



Tunisia

Last update:	1 July 2010
Author:	
Population:	10,589,025 (July 2010 est.)
Prime minister:	Mohamed Ghannouchi (since November 1999)
President:	Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (since November 1987)
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party – Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)
Last election:	Municipal May 2010
Next election:	–
Sister parties:	



Modern day Tunisia has been referred to as being on the doorstep of democratic opportunity. The government's policies of economic advancement, promotion of universal education, progressive social policies, and gender equality have largely contributed to its relatively progressive stance as compared to other countries in the region. However, one of the consequences of the above-mentioned efforts has been a certain consciousness among the recent generations of Tunisians of the darker side of president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's politics. These include a lack of political freedom, of freedom of expression, of freedom of assembly and of freedom of press. With the current president since 1987, Ben Ali, finishing his 4th term, and running for re-election in October 2009 the question arises if and how the above-mentioned ripening public consciousness will find a way to express itself.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Political System

Tunisia is a republic. The executive branch of the government consists of the chief of state – the President, currently Zine el Abidine Ben Ali; the head of government – Prime Minister, currently Mohamed Ghannouchi; and a cabinet (Council of Ministers). The president is elected by a popular vote for a five-year term with no term limits. The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers are nominated by the President and approved by the parliament. The President is the head of state as well as the head of the Executive Branch of the government. He is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Tunisian armed forces and is in a position to make military and civil appointments. The President has powers on two decision-making levels: implementation of decrees and complementary decrees (there are also autonomous decrees, i.e. decrees with no basis in any specific law). The Prime Minister's task is to coordinate government action.

The legislative branch consists of the National Assembly or Parliament, which entails the Chamber of Deputies, or Majlis al-Nuwaab, and the Chamber of Advisors. The former has 189 seats and members are elected by a popular vote for a five-year term. The latter has 126 seats of which 85 members are elected by municipal councillors, deputies, mayors, professional associations and trade unions, and 41 are presidential appointees; members serve six-year terms. The role of the Chamber of Advisors is to complement the Chamber of Deputies in its legislative role: all laws are passed by an absolute parliamentary majority (i.e. of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Advisors). Thus, the Assembly and the President initiate laws in agreement with each other and both have equal right to propose bills, however, those proposed by the President get a priority. In the National Assembly, 20% of seats are given to the opposition by the Constitution. This is, generally, also all they get, as the Assembly has traditionally been dominated by the ruling party (RCD).



The role of political parties is defined by the Constitution as follows: "political parties help to educate citizens so as to organise their participation in political life". In addition it provides that parties must be created on a democratic basis and parties based on sex, language, race or region are prohibited.

President

The current president of Tunisia, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, has been holding that post since 1987, when he ousted the previous president, Habib Bourguiba, in a bloodless coup after doctors declared Bourguiba unfit for presidency by reason of senility. Bourguiba, in fact suffered health problems from as early as the 70s with three heart attacks (1969, 1979 and 1984 coupled with a hepatitis infection) and a manic-depressive psychotic episode in 1969 that left him changed forever. As he was forced more and more to rely on heavy medication, he became a victim of drastic mood swings, sudden rage, insomnia and the regression of physiological functions such as sight and speech, all of which had their effect on his governing abilities. Towards 1987, his personality and his governing became more and more authoritarian while his megalomania increased, making him more and more difficult to work with. The factual trigger for the power change had been a mass trial of 53 Islamic fundamentalists after four bomb explosions in 1987 in Sousse and Monastir that were blamed on the Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) despite its declaration to the contrary. The trial resulted in 7 death sentences, 13 acquitted, and the others receiving varying sentences. However, Bourguiba became obsessed with reopening the trial to demand for a higher penalty (i.e. more than 7 death sentences) especially for movement leader Rashed Ghannouchi (who had received a life sentence in forced labour).

That period in general and the trials in particular were marked by great public turmoil. Consequently, Prime Minister at the time, Ben Ali, claiming to fear a civil war and seeing no opportunity to reason with Bourguiba who seemed to have lost his touch with reality, declared Bourguiba unfit for presidency by reason of senility. The diagnosis was based on a medical report requested by the Public Prosecutor General and signed by seven doctors. Ben Ali then took over the presidency (as was provided by the constitution) in a bloodless coup that is generally referred to as 'the change' in Tunisia. The reaction in and outside of Tunisia to the peaceful change of power was one of overwhelming relief, as it was becoming clear that Bourguiba was rapidly losing his grip on the situation. Bourguiba spent the remainder of his days in a de facto house arrest in his home town of Monastir, where he died in 2000.

After 'the change' Ben Ali ran for president uncontested enjoying the support of the six legal opposition parties in the 1989 elections and, consequently, legitimised his presidency. It was, in fact, only in 1999 that the first multi-party presidential elections took place, be it with little consequence as they resulted in another overwhelming victory for Ben Ali (99.4%) and his party, which obtained 91.6% of the votes in the parliamentary elections of the same year. Although the vote is believed to be somewhat representative of the will of the people, it has also been reported that the campaign and election process favoured the ruling party to a great extent, with unequal campaigning opportunities for opposition parties. There seems to also have been a wide disregard for the secrecy of the vote. In 2002 a constitutional referendum, proposed by Ben Ali, was passed abolishing presidential term limits and changing the maximum age from 70 to 75, thus allowing the president to run for a 4th presidential term in 2004. In the 2004 presidential elections Ben Ali obtained a reported 94.49% of the votes, a downgrade from the previous (1999) elections. In 2009 Ben Ali was elected for his fifth term, obtaining 89.62% of the votes. The 2009 elections, although considered better than the previous, were still thought to be flawed (see below).

Policies

During his presidential reign, Ben Ali continued some of his predecessor's positive initiatives. Economically, the country enjoys one of the highest per capita incomes in the region with the exception of Libya. This is believed to be connected to the investments in education and vocational training, which go as far back as the 60s, when then president Bourguiba made education one of his main budget priorities (accounting for a quarter of the state budget), to ensure the addition of highly educated professionals in the fields of, especially, industry and technology, which would go towards the general technologic and economic development of the country. Since then, education has remained a priority and the fields of education have diversified. In addition, Tunisia has a low population growth



(a little over 1%) which is believed to have resulted from a birth control policy introduced in the 1960s, that actively promoted family planning and legalised abortions in 1973. Tunisia's population has a relatively high standard of living and is one of the few Arab societies with a strong middle class. After 'the change', Ben Ali also promised more development towards democracy and allowed officially recognized opposition parties (whose opposition nature is somewhat under question, see below) a greater degree of participation in political life. With respect to the latter issue, several measures were introduced over the years. For instance, a 1997 amendment to the country's electoral code reserved a minimum of approximately 20% of the seats in parliament and municipal councils for opposition candidates. With respect to press freedom, official censorship was abolished in 1997 and Ben Ali repeatedly exhorted journalists to assert different viewpoints in their work. However, as positive as the new measures sound, they did little to change Tunisia's political climate as a large gap can be observed between government rhetoric and practice.

Thus, opposition parties, which seem to have been already weakened by personal rivalries and internal disputes, were not in any position to offer a viable alternative to the regime and its well-oiled political machine during the election campaign. The opposition's presence remained largely symbolic due to strict limits imposed on presidential candidates (who were required to be veteran leaders of parties with parliamentary representation). For instance, although since 1999 the incumbent presidential candidacy has been contested by other candidates for the first time in Tunisia's history, it has been noted that the opposition did not receive the same opportunities in terms of engagement, speaking out and mounting campaigns. In addition, as they are largely dominated by the RCD in parliament, receiving only the constitutional 20% of seats, there is not much they manage to do in terms of legislature, especially with priority given to presidential proposals, as has been mentioned.

Election law change

After a May 2002 referendum on a proposal by president Ben Ali, the limit on the number of presidential terms was abolished, and the maximum age for a president changed from 70 to 75. This allowed Ben Ali, 67 at the time, to run for a fourth term in 2004 which he won with the vast majority of votes according to the official results; and a final fifth in 2009- provided the age limit doesn't change again. The political climate is thus not expected to change any time soon, as Ben Ali has been fairly consistent in his policies.

The same referendum also marked the birth of the Chamber of Advisors, a new part to the legislative branch of the government. Its role is mainly to complement the Chamber of Deputies in legislative work.

Presidential elections 2009

On 25 October 2009 both Presidential elections and the elections of the Chamber of Deputies were held in Tunisia. Ben Ali officially obtained the vast majority of the votes. Before the elections, Human Rights Watch warned that repressive acts and tight controls on the election process would taint the prospects for free and fair elections. President Ben Ali proclaimed that his government has "endeavoured to provide for these elections all the guarantees of transparency and honesty." But tailor-made laws have prevented the candidates from some of the stronger opposition parties from running, and severe constraints on freedoms of expression, the press, and assembly have deprived challengers from making their case to the public. It was therefore inevitable that Ben Ali would win another term. The head of the African Union observer delegation, Benjamin Boungolous, described the elections as free and fair, but opposition groups said there was no genuine freedom of choice during the election.

Two of the most influential official opposition parties, the Progressive Democratic party (PDP) and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FTDL), were boycotted in the election. The Ettajdid movement participated in the elections, despite considerable restrictions.

Presidential election results

Candidate	Votes	%
Zine El	4,238,711	89.6



Abidine Ben Ali – Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)		
Mohamed Bouchiha – Party of People's Unity (PUP)	236,955	5.0
Ahmed Inoubli – Unionist Democratic Union (UDU)	176,726	3.8
Ahmed Ibrahim – Ettajdid Movement	74,257	1.6
Invalid Votes	7,718	
Total Votes	4,729,649	
Total Turnout (91.5%)	4,737,367	100

Election campaign

During the election campaign President Ben Ali promised to "develop the media and create a youth parliament". His supporters have said that he plays a key role in Tunisia's stability and economic achievement. However, his opponents believe he achieved this by suppressing opposition. In July 2008, a constitutional amendment was approved that stipulates that the head of any political party who has been in his position at least two years may run as candidate. For the election of 2009, the two-year stipulation ruled out all but three candidates aside from Ben Ali. The most important candidate was Ahmed Ibrahim, Secretary General of the Movement for Renewal (Ettajdid movement), who tried to run a serious campaign but acknowledged during the campaign that he could not win. Ben Ali had the most air time, claiming that the additional exposure was accorded him as President and not as a candidate. The other two candidates – Mohamed Bouchiha of the Popular Unity Party and Ahmed Inoubli of the Unionist Democratic Union – rarely criticised the President and were only in the elections to show (according to them) their support for the democratic course.

Oppositional parties had to deal with many obstacles in the media. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) went to Tunisia on 12 to 15 October to assess freedom of the press during the election period. Pro-government, state-run television, radio and print were overflowing with praise for Ben Ali, with no mention of opposition candidates. Opposition activists, independent journalists, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists were under tight surveillance. "Tunisians did not have access to balanced news and information," concluded RSF.



Parliamentary elections 2009

Ben Ali's Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) obtained another overwhelming majority of the seats in Parliament during the 2009 Parliamentary elections. The opposition faced by Ben Ali's ruling RCD party was relatively weak, but was nevertheless given 53 out of 214 Chamber of Deputy seats, as provided by the Tunisian constitution. It should be noted that the 'oppositional' parties that received a share in these 53 seats were mainly parties that were in fact mildly, if at all, oppositional. The elections programs of most of the parties that eventually obtained seats in parliament were not that opposed to Ben Ali's policies, and sometimes even supported them.

Election results

Parties	Votes	%	Seats
Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)	3,754,559	84.6	161
Movement of Social-Democrats	205,374	4.6	16
Party of People's Unity	150,639	3.4	12
Unionist Democratic Union	113,773	2.6	9
Liberal Social Party	99,468	2.2	8
Green Party for Progress	74,185	1.7	6
Ettajdid Movement	22,206	0.5	2
Independent lists	11,552	0.3	0
Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties	5,329	0.1	0
Progressist Democratic Party	1,412	0.0	0
Invalid Votes	8,891		



Total Votes	4,438,497		
Total Turnout	4,447,388		214

Minorities

As the Tunisian population consists of 98% Arabs, 1% Europeans and 1% Jewish and other, the minorities seem to be too small to be politically relevant. Members of minority groups do, occasionally, get seats in Parliament, but not in the official capacity of representing their respective minorities. There are no minority quota in parliament, nor is there official representation for them. The Chamber of Advisors entails three members that represent Tunisians residing abroad.

Local elections 2010

On 9 May 2010 municipal elections were held in Tunisia. According to official results president Ben Ali's CDR gathered 4060 council seats, out of 4478 in 246 districts. The landslide victory of 90 percent gives Ali's ruling party unconcealed control for the upcoming five years. The remaining 418 seats went to the opposition. Movement of Socialist Democrats gathered 154 seats, Party of People's Unity 119, Unionist Democratic Union 66, Social Liberal Party 35, Green Party for Progress 29, while the independents gathered 15 seats. The voter turnout was reported to be 83 percent. One week prior to the elections the parties started their campaign. The opposition Progressive Democratic Party led by Najib Chabbi announced earlier in April its intention to boycott the municipal poll. Opposition parties were only allowed to compete for 25 percent of the council seats.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

After the 2009 elections the vast majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies as well as in the Chamber of Advisors has been occupied by the ruling RCD. The government can be regarded as stable, as it is largely controlled by one party, which does not show any signs of weakening in the next five years. Because of more than 20 years of fairly consistent and uninterrupted rule by one President and one party, no new trends are to arise. However, as the middle class in Tunisia is relatively highly educated, the concern has been voiced that it may protest the fairly authoritarian rule of the current government at some point; even if, for now, it is kept quiet with the opportunities it is given in terms of the already mentioned universal education, relatively progressive social policies and the direction of gender equality. Furthermore, this will probably be Ben Ali's final term, provided the age limit does not change again. But so far, no new leadership has emerged within the RCD or opposition parties. The next Parliamentary elections are to be held in October 2014.

Regarding the status of the opposition, it can be noted that it is divided over its attitudes to the regime and Islamism. One bloc – which includes Ettajdid, the PDP and the FTDL – is willing to cooperate with the RCD and sees this as a possible way to strengthen its presence. The second bloc – Ennahda, the PCOT and the CPR – favours a complete split with the regime. Opposition leaders are also divided on political Islam. Both Ettajdid and the FTDL, cornerstones of the leftist opposition, agree with Ben Ali's policy of shutting out the Ennahda movement. The PDP and CPR, on the other hand, do not reject dealing with the Islamists; both parties favour better understanding, if not



a possible rapprochement. Tunisian laws clearly forbid the inclusion of religious parties in the political system, even though influential western think tanks regard the Ennahda movement as one of the most peaceful Islamist groups in the Arab world.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Militant Islam: excuse to slam opposition?

When Ben Ali came to power in 1987, he proclaimed his will to bring about democratic reform, national reconciliation and a constitutional change that would mandate presidential term limits. Ben Ali did, indeed, abolish presidency for life and showed much benevolence towards the Islamist al-Nahda movement, releasing many of its members from prison, welcoming some into the High Islamic Council in charge of religious affairs and legalizing the party and its student union. It was thus that in the 1989 elections all political parties, including al-Nahda, signed the national pact, a document of reconciliation intended to uphold democratic principles, plan for the 1989 multiparty elections and leave religion out of politics. However, as the Islamists proved very popular during the elections (bringing in approximately 20% of the votes) Ben Ali reversed his policies and began sending Islamists back to prison as well as banning al-Nahda as a terrorist organization in 1990 and sending its leader, Rached Ghannouchi, to jail and then to exile.

According to a 2006 Human Rights Watch report, despite the release of 1650 prisoners in March and 50 in November of that year, over 350 political prisoners remained in custody under the 2003 anti-terror law. Released political prisoners were given a hard time. They were monitored closely, denied passports and most jobs, and some that spoke out on human rights issues were threatened with re-arrest. The definition of terrorism provided by the 2003 law in Support of "International Efforts to Fight Terrorism and the Repression of Money-Laundering" which basically erodes defendants' rights in terror cases is very broad and could be used to prosecute persons for the peaceful exercise of their right to dissent.

The relatively progressive women's rights, free education and healthcare have generally kept the lower- and middle social classes in Tunisia satisfied and calm. For instance, whereas in other countries in the region poor educational and health care circumstances have contributed to pushing parts of the society into the arms of (religious) extremism, the level and popularity of said extremism have been relatively low in Tunisia. Nevertheless, especially considering the post-9/11 angst all over the world, Ben Ali has used fear of religious extremism, and specifically militant Islam, as his main excuse for the crackdown on opposition parties, some of which have a religious base.

Lack of Press Freedom

Despite the fact that official censorship has been abolished, government control still weighs down on most of the media to a certain extent, leaving little room for a lively debate on current affairs. According to the already mentioned Human Rights Watch 2006 report, none of the print and broadcast media offers critical coverage of government policies, apart from a few low-circulation independent magazines that are subject to occasional confiscation. The private dailies are all loyalist, often slandering government critics in a manner that is deemed too base for the official media. Tunisia now has privately-owned radio and television stations, but here too private ownership is not synonymous with editorial independence. In addition, private-owned media are generally reserved for government's associates and entertainment.

The government blocks certain political or human rights websites featuring critical coverage of Tunisia. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) calls it a 'cruel irony' that Tunisia hosted the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in November 2005. Journalists deal with repressive laws, bureaucratic harassment, the withdrawal of state advertising, corruption, police violence, political trials and even torture. This, combined with the president's statements encouraging reporters to write and refrain from self-censorship results in confusion within the media



institutions. One example involves a flood in December 2003, which was reportedly the worst in a century. The media, however, did not report anything about the undoubted damage done by the flood, but instead listed the benefits Tunisian farmers would have from it. As already discussed, government pressure became especially clear during the 2004 election campaigns, as a strong pro-governmental bias was discernable among state-owned and private-owned media.

Lack of judiciary independence

The judicial branch consists of a court of cassation, appeal courts, courts of first instance and district courts. There is also a labour court and a housing court. There are some 1400 magistrates including approximately 25% women. The magistrates are appointed by the President upon proposal by the Supreme Judicial Council. In practice, the judiciary is heavily influenced by the executive. For instance, in 2001 a judge that wrote a letter to the president criticising the lack of judiciary independence was promptly removed from office. Judges may be transferred at any time, as the principle of irremovability has not been established.

Unemployment

Despite the relatively positive economic development of Tunisia, unemployment remains a major issue, encompassing 15% of the active population. Young people are most affected by the unemployment, with as many as 35.8% out of work among 18–20 year-olds, and 31.3% among 20–24 year-olds.

The situation is deteriorated by some government policies. For instance, the government's extensive economic restructuring programme has made firms attempt to become more competitive, resulting in many layoffs. At the same time, although some state organisations have restructuring funds, unemployment benefits provide no guarantees, as they depend on the Tunisian National Social Security Fun reserves.

The government's solution is trying to engage the poor layers of society in the employment market through skill enhancement and education. An adult education program was launched in 2000 and involves approximately 53.000 participants annually, 28.1% of which were between 15 and 29 years of age. As priority is given to people from rural areas (and especially those that have relatively high percentages of illiteracy) and women, the program thus gives underprivileged groups the opportunity to compete on the labour market under more equal conditions.

PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT

Social-Democratic Parties

Ruling party – Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD)

(Democratic Constitutional Rally)

Leader : Zine el Abidine Ben Ali

Full member of the SI

The party is the successor of the ruling (1964–1988) Destourian Socialist Party (PSD), lead by the previous president Bourguiba. After the 'change' in 1987 the party was re-named and headed by Ben Ali. It is considered a moderate left-wing republican party and is a full member of the Socialist International (SI). However, as already discussed, its social-democratic rhetoric does not result in a very democratic practice. The RCD is considered very powerful through affiliated syndicates presenting labour, agriculture, artisans and merchants, students, women and youth. Its



members occupy most major government positions and the majority in the government bodies such as the the Parliament: the party has 152 (out of 189) seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and 71 (out of 126) seats in the Chamber of Advisors.

Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes (Opposition) (Movement of Social-Democrats)
Secretary-general: Ismail Boulahia

The party was founded in 1978 by Ahmed Mestiri and his associates, liberal dissidents from the then ruling Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD), the predecessor of the RCD. The party was only officially recognised by the government in 1983, and unsuccessfully participated in the legislative elections of 1989, after which Mestiri retired from his post as the party's secretary general, and from politics altogether. He was replaced by Mohamed Mouadda, who was incarcerated in 1995 and convicted in 1996 to 11 months in prison for publishing a letter addressed to president Ben Ali, denouncing the degradation of the human rights situation and civil liberties in Tunisia. However, he was released in December 1996 under a conditional pardon as a result of pressure from national and international movements. In 1997 Ismail Boulahia, the last founding member of the party still in function, was called upon to become secretary-general despite a boycott from members of party still loyal to Mouadda. The latter refused to recognise the new direction, and was re-elected to his position in 2001. However, later that same year he was incarcerated yet again after being connected to Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of the unauthorised (and illegal) Islamist al-Nahda party. Mouadda was offered a presidential pardon in 2002, and reconciled himself with Boulahia (who had taken over the leadership in the meantime) and the new leadership of the party.

The party successfully participated in the 2004 legislative elections, obtaining 14 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, making it the largest (opposition) party in the Chamber. Secretary-general Boulahia supported the candidacy of the incumbent president Ben Ali during the presidential elections that same year. As already mentioned, the Movement of Social-Democrats offers almost the same program as the RCD, apart from being more Arab nationalist and socialist.

Other Parties

Opposition – Parti de l'Unité Populaire (PUP) (Party of Popular Unity)
Mohamed Belhaj Amor

The Party of Popular Unity, also offers an Arab nationalist and socialist program (not a member of Socialists International, however). The party was established in 1981 and recognised in 1983. It participated in all legislative elections since 1986. The party's secretary-general, Mohamed Bouchiha, ran in the 2004 presidential elections against president Ben Ali and collected 3.8% of the vote. The party has 11 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Opposition – Union Démocratique Unioniste (UDU) (Unionist Democratic Union)
Secretary-general: Ahmed Inoubli.

The party was founded in 1988 and was officially recognised several days after its establishment. The Unionist Democratic Union has close ties with the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), the country's largest labour union. A high concentration of union members makes up UDU's constituency. UDU espouses both Arab nationalism and Israel-PLO peace talks. The party participated in all legislative elections since 1989 and currently occupies 7 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.



Opposition – Movement Ettajdid (a.k.a. al-Tajdid)
Leader: Ahmed Ibrahim

The 'Movement of Renewal', is the successor of the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT) that was banned between 1963 and 1981. In 1981, Bourguiba legalized the PCT in order to offset the growing influence of the Islamist movement, and in 1988 the party signed Ben Ali's National Pact. In 1993 the PCT was transformed into the Mouvement Ettajdid, abandoned communism and defined itself as centre-left. Ettajdid's influence remained marginal, and the party has never succeeded in capturing the imagination of Tunisia's young people. The party currently has 3 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. During the 2004 elections, the party's presidential candidate Mohamed Ali Halouani stated that he and his supporters had been faced with numerous obstacles, "including the refusal to allow [them] to distribute [their] electoral manifesto". In response to this dozens of Halouani supporters staged a rare demonstration in Tunis on Oct. 22, 2004, calling for the release of their party's manifesto. However, they were blocked by plainclothes policemen on their attempted march to the Interior Ministry.

Opposition – Parti Social-Libéral (Social-Liberal Party)
Secretary General: Mr Mondher Thabet

The party is a member of the Internationale Libérale since 17 May 2008. It was founded in 1988 under a different name (i.e. Parti Social pour le Progrès) and changed its name to the current one in 1993 to reflect its ideology somewhat better. The founder, Mounir Béji, was replaced in 2006 by Mondher Thabet as secretary-general. The Social Liberal Party is a member of the network of political parties affiliated to the "Internationale Libérale". The party is the smallest one represented in the Chamber of Deputies, with 2 seats to its name.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

(Not in parliament)

Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL)
(Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties)
Leader: Dr Mustapha Ben Jaafar
Consultative member of the SI

Established in 1994, just a month before the country's legislative elections, the FDTL is a centre-left NGO of intellectuals, professionals, and political opposition members, that tried to obtain legal status for eight years. It was established by those that refused to ally themselves with the government and believed the advertised pluralism was just a façade. Its establishment was the result of a call by 200 democrats, academics and defenders of human rights who in 1993 called for the unification of democratic forces. Its main goals are the reformation of the political climate in Tunisia in order to release all political prisoners in a general pardon; the revision of all legislative texts to eliminate all those that entrench on public liberties; the separation of the party of power and state mechanisms to guarantee the impartiality of the administration; the organisation of free elections under the authority of an independent commission. They believe that the National Assembly must discuss a new constitution that will guarantee the separation and re-balance of powers, exercise of fundamental liberties and respect for human rights. The party has a consultative status with the SI.

In October 2002 the party was legalised. However, it failed to obtain government positions or seats in the parliament in the 2004 elections.



Other Parties

Parti Démocratique Progressiste (PDP) (Progressive Democratic Party)
Secretary-general: Ahmed Néjib Chebbi

The party was established on 13 December 1983 as the Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste by Marxist groups, but was renamed in 2001 to broaden its ideological basis. Secretary General Chebbi is a lawyer by vocation. The PDP is currently a legally recognised opposition party with no representation in the government. It was excluded from the 2004 presidential elections by the electoral law on the grounds that it did not have members in parliament. This has been criticised by the party as being an obstacle to any independent candidate. The party had withdrawn from the 2004 legislative elections three days before they took place claiming that it was being silenced and protesting against the disqualification of 5 of their candidates out of 21. The political platform of the party according to its leader is politically diverse and includes both liberals and progressive Islamists united by the common goal of replacing the current government. One of the party's main goals during the 2004 elections was also defined by Chebbi as to show that Tunisian political pluralism is a sham. In an interview with the *Reveil Tunisien* newspaper (15 Sept. 2004) he further defines his party's platform as being comprised of: 'political reforms [...] including a general amnesty (for prisoners of conscience and exiled Tunisians), [...] neutrality of the administration, a free press, a constitution that guarantees individual freedoms, the separation of powers and the independence of the justice system, and laws ensuring freedom of association and expression (...) economic and social reforms based on transparency and good governance in order to energize the employment sector, and a fair distribution of wealth.'

NOT REGISTERED PARTIES

Hizb al-Nahda (Renaissance Party) – banned
Founder and one of the leaders: Rached Ghannouchi

Initially established as Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) in 1981. The party is theoretically shaped by the Egyptian Islamic Brotherhood and its key intellectual in the 1950s and 60s Sayyid Qutb. The party began as a rather radical one, but started to be described as moderate Islamist in the 1980s and changed its name to the current one in 1988 after Ben Ali's National Pact that sought to separate religion from politics. They advocate democracy and a Tunisian form of Islamism also described as political pluralism. A dialogue with the West is also discussed, even if Western notions of liberal democracy are rejected, as the party believes in an essentially Islamic constitution. The party used to publish the *Al-Fajr* newspaper, which has been banned. *Al-Nahda* was initially allowed to run in the 1989 elections, but was subsequently banned in 1991. The government continues to prosecute suspected members of *al-Nahda* for "membership in an illegal organization."

Congrès Pour la République (CPR) (Rally for the Republic Party)
Chairman : Dr Moncef Marzouki

The party describes itself as having as an objective the foundation of a republic worthy of its name and democracy that respects the individual freedoms of people. It professes the use of peaceful means to respond to the needs of the Tunisian people to political, economic and social issues. The CPR reportedly rejects all forms of violence and exclusion and professes to be open to all that respect their democratic principles. The CPR has been labelled Islamist, but rejects the label. The party's main objectives include transparent and free elections, independence of state institutions and the judiciary, to guarantee public liberties and defend human rights and to affirm the Arab Muslim identity within the framework of respect for universal humanitarian values as they are stipulated by the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Tunisie Vert (Green Tunisia)
Secretary-general: Abdelkader Zitouni

Established in March 2004, the party's goal is to promote environmental awareness and to anchor a pro-environment culture in the lives of citizens and groups of society. The party has not been recognised yet because the interior ministry claims it has not received all necessary documents for party registration. Despite not having an official status in Tunisia, the party officials claim to have the support of numerous environmental associations and ecological political parties including the Green party of Europe.

Parti Communist des Ouvriers Tunisiens (PCOT) (The Tunisian Workers' Communist Party)
Leader: Hama Hammami

An illegal Marxist-Leninist party, established in 1986. The party has an active youth wing: the Union of Communist Youth of Tunisia. Several reports have been made of party members being harassed and tried for membership in an unauthorised organisation.