



The Tunisian Revolution

Background Guide



EagleMUNC

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Introduction

Letter from the Chair:

Greetings Delegates!

It is my pleasure to welcome you to EagleMUNC VIII and to the Tunisian Revolution. I am Grant Stephano, a Sophomore at Boston College and your chair for the Tunisian Revolution. This is my second year at EagleMUNC; last year I was the co-chair for the Safavid Empire. I was involved in Model UN in High School and still compete as part of Boston College's Collegiate Model UN Club as well. I am from outside of Philadelphia (go Eagles) and also was part of my school's Vex Robotics team and Red Cross Club. At Boston College I am double majoring in Economics and Political Science with a minor in accounting and am very interested in getting involved with politics. Without further ado, I am extremely excited to get into our committee for this year.

Throughout our weekend together we will explore the chaotic turmoil of the Tunisian Revolution in late 2010 into early 2011. This was the beginning of the Arab Spring, as well as the only successful venture in bringing about democracy and liberalism during this region-wide moment in history. Representing politicians, activists, and Tunisian thought-leaders, your timeline will begin on December 17, 2011, the day of F's self-immolation. You will be set with the difficult task of not only bringing about a revolution and overthrowing the corrupt Ben Ali government, but also ensuring that the principles you fight for are enshrined in a constitution and become ideals that shape current and future Governments. The most difficult part of securing Liberty is

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holding on to it and I cannot wait to see how you approach this most fundamental question.

I eagerly await the conference in March and meeting all of you freedom-fighters. If you have any questions about your research, the topic or anything else, feel free to contact me.

P.S.: I recommend using French/Arabic sources for some of the lesser known politicians to the English-speaking world, although you will have to google translate the pages to English.

Signed,

Grant Stephano

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Historical Background

North Africa, especially Tunisia, had long been the envy of Empires from all across the world. Tunisia's long history of foreign influence began in 813 BCE with the founding of the colony of Carthage¹ by the Phoenicians and later conquest by the Romans. Later, Caliphate rule in the Maghreb (East and Central North African desert), Spanish and Portuguese vying for influence in the 15th century, Ottoman dominion in the 17th century, and finally French Imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries² dominated much of Tunisian history.

By 1956, Tunisia had achieved independence under the rule of President Bourguiba. A secular pragmatist, he was a crucial member of the non-aligned movement³ (refusal to subscribe to United States or Soviet Union alliance throughout the Cold War). He strove to help decolonize the rest of Africa as well as non-African colonized sectors of the world, while keeping good relations with both First and Second world powers. At home, Bourguiba's Neo-Destour party won all 90 seats of the parliament, giving him complete control of the country. He used this opportunity to implement socialist policies by nationalizing large swaths of the Tunisian economy, including materials such as iron, oil, glass and steel, sugar, farm cooperatives, and manufacturing facilities such as car and tractor factories⁴. By the '80s, economic success

¹ Mark, Joshua. "Carthage." Ancient History Encyclopedia. <https://www.ancient.eu/carthage/>.

² N. Tanriverdi and N. Tanriverdi. "Background of Tunisian Revolution." Academia.edu. Accessed July 16, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/1144712/Background_of_Tunisian_Revolution.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

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had cooled and Islamic pressure had begun building. In response to these forces, Bourguiba became increasingly authoritarian, cracking down on the Islamic movement by banning public Islamic symbols, such as veils, praying during work hours, and beards for taxi drivers⁵. Many Islamic leaders became political prisoners at this time as well. He also softened his stance on socialism, looking instead to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank for help restructuring his economy and with growing Tunisian government debt.⁶ Tunisia walked a middle ground between a number of opposing forces: securing trade deals with both the Western and Communist powers; implementing statist policies domestically, while remaining out of the USSR grasp and maintaining friendly relations with western powers; recognizing the Islamic history of North Africa while remaining secular; as well as remaining mostly neutral between Israeli and Palestinian conflicts.⁷

Economic restructuring could not come quick enough to his struggling country. As Bourguiba grew ill, General and Prime Minister Ben Ali used the opportunity to oust the aging President in a bloodless palace coup.⁸ Ben Ali initially allowed Islam to take a more prominent place in public life and freed many Islamic Politicians and activists from jail. A similar situation occurred with the electoral process. Free elections were promised and elections were held. Ben Ali's party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), was created as the new version of the old Neo-Destour Party and won the majority of votes

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Emma Murphy, "Habib Bourguiba." Encyclopædia Britannica. April 02, 2019. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Habib-Bourguiba>.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ "Profile: Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali." BBC News. June 20, 2011. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12196679>.

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in 1989. Due to Tunisian Election Law, the party that wins the most votes was given an absolute majority, including every single seat in parliament. This was de facto institutionalized gerrymandering.⁹ This new liberal face of Tunisia would not last for long. Ben Ali feared the amount of votes received by the opposition, especially the Islamic EnNahda Party, and began to crack down immediately on political opponents. EnNahda and the secular Republican Congress party were banned with many of their prominent members either fleeing to Europe or being arrested. The remaining political parties were given more leeway, and opposition parties were given more seats in parliament.¹⁰ While these parties were legitimately independent from Ben Ali, they did not oppose him too strongly for fear of retribution. During times of crisis it was important to understand if these groups would remain somewhat loyal to Ben Ali or if they would jump ship if another opportunity presented itself.

Ben Ali continued to grow his control over the country. After winning the first two presidential elections in 1989 and 1994, the constitution was changed in 1998 to allow himself a third term, which he won in 1999. Ben Ali launched a constitutional referendum in 2002 to remove term limits from the presidency, allowing him to run for a fourth term. The government reported that the referendum overwhelmingly passed with a suspicious

⁹ Nebahat Tanrıverdi O.Yaşar, "Background of Tunisian Revolution." Accessed August 23, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/1144712/Background_of_Tunisian_Revolution.

¹⁰ Ibid

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99% of the vote.¹¹ He was elected to two more terms, winning each one with around 90% of the vote.¹²

While Ben Ali did rule in a time of economic growth and increasing opportunities for women, such as electing over 20 women to the legislature and giving women progressive rights scarcely found in the Middle East¹³, corruption and unemployment took a heavy toll. This large-scale unemployment was mostly concentrated among the youth, who found Ben Ali increasingly corrupt. These unemployed youth served as a potential source of unrest. Protests and political demonstrations were heavily repressed by the government, who ignored the cries of condemnation from human rights groups.¹⁴ With a large populace of angry unemployed youth, the stage had been set for revolution.

¹¹ "27. Tunisia (1956-Present)." Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/middle-eastnorth-africapersian-gulf-region/tunisia-1956-present/>.

¹² "Profile: Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali." BBC News, June 20, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12196679>.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

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Topic 1: Underlying Sentiments Against Ben Ali

Ben Ali did not begin his political career as a cartoon-like dictator. Under Ben Ali, Tunisia became the first country to work with the European Union under the Barcelona Declaration in 1995 due to their economic success and higher level of civil rights compared to others in the region.¹⁵ Tunisia set itself apart two years prior, when Ben Ali passed a law that “granted women greater child custody rights in the event of a divorce and removed a clause from the PSC which stipulated that women must obey their husbands. Wage discrimination in agricultural work was legally abolished, mothers gained the right to pass nationality onto their children with the father’s approval, and the government set up a fund to assist needy divorced women and their children.”¹⁶ While this was great progress for the region, many now criticize Ben Ali on the grounds that his fight for women’s rights was merely a ploy in order to build up support against Islamic leaders who challenged his rule.¹⁷ Yet, economic troubles and civil liberty violations quelled any support for Ben Ali. In a leaked US embassy Cable from 2009, United States foreign policy personal wrote:

The problem is clear: Tunisia has been ruled by the same President for 22 years. He has no successor. And, while President Ben Ali deserves credit for continuing many of the progressive policies of President Bourguiba, he and his regime have

¹⁵“Barcelona Declaration,” n.d., 17.

¹⁶ Monica Marks, “Tunisian Womens’ Rights before and after the Revolution (2013).” Nouri Gana (Ed.), *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution: Contexts, Architects, Prospects* (Pp. 224-251). Accessed August 23, 2019.

https://www.academia.edu/5192899/Tunisian_Womens_Rights_before_and_after_the_Revolution_2013

¹⁷ Ibid

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lost touch with the Tunisian people. They tolerate no advice or criticism, whether domestic or international. Increasingly, they rely on the police for control and focus on preserving power. And, corruption in the inner circle is growing. Even average Tunisians are now keenly aware of it, and the chorus of complaints is rising. Tunisians intensely dislike, even hate, First Lady Leila Trabelsi and her family. In private, regime opponents mock her; even those close to the government express dismay at her reported behavior. Meanwhile, anger is growing at Tunisia's high unemployment and regional inequities. As a consequence, the risks to the regime's long-term stability are increasing.

This quote broke the airwaves on December 7, 2011, just days before the start of our committee. It reinforced long-held beliefs of the Tunisian people that the success they had gained under Ben Ali's rule was not worth the lack of civil liberties, especially as they faced economic hardship after the 2008 recession. This was exacerbated when stories of the immense wealth held by Ben Ali's son-in-law surfaced. While only 28, he was involved in conducting foreign policy and the head of numerous companies in the shipping, manufacturing, and pharmaceutical industries.¹⁸ This corruption and opulence of wealth was another slap in the face to the 13% of the populace that was unemployed.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ian Black and Middle East editor. "WikiLeaks Cables: Tunisia Blocks Site Reporting 'hatred' of First Lady." *The Guardian*, December 7, 2010, sec. World news.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/07/wikileaks-tunisia-first-lady>.

¹⁹ "Tunisian Economy: Background to Revolution." *Tunisiaweekly* (blog), February 4, 2012.

<https://tunisiaweekly.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/hello-world/>.

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Prior to this period in time, protests had been rare²⁰ as just enough progress was combined with fear of retribution in a formula that kept Tunisians off the streets. The only exception came in 2008 when the Gafsa region of Tunisia erupted in protests when it was revealed how much nepotism was present in the granting of mining contracts.²¹ These protests were managed and planned by a coordination of Human Rights groups, politicians, and unionists²². Ultimately, the government cracked down on them with enough force that the protests sputtered out and did not spread any further. This tight crackdown on any form of protest or dissent had suffocated the political will from the people and had lead to a learned helplessness among the populace.

Topic 2: Civil Liberties

Civil Liberties have never been a feature of Tunisian political life. Despite promises of Ben Ali early on in his presidency, the state of affairs did not improve. Over the most recent ten years of his presidency from 2000 to 2010, Tunisia's average Freedom House score, which measures countries on political freedoms and civil liberties, steadily declined from 16.5/21 to 18/21²³, with higher scores being worse. Freedom House ranks countries using the criteria written in the United Nations Declarations of Human

²⁰ "Deadly Riots in Tunisia Shut Down Schools - CBS News." Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/deadly-riots-in-tunisia-shut-down-schools/>.

²¹ Avenue, Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700. "World Report 2012: Rights Trends in Before the Arab Spring, the Unseen Thaw." Human Rights Watch, January 22, 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/global-middle-east/north-africa>.

²² Ibid

²³ "Tunisia," January 12, 2012. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/tunisia>.

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Rights, with countries getting a point for every failure to meet criteria in the document.²⁴

Secret police brutalized dissenters and anyone who dared report on media contrary to the wishes of the government. In 2001, human rights groups held meetings for foreign press to explain the level of censorship and lack of media freedom.²⁵ By 2006, the meetings had closed up and Tunisian Journalists refused to publicly condemn censorship the way they had done just five years prior. The secret police had become so infamous for their indiscriminate arrests and 'disappearances' of both critics of the regime and their loved ones that condemnations of the government from the populace had been successfully silenced.

Tunisia employed a strange strategy when dealing with journalists, unlike many other dictatorships. Tunisia did not outright ban any independent media, and usually did not put any blanket ban on a specific media organization. Ben Ali even went so far to say that the media should feel free to speak openly about all politicians running during the 2009 election.²⁶ Instead, Ben Ali censored the media as a bully. Reporters who ran unfavorable stories about the government were beat up or monitored by the secret police. In more brazen attacks on human rights, dissenters were occasionally killed or arrested.²⁷ Incredibly strong and heavily enforced libel and defamation laws were used often to pursue criminal charges against enemies of Ben Ali.²⁸ With these actions in

²⁴ "Tunisia," January 12, 2012. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/tunisia>.

²⁵ "World Report 2012: Rights Trends in Before the Arab Spring, the Unseen Thaw." Human Rights Watch, January 22, 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/global-middle-east/north-africa>.

²⁶ "Tunisia," January 12, 2012. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/tunisia>.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

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place, Ben Ali did not have a strong official state-run media; instead, he relied on independent private media organizations who were bullied into supporting the regime for fear of retribution.²⁹

In accordance with the hampering of a free press, there was no rule of law in Tunisia. The executive had complete control over the judicial branch, giving him the ability to appoint and impeach any and all Judges.³⁰ Trial judges wielded arbitrary control over conviction and sentencing, often preventing the accused from having a fair trial, especially when the defendant was a political enemy. Torture was often employed by the police to get answers from civilians and forced confessions were commonly the sole source of evidence needed to convict an individual. Even after being released from prison, many former prisoners were heavily monitored and scrutinized. Occasionally, individuals found not guilty were still watched by the police.

Religious freedom is one area of civil liberties that outsiders would certainly find strange. The country is 99% Sunni Muslim with the other one percent of the populace consisting mostly of Jews and Christians.³¹ These minority groups are allowed relatively large amounts of religious freedom, except for the fact that Christians are prevented from building more churches.³² It is actually the Muslim faith that has more restrictions

²⁹Fatima el-Issawi, "Tunisian Media in Transition." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/07/10/tunisian-media-in-transition-pub-48817>.

³⁰"World Report 2012: Rights Trends in Before the Arab Spring, the Unseen Thaw." Human Rights Watch, January 22, 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/global-middle-east/north-africa>.

³¹"Tunisia Demographics Profile 2018." Accessed August 23, 2019. https://www.indexmundi.com/tunisia/demographics_profile.html.

³²"Tunisia," January 12, 2012. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/tunisia>.

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placed upon it. In order to prevent Islamic extremists from gaining a foothold in Tunisia, independent mosques are banned. All mosques are run by and paid for by the state, who also employs all imams.³³ Mosques are exclusively allowed to be open during prayer hours and are prevented from hosting any other activities or meetings. Headscarves such as the hijab are banned³⁴, as are other forms of sectarian dress.

As our Revolutionaries in committee strive to overturn the Ben Ali government and rule during the difficult time of transition, it will be important to balance national security concerns with civic freedoms. While all opposition leaders, formal or others, have spoken out against the degree of civil rights violations, long standing powerful individuals have backtracked on those statements somewhat after coming into power. Nidaa Tounes and Enhadha, after coming into power in 2014, passed an anti-terrorism law in 2015 that many NGOs and members of the opposition parties pushed back on and declaimed as draconian.³⁵

Topic 3: The Transfer of Power

With respect to other African or Middle Eastern Countries, Tunisia has had a relatively bloodless history of transitions of rule. The French and Neo-Destour party leaders negotiated independence from France, and while there were deaths during times of riots³⁶, no battles occurred between the French and Tunisian Revolutionaries. Tunisia

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Mohammad Al-Hamroni, "Hijab Ban Debate Heats up in Tunisia", Islam Online. Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://archive.islamonline.net/?p=15521>.

³⁵ "Tunisia: NGOs Contest the Anti-Terrorism Law 2015 | Africanews." Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.africanews.com/2017/02/03/tunisia-ngos-contest-the-anti-terrorism-law-2015/>.

³⁶ "Tunisian War of Independence | the Polynational War Memorial." Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.war-memorial.net/Tunisian-war-of-Independence-3.105>.

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came under the influence of France in 1881 after signing a treaty with the French government following the loss of influence of the Ottoman empire in the region. Due to the fact that Tunisia had accepted France as the overlord of the region without war, Tunisia became more of a vassal than as a part of France itself.³⁷ While the French helped reform the judicial system and created a stronger bureaucracy, the Tunisian Protectorate maintained the same form of government that it had as a semi-autonomous region of The Ottoman Empire. The Bey, the hereditary governor of the region, remained the absolute ruler³⁸; he was allowed to appoint his own Tunisian ministers and run the country as he saw fit, although the French Resident General possessed the ultimate authority to make decisions and override any action taken by the Bey.

The Destour party (Constitutional Liberal Party) was slowly created out of a handful of French-educated Tunisian independence groups in the early 20th century, with the central group being the Young Tunisians. The Destour party fought for more autonomy for the Tunisian region and also hoped to extend the rights of French citizens to Tunisia.³⁹ After leadership crises and a failure to properly implement reforms, the younger less elitist branch of the party transformed the group into a mass movement, and created the Neo-Destour Party in 1934.⁴⁰ This new party reached larger audiences and eventually became a movement much more willing to get its hands dirty. By the

³⁷ "Tunisia - The Protectorate (1881–1956)." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tunisia>.

³⁸ "Bey | Turkish Title." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/bey>.

³⁹ Clement Henry Moore, "The Neo-Destour Party of Tunisia: A Structure for Democracy?" *World Politics* 14, no. 3 (1962): 461–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009363>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

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1950s, The Neo-Destour party had helped plan protests, seeing many of its leaders frequently imprisoned. While not officially in power, the Neo-Destour Party had power equivalent to the officially ruling Bey. This led to an awkward three-way negotiation between the official government, the unofficial government and the French. The French government initially attempted to negotiate the Bey into signing a treaty which would give Tunisia more autonomy to quell unrest. This changed when the French accepted that the Neo-Destour party had more influence with the people than the official government. In 1954, the French began negotiating independence with the Neo-Destour party, specifically with the head of the party, a lawyer and future President Bourguiba. Simultaneously, the Bey desperately tried to work his way back into the negotiating room and tried to agree to the treaty he had previously disregarded. These negotiations were supposed to lead to an independent Tunisia under a constitutional monarchy, with the former Bey as monarch. Yet, as the country transitioned to independence, it was clear that the Bey had lost all power with the people, and Bourguiba was able to maneuver himself so that he controlled Tunisia and quickly abolished the monarchy before it even began.⁴¹

Decades later, the transfer of power during the palace coup saw Ben Ali seize power from Bourguiba without spilling a drop of blood. The President was old and sickly, and had lost his support among the people. Seeing this moment, former General and Prime Minister Ben Ali had a team of doctors declare Bourguiba unfit to rule and seized

⁴¹ Ibid

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power without any conflict,⁴² from the government or the people, primarily because both were looking for change. This history of power transfers without war has set a precedent for political change to be possible without coming out of the barrel of a gun. A revolutionary movement that attempts to solely use violence to achieve its political ambitions might find itself losing support with those hesitant to make the leap to kicking out Ben Ali. In order for government upheaval to be considered legitimate and win the support of the entire populace, this must not be forgotten. A political movement must govern what it has seized control of, and it cannot do so without widespread support.

Topic 4: Forms of Government

Since independence, Tunisia has had differences in its *de facto* (as is) and *de jure* (as in law) government types. While the Tunisian constitution, written in 1959, three years after independence, formally creates a Semi Presidential Parliamentary System with an independent judiciary⁴³, this has not been the case in practice. A Semi Presidential Parliamentary System in theory has an executive branch, the president, and an independent legislative branch, otherwise known as the parliament. The Parliament elects a prime minister who controls the majority of legislative power of the country while the President holds the majority of executive power, with some overlap. The balance of power between the two varies greatly from country to country.

⁴² Paul Legg, "Ben Ali's Smooth Rise to Power in Tunisia Contrasts with Sudden Decline." The Guardian, January 15, 2011, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/15/ben-ali-power-tunisia>.

⁴³ "WIPOLex." Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/7201>.

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Tunisia had a single legislative house, The Chamber of Deputies, until a second house, The Chamber of Advisors, was created by referendum in 2002.⁴⁴ In 2002 with the adaption of bicameralism, the Chamber of Deputies was demoted to the lower house. Bills were not allowed to originate from this house unless they did not change taxes or spending, severely limiting their legislative ability. The Chamber of Deputies had a fluid number of members, elected directly by the people, with 214 members being elected in 2009. Tunisia elected these members both proportionally and by using districts. After it was decided which party won the majority of seats by using the districts, a certain percentage of extra seats would be given to the opposition. This number changed over the course of Ben Ali's presidency, eventually reaching 20% of the total number of seats.⁴⁵ The Chamber of deputies initially had a voting age of 20 years, but was lowered to 18 in a referendum held in 2008.⁴⁶

The Chamber of Advisors, the upper house, had an entirely different electoral system. First, each governorate (analogous to a state in the US) holds a vote in which the members of the governorate local government vote to send either one or two individuals to the Chamber of Advisors. The number of Advisors sent is based on the size of the governorate, with the larger governorates sending two members. This is a similar process to how senators in the US were elected before the 17th Amendment to the Constitution of the US. Secondly, three different interest groups are allowed to send

⁴⁴ Op. cit., 42.

⁴⁵ "IPU PARLINE Database: TUNISIA (Majlis Al-Nuwab), Last Elections." Accessed August 26, 2019. http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2321_E.htm.

⁴⁶ Ibid

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their own members to the Chamber of Advisors. Employers, workers, and farmers each submit their own list, and an equal number of members are chosen from each of these groups so that the total number of interest group Advisors equal $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total Chamber of Advisors.⁴⁷ Thirdly, the rest of the members are appointed directly by the president. The number of Advisors hand-picked by the President is the number that will ensure that the Chamber of Advisors has $\frac{2}{3}$ the number of members of the Chamber of Deputies.⁴⁸

The powers of the Chamber of Advisors are more numerous than the Chamber of Deputies. Advisors are allowed to submit any form of bill to be voted on without the restrictions placed on the Deputies. However, bills are also allowed to be introduced by the president, which have precedence over any other motion by either chamber. This legislative power, combined with a strong majority, give the President a large amount of power to advance his or her legislative agenda. In practice, Ben Ali, and Bourguiba before him, completely controlled the legislative branch. Their party, The Democratic Constitutional Rally, would win huge majorities, and combined with the handpicked members of the Chamber of Advisors and the ability to initiate votes on bills, was able to rule unfettered.

While the Judiciary was *de jure* independent, this was not the *de facto* case. All levels of judges from the lowest to the highest court were picked directly by the President, without input from either of the two legislative houses. Without any ability for the opposition to stop corrupt judges from being appointed, the judicial system was full

⁴⁷ "WIPOLex." Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/7201>.

⁴⁸ Ibid

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of Ben Ali's political cronies. The Judiciary did not have the power of judicial review, or the ability to assess if laws were constitutional. Due to the lack of checks and balances in Tunisia, the president, whether it was Ben Ali or Bourguiba, ruled Tunisia as a dictator.

Topic 5: The Economy

The history of the Tunisian economy is that of a slow march towards a liberalized Western style market economy. After independence was achieved from France, former President Bourguiba engaged in a quasi-socialist economy in the 1960s. The Brookings Institute describes this system as "agricultural cooperatives, collectivism and state-led import substitution. Industrialization was state-led with the private sector playing a marginal role."⁴⁹ Under this system, there was accumulation of capital in heavy industry, but job growth remained stunted.⁵⁰ In an effort to create jobs for the increasing population, Bourguiba began to shift the economy towards an export focused economy in the 1970s. Heavy industry, such as steel production, water management, and electricity production remained in the hands of the state.⁵¹ Private industry grew and began focusing on tourism and textile manufacturing.⁵² The growth of the private sector during this period accelerated Tunisia's economy to growth rates averaging 7.5% per

⁴⁹ Ayadi, M. and Mattoussi, W. (2019). *Learning to compete: scoping of the Tunisian Revolution*. [online] Brookings.edu. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/L2C_WP17_Ayadi-and-Mattoussi-1.pdf.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

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year. At the same time, the government worked with private companies to encourage exports by facilitating the creation of export-focused firms and subsidized these companies through targeted tax breaks. On the other side of the equation, the Bourguiba regime put high tariffs on all goods coming into Tunisia in order to encourage the growth of domestic industry.⁵³

The late 70s brought economic downturn. The public sector still remained dominant, and prevented the growth of the private sector and consequently, the diversification of the economy that was desperately needed. Combined with soaring deficits from government spending, Tunisians found themselves with high unemployment and inflation.⁵⁴ Bourguiba reacted slowly to this economic downturn, wherein the economy was growing at a meager 1% year over year. This allowed resentment to build in Tunisia, especially among the educated unemployed youth.⁵⁵ It wasn't until 1986 that Bourguiba allowed for an economic restructuring program.⁵⁶ Under this program, foreign loan repayments from Tunisia would be relaxed in exchange for economic reform. Ultimately, economic success was too far down the line and Ben Ali used opinions of moment to peacefully overthrow Bourguiba in a coup.

The restructuring of the Tunisian economy called for “tariff reductions, quantitative restrictions on imports, the introduction of a value added tax, the reduction

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. (1986) *Prospects for Tunisia* (NIE 63-84).
<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00126R001101570007-8.pdf>

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ayadi, M. and Mattoussi, W. (2019). *Learning to compete: scoping of the Tunisian Revolution*. [online] Brookings.edu. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/L2C_WP17_Ayadi-and-Mattoussi-1.pdf [Accessed 14 Sep. 2019].

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in personal income taxes, the devaluation of the Tunisian Dinar [in exchange for] negotiations with creditors to extend the maturity on the country's US\$10 billion foreign debt."⁵⁷ It also led to the privatization of around 150 state owned enterprises.⁵⁸ The result of this change was an economic growth of 3% annually. The main benefits, however, came from a 2.5% deficit, substantially smaller than the previous 7.5%; and a decrease in inflation rates from 8% to 4%.⁵⁹

In the coming years of the 1990s to 2010, the economy was viewed as moderately successful. Growth averaged a steady 4.5%, with inflation and the deficit remaining at normal levels. Part of the success came from increased economic cooperation with both Arabic and European Nations. Tunisia slowly built up economic cooperation with the European Union, resulting in a Free Trade Agreement in 1998.⁶⁰ Tunisia also joined the WTO in 1995, allowing for easier trading with all members of the WTO, which encompasses nearly all of the globe.⁶¹ Easier ability to trade allowed for an influx of money into Tunisia, increasing foreign investment that led to a higher investment level of 5.1%.

However, the economic growth experienced in Tunisia was not evenly distributed. The youth and more inland areas of Tunisia did not reap the benefits of economic growth. During the 2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment was double the

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ "Tunisia - Trade - European Commission." Accessed August 26, 2019.

<https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/tunisia/>

⁶¹ "WTO | Tunisia - Member Information." Accessed August 26, 2019.

https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/tunisia_e.htm.

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prior average, and inland rural areas did not experience growth similar to coastal areas. Public sector investment in factories and large manufacturing were not present in southern or western rural areas, leading to even higher unemployment rates.⁶² These individuals, due to their lack of inclusion in the economic growth, found themselves increasingly in opposition to the Ben Ali regime.

Bloc Positions:

While Tunisian politics is far from simplistic, the most hot-button issue is the role of Islam in government and parties' stance on this matter is largely what distinguishes them from one another.⁶³ While Tunisia is thought of as the most secular Islamic nation, religious matters are far from being settled. While the majority of politicians and citizens agree there needs to be a separation of religion and state, there is disagreement on how to best execute this division. Some support retaining some aspects of religious influence, and others advocate for complete secularization. While most Tunisians do not support implementing separate Sharia courts for religious matters, as seen in other countries⁶⁴, many support implementing specific aspects of Islam into law, such as forbidding non-Muslim men from marrying Muslim women.⁶⁵ This question of how far secularism should go is the most dividing question between political organizations that are still in their

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Sarah Yerkes Yahmed and Ben Zeineb, "Tunisia's Political System: From Stagnation to Competition." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/28/tunisia-s-political-system-from-stagnation-to-competition-pub-78717>.

⁶⁴ "Islam: Governing Under Sharia." Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/islam-governing-under-sharia>.

⁶⁵ Alessandra Bocchi, "How Religiously Free Is the Arab World's Most Democratic Country?" alaraby. Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/8/29/lifting-the-veil-religious-freedoms-in-tunisia>.

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infancy and not yet well defined.⁶⁶ Another important question for political parties are what form of government they want to replace the Ben Ali regime with. All groups want a return to real democracy, but are divided on whether they should embrace a semi-presidential parliamentary republic such as in France, or a pure parliamentary system as in the United Kingdom.

The Islamic movement in Tunisia is called the EnNahda movement. Founded by Rachid Ghannouchi in 1981, the movement was banned under Ben Ali and Ghannouchi fled to Great Britain.⁶⁷ It remains the largest and only real Islamic movement in the country, but due to its big-tent status, its members have struggled to reach a consensus on how the movement defines an Islamic nation.⁶⁸

On the more secular end, the two largest movements are the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol). Both organizations are left-leaning, with CPR being the more centrist of the two, while Ettakatol has members ranging from Social Democrat to Socialist.⁶⁹ Both parties were founded around the turn of the century, but faced legal setbacks during the Ben Ali regime.⁷⁰ The CPR was banned in 2001 and the leader of Ettakatol was prevented from running for President in 2009. A smaller, centrist party led by Maya Jribi, known as the

⁶⁶ Op. cit., 63.

⁶⁷ Rory McCarthy, "How Tunisia's Ennahda Party Turned from Its Islamist Roots." Washington Post, May 23, 2016, sec. Monkey Cage. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/23/how-tunisia-ennahda-party-turned-from-their-islamist-roots/>.

⁶⁸ Op. cit., 63.

⁶⁹ Marina Ottaway. "The Tunisian Political Spectrum: Still Unbalanced." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/19/tunisian-political-spectrum-still-unbalanced-pub-48478>.

⁷⁰ Sam Bollier, "Who Are Tunisia's Political Parties?" Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/201110614579390256.html>.

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Progressive Democratic Party, was another legalized opposition party. It too faced harassment from police and boycotted the elections in 2004 and 2009.⁷¹

There exists a multitude of other, smaller organizations in Tunisia. Most of these groups are secular leftist/communist organizations with small support among the populace. They include but are not limited to: The Democratic Patriots' Unified Party, The Workers' Party, and the Social Democratic Path.⁷² Non-traditional independent groups also played a large role during the revolution. Bloggers such as Riadh Guerfali and Lina Ben Mhenni, Rapper El General, and media entrepreneur Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi influenced the protests in important ways by both sharing crucial details of corruption in the Ben Ali government and helping organize the protests through social media. All of these individuals would later go on to become involved in the political sphere. Other important groups such as the: Tunisia Human Rights League, Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts, Tunisian General Labour Union, and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers have historically worked to mobilize protests against Ben Ali and have been rewarded with political influence with groups opposed to his rule.

⁷¹ "Factbox: Major Parties in Tunisia's Parliamentary Election - Reuters." Accessed August 26, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-election-parties-factbox/factbox-major-parties-in-tunisia-parliamentary-election-idUSKCN0IEoRF20141025>.

⁷² "Tunisian Workers Party (Formerly Workers & Communist Party of Tunisia)." Observatorio Electoral. Accessed August 26, 2019. [/node/504?language=en](#).

Delegates and corresponding political organizations

Independent Outsiders:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. Rapper- | El General |
| 2. Blogger- | Lina Ben Mhenni |
| 3. Blogger- | Riadh Guerfali |
| 4. Blogger- | Amira Yahyaoui |

Independent Technocrats:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 5. Tunisia Human rights -
Moussa | Abdessattar Ben |
| 6. Tunisian Confederation of IT H- | Wided Bouchamaoui |
| 7. Tunisian General Labour Union- | Houcine Abassi |
| 8. Tunisian Order of Lawyers-
Mahfoudh | Mohamed Fadhel |
| 9. Interim Prime Minister 2 - | Mehdi Jomaa |

Religious Affiliated Politicians:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 10. First PM Enhadha- | Hamadi Jebali |
| 11. Second PM Enhadha- | Ali Laarayedh |
| 12. Leader of Enhadha- | Rached Ghannouchi |
| 13. Vice Presidentfor Enhadha-
Maïza | Meherzia Labidi |
| 14. Head Islamic Cleric Mufti | Hamda Saied |
| 15. Popular Petition leader-
Hamdi | Mohamed Hechmi |

Secular Politicians:

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 16. Congress for the Republic- | Moncef Marzouki |
| 17. Vp for CPR- | Larbi Ben Salah Abid |
| 18. Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties- | Ben Jafar |
| 19. Secretary of the Progressive Democratic Party- | Maya Jribi |
| 20. Popular front coordinator/Democratic Patriots' Unified Party-Chokri Belaid | |
| 21. Chairman of Nidaa Tounes/Interim PM- | Beji Caid Essebsi |
| 22. Leader of the Popular Front/Spokesperson of Workers Party-Hamma Hammami | |
| 23. Secretary General of the Ettajdid - | Ahmed Brahim |

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Questions to Consider:

Topic 1: Underlying Sentiments Against Ben Ali

1. How will Revolutionaries create protests when the people fear the secret police and do not have a history of large scale protests?
2. How will Revolutionaries gain the support of the majority of Tunisians, considering the variety of political views?

Topic 2: Civil Liberties

1. Should a new government focus on improving civil liberties during an unstable time?
2. Which liberties can be sacrificed during times of strife and which cannot?

Topic 3: The Transfer of power

1. Should the movement against Ben Ali be strictly peaceful?

Topic 4: Forms of Government

1. Should a new government have a parliamentary model or a presidential model?
2. How much should Islam play a role in public life?

Topic 5: The Economy

1. To what extent should the State be involved in the Economy?
2. What can be done to balance the wealth disparity between coastal and rural inland communities?

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