

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Tunisia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>-4</td> <td>-4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">23</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">Yes</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	-4	-4	0	<b>Democ:</b>	1	1	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	5	5	0	<b>Durable:</b>	23			<b>Tentative:</b>	Yes			
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SCODE	<b>TUN</b>	CCODE	<b>616</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 June 2011</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	1	4	2	3	3																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date	7 November 1987		Begin Date	8 November 1987																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	1959 (1988)																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	Acting President Fouad M'Bazaa; appointed as president of interim government, 15 January 2011 Prime Minister Beji Caid el Sebsi, appointed by the Acting President, 27 February 2011																								
<b>Legislature</b>	Bicameral: Chamber of Deputies (189 seats; directly elected, 20% of all seats allocated to opposition parties; most recent elections, 25 October 2009; parliament was dissolved by President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011; elections for a Constituent Assembly are scheduled for 23 October 2011) Chamber of Advisors (126 seats; 85 members elected by municipal counselors, deputies, mayors, and professional associations and trade unions; 41 members are presidential appointees; most recent elections 3 July 2005; also dissolved by President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011)																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Court of Cassation																								

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)**

In the 1930s, a campaign for independence led by the New Constitution Party began in Tunisia. Since independence, Tunisia has had only two leaders. In 1957 the Constitutional Assembly abolished the Tunisian monarchy and established a republic; Habib Bourguiba, the founder and leader of the New

<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Constitution Party, was elected the country's first prime minister. The 1959 constitution established a presidential system with Bourguiba as president. Bourguiba quickly consolidated power in the party, making it the sole legal party in 1963. In 1964, the name of the party was changed to the Socialist Constitution Party (PSD) and Bourguiba was declared president for life. The current president, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali gained executive office after Bourguiba was declared unfit for office by a council of physicians in November 1987. In 1988, the name of the party was changed to the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) to reflect Ben Ali's new platform of democratic reform.

Ben Ali was twice elected as president (1989 and 1994) while being the sole registered candidate. In 1999, "multi-party" elections were held with three registered candidates, but Ben Ali took over 99% of the vote. The Constitution presently requires that presidential candidates secure endorsement by 30 legislators or mayors, virtually all of whom belong to the RCD, thus effectively precluding non-RCD candidates from winning. In May 2002, the country's first ever referendum was held; voters overwhelmingly approved numerous changes to the constitution, including canceling the limit on presidential terms, extending the age limit for candidates to 75, and granting former presidents lifelong judicial immunity. The referendum also approved the establishment of a second legislative body, a Chamber of Advisors to complement the current Chamber of Deputies. Opponents claimed that the referendum was aimed solely at allowing President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to stay in power practically for life. Ben Ali was once again reelected with over 90% of the vote in presidential elections held in October 2004. While the 2004 election was deemed to be "better than the last," nonetheless, it remained seriously flawed. Ben Ali was reelected again in October 2009, again, with nearly 90% of the vote.

Anti-government protests ignited across Tunisia following the public, self-immolation of a destitute fruit vendor on 17 December 2010 whose goods had been seized and destroyed by police. The protests began in Sidi Bouzid and quickly spread to the capital city, Tunis. Although the protesters comprising the "jasmine revolution" numbered only in the thousands, scores of protesters were killed in confrontations with police; however, after the head of the Tunisia Army, Gen. Rachid Ammar, refused to deploy troops to support the regime, President Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January 2011. Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi briefly claimed succession to the presidency. On 15 January 2011, the Constitutional Council issued its opinion that the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Fouad M'Bazaa, be appointed Acting President until elections could be held; M'Bazaa assumed office on that day. Ghannouchi resigned as prime minister in February 2011 and was replaced on 27 February 2011 by Beji Caid el Sebsi. On 3 March 2011, the Acting President announced that elections to a Constituent Assembly would be held on 24 July 2011, later postponed to 23 October 2011.

#### **Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)**

The president serves as head of state and head of the government and appoints a prime minister, a Cabinet, and 23 regional governors. He exercises a broad range of powers, including the authority to enact laws by decree when the legislature is not in session and to appoint all civil and military officials. The president is also the supreme commander of the armed forces. The president and the Assembly concurrently initiate laws, but any laws presented by the president get priority. Most importantly, the National Assembly is dominated by the president's party. Under the terms of a 1988 constitutional amendment, however, a small proportion of seats were reserved for the opposition (presently 37 seats). Despite these cosmetic changes to the National Assembly, legislation almost never originates from the Chamber of Deputies and bills passed down from the executive usually pass with only minor changes. The prime minister and the cabinet ministers provide more of a restraint on the president than does the docile legislature. The judiciary is formally independent but, in fact, is strongly influenced by the executive branch, particularly in sensitive political cases.

#### **Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)**

Tunisia has an authoritarian government with a highly circumscribed electoral system. Political parties, other than the ruling party, were prohibited from 1963 to 1981 and have remained highly restricted since that time. The 1988 constitutional amendments instituted a multiparty electoral system but parties organized on the basis of religion, region, race, or language were forbidden. President Bourguiba had long viewed religious-based political movements as a threat to a modern Tunisian state and had actively sought to restrict their political space. While his successor, Ben Ali, initially provided more political space for Islamist organizations to operate openly, he later clamped down on these organizations. In 1991, An

Nahda, an Islamist opposition group, was outlawed and labeled a terrorist organization. Thousands of party members were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the government.

The ruling RCD party, which has held power since 1957, is firmly intertwined with government institutions all over the country. This significantly restricts the opposition's access to governmental institutions and their ability to compete fairly. Opposition parties boycotted 1989 and 1991 elections, but four opposition parties were involved in the 1994 legislative elections (and allowed 17 seats). In both the 1999 and 2004 elections, opposition parties were generally given more freedom to campaign than ever before; still, the campaigns and election processes greatly favored the ruling party. Although the government has begun to allow a greater diversity of views in the media, it still resorts to harassment and persecution of opposition journalists. Despite the factional/restricted nature of politics of this country, Tunisia is widely regarded as one of the most peaceful countries in Africa.

Following President Ben Ali's flight into exile on 14 January 2011, the (former) ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) was dissolved by court order on 9 March 2011; ten thousand members of the former ruling RCD were banned from running in the Constituent Assembly elections scheduled to be held 23 October 2011.