



# IPSS

Institute for Peace  
& Security Studies  
Addis Ababa University

## PEACE & SECURITY REPORT

# TUNISIA CONFLICT INSIGHTS

APRIL 2021

The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and recommendations to national, regional and continental decision makers in the implementation of peace and security-related instruments. The opinions expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

[www.ipss-addis.org/publications](http://www.ipss-addis.org/publications)





# CONTENTS

---

<b>SITUATION ANALYSIS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ACTORS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CONFLICT DYNAMICS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CURRENT RESPONSE ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>SCENARIOS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>STRATEGIC OPTIONS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CONFLICT TIMELINE</b>	<b>12</b>

---

# CONTRIBUTORS

---

Nejmeddine Aloui (Author)

Dr. Mesfin Gebremichael (Editor in Chief)

Cynthia Happi (Associate Editor)

---

# SITUATION ANALYSIS

**FIGURE 1. COUNTRY PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>GDP PER CAPITA</b>
<b>11.71M</b>	<b>INDEX: 0.739</b> <b>RANK: 91/189</b>	<b>\$3,447.51 (2018)</b>
<b>NEIGHBOURS</b>	<b>LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YRS)</b>	<b>RECS</b>
<b>ALGERIA</b> <b>LIBYA</b> <b>MEDITERRANEAN SEA</b>	<b>75.4</b>	<b>UMA</b>

<sup>i</sup> UNDP, Inequality-Adjusted HDI, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/download-data>. Consulted December 21st, 2020.

After independence from France in 1956, the Republic of Tunisia engaged in significant reforms to create a modern state under the rule of a political class led by the first president, Habib Bourguiba. Since then, Tunisia has seen two major political changes: in 1987, Prime Minister Zine El Abidine Ben Ali removed H. Bourguiba from office in a bloodless coup and in December 2010, a popular uprising broke out and eventually forced President Ben Ali out of office to flee the country on 14 January 2011. A transitional government was nominated until the new constitution was ratified in January 2014.

Despite the success of the democratic transition and the adoption of a new constitution and laws that are more respectful of human rights and freedoms, Tunisia is still facing burdens of economic crisis reflected in high unemployment rate and deterioration of citizens' purchasing power in the face of rise in the prices of basic commodities. Political division deepened the crisis since it obstructed the work of successive governments in making reforms and issuing relevant laws. Besides, terrorism and religious extremism, with repercussions of the war in neighbouring Libya, have become the main factors for spreading fear, instability and the flight of investments out of the country. These factors can jeopardize Tunisia's successful political democratic transition.

## Division and Antagonism among Political Actors

The political scene in Tunisia is marked by deep divisions that impact the dynamics of social and political struggles. As early as the country's independence, there was a division between the ruling Socialist Destourian (Constitutional) Party, secular, and pro-Islamic-rule communities composed mainly of those educated in the Zitouna Mosque on issues such as women's rights and gender equality.

After the revolution, this schism reached climax while drafting the constitution. There especially was a rift between the Nahdha party, Islamic, and secular democrats on issues like religion of the state, application of the Islamic law and status of women. Many times, this antagonism led to tensions and confrontations. The ideological divisions were a source of unrest and tension through the different stages of the transition, especially with the rise of Salafism. On 7 October 2011, an owner of a private TV channel was threatened, his house burned down and the TV station threatened because of the broadcasting of a movie, *Persepolis*, that Islamists considered a violation of the Saint because there was a representation of God. The owner was condemned for "violation of good morales and disturbance of public order<sup>1</sup>" in an environment where struggles are fuelled by tensions between individual and religious rights becoming an issue of debate on social media and on the ground.

During the decades preceding the 2011 revolution, Islamists were portrayed by the former regimes as "dangerous reactionaries, who manipulated religious symbols to exploit the gullibility of the poor, uneducated, and misinformed<sup>2</sup>." Even years after the revolution, this idea has persisted causing fears on the part of the secularists with regard to individual rights. Islamists accuse secularists of exclusion. This situation has continued especially via social media with fake news, violent phrases and hate speech.

1 Le Monde, Tunisie, Procès Persepolis : le patron de Nessma TV condamné à une amende, published May 3rd, 2012, available at [https://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/05/03/tunisie-le-patron-de-nessma-tv-condamne-a-une-amende\\_1695045\\_1466522.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/05/03/tunisie-le-patron-de-nessma-tv-condamne-a-une-amende_1695045_1466522.html) (personal translation)

2 Anouar Boukharies. In the Cross-Fire: Islamist's travails in Tunisia, Carnegie Endowment for international peace, January 17th 2014, paper in <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/01/27/in-crossfire-islamists-travails-in-tunisia-pub-54311> consulted September 25th 2020, at 17:15

## Socio-economic Factors

A decade after the revolution, the grievances driving protests have not changed; some indicators have even worsened. High youth unemployment, especially among university graduates, economic slowdown, corruption, and the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, with the protracted partisan bickering have limited the government's capacity to tackle the country's acute problems.

Unemployment is higher for women (23%)<sup>3</sup> than for men (12.5%),<sup>4</sup> but it is the highest for youth university graduates (32%).<sup>5</sup> In interior (non-coastal) regions it is even higher (50%). The public sector, despite the government's efforts, could not absorb the high number of unemployed youths and the capacity of the private sector is limited. Therefore, demonstrations and protests for equal access to employment are recurrent in Tunisia, with roadblocks and confrontations with police especially in the south and west of the country where the population perceives the government as unable (or unwilling) to promote local development. As a result, domestic production of oil, gas and phosphates was negatively affected.

In these regions, a new generation of entrepreneurs composed of barons of informal economy has emerged after the revolution has gained power in the political and social life. The competition with the traditional economic class, issued from the north and east (the coastal region mainly) created a polarized business world leading to a conflict on the key positions in administration and access to bank financing. This situation blocked reforms and limited the government's capacity to fight corruption. As a former adviser to the government presidency observed, "From 2011-2015, we knew the business networks were powerful but we had the upper hand. Today, that is no longer the case. An economic operator with abundant liquidity can now break up a party.<sup>6</sup>" Many among these operators have political and media wings, in fact, investigations with the newly arrested economic operators have proved that they were involved in social unrest in the south.

3 African Economic Outlook, in <https://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/tunisia/> consulted September 30th, 2020.

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 International Crisis Group, Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia, Report No. 117 Middle East and North Africa 10 Mai 2017, in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/177-blocked-transition-corruption-and-regionalism-tunisia>

In addition to the economic downturn and the increase in unemployment levels, post-revolution Tunisia is facing a number of socio-economic challenges that maintain grievances and disillusionment among a large proportion of the society. These include regional disparity, growing inflation (5.7% in October 2020, according to the National Institute of Statistics-INS), rising informal sector activities and increasing poverty levels (15.2% according to INS), especially among the youth. These factors led to an escalation of tensions in the interior (non-coastal) regions.

## Religious Extremism and Jihadist Violence

After the fall of Ben Ali's regime, there was a security vacuum that the Salafist groups exploited to promote their ideas and recruit new members especially in poor regions and areas around the capital, Tunis. They used mainstream media and social media to attract the disenchanted youth.

In post-revolution Tunisia, priority was given to political and constitutional concerns while the socio-economic fractures were neglected. This left the population's expectations unmet and created a general feeling of disillusionment, especially among the unemployed youth who served as the primary target of the jihadist groups. As a result, Tunisia experienced two political assassinations: Chokri Belaid, an opposition leader, on 6 February 2013 and Mohamed Brahmi, an opposition MP, on 25 July 2013. Moreover, several attacks were perpetrated against security forces and the army, but the most tragic attacks were those in Bardo Museum (March 2015) that saw 23 people dead, including 21 foreign tourists and in Sousse, a coastal tourist resort (June 2015) where 38 people were gunned down, 30 of whom were British.

Despite the lack of official data about the size of these insurgent groups, investigations and research proved that they were growing in number. In fact, according to Bilel Ghannouchi, a prominent Jihadist, there are more than 50,000 Salafi Jihadists in Tunisia<sup>7</sup>. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>8</sup> estimates the number of Tunisian fighters in conflict zones such as Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Mali to be more than 5,000; many are in leadership positions. The Tunisian Prime Minister announced in 2015 that 15,000 Tunisians were prevented from travelling to join Jihadist groups<sup>9</sup>.

The danger of these groups emanates from their ideology which preaches and calls for the establishment of an Islamic state, the denial of the legitimacy of modern state institutions and their violent methods which threaten the country's democratic transition. They initially relied on humanitarian campaigns to approach the youth in different parts of the country - different types of aids and conflict resolution in communities. "Their preaching and charitable activities allowed them to expand their influence in the public sphere and to recruit militants in the suburbs of Tunis and the inland regions, especially in Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba, Kairouan, and Kasserine<sup>10</sup>."

The Tunisian government still opts for a security-based approach to counter-terrorism; an inclusive overarching strategy is yet to be identified and implemented.

## Regional Instability and Fragile Border Security

In 2016, more than fifty armed militants belonging to the Islamic State were trained in Sabrata, Lybia, and streamed across the southern border into the town of Ben Guerdane in an attempt to proclaim an emirate there. In fact, Tunisia has always faced threats coming from the southern and western borders. The World Bank attributes 24% of Tunisian drop in GDP from 2011 to 2015 to Libya's turmoil.<sup>11</sup> The Libyan side of the border is under the control of non-state actors after the failure of a central state which "provided militant groups with a reasonably safe zone to train, arm, and prepare to carry out attacks in Libya."<sup>12</sup>

Violence in Lybia is the cause of the flows of refugees across the border fleeing civil war, which represents a real challenge for Tunisia given the political tensions and weak economy of the country. Furthermore, the state of insecurity in Lybia poses an economic threat to the Tunisian government as cross-border trade - both licit and illicit - decreases, which is the primary economic activity on the southern border. When borders are closed for security concerns, protests break out in the region.

7 Emna Ben Arab (PhD), Fayçal Maalej (PhD), Mohamed Ikbelloumi (MBA), The Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, Assessing the Threat Posed by Tunisian Foreign Fighters, 2018.

8 UNHCHR, Preliminary findings by the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries on its official visit to Tunisia - 1 to 8 July, 2015, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16219&LangID=E>

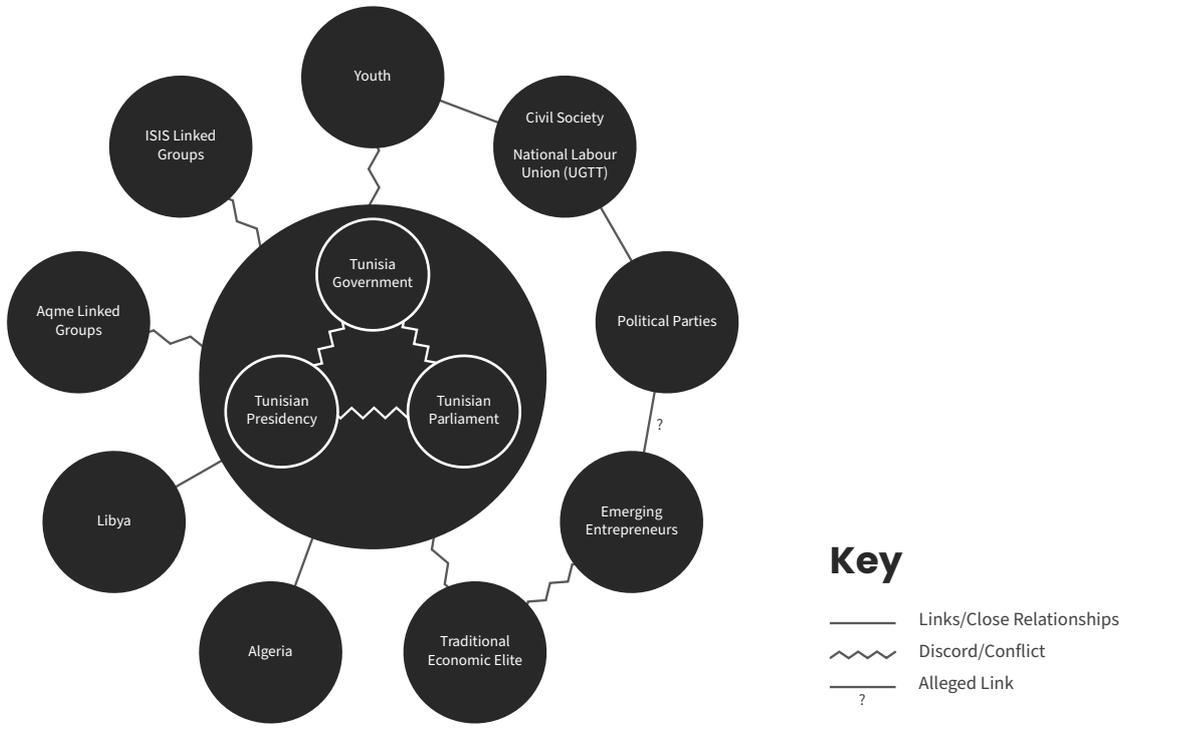
9 Retrieved from Georges Fahmi- Hamza Meddeb, Market for Jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia, Carnegie Middle East Centre (2015), [Carnegie-mec.org. pp10](https://www.carnegie-mec.org/pp10).

10 Ibid p 12. Look at the map of Tunisia to locate cited regions.

11 World Bank, "Republic of Tunisia: Impact of the Libya Crisis on the Tunisian Economy," February 2017, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/517981490766125612/Tunisia-Impact-of-the-Libya-crisis-on-the-Tunisian-economy>

12 James Potheary, A Neighbor's Dilemma: The Implications of the Libyan Crisis on Tunisia, Publication: Terrorism Monitor, Volume 17, Issue 13, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-neighbors-dilemma-the-implications-of-the-libyan-crisis-on-tunisia/>

**FIGURE 2. ACTORS MAPPING**



## The Tunisian Army

Article 18 of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution states that the Tunisian army “is a republican army.” It is required to remain completely impartial. The national army supports the civil authorities in accordance with the provisions set out in law.<sup>13</sup>

To guarantee the army’s impartiality, the defence secretary should be a civilian under the command of the head of state who is the president of the republic. There is no clear evidence that the army is involved in politics or economy in Tunisia; it enjoys popular support due to the role it played in the revolution. Historically, the armed forces were involved in a number of natural catastrophes to assist the national effort to save lives. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the military health services deployed medical personnel and health facilities in areas where the number of positive cases is high.

Tunisians look at the army with great respect especially in its effort to secure the borders and to combat terrorism in the regions where there are armed groups. A survey conducted by the Defence Department in 2019 showed

that 62.42%<sup>14</sup> of the respondents were satisfied with the work of the Department while only 1.87% were dissatisfied.

The impartiality of the army and its role in counter-terrorism, which cost it the lives of many soldiers, granted the military a central role as a pacifier in any tension because of the trust it enjoys among citizens.

## The Tunisian Government

After the revolution, Tunisians have seen nine governments; the most recently appointed one is purely technocratic with the main focus on fighting social hardships, weak economy, corruption, and terrorism.

The current government has to face a number of challenges: political tensions as it is not backed by a coalition in the parliament, economic hardship, inflation, deteriorating purchasing power, terrorism and security problems and escalating COVID-19 crisis. Working towards the solution to these problems is expected to

13

Article 18, The Tunisian Constitution of January 2014.

14

Ministry of Defense, Tunisia, Results of the survey on the satisfaction of citizens about the quality of services. 2019.

be sabotaged by spoilers in different spheres, especially by elements in the informal economy, armed groups and political parties.

## The Tunisian Parliament

The Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) is a unicameral assembly composed of 217 members spread over ten political coalitions. Women represent 26.27% while men represent 73.73%. The plenary sessions are broadcast live on TV.

The profound institutional transformations are something new for Tunisians who are not used to seeing arguments and quarrels in the parliament, and this is among the factors that widened the chasm between the political class and the people, which confirmed the perception that the new political elites are detached from ordinary people's social and economic concerns.

## Civil Society

The post-revolution institutional framework allowed more freedom of organization and openness. As a result, civil society organizations (CSOs) experienced spectacular growth in number and impact in the Tunisian national scene. As a democratizing force, they played a prominent role in the democratic transition in Tunisia. In 2015, the National Dialogue Quartet initiative received the Nobel Peace Prize for its role as peace and democracy builder during the deep political crisis caused by the assassination of an opposition member of parliament. The contribution of civil society to peace and democratization, and as a watchdog, is quite clear in the process. CSOs represent a guarantee that any conflict in Tunisia does not escalate to violence. They organize protest and provide needy families with assistance. During the COVID-19 pandemic in February-March 2020, they played a central role in assisting the government via targeted campaigns, organizing queues and providing protective means to citizens.

## Jihadist Groups

The security vacuum created by the departure of the Ben Ali regime, the economic hardship, the rise of regional and international terrorism networks, and the situation in Lybia are conditions that helped the jihadist groups emerge and threaten the democratic transition. The Salafi Jihadist groups consider all those who do not adhere to their ideology as "infidels" whose death is ordered by Islamic law (Shariaa). In groups or as separate individuals called "lone wolves", they perpetrated a lot of violent and terrorist attacks. In 2012, Ansar Al-Sharia attacked the U.S. Embassy while in 2013, the Islamic State (IS) claimed the assassination of two leftist political figures. In 2015, more than 60 tourists were killed in two attacks, one at the Bardo Museum near the capital, Tunis, and the other at Sousse Hotel. In the same year, a dozen members of the presidential guard were killed in a suicide bomb attack.

Many Tunisians travelled to conflict zones to join the jihadist groups, and since they are well trained, the returnees from among them represent a real threat to peace and security. Despite the success of the Tunisian army and security forces in fighting terrorism, the threat still exists.

The 2011 revolution (The Jasmine Revolution) was a turning point in Tunisia's modern history ending a gloomy past of decades of despotism. It laid the foundations for a representative and direct governance that illustrates Tunisians' desire for freedom and justice.

As soon as the former president left the country, a temporary team was established to organize the transition. The team consisted of historical popular opposers of Ben Ali established as a supreme body for leading the revolution, political reform and democratic transition. It acted as a revolutionary legislative authority and an interim government that organized the first democratic and credible elections of 23 October 2011. A national constituent assembly of 217 members was elected to draft the new Tunisian constitution which was adopted three years later on 26 January 2014.

Tunisians demanded elections after two major sit-ins that gathered youth from different parts of the country in the emblematic square of Al-Kasbah, opposite the Prime Minister's Office. The transition in Tunisia did not meet the expectations of thousands of people who took to the streets to impose Ben Ali's ouster. Several factors came into play, most notably "serious security issues resulting from transnational terrorism and civil war in the neighbouring Libya, alarming economic hardship with unemployment rate reaching 15.6%, and growing social disparities generating feelings of frustration and anger.<sup>16</sup>"

The economy was shattered by terrorist operations. Tourism was hit by the Bardo and Sousse attacks. Other terrorist acts included two political assassinations, bomb attacks in the capital and the assassination of security agents and soldiers in the most hideous way. The Libyan revolution had facilitated the recruitment of many Tunisian fighters to the insurgent groups some of who returned with a mission to assault the town of Ben Guerdane and proclaim an "emirate," but they were confronted by the army, security forces and citizens.

The national unemployment rate continued to rise, especially among the youth and college graduates. Many companies decided to relocate because of security and economic challenges, which meant the loss of thousands of jobs.

Food prices skyrocketed and the informal economy flourished leading to the creation of a new generation of businessmen who decided to have their own share in key administrative positions in order to defend their interests. This group created indirect conflict with the traditional entrepreneurs. The lose-lose game led to mutual economic sabotage and slow down in the government's momentum in the fight against corruption.

The post-revolution political landscape was marked by a multitude of political parties which exceeded 200 in number. Most of these parties failed to meet people's expectations in their short-term or long-term objectives. Even the strategic consensus agreed upon by the two most prominent political figures, Rached Ghannouchi, leader of Al-Nahdha (Islamic), and Beji Kaied Sebsi, leader of Nida Tounes (liberal), could not deal with the crises that the country experienced.

Tunisia has gone through serious crises that threatened peace and security and the emerging democracy but the way each conflict was managed indicates that Tunisians are acquiring a sense that their country has become a land of diversity and emancipation, which leaves a place for compromise. The assassination of the leftist opposition leader, Mohamed Brahmi, put the country in a deep political crisis that mobilized Islamists against the rest posing real threats of civil war. However, the four civil society organizations succeeded in bringing the antagonists to a round table discussion and eventually drafting a roadmap that saved Tunisia from bloodshed. In fact, many analysts spoke about Tunisians' ability to hold multilateral discussions and to come to peaceful coexistence. The plurality of visions and the diversity of ideas in the country did not hinder multilateral communication and peaceful coexistence.

16 Chehoudi, Rfaaa. (2017). Tunisian Democratic Transition: Dynamics of Conflict and Reconciliation. JOURNAL OF ADVANCES IN HUMANITIES. 5. 603-609. 10.24297/jah.v5i1.5907. available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326973829\\_Tunisian\\_Democratic\\_Transition\\_Dynamics\\_of\\_Conflict\\_and\\_Reconciliation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326973829_Tunisian_Democratic_Transition_Dynamics_of_Conflict_and_Reconciliation)

# CURRENT RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

International actors supported Tunisia financially, politically and technically in the transition to set the bases of an inclusive, representative and democratic regime.

## The African Union

The Panel of the Wise of the African Union considered that the popular uprising in Tunisia represents an opportunity to “deepen democratization processes on the continent”<sup>17</sup> since it is an aspiration to genuine democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Two members of the Panel of the Wise visited Tunisia on 6 and 7 April 2011 to assess the situation and present relevant recommendations.

The African Union was also present at the 2011 and 2014 legislative and presidential elections and deployed both long-term and short-term election observation missions, and expressed satisfaction with the two processes as they paved ways towards the establishment of democratically elected and accountable governments.

Tunisia received a grant from the African Union (AU) as part of assistance provided to African countries in the fight against coronavirus. The donation consisted of face masks, coronavirus screening tests and protective clothing.

## France

From 2013-2015, Tunisia’s main economic partner, France, made foreign direct investment of about 320 million euros in Tunisia. However, it seemed to be overtaken by the events of the revolution and did not support the call for liberty until after the departure of the former president, Ben Ali. The French newspaper Libération commented on this matter saying that “Shifting overnight from total support for a dictatorship to backing the democratic movement that follows is no easy feat, hence, the confusion and embarrassment of the French government’s statements in recent days on the ‘Jasmine Revolution.’<sup>18</sup>

## European Union (EU)

The first economic agreement on trade between the EU and Tunisia dates back to 1969.<sup>19</sup> Then several agreements followed until recently when Tunisia was granted the status of strategic partnership with the EU.

After the outbreak of the Arab spring movements, Brussels supported the democratization of the country by making available resources and effective policies through its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as well as by contributing to the institutional dynamic through official visits by its leaders. Natural partners with regard to geographical, cultural and commercial links, the EU and Tunisia have, in this new context, concluded a “Privileged Partnership” in November 2012 and an ambitious Action Plan for its implementation. In 2011, Tunisia received 130 million euros for economic reforms, and 20 million euros for social, environmental and local development.<sup>20</sup>

Technically, at the request of the Tunisian government, the emerging democracy was offered from the EU, a partner for democracy to support the transitional process. Five experts were deployed to assist in the electoral process and new institutions were established. Electoral observation missions have been deployed in different elections since 2011. Last but not least, the EU offered Tunisia 80.5 million euros to manage the refugee crisis following the Lybian Revolution<sup>21</sup>.

17 10th MEETING OF THE PANEL OF THE WISE, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA 12 MAY 2011, available at <http://peaceau.org/en/article/11th-meeting-of-the-panel-of-the-wise-of-the-african-union-zanzibar-united-republic-of-tanzania>

18 Nicolas Cori, La France gênée aux entournures, Libération, 2011, [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2011/01/18/la-france-genee-aux-entournures\\_707979](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2011/01/18/la-france-genee-aux-entournures_707979)

19 RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND TUNISIA, Memo 95/106, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_95\\_106](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_95_106)

20 Alexander Damiano Ricci, Qu’a fait l’Union européenne pour soutenir la Tunisie ? (2019) Alternatives Economiques, available at <https://www.alternatives-economiques.fr/qua-lunion-europeenne-soutenir-tunisie/00090336>

21 Data retrieved from Stefan Fule, La Tunisie et L’Union Européenne- Un an après la « Révolution du Jasmin », Kapitalis (2011) available at [www.kapitalis.com/tribune/7400/la-tunisie-et-lunion-europeenne-1-an-apres-la-revolution-du-jasmin](http://www.kapitalis.com/tribune/7400/la-tunisie-et-lunion-europeenne-1-an-apres-la-revolution-du-jasmin)

Risk factors in Tunisia are internal and external. Despite the success in political transition, these factors can impact stability in the country.

## Worst Case Scenario

Vulnerability to food and rise in oil price would impact on consumers' purchasing power. The government does not take appropriate measures to manage youth unemployment and regional and social disparities increase. The fierce competition between traditional and emerging economic actors would result in weak administration and the spread of corruption. Scarcity of water and energy would affect key economic sectors and agricultural production would decrease due to climate shocks.

Instability in the neighbouring countries would deepen the security crisis and armed groups would seize the opportunity to settle in Tunisia. Tunisia, with the worsening internal and external risk factors, would be unstable and isolated.

## Best Case Scenario

Tunisia would continue to reform its political and economic systems in a way that allows a strong political system and consolidated political institutions. Establishment of a decentralized system would help reduce social and regional disparities.

African, European and regional relationships would help the government withstand security and unemployment challenges. Foreign direct investment would increase signalling to Tunisia positive outlooks from external financial and development institutions.

Regional stability in the neighbouring countries would lead to economic growth by opening labour markets to Tunisian workers and allowing for larger remittances from these workers.

Civil society will continue to play its stabilizing role.

## Most likely Scenario

Mistrust among political and economic actors would lead to an unstable country but that can be influenced by the capacity of the government, the presidency, and the parliament to initiate an inclusive national economic dialogue and to set a roadmap to identify short-term and long-term measures to reduce the impact of the economic downturn, create employment for the youth, and fight corruption.

Political reforms that include appointment of the constitutional court and completion of the transition to decentralization will take place. The government will continue with efforts to attract more external investments.

Tension will continue in inner regions and COVID-19 pandemic will go worse increasing the number of deaths and infected people. That would lay more pressure on the health system. Tunisians would ask for measures to curtail the rapid spread of coronavirus. The government will be under pressure in an attempt to address public calls and meet the requirements of the private sector that suffered from the March 2020 lockdown. The government will continue in its swift reactions.

The Tunisian diplomacy will be more active in solving the spillover of the Lybian crisis with regard to its economic and security impacts, especially in the southern border regions.

The Tunisian President, Kais Said, promised in his campaign to contribute to solving the financial and economic problems Tunisians are facing. It is, therefore, expected that he will present to the parliament a legislative initiative that might ameliorate the situation.

The recent experience has shown that Tunisian politicians can sit together and identify issues that lead to political crises. The 2015 national dialogue is a good example. Therefore, it is expected that both economic and political actors will initiate a new national dialogue to ease the crisis.

# STRATEGIC OPTIONS

## To the Government

The government should launch an inclusive national dialogue that debates both political and economic challenges. Such a dialogue should include the informal economic actors and the powerful networks of cross-border traffickers who dominate informal distribution of networks and contribute to the corrupt business practices that suffocate the Tunisian economy.

There are a number of stalled development projects. It is recommended that these projects find their way to implementation because they will allow more direct and indirect employment opportunities, reduce regional disparities and relieve tensions.

Reform of the national administration towards less bureaucracy is highly recommended in order to facilitate the attraction of more foreign investments. There are similar sectors that need reforms such as education, agriculture, health and others. The government should establish a roadmap to indicate when, how, and for how long to implement these reforms. Such a procedure should be agreed upon by other political partners, too.

Some constitutional regulatory institutions such as media, for example, have reached the end of mandate but were not renewed. Therefore, they suffer from lack of credibility. Others such as the constitutional court have not been established yet. The government should work with other state institutions to resolve the situation and provide necessary funds for the good functioning of the institutions.

## To the African Union

The African Union should continue playing its role as an arbiter and observer to make sure that human rights and political liberty are not undermined in Tunisia.

There should be a specific communication strategy for North Africa that guarantees the visibility of the continental organization allowing political parties and civil society organizations to be more closely in touch with the Union's instruments and institutions.

Regional integration and continental cooperation are adequate solutions to the Tunisian economic challenges that are the major causes of many tensions. The African Union can revive the Maghreb countries' talks towards regional integration and organize bilateral and continental events to identify possible cooperation fields between North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, it is recommended that the African Union provide more capacity building to the Tunisian civil society, institutions and political entities.

## To the Arab Maghreb Union

The UMA member states should increase efforts to revitalise the regional union and take steps towards the integration of Maghreb countries.

- 10th MEETING OF THE PANEL OF THE WISE, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA (2011 MAY 12). available at <http://peaceau.org/en/article/11th-meeting-of-the-panel-of-the-wise-of-the-african-union-zanzibar-united-republic-of-tanzania>
- Chehoudi, Rafea. (2017). Tunisian Democratic Transition: Dynamics of Conflict and Reconciliation. *JOURNAL OF ADVANCES IN HUMANITIES*. 5. 603-609. 10.24297/jah.v5i1.5907. available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326973829\\_Tunisian\\_Democratic\\_Transition\\_Dynamics\\_of\\_Conflict\\_and\\_Reconciliation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326973829_Tunisian_Democratic_Transition_Dynamics_of_Conflict_and_Reconciliation)
- Emanuele Santi, Saoussen Ben Romdhane and Mohamed Safouane Ben Aïssa, (2011) Impact of Libya's Conflict on the Tunisian Economy: A Preliminary Assessment, Second Annual Quarter, The African Development Bank.
- Fredrik Wehrey. (2020 March 18). Tunisia's Wake-Up Call: How Security Challenges from Libya Are Shaping Defense Reforms, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/tunisia-s-wake-up-call-how-security-challenges-from-libya-are-shaping-defense-reforms-pub-81312>
- Georges Fahmi – Hamza Meddeb. (2015). Market for Jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia, Carnegie Middle East Centre, Carnegie-MEC.org. <https://www.timelines.ws/countries/TUNISIA.HTML>
- International Crisis Group. (2017 May 10). Report No. 117 Middle East and North Africa, Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/177-blocked-transition-corruption-and-regionalism-tunisia>
- James Potheary. A Neighbor's Dilemma: The Implications of the Libyan Crisis on Tunisia, Publication: Terrorism Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 13, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-neighbors-dilemma-the-implications-of-the-libyan-crisis-on-tunisia/>
- Jan-Erik Refle. Tunisian civil society and its international links, available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301771112\\_Tunisian\\_civil\\_society\\_and\\_its\\_international\\_links](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301771112_Tunisian_civil_society_and_its_international_links)
- Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing No. 50 Tunis/Brussels, 22 June 2016.
- Maria Cristina Paciello. (2011). Tunisia: Changes and Challenges of a Political Transition, MEDPRO Technical Report No. 3/May, Available for free downloading from the MEDPRO ([www.medpro-foresight.eu](http://www.medpro-foresight.eu)).
- Natalie Nougayrède. (2011). Tunisie: le virage de la France, contrainte par les événements, *Le Monde, Le Monde Afrique*, available at [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/17/tunisie-le-virage-de-la-france-contrainte-par-les-evenements\\_1466501\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/17/tunisie-le-virage-de-la-france-contrainte-par-les-evenements_1466501_3212.html)
- Nicolas Cori. (2011). La France gênée aux entournures, *Libération*, [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2011/01/18/la-france-genee-aux-entournures\\_707979](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2011/01/18/la-france-genee-aux-entournures_707979)
- Shelley Deane. Transforming Tunisia: The Role of Civil Society in Tunisia's Transition, International Alert, available at <https://bit.ly/3eng3UG>
- Tunisians Disaffected with Leaders as Conditions Worsen, Doubts about Democracy; Most Support Political Role for Islam, in Pew Research Center Global Attitudes & Trends, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/09/12/tunisians-disaffected-with-leaders-as-conditions-worsen/> consulted September 19th 2020.
- Walid Abdel Hay. (2011)., Popular Revolutions in the Arab Region: General Characteristics, Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Amman.
- World Bank. (2017, February) "Republic of Tunisia: Impact of the Libya Crisis on the Tunisian Economy," <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/517981490766125612/Tunisia-Impact-of-the-Libya-crisis-on-the-Tunisian-economy>
- Zeghal, Malika. (2013). Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition. *Constellations* 20, no. 2: 254–274. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12724047>

# CONFLICT TIMELINE

## 1956–2020

- 
- 1956 Mar 20** Tunisia is granted independence by France. Tunisia becomes an independent nation under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba, a Francophone lawyer. He launches a campaign advocating birth control.
- 
- 1981** An Islamist leader, Rached Ghannouchi, and other intellectuals found the Islamic Tendency Movement. In 1987 he is sentenced to life behind bars with hard labor under the regime of Habib Bourguiba.
- 
- 1987 Nov 7** Zine El Abidine Ben Ali becomes president of Tunisia after doctors declare Habib Bourguiba (84) medically unfit to govern. That ends the 30-year rule of Habib Bourguiba.
- 
- 1989** Tunisia holds elections heavily rigged. An Islamist-backed coalition manages to win 17 percent of the vote.
- 
- 1992** Tunisia's President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali bans the Islamist Ennahda party.
- 
- 2002 Apr 11** A gas tanker truck crashes into the wall of the El Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Djerba, a south-eastern tourist resort, and kills 14 Germans, 6 Tunisians and a Frenchman. Al Qaeda claims responsibility.
- 
- 2007 Jan 3** At least 14 people, including two security forces, are killed in the shootout in Soliman, 25 miles south of the capital, Tunis. Fifteen people are arrested. On Jan 12 the interior minister discloses nearly 30 Islamic extremists are involved in a deadly gun battle with police; has blueprints of foreign embassies and documents naming foreign envoys.
- 
- 2008 Aug 23** A Tunisian court convicts 13 Islamic militants on charges linked to plots to carry out attacks in the north African country. Six more convicted on Aug 26 for establishing a military camp in Tunisia's north-eastern Kef region designed to train fighters to be sent to Iraq.
- 
- 2010 Dec 17** Mohamed Bouazizi (26) burns himself after police confiscate the fruits and vegetables he sells without permit. His self-immolation sparks the "Arab Spring" revolutions.
- 
- 2011 Jan 14** Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali steps aside after failing to quell the worst anti-government unrest in his two decades in power.
- 
- 2011 Feb 18** Marek Marius Rybinski (34), a Polish priest, is found with his throat slit and stab wounds in the parking lot of the religious school in the Tunis suburb of Manouba.
- 
- 2011 May 1** A seemingly endless flow of Libyans cross into Tunisia from Libya at the Dehiba border post, a day after a record 5,000 refugees fled the conflict in their country.
- 
- 2011 May 11** Tunisian police arrest a Libyan man in a car packed with Kalashnikov rifle cartridges in the south of the country, 80 km (50 miles) from the border with Libya. Authorities also arrest a second man, an Algerian, who was transporting grenades.
- 
- 2011 Jun 26** Six members of the Salafist movement are arrested after storming a Tunis cinema and breaking its glass doors in a bid to stop the screening of the film "Neither Allahnor Master" on secularism in Tunisia.
- 
- 2011 Oct 23** Tunisia holds its first truly free elections since independence in 1956. Voters elect a 217-seat constituent assembly that would shape their fledgling democracy, choose a new government and write a new constitution that would pave the way for future elections.
-

- 
- 2011 Nov 19** The three parties making up the new ruling coalition divide up the top government jobs between them. Ennahda's Hamadi Jebali becomes the prime minister. Congress for the Republic party leader, Moncef Marzouki, becomes the president. The leader of the left of center Ettakatol, or forum, becomes the speaker of the assembly.
- 
- 2011 Dec 1** Thousands of people rally in Central Tunis to express fears of extremism under an Islamist party that swept to power in October polls, but also to denounce unemployment and corruption.
- 
- 2011 Dec 3** Thousands of Islamist supporters descend on Central Tunis to confront liberal demonstrators rallying against extremism as lawmakers draft a new constitution.
- 
- 2012 Jan 28** Over 8,000 people march in Tunis denouncing violence committed by ultraconservative Islamist groups.
- 
- 2012 Mar 16** Several thousand men and women demonstrate outside the parliament to demand the inclusion of Islamic law in the country's future constitution.
- 
- 2012 Mar 20** Thousands of Tunisians gather in defence of liberty as they marked Independence Day amid fears of a widening division between secular and religious groups in the newly democratized nation.
- 
- 2012 May 20** In Central Tunis thousands of hard-line Ansar al-Sharia Islamists, some in Afghan military garb and waving swords, converge to rally for one of the country's most radical religious movements. Researchers estimate Salafists count about 10,000 followers in Tunisia.
- 
- 2012 Sep 14** Violent protests outside the US Embassy in Tunis against an anti-Muslim film are met with tear gas and gunshots. Police kill 4 people. Around 40 others are injured as plumes of black smoke waft over the city. One hundred twenty Tunisians accused of attacking the US Embassy are convicted in 2013 and given two-year suspended sentence.
- 
- 2013 Feb 6** Opposition leader ChokriBelaïd (47), critical of the Islamist-led government, is gunned down as he leaves home in the first assassination in post-revolutionary Tunisia, setting off anti-government riots that left downtown Tunis choked with tear gas and patrolled by a tank and armoured cars.
- 
- 2013 May 19** Some 11,000 police officers and soldiers are blocked at an annual conference by a radical Islamist movement implicated in attacks across the country, prompting clashes with angry youths and resulting in one death.
- 
- 2013 Jul 25** Two gunmen on a motorbike shoot Mohammed Brahmi (58), the leader of the leftist opposition People's Party, dead outside his house. Thousands of Tunisians gather in front of the Interior Ministry building in Tunis to protest against the assassination.
- 
- 2013 Aug 2** Tunisian forces launch air and ground strikes on Islamist militants near the Algerian border after fierce overnight clashes in the area.
- 
- 2013 Aug 12** Tunisia carries out airstrikes on Islamist militants holed up in the Mount Chaambi area near the Algerian border.
- 
- 2013 Aug 27** Tunisia's PM Ali Larayedh declares Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization after obtaining proof that it killed two secular politicians and several soldiers.
- 
- 2014 Jan 8** In Central Tunisia, clashes break out between police and demonstrators protesting economic hardship in Kasserine, as discontent mounts over new taxes and government failure to improve living conditions three years after the revolution.
- 
- 2014 Jan 26** Tunisian lawmakers vote on a new constitution, three years after the revolution, with the premier-designate to unveil his cabinet on a landmark day for the Arab Spring's birthplace.
- 
- 2014 May 28** Gunmen attack the Kasserine home of Interior Minister, Lotfi Ben Jeddou, with his family inside, killing 4 of the policemen standing guard.
-

- 
- 2014 Jul 16** Some 40-60 militants stage two simultaneous attacks in western Tunisia at sundown on army posts while soldiers hold a Ramadan feast, killing at least 14 soldiers. The body of a 15th soldier is found on July 18.
- 
- 2014 Jul 26** At least 2 soldiers are killed when Islamist militants attack a checkpoint in a remote area of Kef region near the Algerian border.
- 
- 2014 Jul 30** Tunisia reports up to 6,000 people a day flee into the country from Libya as violence between rival militias continues.
- 
- 2014 Sep 19** Tunisia's Okbalbn Nafaa, an Al-Qaeda-linked group, offers to get back to the Islamic State organization that has overrun chunks of Iraq and Syria, becoming the third jihadist group to do so.
- 
- 2014 Oct 26** Tunisia holds parliamentary elections. The Islamist party Ennahda finishes second with 69 seats behind the secular rival NidaaTounes with 85 of the 217 seats in parliament.
- 
- 2014 Nov 23** Tunisia holds its first free presidential election. Initial results showed Beji Caid Essebsi (87), Head of the Nida Tunis party, wins 47% of the vote. Outgoing interim president Moncef Marzouki follows with 27% forcing a run-off on Dec 28.
- 
- 2014 Dec 21** Tunisians vote in the run-off of the country's first free presidential election, with authorities urging a big turnout to consolidate democracy after a chaotic four-year transition. Veteran politician, Beji Caid Essebsi (88), wins the presidential election with 55.68 per cent of the vote.
- 
- 2015 Mar 5** Tunisian troops capture a large arms cache near the border with Libya, including Kalashnikov rifles, rockets and landmines.
- 
- 2015 Mar 17** Tunisia dismantles 4 recruiting cells sending jihadis to fight in Libya and arrests dozens amidst tighter security and border controls to counter Islamist militants.
- 
- 2015 Mar 18** Gunmen open fire at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis. Overall, 23 people are killed, including 21 foreign tourists. Yassine al-Abidi and a fellow gunman are killed by the police. Security forces arrest nine people the following day in connection with the attack.
- 
- 2015 Jun 26** Thirty nine people are killed and 40 wounded in a gun attack on the five-star Riu Imperial Marhaba beachside hotel in Sousse. The confirmed death toll of Britons reached 30 out of the 38 foreign tourists mowed down by a Kalashnikov-toting gunman identified as a 23-year-old student, Seifeddine Rezgui.
- 
- 2015 Sep 30** Tunisian troops stop two bomb-laden cars crossing from Libya and seize arms and documents bearing the symbol of Islamic State.
- 
- 2015 Oct 9** Tunisia's National Dialogue Quartet wins the Nobel Peace Prize for helping build democracy in the birthplace of the Arab Spring, an example of peaceful transition in a region otherwise struggling with violence and upheaval.
- 
- 2016 Feb 6** Tunisia completes a 200-km (125 mile) barrier along its frontier with Libya to try to keep out Islamist militants, and would soon install electronic monitoring systems.
- 
- 2016 Mar 7** Dozens of Islamist fighters storm through the town of Ben Guerdan near the Libyan border attacking army and police posts in a raid killing 55 people, including civilians.
- 
- 2018 Jan 13** Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi holds talks with political parties, unions and employers to discuss means of overcoming a week of unrest triggered by austerity measures.
- 
- 2018 May 6** Tunisians vote in their first free municipal elections. The Islamist Ennahda and secular Nidaa Tounis parties, which form a coalition at the national level, are expected to dominate the polls for 350 municipalities.
- 
- 2019 Sep 15** Tunisians cast ballots in their country's second democratic presidential election, choosing from among 26 candidates for a leader who can safeguard the country's young democracy and tackle its unemployment, corruption and economic despair. There is no clear favourite, suggesting that the vote, which includes two female candidates, will only be the first round of the presidential election. Tunisians deliver a political earthquake by

rejecting established leaders for a little-known law professor and a media mogul jailed on suspicion of tax evasion. Kais Saied and Nabil Karoui led 24 other candidates.

---

**2019 Sep 17** Tunisia's electoral commission declares law professor Kais Saied and detained media mogul Nabil Karoui win the most votes in the Sept. 15 presidential election, beating veteran political leaders to advance to a second-round run-off.

---

**2019 Oct 6** Tunisians vote for a new parliament but quiet polling stations indicate that the economic disillusionment that has emerged since the 2011 revolution brought in political newcomers to challenge established parties. Two polls estimate that the Islamist party Ennahdha would win about 40 of the 217 seats in the Assembly of People's Representatives.

---

**2019 Oct 13** Tunisians cast ballots to choose their next president. In the run-off, Saied, an independent law professor, faces Nabil Karoui, a media mogul who faced corruption allegations. Exit polls declare a landslide election win for Kais Saied.

---

**2020 Mar 6** Two suicide bombers blow themselves up near the US Embassy on the outskirts of Tunis killing a police officer and wounding four others.

---

**2020 Mar 23** Tunisia's President Kais Saied orders the army to deploy in the streets to force people to respect a lockdown imposed to halt the spread of coronavirus. Tunisia has 89 confirmed cases of the virus.

---

## Peace and Security Reports

---

Although key continental and regional institutions have their own early warning reporting systems, policy making within these institutions also benefit from a number of analytical and periodic reports generated by think tanks and research institutes. The Research Unit at IPSS provides brief and critical analyses of the state of peace and security in different African countries as well as critical appraisals of interventions by various African actors. The reports will cover African countries showing positive signs as well as those undergoing negative developments.



**IPSS**

Institute for Peace  
& Security Studies  
Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa University  
P. O. Box: 1176  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

+251 (1) 11 245 660  
info@ipss-addis.org  
www.ipss-addis.org