

Conflict analysis of Tunisia

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About this report

This report provides a short synthesis of some of the most recent, high quality literature on the topic of conflict in Tunisia. It aims to orient policymakers to the key debates and emerging issues. It was prepared (in November 2013) for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2014. This report is licensed under the Open Government Licence (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence). The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID.

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Query

Provide a conflict analysis of Tunisia that looks at: Conflict dynamics, including trends, structural and proximate causes, risks and triggers, factors contributing to resilience – drivers and actors – and responses to conflict (existing and recommended). Focus on literature from the current post-Arab Spring situation and draw out any impact the Arab Spring has had. The papers should cover instability at both state-level (often related to politics in the capitals) and territorial peripheries and the inter-linkages.

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Overview

The revolution in Tunisia in 2011 – the first political upheaval of what became the ‘Arab Spring’ – marked the end of over five decades of authoritarian rule, first by post-colonial leader Habib Bourguiba and then by Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. The country’s first democratic elections, held in March 2011, produced a coalition government comprising of the dominant Tunisian Islamic party, Ennahda, and two centre-left groups, Ettakatol and the Congrès Pour la République. Despite the degree of stability the coalition has provided the country, there are still obstacles to democratic consolidation and factors that contribute to social, political and violent conflict in the country today, not least the political climate itself which is characterised by deep divisions and antagonisms between the coalition and opposition groups.

This conflict analysis identifies the dynamics, drivers, and international and local responses to conflict in Tunisia, as well as the key actors involved in current instability. There is a limited but growing body of literature which explores post-2011 conflict in Tunisia. Much of the existing literature draws on qualitative empirical research. To supplement evidence gaps, this report at times draws on media reports.

Drivers of conflict in Tunisia are complex and intertwined. Drawing from the available literature, some of the identified factors that contribute to current instability and conflict include:

- **Divisions between Islamic and secular communities:** The division between Islamic and secular communities is an important feature of modern Tunisian society and one that influences the dynamics of social and political struggles in the country. Experts caution, however, that though such divisions are significant, they should not be overstated and that other issues are at play¹.
- **Socio-economic factors:** Both experts and literature emphasise that socio-economic factors should be central to understanding the current conflict in Tunisia. In particular, high rates of unemployment and a slowdown of the economy have led to economic suffering and contributed to growing antagonism toward the government.
- **Islamist radicalisation:** The growth of Salafist groups in Tunisia is an important feature of post-revolution society. Salafists have been implicated in a number of violent conflict events and regularly stage protests and demonstrations across the country. In December 2012, the Tunisian government publically admitted they had underestimated the danger posed by Salafist groups. Factors that have contributed to the rise of Salafism include: the release of Islamists imprisoned during Ben Ali’s rule; the presence of ultraconservative preachers influenced by Saudi Wahhabism; and dissatisfaction with the ruling coalition.
- **Marginalisation of young people:** Despite their central role in the revolution, young people continue to experience socio-political marginalisation. Empirical research has identified that young people feel ‘neglected’ and ‘deceived’ by their political leaders (Marks, 2013) and experience a disproportionately high rate of unemployment.
- **Geographic economic disparities:** The geography of development in Tunisia has been characterised by stark economic inequalities between the developed coastal regions and the underdeveloped interior regions. This inequality played a key role in fuelling the unrest that led to the revolution and remains an important dynamic of current instability.

International and local efforts to address the drivers of conflict in Tunisia have tended to focus on political and economic stabilisation. Key multi-lateral actors, such as the World Bank, European Union,

¹ Expert comments

and the African Development Bank, have provided substantial financial inputs and technical assistance in an attempt to stabilise the Tunisian economy and overcome the challenges of democratic transition. Assistance has also been provided to security sector reform, including enhancing the Tunisian state's capacity to manage its borders. The US Government and the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), for example, have provided financing, technical assistance and related training to the security sector.

Drawing from the available literature, some of the recommendations presented for conflict prevention in Tunisia include:

- **Develop a targeted socio-economic response** that incorporates civil society and provides micro-credit and technical assistance to facilitate the development of local business.
- **Advocate de- and counter-radicalisation measures** that are tailored to the specific local circumstances, involve a variety of complementary approaches, incorporate an aftercare element, and make use of credible interlocutors.
- **Provide targeted assistance to the security and judicial sectors** that includes technical assistance, education and exchange programmes, and financial backing for the modernisation and improvement of non-lethal crowd control equipment.

2. Conflict dynamics

2.1 Recent history

Tunisia was the first Arab country in modern history to overthrow its government and hold independent, democratic elections (Gray & Coonan, 2013). The revolution in 2011 – the first of what became the 'Arab Spring' – marked the end of over five decades of authoritarian rule, first, by post-colonial leader Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) and then by Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011). Both authoritarian periods were characterised by secularist policies that placed restrictions on religious expression, including group prayer and the wearing of *hijabs*, combined with repression of Islamist groups and the imprisoning of many supporters and their families, as well as political opponents more generally (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013a).

The country's first democratic elections were held in March 2011 and won by the Tunisian Islamic party, Ennahda. Attaining 89 seats out of the 217 seats in the Constituent Assembly (and with 41.5 per cent of the popular vote), Ennahda's victory marked a remarkable transition from its position as an anti-democratic fundamentalist party, to a party at the centre of government (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013a). Following the election, Ennahda entered into a coalition with two centre left parties: Ettakatol and the Congrès Pour la République.

Figure 1: Map of Tunisia



Source: ICG (2013)

2.2 Current conflict dynamics

Despite the degree of stability that the ruling alliance between Ennahda and the centre-left parties has provided Tunisia, there are still **obstacles to democratic consolidation** and **factors which contribute to social, political and violent conflict** in the country today (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013b). Aspects that have been identified as particularly relevant include the deepening economic crisis, rifts and divisions between Islamist and secularist groups in society, and the difficult process of achieving meaningful political and institutional reform, including the inability of the political coalition to agree on a new constitution (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013b).

The current **political climate** in Tunisia is characterised by deep division and antagonism. Ennahda itself is deeply divided between those who were exiled during the Ben Ali regime and those who remained in country under authoritarian rule, as well as between moderate and more conservative factions (ACLED, 2013a: 7). The issue of **constitutional reform** has proved particularly destabilising and contributed to growing popular frustration with the ruling coalition². Opposition politicians have called on Ennahda to resign, accusing it of trying to impose an 'Islamist agenda', of mismanaging the

² See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23563203>

economy, and failing to curb the influence of Islamist groups³. In September 2013, Ennahda agreed to step aside and allow for the creation of a government of independents; however they reject opposition demands to do this immediately⁴. Talks to end the stalemate surrounding the constitution, mediated by actors including the powerful Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), have so far failed to achieve a compromise⁵. The next general election is due to be held on 17 December 2013⁶.

An additional destabilising factor is **Islamist radicalisation** and the growth of Wahhbi Salafism in the country (ICG, 2013: 1). While definitions and understandings of Salafism are broadly debated by specialists (Wolf, 2013a), there is some consensus that in its modern meaning Salafism refers to “conservative Sunni Muslims who seeks to apply literalist interpretations of scripture based on the example set by the Prophet and his companions” (ICG, 2012a)⁷. In Tunisia, Salfism has been understood as a “diverse collection of religiously conservative individuals who position themselves to the right of Tunisia’s ruling Ennahda” (Marks, 2013: 107). Since the revolution, the country has experienced a **surge in Salafi mobilisation** and though their numbers may be small, they have “monopolised the attention of political actors and observers...[as they] are perceived as the most significant threat not only to democratic consolidation, but to regional security as well” (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013b: 25). Salafists have been implicated in various acts of violence in Tunisia, including the assassination of political leaders and an assault on the US embassy in Tunis in 2012.

2.3 Types and distribution of conflict

The types of conflicts currently experienced in Tunisia are broad and include social, political and violent conflicts, which are carried out both collectively and individually. In recent months, there has been an increase in violent clashes, with the month of October seeing the highest number of conflict events to date in 2013 (ACLED, 2013b: 8). Figure 2 below demonstrates the increase of conflict events that have occurred within the last few months. Experts attribute this recent surge in **riots** and **protests** to growing popular dissatisfaction with the Ennahda-led government (ACLED, 2013b). Incidences of **terrorist activity** and **militia violence against civilians** have also increased, with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED, 2013a: 7) contending that much of this involves suspected hard-line Islamist elements targeting opposition party members, journalists, human rights activists, and businesses and vendors selling alcohol. Most recently, on 30 October 2013, there was a **suicide bomb** attack outside a hotel in the tourist town Sousse. Killing only himself, police contend the bomber sought to target the compound of President Bourguiba’s mausoleum⁸.

³ See: http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/tunisia-to-resume-work-on-new-constitution-1.1575955#.Uox_3dJSjTo

⁴ See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/11/tunisians-remain-divided-naming-new-pm-2013112125453545249.html>

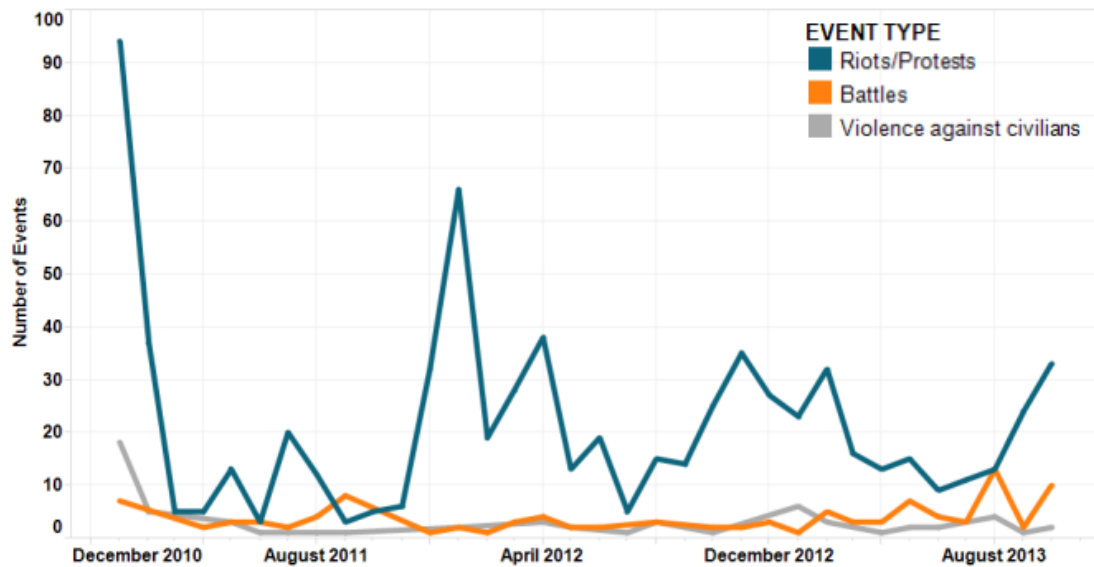
⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2013/10/21/Tunisia-committed-to-reform-as-economy-slows-PM-says.html>

⁷ Salafist groups are strongly influenced by Wahhabism, an ultra-conservative branch within Sunni thinking that is predominately found in Saudi Arabia, and can be broadly divided into two camps: ‘Scientific (or Scripturalist) Salafists’ who are reject the use of violence and preach a ‘pure version of Islam’ (Wolf, 2013a, p. 569), and Jihadi Salafists who are noted to advocate the use of violence in the pursuit of their ultra-conservative goals (Ibid.).

⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24740947>

Figure 2: Conflict events by type, Tunisia, January 2011-October 2013



Source: ACLED (2013b)

In 2013, there were also two high profile **political assassinations** that have been attributed to Islamist groups. In February, Chokri Belaid, leader of the left-secularist Democratic Patriots' Movement, was assassinated as he left his home in the Tunis suburb El Menzah VI. Just five months later Mohamed Brahmi, the leader of the nationalist Movement of the People party was similarly murdered as he left his home in the capital. Brahmi's assassination prompted widespread protests and increased political polarisation across the country⁹. Both murders have been linked by the Tunisian government to the Salafist-jihadist organisation Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST)¹⁰.

Violent clashes have occurred between the **supporters of political parties**. In October 2012, for example, the supporters of Ennahdha and the centre-secularist party Nidaa Tounes fought in the Southern town, Tatouine¹¹. Nidaa Tounes's regional coordinator Lofi Nagdh was killed by groups reportedly linked to the local Ennahdha Bureau¹².

Violent conflict has also been aimed at **western targets**. The most high profile of such incidences was the 2012 attack on the US embassy in Tunis. Hundreds of Islamist protestors attacked the embassy and a neighbouring American school, and four protestors were killed in clashes with the police¹³.

Data collated by the ACLED in March 2013 identifies that social unrest has been **fairly widespread** throughout the country. While pre-revolution conflict patterns were predominately concentrated in urban areas, the post-revolution period has seen demonstrations throughout the country, including

⁹ See: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs=%7B684E8DDD-7048-41F2-A1D0-8D34F565C336%7D>

¹⁰ See: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/08/ansar-al-sharia-connected-to-assassinations.html#>

¹¹ See: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs=%7B684E8DDD-7048-41F2-A1D0-8D34F565C336%7D#results>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

in rural areas (ACLED, 2013a: 7). Regions that have experienced conflict within the last year include Sidi Bouzid, Goubellat, Tatouine, Tunis and El Kef¹⁴.

The **border regions** have been particular hotspots of violent activity, with the Algerian border experiencing two terrorist attacks in 2013: in October, ten militants allegedly under the command of AST were killed by security forces¹⁵, while in July 2013 eight Tunisian soldiers were killed by al-Qaeda-linked militants.

3. Drivers of conflict

Both experts consulted and the published literature note that current conflict in Tunisia is attributable to a range of complex and intertwined factors.

3.1 Islamist radicalisation and division between Islamic and secular communities

The division between ‘secular modernist’ and ‘conservative Islamic’ communities is an important dimension of modern Tunisian society and one which influences the dynamics of social and political struggles in the country¹⁶. While much commentary claims that the growth of Salafism in Tunisia is reflective of regional trends in religious conservatism, some experts indicate that Tunisia has a ‘domestic radicalisation problem’ (Wolf, 2013b: 1). Factors that are noted as contributing to Islamist radicalisation in Tunisia include: the release of Islamists imprisoned during Ben Ali’s rule; the presence of ultraconservative preachers from abroad; geographic economic disparities; and socio-political alienation, particularly among young people (Marks, 2013; Wolf, 2013a, 2013b).

Empirical research reveals that militant Salafists have been able to implant themselves within poor communities by becoming **key economic actors** and providing a **service delivery role** in the absence of state capacity (ICG, 2013: 19). This role extends to helping with schooling, mediating local conflicts and administrative issues, and even improvising as traffic police when needed (ICG, 2013: 19). The ICG (2013: 19) argues that in places such as Menzel Bourguiba, in the north of the country, Jihadi Salafists ‘play an essential role in local life’.

Ennahda’s relationship with Salafist groups has been problematic and confused. On the one hand the party has taken a hands off approach to unrest led or influenced by Salafi groups, while on the other it has clamped down (Marks, 2013: 112). In December 2012, the Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki publically admitted that his government had underestimated the danger posed by Salafists (Wolf, 2013b).

More broadly, the divisions between Islamic and secular communities have been identified as a contributing factor to conflict, though experts caution that this should not be exaggerated¹⁷. An academic working in Tunisia argues that such divisions have been “**overstated** to a certain extent and **manipulated** by elites on both sides of the divide”¹⁸. This, she views, is ‘in order to promote narrow agendas and at the expense of socio-economic demands of those who participated in the Tunisian uprising’¹⁹.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Expert comment

¹⁷ Expert comments

¹⁸ Expert comment

¹⁹ Expert comment

3.2 Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors are crucially important to current conflicts in Tunisia²⁰. Experts indicate that before and particularly after the revolution many Tunisians have suffered economically due to **rising unemployment** (particularly among university graduates), **stark regional inequalities**, and **corruption** (ICG, 2012c). Though Tunisia achieved some growth in 2012²¹, recent economic reporting indicates lower than anticipated growth rates in 2013, combined with high budget deficits of between 10 and 11 per cent and high rates of inflation²².

Evidence indicates that socio-economic factors have some association with processes of radicalisation. While the link between poverty and radicalisation has been broadly discredited (Marks, 2013; Seghaier, 2013), there is some evidence that radical Islamists have been able to **exploit weak economic conditions** and high unemployment in Tunisia to attract followers. Impoverished areas in south and central regions of the country, for example, as well as ‘poverty belts’ that surround the capital Tunis, have a particularly high rate of Wahhabi ultra-conservative communities (Marks, 2013: 569).

3.3 Political reform and transitional justice

The processes of political transition in Tunisia have been protracted and difficult, adding to the tense environment. While broadly regarded as a successful non-violent revolution, deep antagonisms and divisions persist between political competitors. The process of drafting a new constitution is illustrative of the complexities of political division and the delays that have blighted political reform. There are difference between Ennahda and their secular opponents over the basic framework of the proposed talks²³. Ennahda itself is internally divided between the leadership’s more pragmatic position and the core beliefs of its militant base (ICG, 2013: i). In October 2013, large rallies supported by secularists and trade unions were held in the Tunis calling for the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Ali Larayedh²⁴.

The issue of **transitional justice** has also not been settled²⁵. Writing for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Mersch (2013) notes that attempts by the Tunisian government to address transitional justice issues have been ‘sporadic and disorganised at best’. Initiatives and investigations that began in the immediate aftermath of the revolution have been largely ineffective, while reform of the judiciary has been severely neglected (Mersch, 2013).

3.4 Marginalisation of young people

The marginalisation of young people in Tunisia is “**multidimensional**” and “surprisingly widespread” (Marks, 2013: 110). Despite their central role in the revolution, many political parties have failed to ‘meaningfully include young people in their decision making processes and bodies’ (Marks, 2013, p. 110). This is reflected in the leadership of the dominant political forces, which ‘reflect well-known

²⁰ Expert comment

²¹ See: <http://www.afdb.org/en/countries/north-africa/tunisia/>

²² See: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2013/09/tunisia-economy-impending-crisis.html#>

²³ See: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/24/world/africa/tunisian-protests-by-islamist-and-secular-groups-delay-talks-on-constitution.html?_r=0

²⁴ See: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/24/world/africa/tunisian-protests-by-islamist-and-secular-groups-delay-talks-on-constitution.html?_r=0

²⁵ Expert comments.

figures from an earlier generation’ (Marks, 2013: 110). Across the political spectrum, young people complain of being ‘neglected’ and ‘deceived’ by their political leaders (Marks, 2013: 110).

Particularly significant is the high rates of unemployment which disproportionately affect the young. Research cited by Boughzala (2013: 3) identifies a current **youth unemployment** rate of above 30 per cent (compared to a national rate of 19 per cent), with women and those living in poor regions (especially in the west of the country) disproportionately represented among the unemployed young. Across the labour force, the unemployment rate increases with higher education levels and is highest for those with university degrees (an unemployment rate of above 30 per cent for young university graduates) (Boughzala, 2013: 6).

Islamist radicalisation in Tunisia has a significant youth cleavage and has been linked to the ‘**political and social expression**’ of a class of largely disenfranchised youth’ (Marks, 2013; Merone & Cavatorta, 2012). Leaders from both within and outside of Salafism note that the successful mobilisation of marginalised young people has made a significant contribution to the popularity of Salafist groups (Marks, 2013: 110). Significantly, empirical research from Tunisia shows that Salafist groups include followers from the middle to upper classes, illustrating that marginalisation is not solely a reflection of poverty or lack of employment (Marks, 2013). For many young people, Jihadi Salafism offers an **identity**, a **subculture** and ‘an **inspirational opportunity**...[to] fight for something larger than themselves’ (Marks, 2013).

3.5 International events and the return of combatants

International issues that relate to the Islamic world have a resonance on radicalisation and conflict in North and West Africa, through experts caution that these have a far lesser degree of influence than local political and economic issues (Alao, 2013). Empirical research from Tunisia reveals that Jihadi Salafis here “are sensitive to the diminished position of the Arab and Muslim world following what they term successive western ‘invasions’” (Marks, 2013, p. 111). Salafists groups have collected photos of injured children in Iraq, Palestine and Syria as an attempt to promote their message, and many speak of **fighting jihad in Syria** (Marks, 2013: 111).

Weak border security across North Africa facilitates the easy migration of volunteers to fight in conflicts internal and external to the region (JACS, 2013: 29). Evidence indicates that Tunisian citizens have fought in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria (Maher, 2013). Despite recently advocating that Salafists stay in Tunisia, the media wing of the AST continues to eulogise Tunisian nationals killed in fighting in Syria (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013: 17). In May 2013, the Tunisian government estimated that some 800 Tunisians have been involved in the conflict in Syria; international security sources caution that the number may be even higher (Maher, 2013).

The **return of combatants** from conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East has been identified as a contributing factor to radicalisation and instability. Wolf (2013b) contends that the return of trained and potentially armed fighters may “increase the likelihood for the medium and long term that Tunisia could become a staging ground for jihadist action”.

3.6 History of authoritarianism

The authoritarian historical context has been identified as a contributing factor to violence across the North African region (Storm, 2009). In Tunisia, Storm (2009: 998) contends that the repositioning of state power by the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes contributed to a ‘vicious cycle of repression and radicalisation’. Ben Ali in particular used **state-sponsored violence** to quash all forms of resistance to political oppression and widening inequalities (Mullin & Patel, 2013). Islamists, and

those suspected to be Islamists, were principally targeted and subjected to extensive repression, detention and often torture (Mullin & Patel, 2013). Experts indicate that during the Ben Ali regime some 35,000 men and 1,500 women were detained in the name of 'national security' (Mullin & Patel, 2013). Mullin and Patel (2013) argue that this **history of political violence** is important to understanding current trends in violence and conflict. Political violence is viewed as 'intrinsic to Tunisia's post-colonial state-building project' (Mullin & Patel, 2013).

Despite receiving little academic and media attention, 'spaces of resistance and dissent' to the Ben Ali regime sprung up in Tunisia, particularly in the early 2000s (Torelli, Merone, & Cavatorta, 2012). Salafism became the political framework through which a small group of young men could express resentment to political authority, as well as a philosophy that went some way toward satisfying their spiritual needs (Torelli et al., 2012: 142). In the aftermath of the revolution, the **release of imprisoned Islamists** from Tunisian jails became the catalyst for an increase in Salafist recruiting and activism (Torelli et al., 2012: 144). Following the revolution, young Salafists have 'revelled in flouting' Ben Ali's strict prohibitions on forms of religious expression by sporting long beards, short trousers, or the various conservative women's dress such as the *niqab* (Marks, 2013: 112).

3.7 Geographic economic disparities

Local geographical antagonisms have been identified as contributing factors to conflict and tensions. Experts indicate that there is a 'strong geographic element' to historic and current conflicts in Tunisia that centres on stark economic inequalities between the developed **coastal** regions and the underdeveloped **interior** regions²⁶. This inequality played a key role in fuelling the social unrest that led to the revolution (Achy, 2011). Although official statistics show some economic improvement in the last two decades, large parts of the country have been neglected and regional inequality has been exacerbated (Achy, 2011: 19).

Research cited by Boughzala (2013: 8) identifies that regional disparities exist in areas including unemployment, income levels and poverty. While the North-West and Centre-East of the country benefited from public investment as well as private sector projects (for example, tourism), the South and Centre-West continue to lag behind (Achy, 2011: 19). The relative and absolute poverty rates are higher in Kasserine (30-40 per cent), Sidi Bouzid (35-45 per cent) and Gabes (27-31 per cent) than in the rest of the country (ADB, 2011: 3). Disparities also persist in basic infrastructure, education and health services (Achy, 2011: 20). Achy (2011: 20) notes that regional disparities are not only the result of differential 'natural endowments', but rather have been exacerbated by public policy that favoured the north west and centre east regions.

3.8 Cross border linkages, trafficking and smuggling

Cross border linkages, trafficking and smuggling have been identified as contributing factors to instability across the North African region, with the four main illicit commodities traded being **weapons, narcotics, migrants** and **cigarettes**. Evidence indicates that terrorist groups have been able to exploit Tunisia's 'porous' borders to smuggle weapons into the country²⁷. State forces have been involved in clashes with armed smugglers, particularly in the border regions between Libya and Algeria²⁸.

²⁶ Expert comments. See also: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13212/tunisia-and-the-arab-spring-reversal>

²⁷ See: http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/09/25/feature-01

²⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18537714>

The Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) have identified a number of structural factors that contribute to these illicit flows of goods and people (JACS, 2013). These include:

- **Weak regional cooperation:** Both intra-regional trade and regional security and political cooperation are weak in North Africa. Only 5 per cent of Tunisian trade, for example, is inter-regional, with the country tending to favour European or Arab cooperation (JACS, 2013). There is no single institutional architecture for all North African countries (the Arab Maghreb Union for instance does not include Egypt, while the Community of Sahel-Saharan States does not include Algeria), and limited examples of regional cooperation on security issues.
- **Physical geography:** Borders are long and easily traversable, while the terrain of many parts of North Africa makes the region particularly difficult to police (JACS, 2013).
- **Weak border security institutions:** States' abilities to control borders varies notably across the region (JACS, 2013). Lack of adequate security can allow border regions to become 'sanctuaries for violent extremist groups' (JACS, 2013: 40). Southern and Western Tunisia have been identified as potential sanctuaries for violent terrorist cells, and as such have been the focus of much Algerian and Tunisian security cooperation (JACS, 2013: 21; Wolf, 2013b). In August 2013, the Tunisian state announced it was 'stepping up' security along its 460km border with Libya in an effort to deter smugglers and terrorists²⁹. A Presidential decree made the border a 'restricted' zone, with those wishing to enter the area requiring a permit³⁰.

4. International and local responses to conflict

4.1 Support to democratic transition and transitional justice

Following the collapse of the Ben Ali regime, international assistance to Tunisia predominately centred on supporting the process of democratic transition. A variety of bilateral and multilateral actors have had an involvement. This includes:

- **UNDP** has provided support to key institutions, processes and stakeholders that have a role in the transition to democracy (UNDP, 2011). Through its Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening, the organisation provided support to over 50 political parties which aimed at strengthening the capacities, knowledge and skills of politicians, and facilitating exchange between political parties (UNDP, 2011). **Technical support** was provided for drafting new laws regulating political parties and NGOs, while training by international and national experts was provided for potential female political candidates (UNDP, 2011).
- The **World Bank** provided a development policy loan of US\$500 million to finance reform programmes in the short term in areas including governance, transparency and accountability (Mahjoub & Bala, 2012). The Bank has also provided forms of technical assistance to these areas (Mahjoub & Bala, 2012).
- The **European Union** has provided comprehensive assistance to transitional Tunisia, including under the European Neighbourhood Policy³¹. The EU and UNICEF have provided €1.8 million to support the **juvenile justice system**, including ensuring young people are

²⁹ See: <http://www.libyaherald.com/2013/08/31/tunisian-side-of-libya-border-become-restricted-zone-in-move-against-smugglers-and-terrorists/#axzz2kzK6a88j>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See: <http://eeas.europa.eu/tunisia/>

provided with support during the judicial procedures, their detention, and their reintegration into society³².

- In 2013, the **Government of the Netherlands** contributed approximately €2 million to Tunisia for programmes including training officials and diplomats, assisting political parties and promoting employment among young people³³.
- The **International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)** has provided advice to local Tunisian NGOs on transitional justice options and support to strengthen their capacity to respond to the current context, including in areas such as criminal justice and reparations³⁴.
- The **International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)** has partnered with the Ministry of Social Affairs to run a civic education programme targeting Tunisia's illiterate population. This includes an adult learning programme, workshops on voter education, and producing civic information materials for those who cannot read. The adult learning programme imparts information relating to democracy, international standards, electoral processes and civic and political rights³⁵.

Locally, the **Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Centre (KADEM)**, alongside its international partner No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), has provided support to democratic transition through increasing the awareness and understanding of transitional justice, including providing advice on how to investigate past violations (NPWJ)³⁶. The groups work with civil society and other relevant actors to "ensure that abuses are dealt with fairly, transparently and effectively as part of Tunisia's overall democratic transition process" (Ibid.). A key component of this approach involves working with victims, including those who suffer violations of socio-economic rights, to help them engage with policy and decision makers (Ibid.).

4.2 Security sector reform

The **US government** has provided significant support to peace and security architecture in Tunisia. US assistance, in the form of Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and the Counter Terrorism Program 1206, has attempted to address various military needs including providing vehicles, patrol boats, and educational opportunities for military personnel³⁷. The US has also had a role in **enhancing border security efforts** through providing technical assistance, equipment and related training to Tunisian border enforcement personnel³⁸.

The **Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF)** provides support to the Tunisian government on a range of issues relating to security sector reform. Thematic areas of interest include prison reform, gender and security, and police reform³⁹. DCAF has held talks and organised seminars with a variety of government ministries on topics including improving communication in times of crisis and strengthening prison oversight. Alongside the **Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR)**, DCAF has also organised a public consultation on **gender mainstreaming** in the security sector⁴⁰. In May 2013, the Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice and DCAF signed a draft

³² See: http://www.diplonews.com/feeds/free/17_March_2013_24.php

³³ See: <http://www.government.nl/news/2013/06/17/the-netherlands-supports-tunisia-s-transition.html>

³⁴ See: <http://ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/tunisia>

³⁵ See: <http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Articles/2013/In-Tunisia-Adult-Voter-Information-Programs-for-the-Illiterate.aspx>

³⁶ See: <http://www.npwj.org/ICC/Supporting-Democratic-Transition-Tunisia-through-Transitional-Justice.html>

³⁷ See: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/07/201207279778.html#axzz2l0u9SdYw>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See: <http://dcaf-tunisie.org/en/?viewall=1>

⁴⁰ See: <http://dcaf-tunisie.org/en/2013/06/10/dcaf-and-aihr-launch-a-joint-study-on-identification-of-needs-for-gender-mainstreaming-in-the-security-sector-in-tunisia-2/>

agreement on enhancing good governance in Tunisia through the respect for and the promotion of human rights⁴¹.

Local associations and NGOs working in security sector reform in Tunisia include: Labo Démocratique; the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT); the Organisation Against Torture in Tunisia (OCTT); Tunisian Association for Citizen Police (ATPC); Tunisian Institutional Reform (TIR); and the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH) (IFIT, 2013: 37).

4.3 Tackling terrorist activity

The Tunisian government has been working alongside its **regional partners** to combat terrorist activity, particularly in the border regions. In early 2013, meetings between the heads of state from Tunisia and **Algeria** sought to enhance security cooperation in the Chaambi mountains in Western Tunisia (JACS, 2013: 7). Intelligence and security officers from the two countries are reportedly working together to share information about terrorist groups active in the region⁴².

The US **Anti-Terrorism Assistance Training Programme (ATA)** is providing assistance to the Tunisian border forces, particularly in strengthening their ability to detect and intercept terrorists and build capacity for investigating terrorist activity⁴³ (Serafino, 2013).

4.4 Support to socio-economic development

A variety of funds have been made available to the Tunisian government to contribute to post-revolution socio-economic recovery. The **Tunisia Social Protection Reforms Support Grant**, for example, was provided by the World Bank and aims to consolidate and better target social protection programmes⁴⁴.

Since July 2011, the **US Government** has provided over US\$300 million to support Tunisia's transition, with a particular focus on technical and financial assistance to the Tunisian economy and private sector⁴⁵. The USAID **Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund (TAEF)**, launched in June 2013 and with a budget of US\$100 million, will invest in small and medium enterprises in an effort to 'promote inclusion growth and employment'⁴⁶.

The **African Development Bank (ADB)**'s Social Inclusion and Transition Support Program sought to restore socio-economic stability to support democratic transition in the immediate post-revolution period (ADB, 2011). The Bank's 2012-2013 strategy for Tunisia focuses on technical assistance and supplying equipment in two pillars: Growth and economic transition; and inclusion and reduction of regional disparities (ADB, 2012). Specific objectives within this include: Supporting economic transformation; job creation; and access to basic infrastructure and local social services (ADB, 2012).

⁴¹ See: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201305160817.html>

⁴² See: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201308080752.html?viewall=1>

⁴³ See: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/07/201207279778.html#axzz2l0u9SdYw>

⁴⁴ See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/11/05/world-bank-social-protection-reforms-tunisia>

⁴⁵ See: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/07/201207279778.html#axzz2l0u9SdYw>

⁴⁶ See: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/usaid-announces-tunisian-american-enterprise-fund>

4.5 Anti-corruption efforts

Since the revolution, Tunisian authorities have launched a series of investigations into corruption attributed to the former regime. The creation of an independent corruption commission, the National Commission for Investigating Cases of Corruption and Embezzlement (NCICM), has brought to light abuses perpetrated during Ben Ali's rule, as well as identified mechanisms that were used to divert public resources to a small circle of state elites (OECD, 2013). International assistance in this area includes the EU funded 'Good governance and the fight against corruption and money-laundering project'⁴⁷.

4.6 Addressing violence against women

The EU has provided a grant contract of €500,000 which aims to **prevent gender-based violence** in North-East Tunisia. Implemented by the Spanish NGO Fundación CIDEAL de Cooperación y Investigación (Centre for Research and Cooperation), the project involves training specialised staff in legal, psychological and socio-medical support to victims, as well as raising awareness of the impacts of gender-based violence⁴⁸.

5. Practical recommendations

5.1 Develop a targeted socio-economic response

As much of the literature on violence in Tunisia emphasises the socio economic dimensions of conflict, addressing such problems has been a central component of many of the practical recommendations. The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2013), for example, contends that prior to embarking on a security-based response to conflict, the Tunisian government and international actors should aim to provide improved and wide-ranging social, educational, and employment **support services** to the population, particular disenfranchised young people. The ICG recommends that the Tunisian government should work in partnership with civil society and international partners, and encourage joint initiatives between Islamic and secular organisations to address social and economic problems (ICG, 2013: 42).

The ICG (2012c) additionally recommends that the international community should work with and financially support regional and local development organisations, particularly those that work with unemployed university graduates. It is also recommended that international agents should help to facilitate the development of **local business** through modalities such as providing **technical assistance** to local start-ups and making **micro credit** available.

5.2 Tailor de- and counter-radicalisation measures to local circumstances

There is a wide and growing body of literature which explores de- and counter-radicalisation measures in North Africa and elsewhere. As there is no single driver of radicalisation, the issue of how to address this phenomenon is similarly complex and involves a variety of complementary approaches, ranging from religious rehabilitation to de-radicalisation in prisons (UN-CTITF, 2008). Some of the lessons identified from existing programmes in North Africa and elsewhere include:

⁴⁷ See: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/economiccrime/corruption/projects/snac/pdf/SNACTUN-Start-up-DOA-en.pdf>

⁴⁸ See: http://www.diplonews.com/feeds/free/17_March_2013_24.php

- De-radicalisation efforts should attempt to tackle the **socio-economic** and **political problems** in which radicalisation can thrive. Marks (2013: 114), for instance, argues that de- and counter-radicalisation efforts should involve ‘structural solutions’ which seek to mitigate the conditions of socio-economic marginalisation, including, for instance, civilian oversight of internal security forces and transparency in the rule of law.
- Some of the more effective de-radicalisation strategies **incorporate an aftercare element** in their programming. This can range from scheduled counselling sessions to daily text message reminders. Families have an important role in monitoring against recidivism and so should also be incorporated in de-radicalisation efforts (Hearne & Laiq, 2010).
- An emphasis should be placed on **paying attention to context** and **tailoring** de-radicalisation approaches to the specific local cultural, historical and political circumstances (El-Said, 2012; Hearne & Laiq, 2010).
- **Interlocutors**, particularly moderate Islamic preachers have a crucial role to play in de-radicalisation efforts. They should be highly knowledgeable and well respected among the community within which they work (IFSD, 2012). It can also be useful to have former extremists involved in disengagement programmes as they may have a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the individual and credibility among participants (IFSD, 2012).

5.3 Coordinate donor assistance

Drawing from the insights of Tunisian civil society, Kausch (2013: 9) finds that a lack of coordination and an apparent ‘competition for projects, partners and visibility’ among donors has hampered assistance efforts in the country. Relatedly, the IFIT (2013) recommends that donors should map international assistance in Tunisia to identify gaps and linkages.

5.4 Provide targeted assistance to the security and judicial sectors

In a report produced for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Hanlon (2012: 3) finds that Tunisia is ‘well positioned’ to undertake security sector reform. This is due to a combination of factors including it being a ‘legalistic’ society, with a vibrant legal community, civil society groups, and a well-developed legal code that, in principle, prescribes the functions of the government (Hanlon, 2012: 3). Tunisia also has significant security capacity – following the revolution the Tunisian armed forces filled the vacuum created by the collapse of the Ben Ali regime (Hanlon, 2012: 3).

Despite such positive aspects, Hanlon (2012: 3) notes that persistent challenges remain. The transition to democracy demands a reorientation in the mandate and culture of the Tunisian security sector, and a building of trust between itself and Tunisian citizens (Hanlon, 2012: 3).

Recommendations for security and judicial sector assistance provided in the literature include:

- **Restructure** the internal security services and the Ministry of the Interior by drawing on the experience of international experts. This includes resolving the police force’s image through tangible indicators of change, such as a change in uniforms, logos and emblems, as well as a reorientation in how the force engages with citizens (Hanlon, 2012: 12).
- Establish **governance and democratic oversight** in the security sector including the creation of committees on defence, security and intelligence (Hanlon, 2012: 12).
- **Support and strengthen** existing partnerships to improve the Tunisian **judicial system**, and provide technical assistance in the training of judges to fight against corruption (ICG, 2012b).

- **Establish education and exchange programmes** with the security sector on various areas of reform, including providing human rights training for police officers and their supervisors (ICG, 2012b).
- Provide financial backing for the **modernisation** and improvement of non-lethal crowd control equipment (ICG, 2013).
- Support the development of **neighbourhood policing** to help the security forces “re-establish contact with the population in high-risk areas and win back its trust” (ICG, 2013: 43).

Appendix: Key actors

Domestic political parties

Ennahda (Renaissance party)

Ennahda is the Tunisian Islamic party. Legalised in March 2011, the party went on to win the country's first democratic and free elections that same year, winning 89 seats out of the 217 in the Constituent Assembly (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013a). In an analysis of the party's 40 year history, Cavatorta and Merone (2013a: 857) contend that Ennahda has gone through a 'profound ideological transformation', repositioning itself from a fundamentalist anti-democracy party to a conservative democratic party. Currently, Ennahda is in a coalition government with Ettakatol and the Congress Party for the Republic.

Ettakatol (Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties, or FDTL)

Ettakatol is a centre-left party that was founded in 1994 and formally legalised in 2002. Lead by Mustafa Ben Jaafar, the party emphasises transparency, combatting corruption and the call for inheritance laws to ensure equality between men and women⁴⁹.

Congrès Pour la République / Congress Party for the Republic (CPR)

The Congress for the Republic is a centre-left, secular party. Founded by Moncef Marzouki in 2001, Marzouki ran the party from exile until 2011. CPR's platform revolves around civil liberties, including abolishing the political police force, lifting censorship, and establishing legislation that ensures the freedoms set forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The CPR refuses to accept donations from external sources, including businesses⁵⁰.

Hizb al-Tahrīr

Hizb al-Tahrīr is a political party whose goal is the abolition of civil democratic politics and the creation of an Islamic state. The party have been successful in organising protests in various cities in Tunisia, including a well-attended organised prayer in the middle of Tunis, however indications are that their following is limited. Hizb al-Tahrīr was formally registered as a political party after the October 2011 elections, and so will participate in the next elections (December 2012). Research cited by Donker (2013) indicates that the party would receive around 2 per cent of the popular vote.

Jabhat al-Islāh (The Reform Front)

Jabhat al-Islāh is a Salafi political party that seeks the "application of shariah rule in all parts of life" (Donker, 2013: 213). Attempts by the party to gain official recognition prior to the October 2011 elections proved unsuccessful, with the transitional government citing "national security concerns" as the reason for failing to grant recognition (Zelin, 2012). Party members ran unsuccessfully as independents and as members of the Tunisian Labour and Reform Front in the October 2011 election (Donker, 2013). Similar to Hizb al-Tahrīr, research cited in 2011 indicates that in a popular vote the party would receive around 2 per cent (Donker, 2013). Jabhat al-Islāh is led by former University of Tunis academic, Muhammad al-Khawjah.

⁴⁹ See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/201110614579390256.html>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Islamist groups

Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST)

AST is Tunisia's largest Salafi Jihadist organisation. It was set up in 2011 under the leadership of Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi, a jihadist combatant who fought in Afghanistan and was deported to Tunisia on charges of international terrorism (Torelli et al., 2012: 148). The AST uses a combination of 'street politics' to achieve its political and social objectives (Torelli et al., 2012: 149) as well a small number of violent activities (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013). Gartenstein-Ross (2013: 2) contends that violence is kept at 'a level that will not trigger a major crackdown by the state'. Some of the issues and activities the group engages in include: 'occupy mosques', which are campaigns to remove imams they perceive as 'too loyal' to the Ben Ali regime; drawing attention to and lobbying government on the plight of Tunisian prisoners in jail in Iraq; and organising campaigns on a range of social issues such as making blasphemy a criminal offence and introducing gender segregation in public spaces (Torelli et al., 2012).

Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution

The Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution was formed immediately following the January 2011 revolution (Seghaier, 2013). The group claims to defend the principles of the revolution and is estimated to have 17 branches and six or seven administrations across Tunisia (Seghaier, 2013). Activities the groups engage in include intimidating secularists and those who are perceived as too close to the old regime; holding counter-demonstrations and rallies against secularists that often end in violence; and attacking journalists and opposition militants (ICG, 2013: 45). Drawing from empirical research in Tunisia, the ICG (2013: 45) contend that 'these leagues provoke strong fears among non-Islamists, who accuse them of giving their members preferential treatment...and above all of preparing the ground for serious political violence'.

Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia)

Nidaa Tounes is a secularist political party that was founded by the former Prime Minister Beji Caid el Sebsi after the 2011 elections. The party has a 'modernist' approach and its membership includes former members of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally. The party has the support of many members of the Tunisian General Labour Union and the national employers' union. Nidaa Tounes contends that secularist parties should unite to counter the dominance of the Ennahda movement.

Tunisian Islamic Combatant Group (TICG)

TICG was created in 2000 by Seifallah ben Hassine and Tarek Maaroufi. A militant group, TICG has organised the recruitment of volunteers for training in Al-Qaeda-related camps in Afghanistan⁵¹. Members of TICG have given logistical support to Algerians belonging to the Organisation of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and some reportedly maintain ties with the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)⁵².

Other national organisations

Tunisia General Labour Union / Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT)

The UGTT was formed in 1946 and is the umbrella organisation for all trade unions in the country. The union has a membership of 517,000 and is affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions. The Union retains a powerful position in Tunisian society, with protests and strikes being held against the speed of

⁵¹ See: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09002E.shtml>

⁵² See: <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/tunisian-combatant-group-tcg>

reform and the Ennahada coalition⁵³. UGTT has had a role as a mediator to solve the stalemate on constitutional reform⁵⁴.

Tamarod Tunisia

The Tamarod movement in Tunisia is inspired by the movement of the same name in Egypt. The group contends that political Islam is 'doomed' and seeks a new constitution that "guarantees rights and freedoms to all Tunisians"⁵⁵. In July 2013, the group began petitioning for signatures to have the Tunisian National Assembly dissolved, in a campaign similar to that which led to the removal of President Morsi in Egypt. Tactics the group use include sit-ins and protests outside government offices, and members going on hunger strike⁵⁶.

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⁵³ See for example: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/02/2013213154659178276.html>

⁵⁴ See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/11/tunisians-remain-divided-naming-new-pm-2013112125453545249.html>

⁵⁵ See: <http://www.popularresistance.org/tamarod-rebellion-movement-now-in-tunisia/>

⁵⁶ See: <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/08/12/tunisian-tamarod-declares-hunger-strike-at-bardo/>

⁵⁷ See: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09002E.shtml>

⁵⁸ See: <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/tunisian-combatant-group-tcg>

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