

# American Foreign Policy Council

## TUNISIA

### QUICK FACTS

Population: 10,589,025

Area: 162,610 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Arab 98%, European 1%, Jewish and other 1%

Religions: Muslim 98%, Christian 1%, Jewish and other 1%

Government Type: Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$40.04 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated July 2010)



*The unprecedented social and political upheaval in Tunisia which began in December 2010, causing long-serving President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and his family to quit the country roughly a month later, continues to drive events and developments in the North African state. The so-called “Jasmine Revolution” was unexpected to Tunisian Islamists, as it was to all Tunisians and the international community at large. The revolt itself contained little overt involvement of Islamic groups, and very little Islamist rhetoric. It did, however, destroy the one-party structure that had defined political life since the country’s independence in 1956, and prompted the re-emergence of thoroughly suppressed opposition movements, the return of politicians from exile, and the creation of many new political groupings.*

*Today, Islamists as well as other groups are preparing for the*

*first stage of the creation of a new political order, the July 24th election of a National Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. How this election will be conducted, how the constituent council will be organized, and what powers it will exercise before parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled remain open questions, however—the answers to which will determine the trajectory that political Islam will take in Tunisia. Notably, there has not been a surge in Islamist sentiment since the fall of the Ben Ali regime, and Tunisians remain generally supportive of the secular approach to social and political development.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

### *Al-Nahda*

The Islamist movement in Tunisia was long embodied by *Hizb al-Nahda* (The Renaissance Party), which was thoroughly suppressed by the Ben Ali regime but became a legal party in early March 2011. Its leader, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, in exile in London since 1989, returned to Tunis shortly after Ben Ali's January 14th abdication of power to a tumultuous airport welcome, and the party has since been re-establishing its domestic organization. During the Ben Ali years, *al-Nahda* was estimated to have the support of 90 percent of Tunisian Islamists (although not 90 percent of Tunisians).<sup>1</sup> Whether its domination of the movement will continue in the new era, with the creation of other parties and greater political pluralism, remains to be seen, however.

The origin of Tunisia's modern Islamist movement was the Quranic Preservation Society, which was formed in 1970 with the government's approval. It was apolitical, dedicated primarily to encouraging faithfulness and piety. The Society was placed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and supported by President Bourguiba as a counterweight to the country's political left.<sup>2</sup> The Islamists attracted to the Society were not necessarily anti-regime and, in fact, shared some of the regime's views, including its opposition to Communism.<sup>3</sup> They accordingly did not see the need to confront the government and did not see a role for themselves in social and political change, which was the province of the left.

Their approach began to change in the late 1970s, when growing social unrest in other sectors, especially organized labor,

politicized the movement. Several Islamists broke from the Quranic Preservation Society—including Rachid al-Ghannouchi, who founded *al-Jamaat al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Group) and explicitly called for the end of Bourguiba’s one-party rule.<sup>4</sup> In 1978, a year that saw serious rioting across the country, the “Movement of Islamic Renewal” emerged as a loose coalition of Islamist groups; by the following year, Ghannouchi’s group, then called the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (MTI), emerged as its backbone.<sup>5</sup>

MTI issued a political platform in 1981 that included calls for equitable economic reform, an end to one-party rule, and a return to the “fundamental principles of Islam.”<sup>6</sup> These were sufficiently vague and appealing objectives to attract broad support from people across Tunisian society. The group requested recognition as a political party, but was denied such by the government, and most of its leaders were jailed until 1984, when they were released through a general amnesty.<sup>7</sup> During the course of the 1980s, MTI became younger and more populist in nature, and evolved into a well-organized social and political movement linked with the broader civil rights movement in the country.<sup>8</sup> It was considered pro-democracy and was the first Islamist group in the Arab world to explicitly adopt democratic principles; in his writings, Ghannouchi favored Islamist participation in pluralist politics.<sup>9</sup>

In November 1987, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, whom President Bourguiba had recently appointed Prime Minister, ousted him in a bloodless coup. The coup was greeted with relief by the public, as Bourguiba’s age and poor health had seriously degraded his judgment and decision-making capabilities. Ben Ali promised reform and democratization, and Ghannouchi, who sought to openly participate in political life, undertook to cooperate with the new President. He signed Ben Ali’s “National Pact,” which was essentially a social contract between the government and civil and political groups, and then sought to run a list of candidates in the 1989 legislative elections.<sup>10</sup> But Ben Ali soon changed course and, among other measures, prohibited any party’s name to contain the words “Islam” or “Islamic” (the prohibition of religiously-identified parties remains in place today.) The MTI duly renamed itself *Hizb al-Nahda*, the Renaissance Party. However, Ben Ali still refused to allow *Al-Nahda* to enter the elections as a recognized political

party, although he did permit it to field “independent” candidates. Islamists subsequently received 15 percent of the nationwide vote (up to 30 percent in urban areas), but failed to win any seats in the legislature (by contrast, the five recognized secular opposition parties collectively received only 5 percent of the vote<sup>11</sup>). The ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally Party (RCD), the successor to Bourguiba’s *Neo-Destour* (New Constitution) Party, received 80 percent of the vote—a function of both general voter satisfaction and effective regime vote-rigging and polling place intimidation. But the unexpectedly strong performance of the Islamists within the opposition, coupled with *Al-Nahda’s* increasingly strident political rhetoric, caused the regime to deny *Al-Nahda’s* second request for recognition. An escalating cycle of protest and repression ensued, and Ghannouchi fled to London in 1989.<sup>12</sup> By 1992, virtually all of *Al-Nahda’s* leadership was imprisoned and its organizational capabilities within the country destroyed.

Although it was commonly understood that *al-Nahda* was effectively dismantled in the early 1990s, many Tunisians, including Ben Ali, believed it maintained a structure and presence in the country, albeit perhaps a “stand-by” or “sleeping” one. They pointed to the comparatively recent prosecution of several Islamists under a 1959 law prohibiting membership in an unauthorized association, and not under the country’s 2003 counterterrorism law, as implying that the regime still believed the group to exist.<sup>13</sup>

*Al-Nahda’s* ideology is thoroughly rooted in the ideology of its founder, Ghannouchi, who views the Koran and the *Hadith* as “an anchor for political thought and practice.”<sup>14</sup> However, he appears to interpret Koranic texts in the context of Western political thinking and modern concepts of political freedoms: the dignity of human beings, human rights, and Koranic prohibitions against Muslim dictators.<sup>15</sup> Ghannouchi himself is a “literalist” and believes that it is the duty of Muslims to establish Islamic government where attainable; in practice, he has endorsed multi-party politics.<sup>16</sup> He does not advocate government by clerics, and has said that “[t]he state is not something from God but from the people... the state has to serve the benefit of the Muslims.”<sup>17</sup> His idea of an Islamic political regime appears to be a strong presidential system with an elected president and elected parliament. In this structure,

while *sharia* would dictate the constitution and laws, the *umma* (nation) should participate in legislating day-to-day activities of the state.<sup>18</sup> Notably, this structure represents an adaptation of the Islamic concept of *ijtihad* (scholarly interpretation of the Koran), infusing the parliament—rather than a council of scholars—with that power. Ghannouchi considers the elected parliamentary system a legitimate means of political participation.<sup>19</sup> The official ideology of *Al-Nahda*, therefore, appears to be compatible with the Tunisian political system as embodied in its constitution. Ghannouchi's public statements since his return, and those of other *Al-Nahda* figures, have been consistent with this pluralism. He has said that he will not run in the presidential elections, and that his party will accept the outcome of fair and democratic elections.<sup>20</sup>

*Al-Nahda* has had an ambiguous position on the use of political violence, and a mixed record of using and supporting violent unrest to further its aims. It is not associated with the few instances of recent violence in the country that have been attributed to *jihadi* elements or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). There is no evidence that *Al-Nahda* (or any Islamist movement, for that matter) played a significant role in the Jasmine Revolution. However, in 1978, organized labor and leftist groups fomented a wave of public violence against the regime that opened the Islamists (MTI) to the potential utility of violent confrontation, even though they did not participate in it. Similarly, the Islamists did not organize demonstrations in 1984 that resulted in bread riots, although they profited from associating with them because of the support the riots received from the public.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Ghannouchi himself criticized the January 2007 clash between an Islamist band and security forces in the southern suburbs of Tunis (see below) as an obstacle to democracy.<sup>22</sup>

At present, *Al-Nahda* is re-establishing itself in order to compete in future elections, and reassuring the public that it is prepared to play by the rules. Nevertheless, there is concern among secular Tunisians that the party, simply by dint of its organization and the multiplicity of other parties, could score as much as 30 to 40 percent of the popular vote.<sup>23</sup>

### *Other Islamist movements*

While *al-Nahda* dominates Tunisian Islamism, other Islamist groups do exist, though they tend to be small in size and loosely organized. A potentially dangerous group is *Hizb al-Tahrir* (the Islamic Liberation Party), an international group founded in 1953 which seeks to re-establish the Caliphate by force. This group established a presence in Tunisia in 1973, but had only a few dozen members in the country.<sup>24</sup> It has now emerged publicly and stated its goal of competing in elections and offering its “alternative constitution” to the Constituent Council.<sup>25</sup> While the group claims to renounce violence, it does not rule out rebellion and civil disobedience to establish an Islamic state. It clearly believes in the re-establishment of the Muslim Caliphate and in *sharia* as the source of the constitution.<sup>26</sup> Its spokesman says that Hizb ut-Tahrir is preparing for an ideological and political struggle to save the nation.<sup>27</sup> Many Tunisians, including members of *Al-Nahda*, believe with good reason that *Hizb ut-Tahrir* would, if it won an election, ban other parties and implement “one man, one vote, one time.”<sup>28</sup> Its request for a license to operate as a political party was denied by the Interior Minister on March 12th (as was that of the “Tunisian Sunni” party), and it will be interesting to observe what direction this organization will take.

*Tabligh wa Dawa* (“transmission and preaching”) is a group with origins in Pakistan focused on reinvigorating Islamic practices among the people of northern Africa. *Tabligh* is apolitical but, like virtually all civil associations in Tunisia, was illegal under the old regime.

There likewise is an inchoate Salafist movement which under the old regime devoted itself to religious studies and had no political component, but will apparently soon submit a request for a license to organize. It is not associated with violence, and one of its members described *jihadist*-style salafism as “destructive thought.”<sup>29</sup>

The Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG) was formed in 2000 with the goal of establishing an Islamic regime in Tunisia. It reportedly established contacts with al-Qaeda shortly after its formation. Its membership derives from the Tunisian Diaspora and members have participated in violent operations in Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The group has no evident capability to operate in Tunisia itself; in fact, observers disagree over whether the group still

exists. While not on the State Department's formal list of foreign terrorist organizations, TCG is considered a terrorist entity and its assets are frozen under Executive Order 13224 and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1333.<sup>30</sup>

Although al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the February 2008 kidnapping of two Austrian tourists in southern Tunisia, it does not appear that AQIM has a significant presence or recruiting base in the country. In fact, from press reports, all of the perpetrators of that kidnapping infiltrated from outside, and none were Tunisian. That said, a January 2007 gunfight between a well-armed extremist group and authorities near Tunis shocked the country, especially since two members of the group were found to be security forces personnel. The group, which took the name "Assad Ibn Fourat's Army," consisted primarily of Tunisian nationals apparently led by an expatriate living in Italy who, with several companions and a few non-Tunisian Maghrebis, infiltrated from Algeria where they had been trained by the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), AQIM's Algerian backbone.<sup>31</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

An increase in "fundamentalism" and outward expressions of personal piety are common to Muslim societies facing developments they cannot understand or control, such as globalization, foreign cultural inundation, economic recession, and uncontrolled political chaos. Tunisians have been spared much of this, but at the cost of their political freedoms. While Islamism has not, and most likely will not, take hold among Tunisians, pro-religious sentiment is growing, perhaps as a reaction to the country's socio-political situation. Youth are exposed to this phenomenon primarily at the university, especially when secular, modernist, and leftist movements are weak and marginalized. Beneath the modernism and sophisticated worldview exhibited by the population, which is far more substantial than the veneer of modernism seen elsewhere, Tunisia is a traditional society that values its religion and cultural heritage. The Ben Ali regime began to recognize this, and attempted to "Islamize" society and use religion to support government policies.<sup>32</sup> This "Official" or "Popular" Islam was designed to counter the extremist/terrorist threat by

preaching the values of moderation and tolerance, and at the same time claiming Tunisians' Islamic identity, which was denied by past regimes.<sup>33</sup>

One manifestation of this is Radio Zeytouna, a religious radio station established in 2009 by the Ben Ali government as a counterweight to Islamist satellite networks. Zeytouna's content is popular with the public, and it has a good audience base. In the last several years, the government also opened Koranic schools in wealthy neighborhoods in Tunis and established Islamic banks.<sup>34</sup> The Ben Ali regime, during its tenure, tried to project an image that was both pro-Islam and anti-Islamist—"pro-religious, but modern at the same time."<sup>35</sup> This actually resonated with most Tunisians, who recognized that this "official Islam" was aimed at bolstering the state but preferred it to both the anti-Islam secularism of the Bourguiba era and the extremism of the radicals.

The course of Tunisian development since independence has not been characterized by social polarization or identity politics. Tunisians tend to be moderate in their views and behavior, a characteristic that inhibits the ability of Islamists to exploit the socio-political situation. This moderation may be partially attributed to three factors of Tunisia's modern history:

First, Tunisia's colonial and liberation experiences were not marked by extensive violence. Bourguiba, supported by the public, set a moderate course at the very inception of the independence movement and followed through with it after the French left the region. Guerrilla warfare and terrorism did not characterize the struggle, and there were no violent purges and settling of accounts among the victors of the sort that led to continued crisis and near-civil war in neighboring Algeria. Tunisians viewed with horror the disaster that Algeria experienced in the 1990s, and the government is fond of pointing out that a similar catastrophe could befall Tunisia in the future should Islamists be granted political quarter. The prospect is sufficiently feared by a great many ordinary Tunisians, so much so that the regime does not need to expend much effort convincing the citizenry that Islamism must be constrained.



Second, sound economic decisions by the government and the creation of such rural development organizations as the Tunisian National Solidarity Fund have created a large middle class and a high percentage of home ownership. About four percent of Tunisia's population now lives below the poverty line (one-third that of Morocco and one-fifth that of Egypt). Unemployment is about 14 percent, which is high but in line with the rest of the Maghreb.<sup>36</sup> But relative prosperity as reflected in economic statistics was insufficient to prevent upheaval; the Jasmine Revolution was not about bread and jobs alone, but about dignity and the state's relationship with the people. A stroll along Avenue Habib Bourguiba in downtown Tunis is sufficient to reveal the extent of the unemployment or underemployment of young men. Without employment and the means to support a family, these young men cannot marry, start a family, and fully participate in society. Frustration is the result, and a portion of frustrated youth, albeit a very small one, is attracted to the fringes of society, including radical Islamism. This is not new, and there have been violent economic protests since the late 1970s spearheaded by the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), most recently by miners in the southern interior. Early on, the Islamists (MTI) realized that they could not offer the people any message that was not already provided by the government, which had moved to address the workers' concerns. Later, the MTI tried to attract labor support by talking about the "Islamic virtues" of trade unions, but even when *al-Nahda* tried to infiltrate the UGTT by putting up candidates for union elections, they attracted the support of no more than 10 percent of UGTT membership.<sup>37</sup>

The young men are still there on Avenue Habib Bourguiba, although their mood is different since January 14th. How long their mood remains positive will depend on how the new order will address their problems. However, it is clear from the past, and appears to remain so today, that Tunisians do not look to Islam or Islamists to solve their economic woes—rather, they see economic frustrations as a problem the government must fix.

Finally, a very efficient security apparatus made sure that the oppor-

tunities for collective protest and potential rebellion were strictly limited. In the mid-1970s, many felt that if popular unrest against the regime were to occur, it would first break out in soccer stadiums, the one place where Tunisians could gather in large numbers and express themselves. One could argue that the stadium can easily be replaced by the mosque as a forum for dissent; while this certainly has been true elsewhere, Tunisian mosques, at least under Ben Ali, were locked except for prayer times, Friday sermons were scripted and anodyne, and the clergy was tightly controlled.

Additionally, Tunisia is an unusually homogenous country for its neighborhood. Ninety-eight percent of the population is Sunni Muslim.<sup>38</sup> Shi'ites number perhaps in the thousands, mostly converts following the 1979 Iranian Revolution.<sup>39</sup> There is a small Jewish community concentrated on the island of Djerba, and there are virtually no indigenous Christians in the country. While there are differences between Arabs and Berbers, ethnicity is not a significant factor, and no “identity politics” exist to fuel conflict and instability. Nor is there a large socio-economic gulf between rich and poor to create tensions. As a result of some very sound economic decisions by the government, Tunisia has developed an expansive middle class, and a very large percentage of Tunisians have a stake in the system. There is a geographical “have/have not” gap in that the southern interior has not been a focus of development; most dissident movements, including the Islamists, have originated from this region, and it was obviously the cradle of the Jasmine Revolution. Equitable distribution of wealth to all regions remains an important issue, especially after the revelations of Ben Ali family corruption, and a number of Tunisians have advocated renationalizing businesses to ensure fairness.<sup>40</sup>

Although Islamists and *Al-Nahda* have failed over the years to gain the active support of the public, there is sympathy for the vision expressed by the movement—that is, political and economic reform and living by Islamic principles. Most Tunisians do not appear to consider Ghannouchi and other Islamists as leaders to be followed, but rather simply people who express an appealing vision.<sup>41</sup> Many of those who join the movement do not necessarily support the

establishment of an Islamic regime.<sup>42</sup> Tunisians do not like violent transition, but they do believe in good governance, freedoms, and rule of law. They are very protective of their *acquis* (patrimony: the shared cultural, political, social, legal experiences) which they believe distinguishes them from their neighbors. Because of this, any political or religious movement that wants to play a role will have to preserve and improve these values, and not reject or destroy them. Therefore, a call for an “Islamic Republic” will have no standing in Tunisia. Most Islamists realize this, which is why *al-Nahda* moderated its discourse and its strategy to cope with the moderate nature and modern expectations of Tunisian society.<sup>43</sup> For *al-Nahda* to participate in political life, it must accept the framework of the national state, agree to safeguard the Tunisian tradition of modernization, and adopt progressive attitudes toward Tunisia’s Arab and Islamic identities.<sup>44</sup> *Al-Nahda’s* expressed rejection of the Ben Ali regime, and not its Islamic principles, gave the group what appeal it had. It, like other heretofore suppressed opposition groups, now must sell its message to a public suddenly faced with a plethora of alternatives.

Even if Islamism in Tunisia does not seriously threaten the state or the society, Tunisian Islamists are a threat to other countries and societies. Maghrebis, escaping from the frustration and social and economic despair they feel at home, are well-represented in the ranks of the *jihads* in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which AQIM has served as a recruiting office. Tunisian youths, however, tend to be recruited into *jihadist* groups in Europe, where they have migrated, legally or otherwise. Their radicalism and decision to act may be rooted in Tunisian socio-economic-political issues, but have been refined and given momentum by their often negative experiences as expatriates in Europe.<sup>45</sup> Cut off from their real community back home, many are attracted to the virtual community of *jihadist* websites and are drawn into extremist groups that promise to provide fulfillment in Iraq or Afghanistan. A number of Tunisians have been arrested in those countries, as well as in Syria and Europe, for their participation in terrorist plots or actual operations. Many have been extradited to Tunisia, where they are tried and imprisoned.

Even much of the extremist violence that occurs in Tunisia itself has an external dimension. Extremism began later in Tunisia than elsewhere in the Maghreb, and it appears that the extremism of recent years did not arise domestically, but rather was imported (or perhaps more accurately, repatriated) from Tunisian radicals residing in Europe.<sup>46</sup>

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Habib Bourguiba, the hero of the liberation and president between 1956 and 1987 (his popular title was *al-Mujahid al-Akbar*, “the greatest combatant”) dominated the country through force of personality and an efficient political party structure organized down to the lowest grassroots. He made an early decision to devote the country’s energies and limited resources to social modernization and economic growth and not to democracy and political development.

Bourguiba steadily consolidated government control over political life in order to avoid the chaos and serial *coups d’etat* that characterized much of the Arab and African post-colonial experience. The Tunisian people essentially shared this objective and acquiesced to extensive limitations on political participation. Bourguiba’s politics were strictly secular, and he insisted that the country would be also. He ignored the country’s Arab/Islamic history and connected modern Tunisia to a pre-Islamic past—its Carthaginian heritage—while simultaneously secularizing the state and weakening traditional Islamic institutions.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, his regime embarked upon an economic and social development program based on a socialist model. This model failed and the government changed course; the eventual result was impressive economic performance and very progressive social programs involving public education and literacy, economic mobility, and the position of women in society.

The process of tightening regime control accelerated after the 1987 “palace coup” by Ben Ali, who maintained that no accommodation with Islamists was possible, and considered Islamism to be a disease against which the public must be “inoculated.” The country’s 2003 anti-terrorism law allowed the jailing of those threatening national security. It was used almost exclusively against Islamists, primarily

Islamist-leaning youths using the Internet “illegally” (i.e., blogging or visiting *jihadist* websites.)<sup>48</sup> The pre-January 14th state of affairs in Tunisia was one of comprehensive government domination of the public space and virtually all political activity—not just that of Islamists, but of all potential opposition groups. The Ministry of Interior and Local Development had full power and authority over civil associations and decided at will to register them or not. Without being officially registered, independent associations were not legal entities and could not establish offices, hire employees, raise funds, and conduct their activities.<sup>49</sup> North Africa scholar Kristina Kausch noted that “all truly independent organizations [in Tunisia] that work on issues related to human rights and democracy are denied legal recognition, operate under serious financial, organizational, and personal constraints, and are placed in constant confrontation with the regime.”<sup>50</sup> The resulting lack of institutional experience will affect the ability of political groups to organize themselves to compete in elections. Under the current constitution, Islam is the state religion, but it has been a government-controlled version of the religion since independence. The state controlled mosque construction, sermon content, religious education, and appointment and remuneration of *imams*. While these constraints have been relaxed by the interim government, *imams* will not necessarily have *carte blanche* to speak out. When several *imams* delivered uncensored Friday sermons attacking politicians such as the outgoing interim Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated: “In the event of too many excesses, then measures will be taken. Mosques are not meant to be venues for defamation and personal attacks. An *imam* is not a judge, and the law is above all.”<sup>51</sup>

More than 40 legal political parties now exist and are eligible to compete in elections, the first of which will occur on July 24th to elect the National Constituent Assembly, which in turn will draft a new constitution and guide the country to as yet unscheduled parliamentary and presidential elections. How this council will be elected and whether political parties will play a role in both the electoral process and the council’s internal organization and processes remains unclear. A “higher court for the achievement of the

objectives of the revolution, political reform and democratic transition,” appointed by the interim government, has promulgated a new electoral procedures law governing the July 24th election. This group decided that the members of the Constituent Assembly will be elected under a one-ballot majority system as opposed to proportional representation based on party lists or a two-ballot majority (run-off) system.

This decision will have a major impact on the trajectory of Tunisian politics and of political Islam, as it favors strong parties but also encourages weaker parties to form electoral coalitions. If the new law permits successful parties to establish blocs within the Constituent Assembly, and if the assembly’s decisions are majority or plurality-based, then a dominant party or coalition could essentially draft the new constitution (adoption of which, it should be said, will be put to a national referendum.) A new interim government will be drawn from the elected assembly, so a dominant party could also form the country’s temporary executive. *Al-Nahda* is, at least hypothetically, in the best position to do well—as mentioned above, the party could score 30 to 40 percent of the votes. Tunisians are worried about this, and, as one expressed it, don’t want the Islamists to “hijack the mood of the people.”<sup>52</sup> Many, however, are equally worried about fringe parties on the left, and specifically single out the Communists.<sup>53</sup>

While the Jasmine Revolution has shaken off the old regime, Tunisians have not rejected the secular nature of the state and the society and in general are not predisposed to religious or political Islamism. A vigorous public debate on religion and politics—a taboo subject under the Ben Ali regime—is ongoing, and it is clear that it would not at all be easy for Islamists to hijack the revolution outside the electoral process, if they chose to try. *Al-Nahda’s* electoral fortunes will rest in large measure on the ability of competing parties to offer the voters a compelling vision of Tunisia’s future.

## ENDNOTES

- [1] Alaya Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation, 1980-2008," *Journal of North African Studies* 14, no 2 (June 2009), 258.
- [2] Christopher Alexander, "Opportunities, Organizations, and Ideas: Islamists and Workers in Tunisia and Algeria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000), 465-490, 466.
- [3] Jennifer Noyon, *Islam, Politics, and Pluralism: Theory and Practice in Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia, and Algeria* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003), 100.
- [4] Alexander, "Opportunities, Organizations, and Ideas: Islamists and Workers in Tunisia and Algeria."
- [5] Susan Walsh, "Islamist Appeal in Tunisia," *Middle East Journal* 40, no.4 (Autumn 1986), 652.
- [6] *Ibid.*, 653.
- [7] *Ibidem.*
- [8] *Ibidem*, 657.
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- [11] Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 190.
- [12] Noyon, *Islam, Politics, and Pluralism*, 103.
- [13] Author's correspondence with Tunisian academic and lawyer, September 2009.
- [14] Noyon, *Islam, Politics, and Pluralism*, 99.
- [15] Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 107.
- [16] Noyon, *Islam, Politics, and Pluralism*, 101
- [17] As cited in John L. Esposito and Francois Burgat, eds. *Modernizing Islam* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 78.
- [18] Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia*, 109.
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- [20] Al-Munji Al-Suaydani, "Ennahda Movement Leader Talks to Asharq Al-Awsat," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), February 7, 2011, <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=24070>.
- [21] Walsh, "Islamist Appeal in Tunisia," 656.
- [22] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation, 1980-2008," 266.
- [23] Author's discussions with civil society figures and officials in Tunis, March 10-12, 2011.
- [24] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation, 1980-2008," 258.
- [25] Interview with Tahrir spokesman Ridha Belhaj, *Assarib* (Tunis), March 11, 2011.
- [26] *Ibid.*

- [27] Belhaj interview with Al-Jazeera Television, March 10, 2011.
- [28] Interview with an-Nahda official Abdelfattah Moro on Al-Jazeera Television, March 10, 2011.
- [29] *Assabah* (Menzah) daily, February 28, 2011.
- [30] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Appendix C: Background Information on Other Terrorist Groups," in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, April 2008), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/31947.pdf>.
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- [34] Kausch, "Tunisia: The Life of Others," 20.
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- [36] "Tunisia," Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*, July 2010. Poverty line figure is 2005 est. Unemployment rate is 2009 est.
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- [38] This and other demographic statistics derived from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.
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- [44] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation, 1980-2008," 258.
- [45] Roberts, Address before the Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- [46] *Ibid.*
- [47] Noyon, *Islam, Politics, and Pluralism*, 96.
- [48] Roberts, Address before the Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- [49] Kausch, "Tunisia: The Life of Others," 9.



[50] Ibid., 5.

[51] Quoted in *Al-Musawwar* (Cairo), March 7, 2011.

[52] Author's discussions with civil society figures and officials in Tunis, March 10-12, 2011.

[53] Ibid.