transition, civil society has been able to reposition itself within the Tunisian public sphere. Millions of democracy assistance dollars through bilateral and multilateral development streams as well as local, regional, and global foundations have assisted in the creation of a sustainable civil society that is autonomous from the Tunisian state. While the majority of funds are directed toward supporting the democratic transition, homegrown associations have been able to garner popular support and public prestige. Most notably, a set of transparency-focused organizations observing the work of the National Constituent Assembly, such as Al-Bawsala (Compass) or working on election-related themes, such as I-Watch, have used creative and low-cost tools to build popular legitimacy and respect from Tunisian citizens and state. Global organizations such as the Amnesty International, the Carter Center, Human Rights Watch, the National Democratic Institute, and Transparency International, among hundreds of others, have established local networks of organizations and
strengthened their work through training, education, and capacity- and skill-building activities. Local organizations such as the Jasmine Foundation and the Tunisia-branch of Al-Kawakabi Center have also been formed to link sound scholarly research or agendas with policy recommendations related to the various aspects of Tunisia’s democratic transition. Finally, newly established observatories or policy institutes on issues such as transitional justice, judiciary reform, elections, economic and social development and justice, and election data collaborate with clusters of civil society organizations that have the technical know-how as well as the local expertise across issue and regions to strengthen the work of these policy initiatives.

Tunisia’s civil society has also played a major role in navigating the country’s political crises that have threatened to derail democratization since the Revolution. In 2011, the social movement Ekbes (“Get a move on”), for instance, was formed by a youth wing of Ennahdha and successfully pressured the interim government to fire former regime members and those aligned closely with the Ben Ali clan via the “purge campaign.” Following Mohamed Brahmi’s assassination in the summer of 2013, which led to the weeks-long anti-Troika and anti-NCA sit-in and protests, organizations supporting secular and leftist political factions joined in the protest against the government. Long-standing civil society actors were likewise crucial in negotiating the country out of its 2013 political crisis through a National Dialogue (hiwar al-wataniyy), in which the Bar Association, the UGTT, and the largest business association, UTICA, mediated between the Troika-government and its opponents, resulting in a road map that led to adoption of the 2014 Constitution, the replacement of the Troika by a technocratic government, and the legislative and presidential elections in late 2014. In summary, Tunisia’s burgeoning civil society has been able to carve out an important public space to inform the work of government, policy institutions, think tanks, and citizen programs as well as participate and navigate the country out of political crises. Despite criticisms by activists and civil society leaders of harassment and shutting down of some organizations under security justifications, many of which exhibited religious agendas, civil society has nonetheless been able to reposition itself in Tunisia’s political landscape at a scope that the country has never experienced before.

TABLE 24.2

Political Mobilization of Civil Society around Issues


(Continued)
TABLE 24.2
Political Mobilization of Civil Society around Issues (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s organizations and youth*</th>
<th>Transitional justice and judicial reform</th>
<th>Labor and social justice</th>
<th>Popular protest, strikes social movements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATFD (secular, formerly state–co-opted)</td>
<td>Observatory for Transitional Justice</td>
<td>UGTT Forum for Economic and Social Justice</td>
<td>Regional protests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisaat Tounsiyat (social justice, former political prisoners, regional inequity)</td>
<td>Al-Kawakabi Jasmine Foundation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thala and Kasserine and Siliana—popular protest: jobs, compensation of families of the victims of the revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LED—League des electrices democratiques (youth, mainly secular)</td>
<td>Observatory for Judicial Reform Bar Association</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regular and daily strikes and protests across country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Association of Tunisian Judges Tunisian Union of Judges Network for Transitional Justice Truth and Dignity Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gafsa—protests and strikes in southern mining basin since December 2010, and throughout the four years after revolution; many supported by rank-and-file UGTT 2015 Teacher and student strikes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neglect by state of regional disparities in development and opportunity; absence of services and rights.</td>
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<td>Winou El Petrol? Movement</td>
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<td>FEMEN</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rahil Movement</td>
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<td>Tamarod</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-standing organizations</th>
<th>Outlawed movements</th>
<th>Transparency organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Council for Tunisian Liberties (CNLT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tunisian Election Data SAWTY Le Labo’ Democratique (The Democracy Lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGTT General Union of Tunisian Workers called for national strike on January 13, 2014, and negotiated 2013 political crises between different political factions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>management and disposition of regime’s secret police files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>OpenGovTN: Transparency of the National Constituent Assembly, related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union of Tunisian Magistrates Association of Tunisian Magistrates Tunisian Bar Association</td>
<td>AQIM ISIS/ISIL</td>
<td>Youth Decides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nawaat (oppositional bloggers): exposing inaction on new constitution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All of these are examples of a wide range of associations representing these four interests, and this list is hardly exhaustive.
### TABLE 24.3


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Winning party</th>
<th>Percentage of popular vote/# seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 2014</td>
<td>Beji Caid Essebsi</td>
<td>Turnout (Second Round): 60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beji Caid Essebsi: 55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moncef Marzouki: 44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 2014</td>
<td>Nidaa Tounes</td>
<td>Turnout: 66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nidaa Tounes: 37.6% of votes, 86 of 217 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ennahdha: 27.8% of votes, 69 seats</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free Patriotic Union: 4.1% of votes, 16 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Popular Front: 3.6% of votes, 15 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituent Assembly</td>
<td>Moncef Marzouki (president chosen by the NCA)</td>
<td>Turnout: 51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime minister 2011</td>
<td>(CPD) Hamadi Jebali (Ennahdha)</td>
<td>Ennahdha: 41% of votes, 89 of 217 seats</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congress for the Republic (CPR): 29 seats</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ettakatol: 20 seats</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Progressive Democratic Party (PDP): 16 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 2009</td>
<td>Ben Ali (RCD—5th term)</td>
<td>Turnout: 89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 2009</td>
<td>RCD</td>
<td>Ben Ali: 89.6% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(bicameral)</td>
<td>RCD: 161 of 214 seats (75.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Independent opposition: 2 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 2004</td>
<td>Ben Ali (RCD—4th term)</td>
<td>Turnout: 91.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 2004</td>
<td>RCD</td>
<td>Ben Ali: 94.5% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(bicameral)</td>
<td>RCD: 87.6% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RCD: 152 of 189 seats (80.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) withdrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 1999</td>
<td>Ben Ali (RCD—3rd term)</td>
<td>Turnout: 92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 1999</td>
<td>RCD</td>
<td>Ben Ali: 99.2% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RCD: 148 of 182 seats (81.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prime Minister: Mohammed Ghannouchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 1994</td>
<td>Ben Ali (RCD—2nd term)</td>
<td>Turnout: 95.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 1994</td>
<td>RCD</td>
<td>Ben Ali: 99% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RCD: 97.73% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RCD: 144 of 163 seats (88.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential 1989</td>
<td>Ben Ali (RCD—1st term)</td>
<td>Turnout: 76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 1989</td>
<td>RCD</td>
<td>Ben Ali: 99.27% of votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RCD: 141 of 141 seats (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40% abstentions/Islamists 15–20% in independent vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary 1986</td>
<td>Patriotic Union (PSD, UGTT, the employers’, farmers’, and women’s unions)</td>
<td>Turnout: 82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PSD: received near totality of votes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>125 of 125 seats (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opposition party boycott; independent candidates (15) withdrew prior to elections; Prime Minister: Rachid Sfar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
### TABLE 24.3


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Winning party</th>
<th>Percentage of popular vote/# seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parliamentary 1981| National Front (PSD and UGTT) (UGTT split on participation) | Turnout: 84.5%  
PSD/National Front: 94.8% of votes  
PSD/National Front: 136 of 136 seats (100%)  
No cabinet changes; Mzali remains prime minister |
| Parliamentary 1979| PSD                                                | Turnout: 81.4%  
PSD: 121 of 121 seats (100%)  
Boycott by opposition groups; Mzali (1980) named prime minister |
| Presidential 1974 | Bourguiba (PSD—4th term) (later declared president for life) | Turnout: 96.8%  
PSD: 112 of 112 seats (100%)  
PSD unopposed: civil servants (60) over half of deputies |
| Presidential 1969 | Bourguiba (PSD—3rd term) PSD                       | Turnouts: 94.7% legislative, 99.8% presidential  
101 of 101 seats (100%)  
Bourguiba unopposed; PSD unopposed  
Bahi Lgham (1969); Hedi Nouira (1970) prime ministers |
| Presidential 1964 | Bourguiba (PSD—2nd term) PSD                       | Bourguiba: 96% of all votes  
PSD: 90 of 90 seats in parliament |
| Presidential 1959 | Bourguiba (Neo-Destour—1st term)                   | Neo-Destour/National Front: 90 of 90 seats (100%)  
Communist Party fielded list in Gafsa and Tunis; later banned in 1963 |

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union. Available at http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2321_arc.htm.

### Religion, Society, and Politics in Tunisia

Tunisia is 98 percent Sunni Muslim, with very small indigenous Jewish and Ibadi communities located primarily in Tunis and on the island of Jerba. Traditionally, Islamic jurisprudence was based on Maliki legal interpretation, which is enshrined in Article 1 of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution. However, since the late nineteenth century, permutations of a reformist movement originating in Egypt, called al-Nahda, has marked Tunisian Islamic thought. Later, the intellectual thought of the Muslim Brotherhood inspired a new generation of activism, while more recently individual preachers and small groups called Salafis have drawn from the Hanbali tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, which originated in the Arabian Peninsula.

Because the vast majority of Tunisians are Muslim, to many, distinguishing the interaction between religion and politics from the larger phenomenon of politics would seem strange. To some, the two are discreet: Islam is a religion, politics are politics, and the two should not overlap. To others, religion provides a road map for a more just society and way of ruling.

These mutually exclusive perspectives on the place and role of religion in public life graft onto Tunisia’s turbulent history of political Islam, which has swung from periods of contradiction, to conflict, co-optation, repression, and most recently, agreement. Indeed, since 1956, the debate over the role of Islam in public policy has shifted from total separation (laïcité in the French sense of the term) to inclusion (secularism in the American sense of the term).
Contradiction, 1956–1981

For Habib Bourguiba and much of the Neo Destour party, religion and politics were a contradiction: politics were politics, and religion was an individual set of beliefs to be excised from larger communal obligations. This perspective informed the new regimes modernizing policies, which included the transfer of personal code from Sharia to positive law, the corpus of laws known as the Family Code (1957), the liquidation of public (1956) and private (1957) religious foundations, the transfer of authority over mosques and imams to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (1958), and the dismantling of the Zaytouna mosque—the most important site of religious learning in the Maghrib—as an independent leaning institution and transferring the teaching of theology to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (1958).
While segments of Tunisian society and international observers celebrated Bourguiba’s modernizing reforms, a distinct subset strongly resented what they believed to be an authoritarian denaturing of their society. While these forces initially rallied behind Neo Destour party cofounder Salah Ben Youssef, who fled to Cairo following his failed showdown with Bourguiba in 1956, they were dispersed with his assassination in Frankfurt in 1961. Many, including Ennahdha founder Rachid Ghannouchi, were later drawn to pan-Arabism’s selective rejection of Westernization, but increasingly gravitated to reformist Islamic thought and the more politicized arguments proposed by Said Qutb and Hassan al-Banna. Initially a group of small like-minded, informal student groups on university campuses, they quickly coalesced.


In 1981, Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou filed for Ministry of Interior accreditation for the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI), a party built around a student movement called the Association for the Protection of the Quran.54 Inspired by a partial political opening, which allowed for the creation of Ahmed Mestiri’s MDS party (discussed above), their request for accreditation was denied. Within a month, Ghannouchi, Mourou, and hundreds of supporters were arrested and sentenced to prison. Released in 1984, Ghannouchi was again arrested in 1987, and as the leader of a major social and political movement opposed to Bourguiba, was sentenced to death. For Bourguiba, the MTI was an affront to the modernity and the state he had created: While Islam and politics were to be distinct, public religion remained the monopoly of the state. And the state was the monopoly of Bourguiba.


While supporters of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali’s November 7, 1987, coup have argued that he acted out of fear that Bourguiba’s anti-MTI policies would lead to civil war, the new president’s honeymoon with political Islam would be short lived, if ever real. Though participants in the National Dialogue, the new regime refused to give the MTI party accreditation, which had changed its name to Ennahdha to avoid religious connotations in the party name. The party ran independent candidate lists in the 1989 legislative elections, winning between 15 and 30 percent of the vote, but failing to win a single seat. Ballot stuffing and the majoritarian electoral rules set in place precluded significant opposition gains. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and American build-up to intervention provided the MIT, along with other anti-Ben Ali groups, an opportunity to take to the streets, and revealing perhaps for the first time, the size and power of the movement.

The crackdown was swift and violent. Leveraging fear of the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front in neighboring Algeria, in February 1991, the regime decapitated Ennahdha’s leadership, arresting thousands of militants, many of whom were given harsh sentences by military tribunal. Repression against Ennahdha increased following the passage of the 2003 antiterrorism law, which effectively superimposed the term terrorist onto political prisoner, and permitted the regime to mete out harsher prison sentences on suspected opponents. Tolerated as a movement from 1987 to 1991, membership in the group would remain a serious crime until the January 14, 2011, Revolution. Ben Ali attempted to perfect Bourguiba’s monopoly over religion and religious thought and systematically removed independent spheres of thought or symbolic practice, and when possible, incorporated it into the state apparatus through the Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as the commercial sector through initiatives such as Banque Zaytouna and Radio Zaytouna.

Ferment: January 14, 2011–October 2014

The collapse of Ben Ali’s regime ended the state’s monopoly on independent Islamic thought in the public sphere. Ennahdha quickly reemerged as a political force, as underground militants, former political...
prisoners, and exiles returned to the public sphere, symbolically highlighted by the euphoric crowds that met Rachid Ghannouchi at Carthage International Airport on January 31, 2011, to celebrate his return from exile. While other opposition parties had existed either legally (Mustapha Ben Jafar's Ettakatol and Najib Chebbi's PDP), illegally (Hamma Hammami's PCOT), or in exile (Moncef Marzouki's CPR), Ennahdha was the most popular political party in the immediate postrevolution phase. Having worked with the legal and illegal opposition during the Ben Ali years, Ennahdha played a major role in pacting the transition from authoritarianism to the National Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011.

Ennahdha won the 2011 elections with 37 percent of the popular vote, securing eighty-nine seats—just twenty seats from a majority. Having worked closely with both Mustapha Ben Jafar's Ettakatol and Moncef Marzouki's CPR party during the repressive Ben Ali years had built confidence between party leaders and militants, abetting the formation of a coalition government, called the Troika, which would lead the transition to constitutional government.

For three years, the Ennahdha-led coalition government led Tunisia, attempting to reform key parts of the judiciary, security apparatus, and economy, while simultaneously drafting a constitution for a democratic Tunisia. As noted above, the Troika faced deep structural, institutional, and political hurdles along the way, which included sequestering the wealth of former regime cronies, convincing international businesses to continue to invest in Tunisia, initiating reforms in key administrations, reforming the security establishment while protecting citizens from the perceived threat of terrorism, and two political assassinations, in addition to facing an initially fractured but increasingly coalesced opposition led by Nidaa Tounes. Under these multiple pressures, the coalition government was unable to maintain its standing in popular opinion: Political, economic, and security instability were increasingly linked to the Troika. The assassination of two leftists in 2013 served as a catalyst that solidified a broad anti-Troika movement, culminating in the Bardo protests during the summer of 2013.

Following a protracted political crisis, and fearful that the constitution-writing process would be derailed, the Troika government agreed to sit at the table with its harshest critics and negotiate a road map for the adoption of a new constitution, the handover of power to a technocratic government, and the setting of a new election schedule. While Ennahdha agreed to hand over power, the political battles that were waged during the 2011–2014 transitional period marked the political end of Bourguibism on a pure separation of religion and politics, and an end on the state monopoly over religion.

Salafist Movements and Political Islam in Tunisia

While religious expression was tightly controlled in public institutions and spaces during the authoritarian era, a variety of different religious strands have been carving out new spaces of expression on the street, in religious institutions, and in mosques since the Revolution. A conservative Salafist movement has been gaining ground, yet its political ambitions and commitments as well as mobilization strategies remain largely misunderstood.

Though divided into “scholarly” or “doctrinal” Salafism (salafiya ilmiyya) and “jihadist” Salafism (salafiya jihadiyya), Salafi groups are generally bundled together as a homogenous movement with a single goal: the destruction of democratic institution and replacement with Sharia law. While the few scholarly analyses written on Tunisia’s post-Revolution Salafi movement paint it as a largely nonviolent conservative movement, likening it to conservative-religious movements in the West (e.g., the Tea Party in the United States), with a radical and now outlawed fringe, policymakers have focused on fears that the movement has tens of thousands of adherents, preaching to disaffected youth on campuses, in poor districts, and other underserved areas of the country. Such an approach fails to underscore the nonviolent positions of scholarly Salafism and lays the grounds for generalizations.
In Tunisia, for example, opponents of Ennahdha claim Salafism is both foreign to Tunisia’s religious and cultural fabric, and an extension of the Ennahdha party’s policy, belaying the party’s centrist and democratic positions. Indeed, most pundits—in Tunisia and abroad—focus exclusively on factions linked to Jihadist Cheikh Abou Ayadh. Having fought in Afghanistan in the 1990s, Abou Ayadh founded the Tunisian Combat Group in 2001—a group that claimed responsibility for the deadly 2002 bombing in the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba—and founded Ansar al-Sharia following the revolution. Indeed, violent actions linked to the group have been spectacular. Blamed for the 2012 attack on the US embassy, the group is said to have links with its homonym in Benghazi, which is responsible for the attacks on the US consulate and death of American Ambassador Christopher Stevens in 2012. Further examples of this group's radicalism include mobilization against Ennahdha’s decision to abandon discussion of Sharia during the constitution-writing process; violent attacks against a June 2012 art show; a violent attack against Ennahdha cofounder Abdelfattah Mourou at an August 2012 conference titled “Tolerance in Islam”; and accusations that it is behind the assassinations of leftist Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013.

Accusations that the group is somehow linked to Ennahdha are hard pressed to explain Ennahdha’s strong internal democratic party structure, its participation in the National Dialogue, its voluntary demission from power in favor of a transitional, technocratic government in 2014 following the ratification of the Constitution, and its current status as junior coalition member in the Nidaa Tounes-led government. Similarly, claims that the movement is composed of former political prisoners amnestied under the 2011 Beji Caid Essebsi government, and thus a project meant to sabotage Ennahdha, should be taken with a grain of salt. The current Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition government has taken a very strong position against Ansar al-Sharia, which was declared a terrorist organization under the Troika government. Competing claims that Ansar al-Sharia is an occult puppet of mainstream politics are increasingly difficult to justify, but underscore the difficulty Tunisian society, political actors, and international pundits have when analyzing the wide variation of Salafism and Tunisian Islamist movements in particular.

**Political Islam and Tunisian Politics in the Future**

While Nidaa Tounes won the October 2014 Legislative elections, Ennahdha did not do as poorly as many had suspected, especially given the virulent campaign against it. Unlike Mustapha Ben Jaafer’s Ettakatol, which failed to win a single seat, and Moncef Marzouki’s CPR, which won only four, Ennahdha was able to claim 31 percent of legislature, the second largest political bloc.

Though defeated at the polls, that Ennahdha could still capture close to 30 percent of the popular vote revealed two important aspects of Tunisian politics. First, it underscored the vitality of Ennahdha as a political party. Its membership base and institutional structures effectively mobilized party turnout, unlike CPR and Ettakatol—parties with an important elite, but thin militant base. Second, it confirmed political Islam’s place in Tunisia’s political arena, placing it alongside economic liberalism, socialism, and Arab nationalism. These factors, in addition to its legislative seats, allowed it to enter into coalition government as a junior partner, following Nidaa Tounes’s failed and heavily criticized first attempt at negotiate an Ennahdha-free coalition in January 2015.

The coalition government has confused many Tunisians: Only a few months earlier, the two parties had led political campaigns based on seemingly mutually exclusive political platforms, best summed by a total war between secularism and Islamism.

To scholars of democratization, the Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition represents the “twin tolerations,” an agreement on the “minimum boundaries of freedom of action that . . . be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions.” In essence, Bourguiba’s rigid division of
religion and public space and Ben Ali’s regime monopoly over religion have crumbled, and at the same time, Ennahdha’s once-revolutionary stance against both autocrats, and by extension their state institutions. It is important to note, however, that under both the Troika government and the current Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition, space for independent religious movements has contracted—first the dissolution and classification of Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization in 2013, and more recently, the government-led shutdown of independent religious radio and television stations, and takeover of independently run mosques under the new national security strategy.

While political Islam appears to have secured its place in Tunisian politics as one of many political ideological blocs, itself broken into smaller parties, many critics are left wondering whether the secularist-Islamist divide that both Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes seemed to project during their electoral campaigns might not have clouded our vision from other, equally important aspects of the Tunisian revolution. For some, like the young men in Ben Guerdane, Gafsa, Kasserin, Redeyef, and Sidi Bouzid, demands for greater social justice and the redistribution of wealth via a new developmental pact has been occulted. Writing on the night of the 2014 Legislative elections, Laryssa Chomiak reminded us:

In Gafsa, the phosphate-rich epicenter of southwest Tunisia, and the neighboring mining town of Redeyef, lofty debates about religion and secularism means very little to residents. Unemployment in the area soars, and disgruntled residents complain of no improvement since the 2011 toppling of Ben Ali, blaming Ennahdha’s governance as much as the corrupt interests of the lingering old guard in Tunis.

For others, like Nadia Marzouki, the current government is a “rotten compromise” and is the result of undue focus on debates over secularism and Islam during the constitution drafting process and subsequent elections that have turned focus away from three crucial goals of the revolution and democratic transition: legislative reform, transitional justice, and renewal of the political field. And with that loss of attention, the fundamental goals of the January 14, 2011, Revolution have been derailed.

**Political Economy**

While much has been written on the economic effects of the 2011 Revolution, Tunisia’s economy has been in flux for much longer. In 2008, for instance, a prolonged labor dispute in Gafsa virtually ground the mining of phosphates to a halt, while the manufacturing and tourism sectors of the economy suffered from the effects of global economic contraction. Already slowed, the country’s economy was challenged again with the Revolution. In addition to the uncertainty of the democratic transition, and perceptions of increased security risks to foreign and domestic investments, the exact state of the economy is not clear. Figures reported to international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and to international organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization, during the Ben Ali period are increasingly called into question. The uncertainty of Ben Ali-era figures makes a sober assessment of the state of the Tunisian economy difficult.

According to a World Bank report, in 2011, GDP growth fell to 1.6 percent, while unemployment spiked to a national aggregate of 18.1 percent—up from 13 percent the previous year. Alarmingly, the ILO reported that unemployment among Tunisians between the ages of 25 and 35 years old—the age group most invested in taking to the streets during the revolution—increased from 29.4 percent in 2010 to 42.3 percent in 2011, reflecting both an increased stress on the economy and politicized book keeping under the previous regime. According to the World Bank, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and tourism receipts plummeted, as foreign investors and potential...
visitors shied from the aftershocks of revolution. FDI fell from $US 1.3 billion in 2010 to just over $US 400 million in 2011, and Tunisia received close to two million fewer tourists in 2011 than it did in 2010.

As the economy has contracted, labor unrest has spiked. After the Revolution, citizens demanded swift action to increase employment options and salaries as part of pent-up economic security demands voiced during the uprisings. For decades, labor movements had been at the forefront of resistance to the Ben Ali regime, most notably during the 2008 Gafsa phosphate basin rebellion. While the peak union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT) joined the anti-Ben Ali protest movement, calling for a general strike on January 13, 2011, the day before the ex-president fled the country, local union branches had effectively mobilized membership to join anti-Ben Ali protests from the start of the uprising, and have been continuing to voice their demands for a more proactive employment policy during the post-revolution period. According to one estimate, in 2011 the number of strike movements increased by 122 percent in relation to 2010, involving 340 companies and over 140,000 workers. This has had a major effect on nonmanufacturing industries, which saw a reduction of 40 percent of value added in mining, primarily due to labor unrest in the phosphate sector: Phosphate production, 8 million tons in 2010, fell to 2.5 million tons in 2011.

Given these overlapping challenges, it remains surprising that Tunisia’s economy is not in worse shape and that more social unrest has not occurred. Tunisia has been able to navigate recent economic pressures, in part, due to good rainfall and poor olive harvests in Europe. More importantly, skilled economists and technocrats were appointed to key ministerial posts after the Revolution, who were able to push through a 2013 $1.75 billion IMF Stand-By Arrangement. While there have been a number of disagreements over the manner in which the government needs to encourage growth—including the dispute between the Troika and former Governor of the Central Bank Mustapha Nabil and Finance Minister Houcine Dimassi over public sector employment—macroeconomic policy has continued to contain inflation, which has averaged around 4 percent since the Revolution (2011–2013), compared to an average 3.85 percent from 2005 to 2010.

Historical Overview: “A Good Pupil”

Tunisia’s various postindependence governments have cautiously managed the Tunisian economy. And in doing so, Tunisia has historically been considered a “good pupil” of international financial institutions. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tunisia built infrastructure and attempted to rationalize its agriculture sector (then the largest employer to the economy). In the 1970s and 1980s, Tunisia developed its private sector, especially promoting industries in textiles and food processing as well as a nascent tourism sector. Since the late 1980s to present, Tunisia has engaged globalization and managerial rationalization, marked by limited structural reforms and deepened finance reform and regional and global market integration.

Postindependence Rationalization (1956–1969). After independence (1956–1960), Tunisia’s economic governors implemented economic policies that promoted the nationalization of foreign-held sectors, private-sector investment, and the establishment of Tunisia’s economic institutions. The new state implemented the 1960 Social Security Law to serve as an economic road map defining the relationship between the private sector and labor interests. The law sought to modernize the private sector by requiring it to make contributions to the state for employees, while promoting labor interests by guaranteeing employee rights to social security and protection from employer abuse. The government’s attempts to simultaneously please both capital and labor had very limited results.

Still structurally weakened from years of colonial occupation and wary of the new government, capital remained timid. Government policies failed to draw...
capital from the real estate, small business, and agriculture sectors into light and heavy industry, forcing the state to assumed investment and management leadership in utilities, transportation, and mining. For its part, the UGTT, which had developed into a mass organization during the colonial period, and major Neo-Destour party ally, called for more robust state-led development, even if it came at the expense of the private sector.

Responding to these calls, in 1961, President Bourguiba nominated former head of the UGTT (1954–1956), Ahmed Ben Salah, Minister of Planning, Finance, and Economy. Popular with UGTT rank and file, Ben Salah proposed a more active state-led industrialization, based on the modernization of agriculture, the nationalization of heavy industry, and ultimately the forced state-led development of commerce. In 1961, the state nationalized all foreign-owned land and nationalized the phosphates sector a year later. Following the 1964 “Congress of Destiny,” where the Neo-Destour changed its name to the Socialist Destourian Party (PSD) to reflect a socialist outlook, Ben Salah announced the forced collectivization of state land, and surrounding tracts of private land. In 1966, the government nationalized rail services between Gafsa mining basin and industrial ports of Sfax and Gabes (1966) to rationalize the link between the mining basin and state-owned phosphate processing industries on the coast. Between 1964 and 1969, the government expanded the cooperative experiment of nearly all of Tunisian land and proposed a similar state-led collectivization plan for commerce. Following a critical 1969 Central Bank report on the underperformance of the cooperative movement, and in a climate marked by three years of drought and growing opposition to Ahmed Ben Salah, Bourguiba sacked his minister, and in 1970, appointed the head of the Central Bank, Hedi Nouira, as prime minister.

State-Managed Private Sector Development and Labor Unrest (1970–1985). While Ben Salah’s dismissal marked the end of Tunisia’s socialist experiment, it did not end state-led development. Nouira dismantled the collective farms and embarked on an economic policy to promote private sector investment in agro-industry and tourism, while encouraging its nascent textiles industry through foreign direct investment. Policies also targeted efficiencies in state-owned industries producing intermediate products that required economies of scale or were deemed of strategic importance. In 1972, Bourguiba’s government liberalized the foreign investment code and provided a ten-year tax exemption to exporting firms. Within industry, the state increased investments in phosphates, consolidating phosphate mining, transport, and processing into the Compagnie des Phosphate de Gafsa (CPG) in 1976. Phosphate production grew from 2.7 million to 4.0 million tons during the decade, behind new mines that would double production by 2007 (8.005 million tons). Tunisia’s economy became outward oriented and mixed, encouraging private investment, while the state supplied infrastructure, utilities, heavy industry, and products linked to national food security.

The 1970s also brought volatility to oil markets, petrodollar lending, and disadvantageous European protectionism for Tunisian agricultural and textile exports. The European Community’s 1966 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) led to the 1969 EEC-Tunisia association agreement, which did not provide large-scale concessions for Tunisian exports. The EU’s 1974 Multi-Fiber Arrangement protected the European “finishing” and nascent “ready-wear” textile industry, enabling its producers to export nonfinished fabric and to reimport duty-free finished textiles from developing countries. It otherwise set quotas on textile imports and was followed in 1979 by “voluntary export limitations.” Consequently, non-EU countries established supply chains with European partners for ready-wear production, with “outward processing” favoring countries with high labor productivity and low labor costs. Trade regime changes aside, fluctuations in oil, phosphate, and wheat prices and rising international lending rates deteriorated Tunisia’s fiscal budget and foreign debt.
Inflation renewed labor militancy for cost-of-living increases, during a decade that witnessed state-labor agreements on fixed wage increases across many economic sectors. In 1977, the unions negotiated terms for inflation-adjusted wage setting, but a January 1978 general strike by the UGTT sparked widespread civil violence and vocal expression of dissatisfaction with autocratic rule. With state finances in dire straits, Bourguiba arrested UGTT leaders and replaced them with moderates.

While primary sector commodities provided unstable contributions to GDP, Tunisian manufacturing increased its share of GDP behind gains in textiles, food processing, and leather production. Small family firms with less than ten employees dominated manufacturing, comprising 90 percent of the sector. These firms were closed, inexperienced, and focused on producing those goods that, as merchants, they once sold. The export manufacturing sector preferred flexible labor, including young women who worked prior to marriage. Many manufacturers owed their start to agricultural rents and state loans.

Manufactures did not keep macroeconomic difficulties at bay. By 1982, the signs of state austerity planning were visible, and by 1983 to 1984, a deep recession in France coupled with an international liquidity crisis prevented Tunisia from securing the credit and exchange on private international markets needed to float debt and repay loans. The economic crisis turned social on December 29, 1983, when the government increased the price of semolina, setting off protests in southern oases and in poor communities. Through January 3, rioting spread throughout secondary cities, reaching Sfax and Tunis. Rioters targeted government officials and property and directed anger toward the upper and middle classes. Two days of rioting left more than 150 people dead and thousands wounded, as the government rolled out military forces to quell it. On January 6, President Bourguiba annulled price hikes for bread and calm returned.

Structural Reform and Globalization (1985–Present). In 1985, Tunisia approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for an emergency loan and introduced a program to stabilize its current account and fiscal deficits. Foreign exchange and trade balances were to be corrected through monetary devaluation, making imports more expensive and exports more competitive abroad. Fiscal deficits would be stabilized through reductions in subsidies and in government spending. Given the shallowness of the deficits, the World Bank program stressed structural, sectoral adjustments in agriculture, industry, finance, public enterprise, and trade. In general, structural reforms sought to reduce the state’s role in economic production and service delivery, while promoting markets and private investment. In 1986, economic adjustment got a slow start due to falls in domestic oil production, oil prices, and remittances. Yet the state pursued stabilization by privatizing state-owned assets; limiting public-sector employment; and raising subsidized prices for foodstuffs, utilities, and services. To cushion the immediate crisis, Tunisians turned to networks of family and social solidarities.

The past two decades have witnessed measured economic openness, growth, and unevenly distributed economic gains. In 1993, the government enacted Investment Code 93-120, which provided incentives and majority ownerships for foreign investors in “offshore” export sectors, yet it protected domestic Tunisian majority ownership in “onshore” markets. In 1994, the Tunisian government enabled the convertibility of the dinar for current account operations. The government also established free trade zones, where designated companies import raw or semifinished goods without customs duties or taxes for reexport. By 2008, foreign direct investment by 2,973 foreign firms and joint ventures accounted for one-third of all exports and one-fifth of employment (290,000 workers).

The Tunisian government also protected domestic producers by raising customs tariffs for a list of select, imported goods in 1994. Import restrictions were eliminated for most goods, yet tariff rates (10–43 percent), a temporary supplemental
duty (30 percent), a customs formality fee (5 TD), a value-added tax (6–29 percent), and a consumption tax (10–500 percent) for certain goods restricted foreign competition in domestic markets. Temporary, supplemental duties were to be phased out over three years but were not done so uniformly, and new goods were added to the list in subsequent years.

In 1995, Tunisia entered into a Partner Agreement with the EU, a ten-year agreement that specified an end to the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) in 2005. In exchange for European market access for its industrial goods, Tunisia lowered tariffs on EU industrial imports over twelve years.

Tunisia’s Economy Today

While post-Revolution governments have made efforts to kick start the economy, IMF efforts to push investment deregulation and labor code reforms have been mired in debate between ruling parties, on the one hand, and with opposition and labor groups, on the other. As a result, post-Revolution economic reform measures have been largely limited to dismantling the regime-supported private sector oligopolies created by previous regimes. Unsurprisingly, then, while the 2015 World Bank Doing Business Report ranks Tunisia at 60 out of 189 countries on the “ease of doing business,” the Heritage Foundation classifies Tunisia’s economy as “mostly not free,” ranking it at 107 out of 186 countries.

While the estimated 50 percent of the population that constitutes the middle classes has eroded over the past decade, it nevertheless outperforms the Middle Income Country average in GDP per capital. In 2013, national unemployment stood at 15.9 percent, youth unemployment hovered at around 37 percent, and regional unemployment in the disadvantaged regions of the south and west ranged from 20 to 40 percent. In 2000, the richest 20 percent of the population accounted for 47.3 percent of all expenditures, while the poorest 20 percent accounted for only 6 percent of expenditures. Disparities in wealth and opportunity remain significant.

Since independence, Tunisia’s economy has been characterized by strong rates of growth, with

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<th>TABLE 24.4 Major Economic Indicators for Tunisia</th>
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<td>GDP % growth</td>
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<td>FDI ($US, million)</td>
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Source: Unless otherwise indicated, all figures are taken from the World Bank World Development Indicators Databank.
average GDP gains of 4.7 percent from 1960 to 1970, 7.5 percent from 1970 to 1980, 4.7 percent in 2000, and 5.1 percent in 2008. Its GDP per capita in 2013 (adjusted for purchasing power parity) stood at $11,124, which remains high in comparison with non-oil-exporting nations in the Middle East–North Africa region and to “middle-income country” averages. Growth has been led by manufacturing, which first surpassed agriculture's contribution to total domestic product in the 1980–1990 period. Industry (30 percent) and services (61 percent) remain important economic contributors.

Tunisia’s trade regime is outward oriented, and Tunisia is the most “open” of the Maghreb countries, with imports and exports expressed as a percentage of GDP reaching a very high 92.5 percent in 2004. It maintains a slight bias toward imports over exports, however, and benefits from overseas remittances of more than one million Tunisians living abroad (US$ 1.97 billion in 2010; 4.45 percent of GDP) and small exports of oil to ease the current account deficit. Structurally, Tunisia imports substantial quantities of prefinished goods that its workers assemble or process for reexport (e.g., textiles, leather, electronics). Finally, Tunisia benefits from substantial foreign direct investment (FDI), which is concentrated in export sectors (US$ 1.05 billion in 2013). Prior to the Revolution, FDI increased with liberalization of telecommunications, bank privatization, and investments in newly developing sectors. It fell in 2009, following the 2008 global financial crisis. While FDI spiked briefly in 2011, it has yet to recover to the 2000–2009 average.

Tunisia’s political elite built an economy predicated on an alliance between the state, private, and foreign capital. State economic involvement has been highest in heavy industry, infrastructure, and domestic services (i.e., telecommunications)—sectors that historically required capital investments exceeding private-sector capacity. Elsewhere, the Tunisian state has promoted private-sector development. Foreign direct investment flows into export sectors with the help of liberal investment codes, industrial export zones, and the progressive opening of current accounts and capital flows. Investment codes have encouraged domestic foreign capital partnerships, yet guarantee Tunisian majority ownership in firms that serve the domestic market.

**Sectoral Overview.** Tunisian tourism, which grew in the 1990s, had been in sustained crisis. The sector earns less revenue per tourist than tourism sectors in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey. The effects of failing to develop the industry outside of package tourism are increasingly clear; however, following the Revolution, the Ministry of Tourism and tourism-related civil society and cultural associations have worked toward diversifying the tourism sector. In addition to the degradation of quality frequently experienced in quick-profit packaged tourism, lack of diversification comes at a high cost. Middle-class European holiday goers were the first to be hit by the 2008 economic crisis, with substantial effects on the tourism industry, which represents between 7 and 15 percent of GDP. While tourism receipts had begun to climb back following the Revolution, recovery efforts were shattered following the March 2015 Bardo Museum attack and the June 2015 Sousse attack, in which nineteen and thirty-eight tourists were targeted and murdered, respectively. Following the June Sousse attack, the United Kingdom, which accounted for nearly half a million visitors to Tunisia in 2014, declared Tunisia off-limits. While the long-term implications of these developments to the Tunisian economy are unclear, in the short term, the tourism sector has entered a profound crisis.
The textiles sector, which constitutes approximately 20 percent of value-added in manufacturing, has fared slightly better. While the 2005 expiration of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement slowed textile sector growth prior to the Revolution, Tunisia produces high-end textiles for European markets. As a result, it was not as hard hit by the 2008 economic crisis as the low-end package tourism sector. While the Revolution itself did not directly affect the textile sector, continued international pressures as well as an increase in strikes in post-Revolution Tunisia have decreased productivity. Such structural and contextual pressures, moreover, have forced foreign investors to reassess their willingness to invest in the country, as indicated in declining foreign direct investment receipts—monies that are crucial to the continued modernization of that sector. During the first half of 2012, textile, clothing, and leather exports declined 8.6 percent.

Export agriculture has advanced but faces competition in the southern Mediterranean. In the late 2000s, Tunisia produced on average 100,000 metric tons of olive oil per annum—close to 10 percent of Tunisia’s exports—in a sector that employs 267,000 people (20 percent of all agriculture labor) directly and more than one million people indirectly. Tunisian cultivation of Deglet Nour dates in the Djerid oasis (Tozeur, Nefta) had increased, and exports to Europe totaled more than 68,000 MTs in 2008 to 2009, increasingly via supply chains in large-scale, retail distribution. Production and distribution continued to improve in 2011 to 2012, with exports reaching 90,000 MTs, worth $194.6 million, compared with 78,392 MTs the previous year.

**Reshaping the Economy**

In 2013, the Tunisian transitional government signed a Stand-By Arrangement with the IMF, to offset the costs of political transition. The agreement committed Tunisia to reform in its macroeconomic framework, restoring fiscal and external buffers, deregulation to support private sector growth, and strengthening social assistance mechanisms to reduce income disparities.

Discussed at length in the World Bank’s groundbreaking *All in the Family* report, which underscored the degree to which the Ben Ali clan of families and associated businesses used market regulation, expropriation, and cronyism to amass billions of dollars, Tunisia is in great need of financial sector and regulatory reform. Prior to the revolution, Tunisia’s private sector was dominated by holding companies with close relations to political power and to financial institutions. Of the more than 500 buildings,
300 companies, and 370 bank accounts that were seized following the Revolution, for example, 220 belonged to the Ben Ali family and alone appropriated 21 percent of all private sector profits and accounted for 3 percent of private sector output. In December 2012, for example, the government generated US$ 10 million from the sales of a single Ben Ali estate.

An overhaul of the banking sector is a critical component of laying the groundwork for a productive, post-Revolution economy. In 2012, Standard and Poor's Banking Industry Country Risk Assessment (BICRA) lowered its assessment of Tunisia, with credit risk to the economy moving from “very high risk” to “extremely high risk” and economic resilience from “high risk” to “very high risk,” while economic imbalances remained as “intermediate risk.” Currently, close to 20 percent of public sector bank loans are nonperforming, nearly the double of the private sector, or 14 percent of all bank assets. To a significant degree, this public sector portfolio is likely linked to loans given to the Ben Ali family or political allies. Additionally, public sector banks are overexposed to the ailing tourism sector. The financial system’s first priority is establishing and abiding by a more uniform regulatory environment that is aligned with international norms, while increasing both the financial and human resources dedicated to financial sector management.

Foreign Relations

A small country neighbored by Algeria to its west, Libya to its east, and Italy to the north, Tunisia has always positioned itself at a crossroads—linking Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East—and has enjoyed strong relations with its neighbors. Though Tunisia places a high premium on Souverainism—a position that can be traced to President Habib Bourguiba’s policies—Tunisia is a member in the Arab League, African Union, Maghrib Union, and Mediterranean Union, while also participating larger international initiatives when they suit its immediate and long-term interests.

Inter-Arab Relations and the Arab League. While Tunisia joined the Arab League in 1958, President Bourguiba’s “Tunisia First” positions were frequently at odds with the organization’s pan-Arab ideals and positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1965, President Bourguiba proposed a negotiated settlement between Palestine and Israel, based on the 1947 UN Resolution. The proposal created serious frictions with member-states, and the League considered but ultimately did not expel Tunisia. Tunisia returned to the fold, and in 1979, the Arab League moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis, in reaction of Egypt’s participation in the Camp David accords, where it would remain until 1990. In 1982, Tunisia agreed to host the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been expelled from Lebanon. PLO headquarters would remain in Tunis until 1994, when PLO leader Yasser Arafat returned to Ramallah following the Oslo Accords.

While Tunisia does not have formal relations with the State of Israel, following the Oslo Accords in 1996, the two countries opened “interest sections.” In 2000, Tunisia ended the relationship following then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

Inter-Maghribi Relations and the Maghrib Union. During colonial occupation, nationalists from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia considered their national struggle as a collective, regional cause. Student unions and political movements met and discussed common strategies. The collective struggle ended with national independence: Morocco and Tunisia gained independence in 1956, while Algeria won freedom after a brutal war of independence in 1962. While collective political positions were untenable in the postindependence era, cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia has generally been good, whereas an attempted political union with Libya in 1974 failed, creating tense relations that would last until the late 1980s, culminating in a Libyan-sponsored attempted revolution in Gafsa in 1980 and expulsion of thirty thousand Tunisian workers in 1986.
In 1989, leaders from Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia announced the formation of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA). Ostensibly the institutional framework for eventual economic and possible political unity, the Maghreb Union has never come to fruition: Tensions between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara effectively block integration of the region's two largest markets. Further economic or political cohesion has broken down altogether.

Despite these setbacks, Tunisia retains good relations with Algeria, and military cooperation is increasing along their shared borders, especially since 2011. In May 2014, Algeria agreed to a financial package worth US$ 250 million—two loans for US$ 100 million each, and a further US$ 50 million in nonreimbursable aid money—to stabilize the economy, adding to the 2013 IMF loan. Relations with post–al-Qadhafi Libya were also initially very good. On his first visit abroad, interim President Moncef Marzouki went so far as to discuss the possibilities of political and economic union. However, contact between the two states is currently limited, in large part due to Libya's current political crisis pitting a self-proclaimed government in Tripoli against an internationally acknowledged government in Tobruk. Currently, there are an estimated one million Libyans living in Tunisia. While the border is frequently closed, and Tunisia in now constructing a wall along the border, border crossing continues at informal points, much to the dismay of both the Tunisian and Algerian governments most recently concerned with the movement of terrorist networks.

According to the Tunisian government, the perpetrators of both the March 2015 Bardo attack and July 2015 Sousse attack were young men who allegedly had trained in terrorist camps in Libya.

**Relations with Europe and the European Union.** Notwithstanding episodic crises, relations between France and Tunisia have been warm since independence, along economic trade and aid lines. A 1957 preferential trade relationship between France and Tunisia has ensured that Tunisia's number one trading partner remains France. France's leading role in the European Community has expanded this preferential relationship to EU countries. In 1969, Tunisia signed a bilateral agreement with the European Community that imposed quotas rather than tariffs on Tunisian manufactured items, promoting investment in Tunisia's then nascent textiles industry. The agreement also allowed for the importation of citrus and olives. The bilateral agreement was modified in 1976, with the European Community's Global Mediterranean policy (GMP), which expanded economic exchange to trade in financial protocols.

Tunisia was the first country to sign an EU MEDA agreement as an outcome of the 1995 Barcelona Accords that ended the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. MEDA provides European economic assistance to Tunisia to support building free trade in neighboring European countries. From 1996 through 2007, Tunisia and Europe agreed to progressively liberalize the trade of goods over the twelve-year period, with Brussels providing funds to support Tunisia's economic reforms. The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI; 2007–2010), and its more recent corollary, the Union for the Mediterranean, continue to govern Tunisia-EU economic and political relations. In October 2012, Tunisia was granted “European Partner” status, which will provide between €400 and €600 million over a period of five years.

In addition to economic cooperation, Tunisia has engaged the European Union on security and immigration issues. In April 2011, Italy granted Tunisia €200 million to buttress its security in the wake of spiked illegal immigration following the flight of Ben Ali. This offer was matched by a €400 million grant to promote joint EU-Tunisian immigration measures. The EU-Tunisia cooperation accords reduced illegal migration substantially, and in September 2011, an EU-Tunisia joint task force met to determine the EU's contribution to supporting the 2012–2016 development plan, with EU pledges of €150 million for a €1 billion multidonor plan.
Relations with the United States. True to its position of Souverainism, the Tunisian government did not support the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or the 2011 NATO strikes against Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi’s military apparatus.

However, the Tunisian government has maintained a close relationship with the United States following the September 11, 2001, attack and subsequent US-led War on Terror. Former President Ben Ali leveraged the US-led War on Terror to classify elements of opposition as domestic terrorists, as per the 2003 Tunisian antiterrorism law. Using the War on Terror, thousands of opponents to the Ben Ali regime were arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned, and often tortured, despite the fact that they did not belong to terrorist groups. The regime also strengthened the Ministry of Interior’s monitoring of the country’s political and civic elite, consolidating Tunisia into a police state. The regime also cooperated with the United States, relaying information on known terrorist networks, such as the Tunisian Combat Group.

In 2011, the United States pledged a US$ 100 million cash transfer to alleviate the burden of debt payments. US-Tunisian relations symbolically frosted briefly following the September 2012 attack on the US Embassy in Tunis; however, the United States continued to assist Tunisia especially through its democracy-promotion program, and relations have once again strengthened since the 2014–2015 elections. Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi visited Washington, DC, in May 2015. The event was epitomized in a Washington Post joint op-ed by the two heads of state, US President Barack Obama and Essebsi. During the visit, President Obama pledged to support Tunisian democracy financially and militarily. Shortly after the visit, Tunisia was declared “a major non-NATO ally,” which permits greater military cooperation between the two states.

Domestic Conflict

Domestic conflict in Tunisia is limited. Tunisia’s 2011 Revolution chased an authoritarian leader from power, and the work of activists and civil society and Tunisia’s nascent and already existing political parties played a major role in setting up an institutional framework that largely limits domestic conflict to the electoral process, as defined first by the Ben Achour Commission, 2011 National Constituent Assembly elections, 2011–2014 constitution drafting process, and 2014 legislative and presidential elections.

No Lingering Authoritarians. Unlike Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, mass mobilization channeled by civic groups and political parties effectively precluded opportunities for elements of the former regime to affect the course of the transition. However, some members of the former regime are likewise active in civil society or have founded new political parties.

Unlike Egypt and Yemen, where the backbone of the authoritarian regime had maintained its role while pushing the former dictator from power, in Tunisia, lingering elements of the regime’s core leadership had fled, were arrested, or dissolved within three months of the Revolution. Ben Ali’s political network of privileged families, buttressed by the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) and overarching security apparatus, crumbled when the dictator fled on January 14, 2011. Prominent individuals linked to his immediate entourage either fled before, or were arrested and placed under judicial control shortly after the Revolution. Ben Ali’s prime minister Mohammed Ghannouchi’s bid to declare himself interim president was overruled by the Constitutional Court on January 16, and he was replaced following the Casbah protestors who feared he would abet the return of Ben Ali, a month later. Similar fears that the RCD party would attempt to usurp the political transition were laid to rest on February 6, when the interim Minister of Interior froze party activities, and on March 28, when a Court of Appeals officially dissolved the party as a legal entity again following sustained protests. By late March 2011, the former regime was dissolved completely.

Transition from Below. The void abetted a remarkable transition from below, exemplified in the Ben Achour commission, which allowed existing, nascent, and
formerly illegal political parties and civic groups to mutually develop a roadmap to political transition, culminating in the NCA and creation of a transitional government. While the two political assassinations in 2013 threatened to derail the transition process, seemingly pitting Islamists against secularists in a zero-sum game reminiscent of the showdown between Morsi and the SCAF following Tamarod protests in Egypt, key civic organizations intervened to encourage discussion between the Troika government and the Rahil movement. Those negotiations gave the Troika much needed space to produce a final draft Constitution, which was adopted in January 2014, and the appointment of a mutually accepted technocratic government to organize legislative and presidential elections, which were successfully organized in late 2014.

Politics within Institutions. Street protests and demonstrations throughout the transition period appear to have abetted, not hindered, the development of an institutionalized democratic political system, epitomized by the 2014 Constitution. During the period of the interim government, popular protests definitely excluded former autocrats participating in the transitional process; contention during the NCA transitional government pushed staunch secularists and Islamists to negotiate with each other, initiating more dense discussions, and laying the groundwork for the current Nidaa Tounes-Ennahda coalition government.

With few exceptions, Tunisian politics are now institutionalized. Domestic conflict is resolved through elections, not violence. Unlike the Ba’th party in Iraq, whose membership were banned from political life and rooted out of administrations, with few exceptions, members of the dissolved RCD party have been free to participate in new political parties. Indeed, former Ben Ali Minister of Foreign Affairs and member of the RCD Political Bureau Kamel Morjane was permitted to found a political party, the National Destourian Initiative, which participated in and won five seats in the October 2011 NCA elections. Ansar Sharia is currently the only movement that is actively banned from politics, having been declared a terrorist organization in August 2013, because of its rejections of Tunisia’s political institutions and political violence such as the 2012 attack on the US Embassy and its alleged links to the 2013 assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi.

Terrorism and Spill-Over Effects. A weakened post-Revolution state has permitted the growth of armed groups who are currently fighting the state, though it is difficult to situate these groups outside of a larger regional context. Groups linked with terrorist organizations located in Algeria to the west, and Libya to the east, have expanded into Tunisia. In western Tunisia, along the Algerian board, the Okba Ibn Nafaa brigade has been attacking military convoys, police, and customs agents since 2012. Linked to al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM), based in eastern Algeria, and led by an Algerian, the group’s range is congruent to existing smuggling channels between Algeria and Tunisia. Cross-border movements have pushed the Algerian and Tunisian governments to militarily collaborate against the group.

While less organized groups exist along the Libyan border, an Islamic State branch in Libya has claimed responsibility for Tunisia’s most notorious violence since the revolution: the March 2015 attack at the Bardo museum in Tunis and the June 2015 attack at a resort in Sousse collectively killed fifty-seven tourists. Young Tunisians who had trained with groups rallied to the Islamic State in Derna carried out both attacks. Tunisia’s experience with terrorism has been horrific, and its impact important to national politics, but terrorist groups are hardly expressions of deep-seated domestic conflict in the country and should be taken in a regional context.

Conclusion: Democratic Consolidation or Reversal?

Tunisia’s transition from dictatorship to democratization has been remarkable and distinguishes the small North African nation’s experience from other post-Arab Spring countries. Tunisia is in a unique situation to
declared a state of national emergency on July 4, 2015, criticisms of potential arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention, and targeting of specific groups, especially those who appear to belong to Islamist organizations or exhibit piety, abounded. New policies absolving former state cadres and businessmen with links to the Ben Ali regime have also been criticized as threatening to derail the important Truth and Reconciliation process—a process that should help Tunisia cope with past human rights, political, and economic abuses, while promoting much needed judicial reform. Balancing security and protections guaranteed in Tunisia’s new Constitution will be a delicate matter for Tunisia’s new Nidaa Tounes-Ennahda coalition government.

Tunisia’s ailing economy will be at the center of the government’s policy platform as well as a major concern for international donors and development programs, first to address domestic concerns over rising unemployment and social spending, and relatedly to encourage international investment economic diversification. The shape of Tunisia’s economic plan will likely be a dividing force between those political actors and business groups preferring a liberal economic model that is buttressed by political institutions and those who are looking for greater nationalization and protection from global financial institutions and the accompanying global trade fluctuations. In today’s Tunisia, major tensions are not around secularist versus Islamist proposals for a new political order, but rather about the economy and the enforcement of protections guaranteed in the constitution. The contention, debate, and resolution around these issues will define Tunisia’s new political future and the shape of the country’s nascent democracy.

Suggested Readings


