# Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

# TUNISIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Tunisia, focusing on unique cultural features of Tunisian society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and

economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

## Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

## Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for

universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

## Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.

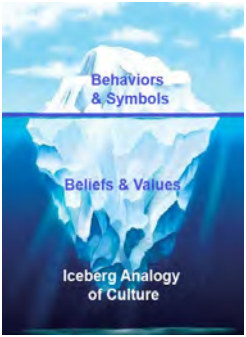
As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

## Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.




## Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the

deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and

ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles (Photo: *Kutubiyya Mosque* courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest, 2013).

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European

presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai,

along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

## 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer

individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia).

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness,

death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

## 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.

First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of singles parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt multilingual

practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.

While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also hamper progress. According to 2017 statistics, only 80% of the

continent's children were enrolled in primary school, leaving over 33 million African children without any schooling at all.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.

Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.

Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world’s dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 17% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 70% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 92% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 63% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to safe drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.

Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.

International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Tunisian society.

# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Overview

A distinct territorial unit for centuries, Tunisia has blended foreign cultures and indigenous traditions into a homogenous society. Although it is the smallest North African state, Tunisia has set important precedents—most recently, it was the first Arab country to overthrow its despot in a popular movement.

### Early History

Early hominids and their descendants have lived in Tunisia for 200,000 years. Between 7000 and 4500 BC, a group of settlers from Berber descent inhabited present-day Gafsa, Tunisia (see p11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Known today as the Capsians, this group domesticated sheep and cattle, established villages, and cultivated snails for food and art. The Capsian culture left behind paintings, pottery, jewelry, and decorated ostrich eggs, in addition to stone and bone tools. These and other early inhabitants enjoyed lush landscapes until desertification began around 8,000 years ago.

### Carthage

The sea-faring Phoenicians from present-day Tyre, Lebanon first settled the Tunisian coast in 1100 BC, establishing the city of Carthage in 814 BC. Although originally a minor Punic (Phoenician) outpost, Carthage eclipsed its homeland to become a major regional trading empire defended by a strong navy and linked to inland Berber communities for labor and raw materials. A rival of both the Greeks and Romans, Carthage fought Rome and lost 3 Punic Wars fought between 264-241 BC, 218-201 BC, and 149-146 BC respectively (Pictured: 19th century painting of the Second Punic War).

In the Second Punic War, famed military genius Hannibal commanded Carthage's attacks into Europe, leading columns of men and elephants across the Alps. Carthage ultimately lost to Rome, and Hannibal committed suicide. Yet, his larger-than-life actions have been immortalized in Tunisia. Today, Tunisian streets, cafes, and the Hannibal Club, an institution promoting Tunisian culture abroad, bear his name.

Following this defeat, Carthage lost territory and was forced to pay tributes to Rome. Slowly, Carthage began to lose control of the Berbers at home, in part because it could not pay its Berber mercenaries. At the end of the third disastrous war in 146 BC, Rome destroyed Carthage and sowed its land with salt.

### Carthage's Mythical Founding

In contrast to history, which is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths can provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

According to a Carthagian myth, a widowed Punic princess named Dido fled with her husband's fortune to North Africa in 814 BC. When the local Berber chief allowed her only the amount of land an ox hide could cover, Dido trimmed the hide into long strips that covered a hill, which became the center of Carthage. When the Berber chief insisted she marry him, Dido killed herself to save the city from the war that would have resulted from her refusal.

The historical details about Carthage's founding are unclear, but the myth may be rooted in facts. Some believe Carthage must have been founded by a woman because the mythical details are so unusual. Carthage's actual connection to exiled royalty is unproven, yet this assertion likely justified the city's supremacy among other Punic outposts.

## The Influence of Regional Empires

**Berbers:** With Rome's agreement, Berbers filled the resulting power void. The region called Numidia (part of modern Algeria and Tunisia) was united and divided several times as Berber kings supported or opposed Rome, which ultimately defeated the last independent Berber king in the 1st century BC.

**Romans:** In 46 BC, the Romans began colonizing and directly governing what comprises modern Tunisia as a province called *Africa Proconsularis*. With the rebuilt city of Carthage as its capital, Roman Tunisia became a melting pot of Latin-speaking settlers living among Berber and Punic speakers and Jews arriving from Palestine (see p4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Tunisia produced grains, wine, and olives to help feed the Roman Empire. In return, Rome invested heavily in the region's infrastructure, creating an extensive network of roads with mile markers, aqueducts, baths, stadiums, and other structures now seen as ruins across Tunisia (pictured). Tunisia and greater North Africa were well-represented in Rome's Senate: at one point, 15% of senators came from the region. From 193 to 211 AD, North African native Septimius Severus ruled as Caesar. After his dynasty ended in 235, political turmoil resulted from frequent leader turnover, inflation, steep taxes, and diminished Roman power. As Rome declined, Christianity made significant in-roads into Tunisia (see p5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

**Vandals and Byzantines:** In 429, Germanic Vandals crossed into Algeria from Spain, defeated the Romans, and established a short-lived kingdom with Carthage as its capital. The Roman Empire's Greek-speaking successor based in the Byzantine Empire's capital, Constantinople (known today as Istanbul), routed the Vandals in 533. As inattentive landlords, the Byzantines gave the Berbers de facto autonomy during their rule. In 646, a bold Byzantine governor declared independence but was killed the next year by Arab Muslims from the East.

## Advent of Islam

Eager to spread their new religion, early converts to Islam from the Arabian Peninsula moved into Tunisia in the latter half of the 600s. While the first Muslim raid on Tunisia in 647 did not convert many people or establish Islamic rule, over time, Islam would fundamentally reshape Tunisian society (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Uqba bin Nafi al-Fihri, a general associated with the Islamic Umayyad caliphate in Damascus, Syria, established the city of Kairouan in 670. Strategically located near Carthage and remote from Berber strongholds, Kairouan became militarily and religiously significant as the capital of various Islamic dynasties.

Some Berbers accepted Islam, intermarried with Arabs, and facilitated further Arab conquests. Other Berbers, including some Christian and Jewish populations, initially resisted and fought the Arabs independently or as allies to Byzantine forces. Still others embraced the Kharijite school of Islam, which rejected central Islamic governance and solely Arab caliphs, to assert their uniqueness.

## Islamic Rule

Various Islamic groups administered Tunisia from the late 7th to the 16th centuries. The Damascus-based Sunni Umayyads governed the region as the province ***Ifriqiyya*** (Arabic for Africa, Tunisia's Roman name), then were followed by the Baghdad-based Sunni Abbasid caliphate. Both caliphates considered Tunisia too distant to warrant sustained attention.

**Aghlabids:** In 800, the Abbasids named Ibrahim bin al-Aghlab governor. He successfully suppressed various Kharijite rebellions and founded the hereditary Aghlabid dynasty, which remained nominally subordinate to the Abbasid caliphate. The Aghlabid dynasty presided over the first golden Islamic age in Tunisia: it built the Great Mosque at Kairouan, constructed several ***ribats*** (forts), repaired Roman infrastructure, revitalized agriculture, and even conquered Sicily, Italy (Pictured: Coin from Kairouan, Tunisia with a reference to the Abbasid caliph and Aghlabid emir).

**Fatimids:** In 909, Shi'a Muslim Berbers called Fatimids conquered Kairouan and overthrew the Sunni Muslim Aghlabids. The Fatimids continued their march to Egypt and then outsourced their rule to the Berber Zirids. In 1049, the Zirid emir returned Tunisia to Sunni Islam (see p6 of *Religion and Spirituality* for an explanation of Muslim sects).

**Zirids and Banu Hilal:** Angered by the reversion to Sunni Islam, the Fatimids encouraged the Arab Banu Hilal tribe to punish the Zirids. Local Arabs plundered Tunisia, weakening it so much that the crusading Normans of England were able to move in and control Tunisian coastal cities between 1135 and 1160. The Banu Hilal had a lasting effect on Tunisia: the tribe expedited Arabization, the process by which the non-Arab indigenous populations adopted Arabic language and cultural customs in place of their own (Photo: The Great Mosque of Kairouan).

**Almohads and Hafsids:** The Sunni Almohads of Morocco conquered Tunis in 1159 and in 1207 installed the Hafsid dynasty. Ruling from their capital of Tunis, the Hafsids re-established trade ties with Europe that were so durable that even the French King Louis IX's short-lived, unsuccessful Eighth Crusade in 1270 could not penetrate them. Although their rule officially continued until 1574, the Hafsids began a long, slow decline well before then.

## Spain and the Ottoman Empire

To help control their territory, the Hafsids turned to pirates, including Barbarossa (Red Beard). When the Hafsids later rejected their pirate allies, Barbarossa sought and received Turkish Ottoman support against them. In 1534, Tunis fell into Ottoman hands after a seaborne attack. The Hafsid ruler, Hassan, fled to his trading partner, Spain. There, he appealed to the king, and a year later, Hassan was back on the throne in Tunis thanks to Spanish support. In the ensuing years, Tunisia changed hands multiple times as the Ottomans and Europeans vied for control. In 1574, the Turks finally routed Spain and made Tunisia an Ottoman province.

In the Ottoman Empire, ***beys*** (provincial governors), ***deys*** (military leaders), and ***pashas*** (governors) competed for influence while nominally reporting to the sultan in Istanbul, Turkey. Turkish-speaking Ottoman administrators generally excluded Arabic-speaking natives from leadership positions. Nevertheless, the Ottoman era was a prosperous time for Tunisia as the Ottomans constructed and restored buildings and infrastructure. In the 16th century, Tunisia welcomed thousands of Jews and Muslims escaping persecution in Spain (Pictured: Turkish depiction of the Ottomans marching on Tunis in 1569).

In 1705, after thwarting an Algerian invasion attempt, Tunisian ***Bey*** Hussein bin Ali established a hereditary line of ***beys*** known as the Husseinids that swore allegiance to Istanbul but operated autonomously. Each generation the ***bey*** selected the best suited Husseinid prince as heir. Eventually broadening their support base to include Arab elites, the Husseinids would continue to govern nominally until independence in 1957.

By the 19th century, Berber and Arab leaders In Tunisia's interior stopped paying taxes, which eventually curtailed the army's capability to control the hinterlands. The Husseinids sought foreign loans to compensate for lost revenue, rebuild the military, and add to their personal wealth. This foreign assistance thrust Tunisia deeply in debt under the condition of reforms favoring the foreigners.

## Khayr ad-Din and the First Constitution

Tunisia's rulers hoped that modernizing reforms would ensure Tunisian independence by appeasing the foreign powers active in the region, namely France in Algeria and the Ottoman Empire in Libya. In 1857 France directed Tunisia to adopt the so-called Fundamental Pact, granting citizens equal treatment under the law regardless of religion and allowed foreigners to own property. By guaranteeing foreigners equal protection under Tunisian law, the Pact undermined Tunisian sovereignty.

In 1861, Khayr ad-Din Pasha al-Tunsi (known as Hayreddin Pasha) drew up the Arab world's first ***destour*** (constitution), establishing Tunisia as a constitutional monarchy with a representative Supreme Council and a secular Supreme Court. Hayreddin Pasha was an Ottoman Tunisian political reformer during this period of growing European ascendancy and considered the father of Tunisian nationalism.

## Indebtedness and French Control

Popular discontent due to Tunisia's bankruptcy led to the constitution's 1864 suspension and the country's alignment under the management of an international commission comprised of British, French, and Italian members. First as Tunisia's commission representative and then as Prime Minister, Khayr ad-Din (pictured) introduced reforms that ran afoul of European interests. As famine and cholera ravaged the countryside, the French replaced him with a leader they could control in 1877.

In 1881, France occupied Tunisia under the pretext of defending Algerian borders. Under pressure from over 40,000 French troops plus naval assaults, the ***bey*** signed a treaty that gave France political and economic control while nominally leaving Ottoman Husseinid rule intact. As the new system overlaid existing structures, parallel legal systems evolved making Europeans subject to French law and Tunisians to the Islamic legal system.

French rule in Tunisia was less heavy-handed than in neighboring Algeria. Through the civilian leadership of French ***resident generals***, France pursued primarily economic interests in Tunisia and modernized agriculture, infrastructure, and sanitation systems. Because its goal in Tunisia was generating wealth rather than annexing its territory, France encouraged far fewer European settlers and conducted fewer land confiscations than in Algeria. Although many Tunisian reformers believed that French rule would have a positive, modernizing influence, French contributions did little to help the Tunisian people prepare for self-government.

## Growing Nationalism and WWII

Inspired by the modernizing Young Turks' movement in Turkey, young French-educated Tunisian elites began demanding equal rights with Europeans. In 1920, some of these "Young Tunisians" established the Destour Party, named for the 1861 constitution. Although the party program called for gradual reforms, the French made only minor concessions, arrested party leaders, and ultimately banned the party in 1933.

In 1934, young Tunisian nationalist Habib Bourguiba founded the Neo-Destour party, which encouraged protests and civil disobedience. On the eve of World War II, Bourguiba was arrested and his party banned. Deported to France and then Italy, Bourguiba vocally supported the Allied cause.

When France fell to Germany in 1940, Tunisia came under the jurisdiction of Vichy France, which collaborated with the Nazis. In November 1942, Germany invaded Tunisia to block Allied advances in the region.

The first major battle between American and German forces took place in central Tunisia's Kasserine Pass (pictured) in February 1943. The US Army performed poorly yet learned from its mistakes. The Allies took Tunis in May 1943, pushed Axis forces from the Maghreb, and paved the way for the Allied invasion of Italy.

## Independence

Bourguiba returned to Tunisia in the early 1950s, but was forced to leave again because France's anti-nationalism stance towards Tunisia had not softened. In exile, he lobbied for his cause in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. Upon his return, Bourguiba was imprisoned again, while some of his Neo-Destour supporters committed terrorist acts that prompted reprisals and arrests.

By 1954, France's colonial empire was crumbling as French Indochina, Algeria, and Morocco opposed French rule. Evading a stand in Tunisia, France negotiated Tunisian autonomy, which led to full independence on 20 March 1956. By 1957, as the last Ottoman ***bey*** was deposed, Tunisia became a presidential republic with Bourguiba at the helm.

### Bourguiba: Builder of Modern Tunisia

To create the modern, secular Tunisia he envisioned, Bourguiba (pictured) prioritized social and legal reforms. At his urging, Tunisia adopted the Personal Status Code that gave women unprecedented rights in the Arab world (see p5 of *Family and Kinship*). The code proclaimed equality before the law, empowered women to vote, and disallowed Islamic divorce. Bourguiba devoted a quarter of Tunisia's budget to education, which raised literacy and school attendance rates (see p2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Economic reforms and investments in the health care system improved living standards and life expectancy.

Democratic reforms did not follow from these social, economic, and legal reforms: Bourguiba was named President for life in 1974. Throughout his Presidency, Bourguiba believed Islam contributed to Tunisia's backwardness and tried to limit its influence (see p6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Consequently, clerics and many Muslim constituents protested this threat to their values. Islamic opposition groups arose in the 1970s and were persecuted throughout the 1980s. After 30 years in power, Bourguiba and his policies began to grow more erratic.

### Ben Ali Takes the Reins

In 1987, Prime Minister Zine El Abidine Ben Ali declared Bourguiba mentally unfit for his presidential duties. To preempt a popular uprising over the planned execution of some Islamists, Ben Ali seized power. A soldier by profession who had served in various government posts, Ben Ali promised political openness and respect for human rights.

In reality, Ben Ali continued Bourguiba's policies of reform and repression. In contrast to Bourguiba, Ben Ali was more willing to tout his Islamic credentials when it suited him politically. He changed the name of the Neo-Destour Party to the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) and in 1989 was elected President after running unopposed. He banned the Islamist en-Nahda party in 1989 and arrested many of its activists. Illogical vote totals well over 90% in the 1999, 2004, and 2009 elections suggested that he was no democratic reformer.

### Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution

In December 2010, a young fruit vendor named Muhammad Bouazzi set himself on fire after government officials treated him unfairly. This action drove Tunisians to the streets to protest unemployment, a lack of political freedom, and corruption.

Following this series of popular protests that Tunisians called the "Jasmine Revolution," President Ben Ali (pictured) fled Tunisia for Saudi Arabia in January 2011. Tunisia thus became the first Arab country to oust its authoritarian leader. These events triggered a wave of protests that swept the Arab world and came to be known in the West as the "Arab Spring."

Following Ben Ali's ouster, his RCD party dissolved. In elections held in October 2011, the once-banned en-Nahda party won a plurality of parliamentary seats (see p4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Since 2011, the Islamist-led government under interim President Moncef Marzouki has pivoted between factions desiring a secular society with expanded rights and those wanting Islam to be the basis for society and law. The politically motivated murders of 2 anti-Islamist opposition figures sparked new waves of protests in 2013. Consequently, dissenting tensions impeded the process of drafting a new constitution (see p3 of *Political and Social Relations*). However, the constitution was approved in January 2014.

# 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name
Tunisian Republic
*al-Jumhuriya at-Tunisiya* (Arabic)
*République Tunisienne* (French)
*Tagduda n Tunes* (Tamazight)

### Political Borders
Libya: 285 mi
Algeria: 600 mi
Coastline: 713 mi

### Capital
Tunis

*Note: In Arabic, Tunis refers to both the capital city and the country itself.*

### Demographics
Tunisia's population of 11.7 million is growing at a rate of 0.85% per year, close to the US growth rate of 0.72%. Tunisia has been more urban than rural since the 1970s, and as of 2020, 70% of Tunisians lived in urban areas, mostly concentrated in the North. About 20% of the population or 2.365 million people lived in Tunis, the largest city, in 2020.

### Flag
The Tunisian flag design is based on the Ottoman flag (see p5 of *History and Myth*) and features a red field with a central white circle containing a red crescent and a 5-point star. Red symbolizes the blood of Tunisian martyrs who fought oppression, and white stands for peace. The crescent represents the unity of Muslims and the 5-point star the Five Pillars of Islam.

## Geography

Tunisia is 63,170 square miles in area or slightly larger than the US state of Georgia. Located in North Africa, Tunisia borders Libya to the southeast, Algeria to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea (its longest boundary) to the north. Tunisia is 90 miles from the Italian island of Sicily.

Tunisian terrain varies widely. In the North, the Dorsal Mountains (pictured) dominate the landscape. North central Tunisia consists of a fertile coastal plain, while in the South, the semiarid central plateau transitions to desert. The southern desert landscape varies from sand dunes to rocks to oases.

Tunisia's highest point is Jebel ech-Chambi, a 5,066-ft peak in the Northwest. The lowest point is Chott al-Gharsah, a salt flat 56 ft below sea level, which is often depicted on maps as a lake but rarely contains water. The Medjerda River is Tunisia's longest and only perennially wet river, serving as an important waterway and irrigation source. A producer of grain and olives since Roman times, 19% of Tunisian land today is arable with 15% used for permanent crop cultivation.

## Climate

Tunisia's climate varies with its terrain. The North enjoys a Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters having temperatures in the 50s°F and warm summers with average temperatures in the low 80s°F. High temperatures in August, the hottest month, can reach 104°F. Colder temperatures occur at higher elevations where some mountains get snow. Northern Tunisia's average annual rainfall is about 40 inches.

In the central region, average rainfall totals approach 6 in. Precipitation is even rarer further south where the semiarid plateau transitions into the Sahara, the world's largest subtropical desert. Some parts of the Sahara do not receive rain for years at a time, where daytime temperatures can soar to over 120°F in July and August. In summer, sandy Sirocco winds blow across Tunisia and into some parts of Europe carrying heat and dust from the Sahara.

## Natural Hazards

Tunisia's few natural disasters include occasional deadly flooding—8 floods killed 222 people between 1980 and 2010. During the hot summer months in particular, water shortages can occur, stressing Tunisia's limited natural freshwater supply. Man-made hazards include improper waste disposal, deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification (Photo: the Sahara Desert).

## Government

An electoral democracy with 24 provinces, Tunisia is in a time of transition. While Islamists did not inspire the uprisings that led to Ben Ali's overthrow, nevertheless, they gained political clout in fair interim elections held in October 2011 (see p10 of *History and Myth*). Since then, Islamist and secular political forces have remained at odds over how best to govern the country (see p9 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

In conjunction with the 2011 elections, the National Constituent Assembly was appointed to draft a new constitution. A revision was adopted in January 2014, following an extended period of controversy and debate. Fundamental provisions include a guarantee of religious freedom, gender equality, and government accountability for protecting women from violence, among others. With the new constitution, then-Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa appointed a caretaker Cabinet to negotiate an end to the crisis between Tunisia's Islamist party and its secular opposition, pending the 2014 elections.

## Legislative Branch

Prior to the 2011 revolution, the President appointed legislators who largely rubber stamped his initiatives. The 2011 elections were designed to select legislators empowered to govern, resulting in the installment of 217 interim Assembly members. The Islamist en-Nahda was reinstated, acquiring a majority coalition with 2 left-leaning parties—the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and et-Takatol. The new constitution retained Tunisia's single-body legislature, the Chamber of the Peoples' Deputies, whose members are elected to 5-year terms.

## Executive Branch

The new constitution establishes a mixed-party system, distributing executive powers between the President and Prime Minister, each elected to a 5-year term. Current President Kais Saïed (pictured) was elected in October 2019 with 18.4% of the vote. Kais Saied is a Tunisian politician, statesman, jurist and former lecturer serving as the fifth President of Tunisia. He was president of the Tunisian Association of Constitutional Law from 1995 to 2019. An independent candidate in the 2019 presidential election, he was elected against Nabil Karoui in the second round.

The Tunisian Prime Minister acts as head-of-government. Elyes Fakhfakh is a Tunisian politician. He served as the Minister of Tourism and, starting in December 2012, as the Minister of Finances as well, under Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali. He serves as the current Prime Minister of Tunisia since February 2020 having succeeded Youssef Chahed.

## Judicial Branch

Under the control of the executive branch until 2011, Tunisia's judiciary under its new constitution has taken strides to be in step with the post-revolutionary government. Judges are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Supreme Judicial Council. Tunisia's legal code was based on French civil laws and transferred power from ***shari'a*** (Islamic law) courts to secular courts in the 1950s. Strong representation from Islamists instrumental in drafting the new constitution promises to provide Islamic law with an official judicial position.

## Political Climate

Tunisia was the first Arab country to overthrow its authoritarian government in a series of uprisings across the region, known in the West as the "Arab Spring." Despite some setbacks and renewed protests, Tunisia has become the most successful and peaceful post-revolution Arab country. It held free and fair elections while the military maintained order without usurping power. En-Nahda, the main Islamist party, agreed not to overhaul Tunisia's social contract. Nevertheless, the ultimate political outcomes of the "Jasmine Revolution" are unclear (see

*History and Myth*). The new constitution and forthcoming elections will be critical to setting Tunisia's future course. Supporters of secular and religious visions for Tunisia are at odds, sometimes violently (see p9 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Drafts of the constitution have energized Tunisians hoping to maintain a progressive stance on issues like women's rights (see *Sex and Gender* & 5 of *Family and Kinship*). Meanwhile, Salafist groups are interested in applying a literal interpretation of the Qur'an to Tunisian society, protesting what they see as dangerous departures from fundamental 7th- century Islam (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Tunisia's government faces extreme challenges in satisfying such divergent competing demands. Many Tunisians took to the streets in 2013 to call for a new technocratic government and protest issues ranging from political violence to Salafist influence to specific constitutional provisions. Lawmakers struggle to cope with day-to-day governing requirements while implementing the new constitution under enormous pressure from politicians and protesters alike.

## Defense

The Tunisian 35,800-member Armed Forces comprise the Land Army, Navy, and Air Force. Males ages 20-23 are obligated to complete a year of military service. Active duty personnel are not authorized to vote while serving. (Photo: Then-Tunisian Defense Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi with former US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta in 2012).

Between 2003 and 2013, Tunisia spent less than 2% of GDP on its military annually. Its estimated $933 million military outlay in 2019 was the smallest military expenditure in North Africa. Furthermore, there are no indicators of significant military changes in spending; 2019's defense budget was 2.56% GDP.

Many commentators believe former President Ben Ali's lack of personal ties with the military contributed to the military's deliberately disobeying his orders to fire on protestors during the "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*). The military's decisions to side with the public and stay out of politics have earned it respect.

**Land Army:** It is Tunisia's largest service with approximately 27,000 personnel, although small compared to other regional armies. The Land Army is charged with protecting the country from external threats, maintaining domestic stability as directed by the civilian government, and aiding development programs. Embedded in the Land Army is the Tunisian Air Defense Force, which defends Tunisian air space. Land Army personnel have gained valuable experience through their participation in African Union and United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions since 1960.

**Air Force:** Created in 1959, the Tunisian Air Force provides airlift and transport on behalf of the other services and executes a supporting role in countering security threats from the air. To support this mission, the Air Force had 14 combat, 12 surveillance and reconnaissance, and 18 transport aircraft, 62 helicopters, and roughly 4,000 personnel as of mid-2019. Poorly equipped, the Air Force is unable to mount credible air defense or strike capabilities (Photo: Tunisian and US military personnel load a Tunisian helicopter during a military exercise).

**Navy:** With about 4,800 personnel, Tunisia's Navy defends Tunisia's coastline and territorial waters and patrols for smugglers, traffickers, and illegal fishing from its bases in Tunis, Bizerte, Sfax, and Kelibia. Constrained by its small budget, the Navy has limited, largely outdated equipment, no deep-water capable ships or submarines, and has not been combat-tested.

**Internal Security Forces:** The Internal Security Forces (ISF) fall under the Ministry of the Interior's authority and include the police, National Guard, Judicial Police, Intervention Forces, and Presidential Guard Forces. For their respective actions in Tunisia's uprisings, the ISF are as despised as the Land Army is respected. Some reforms are underway to improve respect for human rights. Total membership in these forces is currently difficult to estimate, although proposed reforms would likely increase transparency.

# Tunisian Air Force Rank Insignia

## Security Issues

**Terrorism:** Regional terrorist groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and others in Mali, Algeria, and elsewhere threaten Tunisia's security. Several Tunisian nationals involved in terrorist activities abroad have turned their attention to Tunisia with the goal of spreading Islamic law (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In summer 2013, the government declared the Tunisian Salafist group Ansar al-Shari'a a terrorist organization after it had violent clashes with the Armed Forces. Members of this and other suspected extremist groups have been arrested since 2011. In 2015, Tunisia experienced 3 acts of terrorism; ISIL claimed responsibility for the attacks. In addition to jeopardizing Tunisia's internal security, increased terrorist activities could undermine tourism and foreign investment.

**Regional Instability:** Porous borders and the increased availability of weapons from post-Qaddhafi Libya jeopardize Tunisian security. Violence in neighboring countries has the propensity to spill over into Tunisia, as it did in 2011 when Libyans crossed the border and briefly engaged Tunisia's Armed Forces. Arms from the Libyan conflict, available on the regional black market, support the reprehensible activities of criminals and pro-Salafist groups

Nearby conflict and chaos have resulted in other problems as well. Tunisia is a country of origin, destination, and transit for human-trafficking due to its proximity to Europe and various African trouble spots. Tunisian smuggling and human- trafficking networks have been especially busy during regional unrest and are adaptable to a range of illicit purposes. In contrast to the prior government's tendency to ignore the trafficking activity, the interim government drafted laws to combat the problem. Since 2016, the government has demonstrated increasing efforts by prosecuting traffickers under the anti-trafficking law and training judicial and law enforcement officials on application of the law (Photo:

Tunisian soldiers learn ordnance disposal techniques from members of the West Virginia National Guard).

## Foreign Relations

Since independence, Tunisia has sought friendly diplomatic relations with its European and Arab neighbors and the US and has largely honored the previous regime's international commitments. In the past decade, Tunisia has made the Middle East and nearby sub-Saharan Africa its highest foreign relations priorities, a stance likely to continue under current circumstances.

Tunisia's role in pan-Arab affairs was relatively minor until 2011, when its regional influence emerged, and likely to grow if it remains on course with its democratic transition. As a beacon for other Arab Spring countries to emulate, Tunisia has facilitated Libya's transition and offered safe haven to Syria's dictator as the country seeks to end its violence.

Tunisians favor the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel and supported Palestine's recent UN bid for statehood. In addition, Tunis previously served as the headquarters for the Palestinian Liberation Organization in exile. Nevertheless, former President Bourguiba was the first Arab leader to call for Israel's recognition, leading to Tunisia having unofficial diplomatic representation in Israel until 2000. While most Tunisians oppose normalizing relations with Israel, hard-liners' demands to criminalize ties with Israel are not expected to receive broad support.

**Tunisia-US Relations:** Security issues are major drivers of close US-Tunisian ties. The US was the first major world power to recognize Tunisia's independence and has provided extensive training support and military equipment to Tunisia's military. A long-time US strategic ally, Tunisia is the top International Military Education and Training recipient in Africa: over 4,600 Tunisian personnel have trained in all US service academies

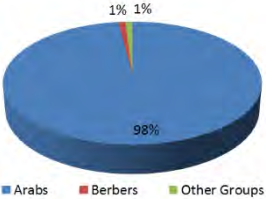
since 1956 (Photo: US Commerce and Trade Representative officials with Tunisian representatives).

Tunisia participates in the US-led Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a program that fosters CT cooperation among Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco, and Tunisia. The TSCTP augments these countries' capacity to eliminate AQIM and other terrorists' safe havens, movement, and illicit activities in the Sahara.

Although the US initially greeted the "Jasmine Revolution" with caution, the events did not diminish the bilateral relationship. Hardly 18 months after Ben Ali's overthrow, US military assistance to Tunisia stood at $32 million, nearly twice the amount in the same period before the leadership change. High-level US officials continue to meet with their Tunisian counterparts: the US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan visited Tunisia in 2017.

**Tunisia-France Relations:** France is an important Tunisian trade partner due to proximity, shared language, and colonial legacy. In 2017, France accepted 32% of Tunisian exports and provided 15% of its imports (see p3-4 of *Economics and Resources*). Many Tunisians were irritated that France initially sided with Ben Ali during their protests. Although the Tunisian government has tried to play up its Islamic and Arab roots while minimizing French ties, a rupture in relations is unlikely. French and Tunisian leadership have met multiple times annually since 2016.

## Ethnic Groups




While nearly all Tunisians have mixed Arab and Berber ethnicity, most of them identify solely as Arabs. The vast majority of Tunisians are native Arabic speakers, claim Arab heritage, and have fully adopted Arab customs as their primary cultural identity. The waves of Arabization that swept through Tunisia starting in the 7th century homogenized Tunisian culture and nearly erased Berber identity (see p4 of *History and Myth*). Since Tunisia's Berber minority is tiny compared to those of Algeria

and Morocco, the significance and impact of Berber identity politics are negligible.

### Arabs

Arab Tunisians speak Arabic as their primary language and follow Arab cultural customs, which link them to Islamic and Arabic history and the larger Arab Middle East. Many Tunisian Arabs are also aware of earlier cultural groups such as the Carthagians and Berbers who also contributed to Tunisia's historical past (see p3 of *History and Myth*).

### Berbers

Tunisians who identify primarily as Berbers constitute about 1% of the population and live primarily in the South. Berbers refer to themselves collectively as ***Imazighen*** or "free or noble men" (singular ***Amazigh***). They typically embrace their Berber identity by speaking a Berber language (see p2 of *Language and Communications*), referencing Berber historical and cultural narratives, wearing traditional Berber dress, and maintaining unique Berber-style homes.

## Social Relations

As with the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisian society is status-conscious. Employment, wealth, age, educational attainment, and family status are key determinants of social status. Salary, position, and job title are especially important. Consequently, unemployment and underemployment present an array of serious social problems for young Tunisians (Photo: Tunisian business school students with Ambassador William Taylor).

In fact, the lack of opportunity among young adults—particularly the frustration of being unable to find a decent job and afford to marry and have children—contributed to the "Jasmine Revolution" that overthrew the government in 2011 (see p10 of *History and Myth*). Thus far in the post-revolutionary period, young Tunisians' prospects have not improved much. Economic and political uncertainty in the transition has made

both Tunisian and foreign business-owners reluctant to invest, expand, and employ (see p1 of *Economics and Resources*).

Within Tunisian society there are several different classes. The political and military elite, aristocratic families, top businessmen, administrators, and well-educated professionals comprise the elite class. Tunisian elites are concentrated in urban areas and can afford lifestyles that are quite distinct from those of their poorer compatriots. Tunisia's elite tend to marry each other, are well educated, wear designer clothes, use Internet-enabled technologies, and have a more Western-oriented outlook.

Elitists tend to view their countrymen in poverty with disdain, although poor Tunisians may rise on the social ladder through education, networking, and tenacity to join Tunisian's relatively large middle class.

Tunisian social relations also revolve around personal and family relationships and the concepts of generating or upholding ***sharaf*** (honor) and avoiding ***'ayb*** (shame). Honor implies maintaining the collective family's good reputation. Failing to do so can shame the individual and damage his standing within the family as well as society at large.

Shame is associated with a variety of behaviors—from breaking Islamic laws to displaying inadequate hospitality towards guests to being embarrassed publically. Shame likely played a role in catalyzing Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution:" the fruit vendor who helped to spark the event did so, in part, because of his shame for being publicly slapped by a police officer (see p10 of *History and Myth*).

Maintaining family honor also allows family members to benefit from their relatives' personal and professional connections. Likewise, an active social network is essential to livelihood in Tunisian society, from finding work to navigating bureaucracy to hiring a plumber. There are negative societal consequences when family interconnections contribute to corruption and nepotism, reinforcing the poverty cycle.

# 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

### Overview

Some 99% of Tunisians are Sunni Muslims, 25,000 are Christian, while a formerly large Jewish population has dwindled to about 2,000. Tunisia's society is largely liberal and tolerant. While Islam was enshrined as the country's official religion in the 1959 constitution, Tunisia's post-independence leaders worked deliberately and successfully to keep religion and state separate. Today, Tunisia is the Arab world's most secular state (Photo: Courtyard of El Abidine mosque in Carthage).

Since the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*), Tunisia's new Islamist government has condemned many but tolerated some ***Salafists'*** (fundamentalist Sunni Islamist groups) attacks on Tunisia's modern secular society. In addition, it has occasionally ignored ***Salafists*** targeting moderate Sunni Muslim leaders, forcefully seizing control of mosques across the country. It appears from the January 2014 constitution that mosque and state will remain separate in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

## Muslim Faith

### Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century when Muhammad, whom Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an or "Holy Book," to guide peoples' everyday lives and shape their values.

### Meaning of Islam

Islam is more than a religion to its adherents – it is a way of life. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

### Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Almost all of Tunisia's Muslims belong to the Maliki school (see below) of Sunni Islam.

### Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

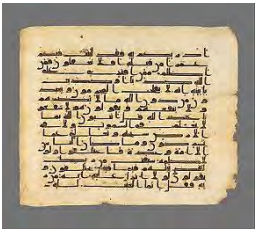
- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship (Photo: US Marine at the Ka'aba in 2012).
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.

- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once a lifetime.

### Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

**Abraham:** All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.



**Scriptures**: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and only Muhammad received the true revelation of God (Pictured: Qur'an page from 8th century North Africa).

**Jesus:** The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of Jesus. While Christians consider Jesus the divine Messiah who fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge Jesus' divinity or the Christian Trinity.

**View of Death:** Muslims believe that the time of death, like birth, is determined by God. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in heaven.

## Concept of Jihad

The concept of ***jihad***, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with ***jihad***. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, one learns to appreciate the good in life. It is common for Muslims to break their fast at sunset with dates and a light meal followed by prayer and then dinner.

Ramadan is observed during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar (see p3 of *Time and Space*) and includes 3 holy days (Photo: Kairouan Great Mosque and cemetery).

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** Known as "The Night of Power," this event marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to the Christian faith), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is celebrated the day the Hajj ends.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This is a 3-day "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrated at Ramadan's end.

**Sufi Tradition:** Some Tunisians follow the Sufi tradition of Islam, characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer. In the past, ***marabouts*** (Islamic teachers) believed to hold ***baraka*** (special spiritual powers) were venerated as healers and saints. Sufi religious centers where followers built shrines to ***marabouts*** that are still places of pilgrimage today.

## The Introduction of Organized Religion

### Judaism

The first Jews arrived in Tunisia from Palestine well over 2,000 years ago and began to convert local Berbers to Judaism. Still other Jews came from Spain when King Philip III expelled them in the late 15th century.

During its occupation of Tunisia during World War II (see p8 of *History and* Myth), Nazi Germany confiscated Jewish property, sending its occupants to forced labor camps. Tunisia's Jewish population in 1948 was estimated to be about 105,000 but was reduced by 40,000 who left immediately following independence with more following in subsequent decades.

## Christianity

By the beginning of the 2nd-century AD, Romans had introduced Christianity to Jewish communities in North Africa and gained converts. Roman Christians built a church in Carthage in 170 AD, where they taught the Scriptures in Latin. Over the next several centuries, Christianity spread throughout North Africa while Tunisia became an important Christian center. Christianity in Tunisia then retreated gradually after the Arab invasions beginning in the 7th century, disappearing almost entirely by the 12th century.

## Islam

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, the arrival of Islam had pervasive and long-lasting effects on the region. Islamization and Arabization collectively displaced Jewish, Christian, and native Berber social, political, educational, and religious structures (see p4-5 of *History and Myth*).

**Introduction of Islam:** After Muhammad's death, Islam spread as conquering armies departed Arabia. In the 7th century, Arab armies began their sweep across northern Africa, and, by 670 AD, Arabs had founded Kairouan, Tunisia, which would become Islam's 4th holiest city after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem (Photo: Kairouan's Mosque of the Three Doors, built in 866).

**Empires and Dynasties:** Waves of Islamic expansion followed as several different Arabic dynasties struggled over centuries to control Tunisia as part of their extended empires (see p4-5 of *History and Myth*). Although there was some Berber resistance, Islam and Arab culture spread relatively rapidly. Some Berbers converted to Islam when they married Arabs, while others converted and joined military service to avoid Arab-imposed taxes. Still others like the Kharijites (see p8 of this section and p4 of *History and Myth*) converted but defied the Arabs, protesting Arab interpretations of Islam and being treated as second-class Muslims. A few Berbers maintained their pre-Islamic religious beliefs and practices.

Most Islamic ruling groups were Sunni, except for about 100 years in the 10th century when a Shi'a Berber dynasty called the Fatimids ruled (see p5 of *History and Myth*). Tunisia experienced a cultural and religious revival during Sunni Hafsid rule from the 13th to the 16th centuries. With its library of 36,000 Islamic texts, the Hafsid's Zituna Mosque in Tunis became the center of Islamic learning in the Maghreb.

**Islam in the Protectorate:** As a protectorate of France from 1881 to 1956 still under the nominal control of the Turkish Ottomans (see p7 of *History and Myth*), Tunisia retained its Islamic identity and its system of ***shari'a*** (Islamic law). Gradually, Islamic and Arab identity became a source of opposition to the French as nationalist Tunisians rallied for reform and independence (see p7-9 of *History and Myth*).

**Islam in the Post-Independence Period:** After independence, President Bourguiba initiated reforms intended to neutralize the power of Muslim clerics and to secularize Tunisian society (see p9 of *History and Myth*). He abolished ***shari'a*** courts, reformed religious education, outlawed polygyny (the practice of men having multiple wives simultaneously), banned beards and veiling, and legalized birth control and abortions. These reforms were largely successful, resulting in Tunisia becoming the most secular, nominally Islamic, country in the region. Religious observance dropped in subsequent decades, particularly in urban areas and among young people.

This trend reversed course during the last few decades. Many new mosques, resourced with both local and foreign funding, opened and attendance increased. For political fundamentalists, a return to Islamic values was coupled with the desire to reinstate ***shari'a*** law and apply Islamist principles to Tunisian society. For more politically moderate Tunisians, this return to Islamic values was part of a larger criticism of the government's corruption and its inability to correct the vast

economic disparities in Tunisian society. For many youth, identification with Islam even had a countercultural appeal.

After he deposed Bourguiba in 1987, President Ben Ali emphasized his Islamic identity when it suited him politically (see p10 of *History and Myth*). He was also determined to keep state and religion separated and continued to repress Islamic fundamentalists. When broader protests against the lack of political freedom and widespread corruption resulted in Ben Ali's ouster in 2011, the Islamists took advantage of the political opening. The formerly banned moderate Islamist en-Nahda party took power (see p3-4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

## Religion Today

Tunisia is presently at a crossroads. Despite its tradition of secularism, there is a strong movement within Tunisia calling for policies and structures that would "re-Islamize" its people and institutions, including the army, police, educational system, and media. While the January 2014 constitution recognizes Islam as the national religion, it allows for religious freedom and separation of religion and politics. (Photo: Mosque in Nefta).

Regardless of Tunisians' political and religious affiliations, Islam pervades their social, cultural, and ethical lives. Even secular Tunisians often promote their Arab-Islamic heritage. Although they may not strictly follow Islamic teachings, almost all Tunisians consider Islam as an important part of family and community life at special occasions such as births, weddings, burials, and annual holidays (see *Family and Kinship*).

## Islam

About 95% of Tunisia's Muslims belong to the Maliki school of Sunni Islam, a generally tolerant school of thought that teaches the primacy of the Qur'an over later teachings and stresses the importance of community consensus. Observant Muslims consume neither alcohol nor pork.

**Sufis:** Sufism remains important in some communities in southern Tunisia, where followers belong to brotherhoods that

focus on attaining a mystical communion with God at ***zaouinas***, tombs of Sufi ***marabouts*** (Muslim religious leaders and teachers). Members of the Sunni establishment generally frown on this practice of "saint worship," and recently, members of ***Salafist*** groups defaced or burned over 30 such shrines.

**Kharijites:** The Kharijites trace their history to a Berber protest movement that arose shortly after the Arabs arrived in North Africa (see p4 of *History and Myth*). Fairly successful in establishing their own kingdoms in the 10th century, the Kharijites were eventually defeated and forced to retreat to Djerba Island, where they live today. Known also as ***Ibadis***, they are admired for their religious austerity and simply-designed mosques.

## Folk Beliefs

Many Tunisians combine local cultural traditions with Islamic beliefs and practices, although many of these practices appear to be vanishing. For example, some Tunisians believe that certain individuals possess ***baraka*** that allows them to perform miracles. Others may wear amulets inscribed with Qur'anic verses to protect them from ***djinn*** (spirits). Mothers often sew Qur'anic verses into their newborn babies' clothes for protection as well (see p2 of *Family and Kinship*).

## Christianity

Although there are no official statistics, it is estimated that fewer than 25,000 Christians remain in Tunisia. The Roman Catholic Church has the largest presence and operates several private schools, libraries, and clinics. Other denominations include Russian Orthodox, French Reformist, Anglican, Seventh-day Adventist, Greek Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses (Photo: Catholic Church on Djerba Island).

## Judaism

Tunisia's Jewish population of about 2,000 is concentrated in Tunis and on Djerba Island where the El Ghriba Synagogue contains one of the world's oldest Torahs and is a site of Jewish pilgrimage.

A 2002 al-Qaeda-linked attack against the synagogue killed 21 people, mostly German tourists. The Tunisian government condemned this and other sporadic acts against the Jewish community, such as vandalism and anti-Semitic chanting outside synagogues. The government has generally allowed the Jewish community freedom of worship, paying the grand rabbi's salary, providing security at all synagogues, and having subsidized some of their restoration and maintenance (Photo: The Great Synagogue of Tunis).

### Religion and the Law

As Tunisians framed a new constitution (see p3-5 of *Political and Social Relations*), they grappled with the notion of what it means to be Muslim and Tunisian and ultimately what those answers entail for Tunisian society. Earlier decrees that restricted the wearing of religious attire have been lifted, and women are permitted to wear the ***niqab*** (face-covering veil) at public educational institutions as of May 2013.

Although the 1959 constitution did not permit the establishment of political parties based on religious principles, it appears that religious-based political parties will now play a much larger role in Tunisian politics. Previously banned, the ruling Islamist en-Nahda party was granted official party status after Ben Ali's ouster in 2011. Recently, the government has allowed a ***Salafist*** group to register as an official political party. The new 2014 constitution offers prospects for definitive religious and political identity (see p3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

**Religion and Education:** Islamic religious education is mandatory in all public schools (see p4 of *Learning and Knowledge*), although secondary students also learn about the history of Judaism and Christianity. The government has permitted Djerba's Jewish community to operate its own private religious schools that Jewish schoolchildren attend in addition to public school.

# 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

## Overview

Tunisian society revolves around the family. Individuals are generally expected to subordinate their own desires to those of their extended families to demonstrate respect, honor their elders, and maintain family harmony. To do otherwise would bring shame upon the family unit at large.

## Family Structure

While Tunisian men and women have equal legal rights, men traditionally are the heads-of-households, decision-makers, and primary breadwinners. Women are responsible for domestic chores even though many of them also work outside of the home.

Tunisians typically live in nuclear family units composed of parents, children, and often grandparents. These households typically maintain close ties to their extended families which include aunts, uncles, cousins, and parents' cousins. Children usually live with their parents until they marry.

**Polygyny:** In accordance with ***shari'a*** (Islamic) law, Muslim men may have as many as 4 wives simultaneously. Known as polygyny, this practice has been illegal in Tunisia since 1957. Although some hardline Islamists (see p7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) have advocated overturning this prohibition, the practice remains illegal.

**Children:** Tunisians consider children to be one of life's blessings and an investment toward elderly parental care. It is customary for Tunisian adults to care for and live with their elderly parents.

Parents teach their children to be obedient at a young age. Many Tunisians treat their sons and daughters differently in preparation for their future gender roles. For example, even very young daughters from all economic classes

perform chores such as caring for younger siblings or cousins. Sons in less affluent households learn to accomplish small jobs to help care for their families, while upper- and middle-class sons enjoy more carefree, playful childhoods.

## Residence

The home ownership rate in Tunisia is almost 80%, and Tunisians take great pride in maintaining their homes. Tunisian homes typically have a formal living room for receiving visitors, a less formal family room, several bedrooms, a kitchen, and at least one bathroom. The vast majority of homes have electricity and running water. Many also have balconies, terraces, or verandas from which Tunisians enjoy the mild Mediterranean climate. The most traditional homes have gardens and a central open courtyard.

In urban areas, white-washed homes often dating to the pre-colonial era are close together (pictured) and often surrounded by external walls to ensure privacy. Rural residences are spaced farther apart for privacy. In the desert regions of southern Tunisia, some Berbers live in homes carved from rocks or up to 20ft underground to protect the family from the extreme external temperatures (see p2 of *Political and Social Relations*).

## Rites of Passage

Tunisians commemorate major life transitions such as birth, adulthood, and death through various celebrations.

**Birth and Naming:** The birth of a baby is a happy occasion. Following the Muslim call to prayer just moments after birth, the child is dressed in clothing decorated with Qur'anic verses to protect him from harm. A week after birth, the baby officially receives its name in a ceremony attended by family and friends, who gather to celebrate with food and gifts.

**Circumcision:** Tunisian boys typically undergo circumcision between ages 5-7. Conducted either during the boy's first trip to the mosque or at home, a doctor or specially trained barber performs the procedure. The boy is dressed in fine clothes and

receives presents from extended family members who have gathered to celebrate the occasion. Female circumcision is rare in Tunisia although a common practice in some African countries.

**Dating:** Tunisian dating practices differ based on location and religious observance. Particularly in rural settings, strict Islamic traditions prevent many Tunisians from interacting with unrelated members of the opposite sex. Occasionally, though, rural or religious couples date secretly or get to know each other after they are engaged.

Western influence is more prominent in urban areas, where liberal dating practices occur. Thus, most urban Tunisians have greater opportunities and freedom to date. Some Western practices, like online dating and celebrating Valentine's Day, have recently filtered into Tunisian society (Photo: Tunisians and tourists dance in Tabarka, Tunisia). Some Tunisian men target Western women under the pretense of love to acquire visas or money, a practice known as ***bezness***.

## Marriage

Tunisians view marriage as a bond between 2 people and their families and an important rite of passage to adulthood for both men and women. For many women, it marks a transition to a new way of life, as they sacrifice their jobs and education to become dedicated to their homes and families (see p1-2 of *Sex and Gender*). Both males and females may legally marry at age 20, although many Tunisians delay until their late 20s.

Individuals usually choose their marriage partners, although Tunisian families remain involved in the pairing process to ensure the future spouse's financial, moral, religious, and social suitability. Family participation in spouse selection is most pronounced in traditional, religious families in which the couple does not date beforehand. Family consent is not a legal requirement for a couple to marry. Virginity before marriage is

considered ideal for Tunisian women, and marriage between cousins remains relatively common.

**Wedding Arrangements:** Once a man identifies a potential wife, he and his relatives visit her parents with gifts to request her hand in marriage. After the potential bride agrees and her family accepts the offer, both families recite the first ***surah*** (Qur'anic chapter). The families then select a wedding date, begin making arrangements, and negotiate the brideprice the groom will pay to show his commitment. An engagement party is often held to celebrate the betrothal publicly.

**Weddings:** Tunisian wedding festivities can last up to a week, although most modern ceremonies combine some festivities to shorten the celebration. A few days before the wedding itself, the Tunisian bride gathers her friends and relatives to celebrate in her new home. The next day, the bride and her female relatives go to a ***hammam*** (Turkish bath). Her hands and feet are then decorated with ***henna*** (pictured), a reddish brown dye made from the henna plant. Typically, she wears an extravagant red dress and jewelry, which are gifts from her future husband. On the same day, the groom often shaves off his beard.

On the wedding day and in the presence of witnesses, the bride and groom sign the marriage contract, usually at the bride's home. Then the new couple attends a wedding reception, often held at a hotel or banquet hall, where they sit together as well-wishers greet them. The bride typically wears heavy make-up and changes outfits several times during the festivities. Sometimes male and female guests separate for the dinner and dancing portions of the wedding festivities.

## Death

Per Islamic tradition, Tunisian funerals occur as soon as possible after death—usually within 24 hours. Female relatives

bathe the body in rosewater and wrap it in a white shroud. Male relatives then carry the body to the cemetery and bury it with the head oriented towards the Islamic holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia (see p2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Some wealthier Tunisians hold lavish funerals with paid Qur'an reciters and catered dinners in social halls. Friends and family then gather for 3 days of prayers and Qur'anic readings to assist the deceased through God's judgment. The family of the deceased receives visitors one day each week until the 40th day, at which point the mourning period officially ends.

### *Personal Status Code*

Implemented prior to Tunisia's 1959 post-independence constitution, the 1956 Personal Status Code (PSC) affords Tunisian women greater equality before the law than in many other Muslim majority countries. The PSC is largely due to the efforts of President Bourguiba, who considered himself Tunisia's liberator of women (see p9 of *History and Myth* and p1 of *Sex and Gender*). It established men and women equal before the law, prohibited polygyny, raised the marriage age, disallowed verbal Islamic divorce, and required women's consent for marriage. Amendments to the PSC in the 1990s granted more rights, including a woman's right to transfer her Tunisian nationality to her children regardless of their father's origin. Tunisians commemorate the progressive PSC's passage on August 13th as National Women's Day. Despite these reforms, Islamic customs still govern inheritance, which grant male heirs twice the inheritance of female heirs. As of summer 2013, the main Islamist party, en-Nahda, had promised to keep the PSC in place (see p1 of *Sex and Gender* and p4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

# 5. SEX AND GENDER



## Overview

Through its progressive Personal Status Code (PSC) (see p5 of *Family and Kinship*), Tunisia has led the Arab world in equality for women before the law. Nevertheless, such top-down legal reforms have long been at odds with conservative Islamic values, which thus far have kept Tunisian women subordinate to men at work and home. The negative association of women's rights with earlier despotic Tunisian regimes (see p8-10 of *History and Myth*) plus the increasing influence of Islamism in Tunisian politics (see p9 of *Religion and Spirituality*) likely could slow if not halt any further expansions of women's rights (Photo: Friends relax at a café, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

## Gender Roles and Work

Men typically provide financial support to the family through work outside the home, while women traditionally have been responsible for maintaining the household and caring for children—often in addition to holding a paid job. Access to education, family planning services, and legal protection has allowed more women to enter the workforce. As of 2019, 24% of Tunisian women worked outside the home.

During their tenures, former Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali enacted a variety of laws supporting working women, including a 1993 law that outlawed gender-based discrimination. Tunisia's female workers—including the self-employed—are entitled to maternity leave benefits at 67% of their pay while Tunisian men may take paternity leave at full pay. Daycare facilities are available for working parents.

Despite these positive developments and promise for greater social freedoms, as outlined in the new constitution (see p3 of *Political and Social Relations*), sexual harassment and equal hiring practices and pay are issues that continue to hinder women's workplace success and will take time to resolve.

Historically, women have been particularly well-represented in dentistry, pharmacology, civil service, banking, and the law. Tunisia's recent high unemployment rates have driven both men and women to cash-paid jobs in the informal sector where labor is not taxed or factored into GDP; 45% of working women are informally employed.

While many Tunisian women provide financial support to their families, more traditional, religious families are often reluctant to allow their female family members to work outside the home. The notion that women have different physical and mental capacities than men continues to restrict women to more traditional gender roles.

## Gender and Politics

Women have been entitled to vote since 1959 and provisions are in place to help bolster female participation in politics. Nevertheless, women's representation in the political sphere lags behind that of men. Under former President Ben Ali, Tunisia installed a voluntary quota system that increased women's political representation to almost 30%. Following the "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*), political parties were required to alternate male and female candidates on their voting lists. As a result, in 2019 women held 78 of 217 seats (or 36%) in Tunisia's Constituent Assembly—better than the 24% rate in the 2018 US Congress (Photo: Tunisian participants in a US women's political leadership program).

Tunisia's 1959 constitution required the President to be a male Muslim, a provision which changed in the new constitution (see p3-5 of *Political and Social Relations*). The new language stipulates that the presidential candidate can be male or female Muslim and a national citizen since birth. Women have historically been underrepresented in other parts of the executive branch as well. In Prime Minister Fakhfakh's cabinet, only 4 of 28 ministries (14%) are headed by women.

Several Muslim groups (see p9 of *Religion and Spirituality*) are enjoying increased influence in political affairs, a development that worries many who fear such groups will reverse Tunisia's progress on women's rights. Despite its conservative stance, the ruling en-Nahda party (see p4 of *Political and Social Relations*) has stated publicly that it does not support polygyny (see p1 of *Family and Kinship*), that women's dress will remain a personal choice, and that it will retain Tunisia's PSC (see p5 of *Family and Kinship*). Although en-Nahda has some prominent female politicians in its ranks, they typically espouse the traditional Muslim views on women's societal roles common to all party members.

## Gender and Education

All Tunisian children are required to attend initial 9 years of school (see p3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Nearly all girls attend primary school, and over 87% attend secondary school. Females are even the majority in most post-secondary institutions, making up over 64% of the student body (Photo: Tunisian participants in the US-sponsored TechGirls Initiative for girls in technology).

Despite this high rate of attendance, females are far less likely than their male counterparts to use their education in a professional career. While Tunisian families are proud of their daughters' intellect and educational attainment, many families view education mostly as a productive way for their daughters to bide time before they marry and enter domestic life.

## Rape and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Despite the criminalization of rape and other acts of GBV, violence against women still exists. About 53% of Tunisian women are likely victims of GBV, usually from a husband or boyfriend. The 1959 constitution considered it an assault and punishable by fine and prison sentence. With the new constitution, the government is responsible for protecting women (see p3 of *Political and Social Relations)*; however, traditionally, the norm has been to treat domestic violence as a private matter within the family and is rarely punished.

While Tunisia penalizes statutory rape for victims under the legal age of consent (20) and all forcible rape cases regardless of age, most victims are too ashamed to report such crimes. In fact, victims are often pressured to marry their assailants to preserve family honor. In 2012, there was a highly publicized case in which policemen raped a woman and then accused her of indecency. This incident prompted protests against Tunisia's "blame the victim" approach and a history of abuse by internal security forces (see p6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

### Sex and Procreation

Tunisian families are small compared to those of their North African neighbors: the average Tunisian woman has only 2 children, down significantly from averages of 7 children in 1956 and more than 3 in the 1990s.

Over 65% of women in Tunisia use contraception. Before the "Jasmine Revolution," the government actively supported and funded family planning: in the last decade of former President Ben Ali's rule, Tunisia spent $10 million annually on public education for family planning. Tunisian women have access to free birth control methods through the country's healthcare system (see p4 of *Sustenance and Health*). Legal since 1965, abortion is available and safe, although easy access to birth control and emergency contraception methods have helped make it a relatively rare last resort (Photo: Young urban women in Tunis, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

### Homosexuality

Islam forbids homosexuality, a practice that most Tunisians consider "Western," immoral, and against Islamic and family values. Not only do homosexuals face discrimination and harassment, but homosexual behavior is illegal and punishable with up to 3 years of prison. Although this law was rarely enforced under former President Ben Ali, the number of arrests has risen since the "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*). While there is no organized gay rights movement in Tunisia, individual activists recently started an online magazine to address topics of interest in the homosexual community

# 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

## Language Overview

Most Tunisians speak Tunisian Arabic as a first language and French as the language of business. Concentrated in the South, members of the country's Berber populations speak their own Amazigh languages (see p11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Arabic, French, and English are taught in Tunisia's schools (see p3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

## Arabic

Arabic is the country's official language and used in different forms for diverse purposes. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is a version used across the Arab world for education, media, religious purposes, literature, and in government. The vast majority of Tunisians speak a ***darija*** (dialect) in social and informal situations. Unlike MSA, this colloquial form—often called ***Tunsi***—borrows from several other languages, including Berber, Italian, Turkish, French, and Spanish (Photo: Arabic inscription from Sousse, Tunisia).

Urban and rural versions of Tunisian Arabic vary in pronunciation and pronoun use. Despite these distinctions, Tunisians from different parts of the country can usually communicate with each other and with Arabic speakers from other North African countries such as Morocco and Algeria. Speakers of Arabic dialects from beyond North Africa may find ***Tunsi*** difficult to understand.

## French

As Tunisia's dominant language during colonial times (see p7 of *History and Myth*), French is still widely spoken, especially within the educated upper classes and in business settings. It is the second language of over half the population and is taught alongside Arabic and English in Tunisian basic education program (see p3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Since former President Ben Ali's ouster (see p10 of *History and Myth*), some politicians have urged Tunisians to learn and use English over French, as they believe English can better connect Tunisia to the global economy.

## Berber Languages

Less than 1% of Tunisians are speakers of Berber or Amazigh languages spoken by the Berbers of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Morocco, and Niger. Due to certain social influences, some Berbers, particularly among the younger generation, understand but do not speak their native languages. These influences include exposure to Arabic media and education, intermarriage, and social necessity to speak Arabic or French. Nevertheless, some Berber activists are seeking official government recognition of their languages, which hardline Islamists strongly oppose (see p4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

## Communication Overview

Beyond speaking Arabic or French, effective communication with Tunisians requires an ability to interact in culturally appropriate ways. Communication competence includes paralanguage (speech, volume, rate, and intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, and gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these elements of communication help ensure that Tunisians will interpret statements as the speaker intends (Photo: Former US Ambassador Jacob Walles, right, shaking hands with a Tunisian at an embassy celebration).

## Communication Style

Most Tunisians strive to be helpful and hospitable, typically expressing warmth in their conversations. While many Tunisians appear to be reserved initially, this formality diminishes with time and familiarity. Conversations reflect Tunisian cultural preferences for showing appropriate respect and avoiding shame (see p12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Tunisians value conversational courtesy, considering it impolite to critique or otherwise embarrass each other in public.

## Greetings

Greetings in Tunisia allow participants to facilitate or reaffirm friendly relations. In fact, Tunisians consider it impolite not to greet a friend or acquaintance even if that person is otherwise occupied. Tunisians typically greet by shaking right hands and may maintain that hold for an entire conversation. In rural areas, a handshake may be followed by placing one's hand over heart to indicate sincerity.

Although unrelated Tunisian men and women often shake hands, a male foreign national should wait for a Tunisian woman to extend her hand first. If she does not offer a hand, he may simply nod to acknowledge her presence. Many urban Tunisian men and women touch cheeks and make kissing noises to greet family, friends, or close acquaintances. This custom is typically limited to people of the same sex in rural regions. When making introductions, a Tunisian host will usually introduce women first, followed by men in order from highest social rank to the lowest and youngest (Photo: Same-gender friends often walk holding hands in Tunisia, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014).

## Forms of Address

Tunisians usually address superiors and people they are meeting for the first time by their professional French or Arabic title and last name. Alternatively, they may use only the singular term *monsieur*, *sidi*, or *si* (roughly equivalent to "sir") or their female equivalents, *madame*, *mademoiselle*, and *lella* or combine the term with the last name.

Tunisians may also address both strangers and acquaintances using terms that translate as "my father," "my mother," "my sister," or "my brother." They also use a term of respect *Hajj* (male) or *Hajja* (female) for those who have completed a pilgrimage to Mecca (see p2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Since the improper use of these more personal terms can be insulting, foreign nationals should generally avoid using these forms of address.

Work colleagues and peers typically address each other by first names. Even when using more formal titles, Tunisians tend to use the informal French “you” (*tu*) rather than the formal “you” (*vous)* when conversing.

## Conversational Topics

Tunisians typically begin conversations with small talk about health, family, and other general topics to establish a personal connection before discussing more serious matters. Topics like sports, movies, art, travel, and work are generally acceptable when conversing with people of both sexes. Foreign nationals can help establish rapport by showing an appreciation for Tunisian common interests, such as soccer (see p2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Tunisians tend to avoid potentially sensitive topics such as sex, religion, and politics that could cause disagreement or embarrassment in polite conversation. If conversations veer toward contentious topics, foreign nationals should remain neutral and courteous.

## Gestures

Tunisians often use hand gestures to stress or replace spoken words, and some gestures have multiple meanings. For example, joining the fingers to the thumb and holding up the hand can mean various things depending on the hand’s movement: annoyed waving suggests impatience, slow waving or holding indicates the need to wait or have patience, and shaking underscores the speaker’s authority on an issue. Tunisians often pair the word “no” with a tongue click and dismissive head movement.

Some Tunisian gestures resemble US gestures but have different meanings. The “OK” sign (pictured) means “zero” or “bad” in Tunisia. Tunisians beckon a person by moving a hand with palm down. Generally, foreign nationals should avoid using the index finger to point at people.

## Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

## Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. Although Arabic dialects and scripts generally are consistent pronouncing and spelling words, there are many different ways of converting Arabic sounds into the Roman alphabet. Countries like Tunisia that were under French rule spell words differently. Some common consonant differences are summarized below.

| Common English Transliteration | Common French Transliteration | Romanized Arabic |
|---|---|---|
| S or ss | C | Said vs. Caid (name pronounced Sī-eed) |
| Sh | Ch | Rashid Ghannoushi vs. Rached Ghannouchi (name of en-Nahda party co-founder) |
| J | Dj | Mejerda vs. Medjerda (name of Tunisia's longest river) |

Since Arabic words often include sounds or letters having no equivalent in the Roman alphabet, the following symbols and letters are used to represent those sounds and letters when they are transliterated into the Roman alphabet.

| Letters or Symbol | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| gh | Like the guttural French "r" | Pa**r**is (as pronounced by a French person) |
| Kh or x | Strong "h" | lo**ch** (as pronounced by a Scottish person) |
| H | Whispered "h" | **h**oot |
| dH | Soft "th" | **th**is |
| ‘ | Glottal stop | Pause in the middle of "uh-oh" |
| q | "k" sound from the throat; "g"; or glottal stop | **cou**gh; **g**olf; pause in the middle of "uh-oh" |

## Useful Translations

| English | French | Romanized Tunisian Arabic |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Oui | Ayi, aywa |
| No | Non | La |
| Please | S'il vous plaît | Minfadlak(m)/ Minfadlik (f) |
| Thank you | Merci | Shukran |
| You are welcome | De rien | Min gheer muzeeya |
| Hello | Bonjour | Assalama |
| Goodbye | Au revoir | Bisalama |
| Excuse me/sorry | Pardon moi | Samahanee |
| Do you speak English? | Parlez-vous anglais? | Tikallem ingleezeeya? |
| I do not speak Tunisian Arabic | Je ne parle pas l'arabe tunisienne | Ma nitkallamsh arbi toonsee |
| I understand | Je comprends | Fahem |
| I do not understand | Je ne comprends pas | Mish fahem/mefehemsh |
| How are you? | Comment allez-vous? | Ashnooa ahwalik? |
| I am fine, thank you. How are you? | Bien, merci, et vous? | Laa-baas, shukran. Winti/winta? |
| I am fine | Bien | Laa-baas |
| What is your name? | Comment vous appelez vous? | Sismik? |
| My name is ___ | Je m'appelle ___ | Ismee ___ |
| I am pleased to meet you | Enchanté | Nitsharrafoo |
| Help | Au secours | 'Awnoonee |
| Call the police | Appelez la police | Jeeboolee il-bolees |
| Thank you for your help | Merci pour votre aide | Shukran 'ala al-moosaa'eda |
| Where are the bathrooms? | Oú sont les toilettes? | Ween it-twalet? |
| Straight ahead | Droit | Ala Tul |
| Right | À droite | Limin |
| Left | À gauche | Lisaar |

# 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

## Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 81.8%
- Male: 89.6%
- Female: 74.2% (2015 estimate)

## Overview

Traditionally, Tunisian family members conveyed knowledge and skills to the next generation at home. While the introduction of Islam offered the elite greater access to formal education, it was not widely available to average Tunisians until after independence (see *History and Myth*).

## Introduction of Formal Education

Formal education came to Tunisia with the 7th-century introduction of Islam, which would become the foundation for all academic pursuits (also see *Religion and Spirituality*). Built in 670 AD by Arab general Uqba ibn Nafi, the Mosque of Uqba at Kairouan (also known as the Great Mosque, pictured, courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest 2014) was established as a regional center of Islamic education and scholarship.

During the Ottoman era (see *History and Myth*), poorer children were limited to practical learning at home, while formal educational opportunities expanded for society's elite. Wealthy families often sent their sons to ***kuttabs*** (Islamic primary schools) and then to ***madrasas*** (Islamic residential colleges) to study the Qu'ran and receive a basic education.

Higher education options were restricted to the Bardo Military Academy and the Islamic Ez-Zitouna University until Sadiqi College opened in 1875 in Tunis. Sadiqi College was the first Tunisian institution to offer non-Islamic and non-military subjects such as science and mathematics at the tertiary level.

## Education under French Colonialism

The French created modern government-run schools for the children of French nationals and Tunisian elites, while leaving most Islamic educational institutions intact. Many educated Tunisian elites promoted Tunisian nationalism and paved the way for independence (see *History and Myth*).

French schools did little to educate the general public, which France primarily regarded as a labor force. In turn, most Tunisians had negative attitudes toward French-run schools, as their curriculum and limited capacity were not designed to address Tunisian needs and preferences. Consequently, Tunisian-run educational institutes emerged to fill the gap. Reformed ***kuttabs*** and the ***Khalduniyya***, an educational society that supported the study of classic Arab-Islamic and modern Western subjects, flourished.

## Post-Independence Education

After independence in 1956, President Bourguiba created the Ministry of Education to expand education for all young Tunisians in an effort to address the country's economic and labor demands. The ministry established a post-primary education system that selected students based on French standards and proportionally controlled enrollments based on the requirements of Tunisia's economy.

## Education under Ben Ali

Education was one of Tunisia's highest priorities under former President Ben Ali whose educational system was considered one of the best in the Middle East and North Africa. Nearly 22% of the 2009 national budget was spent on education. By 2010 school enrollment reached 97.7% for primary school-aged children and 75.5% for secondary school-aged children. In the same year, over 360,000 students were enrolled in tertiary education, of which nearly 60% were females (Photo: A US Army lieutenant colonel visiting a Tunisian elementary school class in 2006).

## Basic Education

Today, basic education is free and compulsory for Tunisians ages 6 to 16. It consists of 6 years of primary education and 3 years of lower secondary education. The curriculum includes Arabic, French, English, Islamic studies, history, mathematics, science, music, art, and technical education. After 6th grade, students take regional exams to determine placement in lower secondary programs. At the end of 9th grade, students must pass the National Basic Education Graduation Exam with a grade above 50% to continue on to upper secondary school.

## Secondary Education

Secondary education is a 4-year program, divided into 2 stages. The first 2-year segment is a general academic track for all students. For the second 2-year stage, students may pursue vocational or college preparatory studies. Vocational programs, typically overseen by the Ministry of Employment, train students for a particular profession. At the conclusion of their studies, vocational students receive a certification called the ***Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle.***

College-bound students must specialize in one of the following areas: experimental sciences, technical sciences, mathematics, language arts, economics, or management. Science and math classes are taught in French, while language arts, economics, and management classes are taught in Arabic. Students must pass the comprehensive ***Examen National du Baccalaureate*** to continue their education at the tertiary level. Annually, roughly 64% of students pass and receive a diploma called the ***Diplôme du Baccalauréat***.

## Tertiary Education

Higher education is guaranteed to recipients of the ***Diplôme du Baccalauréat***. The national university orientation system takes into account student preferences, exam scores, specializations, and government-set field quotas to assign students to particular colleges (Photo: The University of Tunisia).

There are three 2-year stages of higher education. The first stage focuses on general academics, while the second stage is specialized for students' selected fields of study. Upon completing the second stage, students are awarded the ***Maîtrise***, which is considered the first degree in Tunisia's university system. The third stage requires a thesis and culminates in the ***Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies***, which is required for entry into doctoral programs.

## Post-Revolution Education

While the full impact of the "Jasmine Revolution" on education is still unclear (see p10 of *History and Myth*), some problems have been identified along with proposed solutions. In 2012, the Ministry of Education sponsored a conference on educational reform during which participants identified key educational challenges. These challenges included declining performance, increased rates of academic failure, inefficient teacher training, and regional achievement disparities (Photo: US Ambassador Jacob Walles at the Instituts Superieurs des Études Technologiques de Sidi Bouzid).

## Religious Instruction

While religious instruction traditionally has been a component of compulsory education, its tone has changed in the last few decades. Appointed Minister of Education in 1989, human rights activist Mohamed Charfi spearheaded religious education reforms. His initiatives included removing intolerant references to other religions, reemphasizing Islam's liberal aspects, and addressing creation and evolution in textbooks.

Presently, 2 hours-per-week of public primary school are dedicated to Islamic studies. In public secondary school, students attend an "Islamic Thinking" class that promotes analytical thinking in the tradition of the Maliki school of Sunni Islam and also teaches the history of Christianity and Judaism (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Although ***kuttabs*** and ***madrasas*** were unpopular in the 1990s, they are enjoying some renewed popularity since the "Jasmine Revolution."

# 8. TIME AND SPACE

## Concept of time

Tunisia is largely a society where interpersonal relationships are valued over productivity, particularly in rural areas. In modern urban areas, some Tunisians such as business professionals value efficient time management as an integral part of their work lives.

## Time and Work

The Tunisian work week extends Monday-Thursday from 8:00am- 6:00pm with a half-day on Friday, the Muslim holy day. Lunch breaks begin around 12:30pm, usually lasting about 2 hours. Regular summer hours may be shortened to 7:30am-1:30pm to avoid the extreme afternoon heat. For some Tunisians, the workday is punctuated by ***salat***, the 5 daily Islamic prayers (see p2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Tunisia is on Central European Time (CET), one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

## Punctuality

While punctuality in Tunisia is preferred in business settings and everyday life, tardiness is more commonly accepted than in the US. In Tunisian culture, meetings/deadlines generally occur/are fulfilled on schedule, although taking extra time to develop a relationship properly is more important than timeliness. Consequently, foreign nationals should be prepared for business meetings to start late and/or run long.

## Personal Space and Touching

Tunisians generally maintain less personal space while interacting, and touching between friends and family is normal behavior. Depending on the level of familiarity, men may sit closer to each other than Westerners typically do. In addition, physical contact may be used to reinforce verbal conversation.

In contrast, when speaking with strangers or members of the opposite sex, Tunisians usually refrain from conversational touching and maintain a greater distance. Generally, foreign nationals are advised to limit or avoid conversational touching until their Tunisian counterpart initiates contact or until a solid relationship has been established (Photo: US Ambassador Jacob Walles, left, shaking hands with a Tunisian official).

### Eye Contact

The use of eye contact in Tunisia varies by status and circumstance. Generally, avoiding eye contact with elders and superiors shows respect and an awareness of social order and authority. In more relaxed contexts, eye contact indicates an understanding of, and genuine interest in, the topic being discussed. Eye contact between males and females is appropriate if initiated by the female, although it is considered disrespectful for a male to force eye contact with a Tunisian female.

### Physical Taboos

As is common throughout many Muslim cultures, Tunisians consider feet unclean and consider it inappropriate to move objects by foot or show feet or shoe soles. Similarly, Tunisians consider the left hand unclean because it is typically reserved for personal hygiene. Foreign nationals are advised to avoid using the left hand when eating, accepting or offering items, gesturing, or greeting another person.

### Public Space

In Tunisia's public spaces, litter is common. There are relatively few waste receptacles, while some towns lack garbage collection altogether. Likewise, building exteriors are generally not as well maintained as their interiors. While Tunisians often form lines when waiting, they are known to sometimes skip ahead of foreign nationals, so polite assertiveness is on occasion necessary. Public displays of affection, such as couples holding hands, are considered inappropriate.

## Photographs

Although many Tunisians are willing to be photographed and appreciate the opportunity to see themselves in the picture, it is best to request permission before taking a photograph. This advice is especially important in rural parts of Tunisia, where some communities forbid photographs of people due to religious traditions. In addition, military or government personnel or installations should not be photographed.

## Lunar Islamic Calendar

While they use the Western calendar for daily events, Tunisians rely on the Islamic lunar calendar to calculate Islamic holidays. Based on moon phases, the Islamic year consists of 12 months, 29 or 30 days each. Consequently, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. Days begin at sunset on what Westerners consider the previous day. Each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day (Friday) on Thursday evening.

### Public Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March 20: Independence Day
- March 21: Youth Day
- April 9: Martyrs' Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- July 25: Republic Day
- August 13: Women's Day
- October 15: Evacuation Day
- November 7: New Era Day

### Islamic Holidays

- ***Mawlid al-Nabi***: Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Ramadan***: Holy Month of Fasting
- ***Eid al-Fitr***: End of ***Ramadan***
- ***Eid al-Adha***: The Festival of the Sacrifice
- ***Awwal Muharram***: Islamic (Lunar) New Year

# 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION



## Overview

Tunisia's clothing, games, music, theater, literature, and artwork reflect a variety of Berber, Arab, and European cultural influences. Tunisian aesthetic and recreational preferences, at times, represent a stark contrast between Tunisians' interest in globalization and modernity on one hand and their attachment to Islamic traditions on the other.

## Dress

Dress in urban Tunisia is a modest blend of modern European and traditional North African styles. In rural areas, men and women often cloak themselves in fabric both for modesty and for protection from the elements. Like their Tunisian hosts, visitors to Tunisia should dress conservatively and blend in.

**Men:** Tunisian men's clothing varies based on daily needs and activities. Tunisian businessmen typically wear US- and European-style suits and ties to the office, sometimes accompanied with more traditional attire like a ***jelaba*** and/or a ***chechia***. The ***jelaba***, a long-sleeved cloak or gown, is often worn over a suit but can also be worn alone over loose pants. The ***chechia*** is a popular red or brown brimless felt hat (pictured). In rural areas and the South, men often wrap fabric around their heads, similar to a turban, and wear a loose tunic to protect against rain, wind, sun, and sand.

**Women:** Many Tunisian women, particularly in urban areas, dress in an American or European style. In offices, women typically wear modest dresses or long-sleeved blouses with skirts below the knee. Women tend to dress more conservatively in rural settings, where some of them wear full-body clothing when outside the house both for religious modesty and to protect themselves from dust and rain.

Women's right to wear the ***hijab*** (Islamic headscarf) has been controversial since former President Bourguiba banned it from public places in the early 1980s. Citing the ***hijab***'s non-Tunisian origin, Bourguiba encouraged women to dress in line with traditional norms of Tunisian modesty, which did not require a veil. After the "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*), the ***hijab's*** legality was reinstated. Likewise, the ruling en-Nahda Party (see p4 of *Political and Social Relations* and p3 of *Sex and Gender*) has issued decrees permitting use of the ***niqab***, an Islamic veil covering the head and face except the eyes (see p9 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

## Recreation

Tunisians typically spend their leisure time enjoying activities with their families or friends. Popular pastimes include outings to the beach, playing and watching soccer, and playing board or card games. Men often socialize at coffeehouses or markets, while women tend to socialize with friends at home.

**Sports:** Soccer, known as football in Tunisia and throughout Africa, is the country's largest and most popular sport. Tunisians avidly follow the exploits of the national team, nicknamed *Les Aigles de Carthage* (the Eagles of Carthage), which has made 4 appearances in the FIFA World Cup and won the Tunisia-hosted 2004 African Cup of Nations. The ***Championnat de Tunisie*** is Tunisia's top-tier soccer league where the nation's fiercest rivalry between 2 Tunis-based clubs, Esperance Sportive de Tunis (EST) and Club African, is exhibited (Photo: A soccer game between EST and Club Africain).

Although the government encourages a healthy lifestyle and participation in sports for both males and females, relatively few Tunisians are involved with sports due, in part, to the nationwide lack of adequate sporting facilities. Tunisia's coast is a popular destination for diving, sailing, and windsurfing for Tunisians and tourists alike. Golf, volleyball, hunting, handball, and horse or camel riding are popular in the countryside.

**Games:** Tunisians like to play games while socializing at home or in coffeehouses. ***Chkouba***, derived from the Italian game Scopa, is a popular card game in which 2 players or teams try to collect as many cards as possible to amass the highest value and win. Dominoes, backgammon, and classic Western card games, such as rummy, are also common.

## Music

Originating in 15th-century Islamic Spain, ***malouf*** has become the typical music heard throughout Tunisia. Meaning "normal," ***malouf*** experienced a surge in popularity when it became a symbol of national identity. ***Malouf*** is traditionally played by a band consisting of a violin, a hand drum, an oud (a pear-shaped stringed instrument), and vocal.

Many young Tunisians enjoy Algerian ***rai***, a genre of primarily love songs that combines elements of traditional Arabic vocal styles with Western pop. A mix of French, US, and Arab pop music is heard on the radio and played in nightclubs. Western styles like jazz, reggae, and rock are also performed in many venues (Photo: 2010 concert in Carthage).

## Dance

Tunisia is home to unique traditional dance forms commonly performed during weddings and festivals and as entertainment at restaurants. A dance called ***raqs al-maharem*** developed into a symbol of resistance during the 1950s. It involves dancers showcasing red and white scarves to signify their support for an independent Tunisia (see p8-9 of *History and Myth*).

## Theater

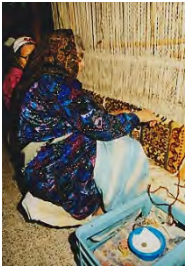
During the French colonial period (see p7 of *History and Myth*), translations of European classics and colloquial Arabic theater performances were primary entertainment media for expatriates and local elites. Tunisian theater took shape in the 1950s and is funded today through the Ministry of Culture. Current works often offer insight into modern Tunisians' lives and tend to be satirical or melodramatic.

## Cinema

Tunisia's cinema industry has historically been one of the most successful in Africa. Former Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali sponsored a national production company and created attractive financial incentives to encourage both domestic and foreign film production. Although parts of the critically acclaimed *Star Wars* series were filmed in southern Tunisia, the country's economic hardships and instability in recent years diminished Tunisia's appeal to major studios (see p9-10 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, no major films have been produced in Tunisia since 2011. Tunisia's domestic film industry has been negatively affected by the widespread availability of pirated DVDs and the public's preference for films from Hollywood, India, Egypt, and France.

## Literature and Folklore

Tunisia is a regional standout in the quality of its Arabic literature, although its French works are not as well-known as those of neighboring Algeria and Morocco. Poetry and short stories are popular, as are literature forms that employ humor. Since Tunisian writers were censored both during French colonization and after independence, many well-known and influential Tunisian writers relocated to Europe. Folklore in Tunisia often has a religious theme and recounts tales of heroic and pious Muslim leaders.



## Arts and Crafts

Traditional Tunisian crafts are both functional and decorative, and the artisan craft industry has long been an important source of income. As of 2005, over 120,000 craftsmen worked in the production of ceramics, pottery, and iron and leather work. The government passed laws that require craftspeople to authenticate their wares in order to safeguard industry products for export and to encourage craft-making as a tourist attraction. Carpet-making, which typically involves knotting or weaving fibers into geometrical and abstract patterns, is another important money-making craft (Photo: Tunisian woman weaving a carpet with a traditional pattern).

# 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

## Sustenance Overview

Tunisian cuisine consists of a unique blend of Berber, Arab, French, and other cultural influences created from Tunisia's local resources. Staple foods include bread, couscous (traditional Berber pasta), seafood, and slow-simmered meat stews.

## Dining Customs

In rural areas, Tunisians often eat their meals seated on the floor around a ***ma'ida*** (low, round table). Food is served typically from a common plate or group of dishes. Using the right hand, Tunisians prefer to scoop the food with a piece of bread (see "Physical Taboos" in *Time and Space*). In urban areas, they typically sit at a dining table and use utensils to eat from separate plates.

Tunisians are hospitable and encourage their guests to have multiple servings at meals. It is considered impolite to refuse these offers. When full, Tunisians often say *Khamsa Aalik* (You have done an excellent job) or *al-Hamdu lillah* (Thanks be to God) to indicate they enjoyed the meal.

## Typical Meals

A typical Tunisian breakfast consists of coffee or milk and, depending on the season, eggs, fritters, ***assida*** (a flour-based pudding with dates), ***sohlob*** (sorghum mixed with milk, sugar, and cinnamon), or ***hsou*** (a caper-based spicy soup).

Both lunch (the main meal of the day) and dinner meals begin with soups, salads, vegetables, or ***tajine***, a frittata-like egg and meat dish, followed by couscous.

## Staples

Couscous is Tunisia's national dish. Although it is popular throughout the Maghreb region, Tunisia's version is unique in its use of ***harissa***, a North African spicy chili paste (pictured center with tuna and black olives). Couscous is often served with a sauce of vegetables, chickpeas, and a meat. Bread, either a French style baguette or the Berber

***tabouna***, is served with most meals and is used to scoop harissa, olive oil, or sauce.

### Seafood

Tunisia's Mediterranean coast offers an abundance of seafood, which is a staple in modern Tunisian cuisine: red mullet, mackerel, grouper, tuna, and perch are especially popular. Usually baked or fried, fish is often paired with olive oil and spices or cooked with couscous. Tunisians also eat octopus, squid, mussels, clams, prawns, oysters, crayfish, and lobster.

### Meat

Chicken, beef, and lamb are primary meats in the Tunisian diet and are most commonly combined with couscous or slow-cooked in a stew. Pork is forbidden under Islamic law, although wild boar is sometimes served to visitors. Camel meat is served occasionally in the South (Photo: Lamb sausage over couscous and vegetables).

### Fruits and Sweets

Abundant in Tunisia, fruit is included in meat dishes and desserts and also a popular snack. Oranges, figs, grapes, melons, apricots, and dates grow in Tunisia alongside the less familiar ***bousa'a*** (medlar fruit of the rose family) and ***boutabguai*** (France's peche de vigne, a cross between a peach and a raspberry).

***Makroudh*** and ***baklawa*** are popular desserts often served in Tunisian restaurants and homes. ***Makroudh*** is a honey topped pastry with a date filling, while ***baklawa*** is a filo dough pastry filled with nuts and honey. Nuts, in either crushed or paste form, are often added to Tunisian desserts.

### Beverages

Coffee, tea, and juices are popular throughout Tunisia. Noteworthy drinks are ***Citronnade*** (lemonade in French)—a mixture of blended whole lemons, sugar and water—and ***lait de poule***, literally translates as "chicken's milk" but actually a fruit milkshake with egg whites. They are served in cafes along with mineral waters and sodas.

Coffee is served in variations similar to those of France and Italy and usually includes milk and sugar. Black, green, and mint teas are boiled with sugar and are served without milk. Mint tea (pictured) is sometimes prepared with pine nuts or almonds.

Although Islam prohibits alcohol consumption, wine and beer are produced in Tunisia and sold at restaurants and stores. While men may frequent the bars of larger cities, women usually confine themselves to bars of European-style hotels. The local Tunisian beer Celtia and the German brand Löwenbräu, which is produced under license in Tunisia, are popular. ***Boukha*** and ***thibarine*** are strong spirits made of dates and figs, respectively.

Out of respect for the Islamic holy day, alcohol typically is not sold on Fridays. Some hardline Islamists have criticized establishments that sell alcohol for their un-Islamic practices. Nevertheless, in the post-Ben Ali era, the Islamist government has not changed alcohol laws, although alcohol taxes have increased.

## Health Overview

Due to government efforts to improve the nation's overall health, the Tunisian healthcare system has become a model for neighboring Arab countries and is regarded as the second best in Africa after South Africa.

As of 2020, infant mortality ratio had fallen to 11 deaths per 1,000 births, a rate far lower than most of Africa but still higher than the US rate of 5 per 1000. In 2020, life expectancy from birth rose to a high of 76 years, an increase of 20 years since 1966 and on par with rates in Algeria and Morocco. As of 2016, there were 130 physicians per 100,000 people in Tunisia, which was lower than that of neighboring Algeria (183).

## Modern Healthcare

Managed by the Ministry of Public Health, the Tunisian healthcare system has 4 levels of integrated public facilities—basic centers, district hospitals, regional hospitals, and university facilities—and a growing private sector. With increased economic pressures over the past decades, the public sector's state funding has been declining gradually, forcing individuals to pay for a larger portion of their medical costs out-of-pocket (Photo: Former US ambassador Gordon Gray, center, outside a hospital in Remada, Tunisia).

Employing around 1,800 doctors, the basic healthcare center is the first level entry point of preventative care and site for the 90% of Tunisians who live within 5 km of the 2,091 centers. The 121 district and 33 regional hospitals comprise the second and third levels, employing specialists and providing in-patient services. The final referral level comprises the university facilities that provide advanced specialist treatment and medical training programs. These facilities comprise 70% of specialists in the public sector and most of its heavy medical equipment.

The private health care sector represents 12% of the total capacity in beds and 70% of the top range medical equipment in the country. Most of the private hospitals and medical facilities are located in the major cities and it employs over 50% of the doctors, 73% of the dentists, and 80% of the pharmacists. Although these private centers principally serve only residents of major coastal cities, they receive 50% of the total health expenditure in Tunisia.

## Mental Healthcare

Tunisia's mental health care industry suffers from an increasing demand for services coupled with a negative social attitude towards mental health issues and psychiatric care. The exact amount of funds dedicated to these services is difficult to calculate since they are integrated in the total healthcare budget of roughly 7.23% of gross domestic product.

## Health Challenges

Tunisians have relatively good access to preventative and general healthcare and therefore experience few serious health challenges. Measles and polio have nearly been eradicated, and malaria and schistosomiasis have not been present since the 1980s. Conversely, rates of non-communicable disease are rising mostly due to obesity and tobacco use. Women suffer from hypertension, diabetes, and stroke, while men's leading issues are heart and pulmonary disease and lung cancer.

**Tuberculosis:** Tuberculosis is a problem for both humans and animals in rural, southern Tunisia where milk is largely unpasteurized. With a prevalence rate of 35 cases per 100,000 people, Tunisia is slightly above the regional average of 31 cases per 100,000 people.

**HIV/AIDS:** The government-implemented HIV/AIDS control program ensures blood transfusions are safe and provides free condoms and antiretroviral drug treatments. Consequently, HIV/AIDS prevalence has been contained at a low and stable rate of less than 0.1% of the population, one of the world's lowest rates. High risk groups include men having same-sex relations (9.1% prevalence rate), intravenous drugs users (6%), and sex workers (0.92%).

### Water

Although Tunisia is a water-scarce country, it has some of the highest regional rates of access to water and sanitation. Nearly 100% of urban Tunisians have access to clean water, while over 89% of rural Tunisians have similar access. To ease problems of water scarcity and infrequent and changing rainfall patterns, Tunisian officials have made concerted efforts to conserve available water resources. The government continues to seek ways to reduce water demand, while actively managing water conservation through dams, lakes, and wells.

# 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES



## Overview

Tunisia's strategic location and abundant natural resources promote a diversified economy and one of Africa's strongest. Although Tunisia historically supported sizeable service and industrial sectors, its economy has weakened due to lingering effects of the former regime's economic mismanagement, ongoing state of political uncertainty, and long periods of high unemployment. In the 2 years following the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" (see *History and Myth*), public discontent rose as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell and unemployment, debt, and inflation increased. However, in the past few years, the economy has stabilized.

## Services

Accounting for 64% of GDP and 54% of the total labor force, the services sector comprises the largest portion of Tunisia's economy. The main subsectors are government services (21% of GDP); internal trade (10%); and transport (7%), and financial services (25%).

**Tourism:** The political uncertainty following the "Jasmine Revolution" (see *Political and Social Relations*) harmed the industry: that year, only 3 million tourists visited Tunisia—less than half of the annual totals from the 3 previous years. Tourism rebounded somewhat in 2012 when the number of total visitors increased to 5.76 million and revenue from tourism increased from $1.38 billion in 2011 to $1.98 billion in 2012.

A small but important sub-sector of the services industry, tourism encompassed 7.4% of GDP, employed 473,000 workers directly and indirectly, and provided 14.1% of Tunisia's foreign exchange revenue in 2014. This improvement was short-lived; the tourism industry collapsed after the 2015 Bardo National Museum attack, decreasing by 35%. However, tourism is recovering, with arrivals growing by 18% in 2018 and 14% in 2019 - amounting to 9.5 million arrivals. Decreased tourism revenue had a

negative effect on the country's overall economic climate and important tourist-related industries like the artisan handicrafts industry (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). However, tourism now accounts for 8% of Tunisia's GDP.

## Industry

The industrial sector is the second largest component of Tunisia's economy, accounting for 26% of total GDP and 33% of the labor force. The largest subsector by far is manufacturing, followed by mining and quarrying, and construction. The mining sector centers on preparing phosphates and fertilizers for export; Tunisia is one of the world's leading phosphate producers. Many industries have struggled during a European economic crisis over the last several years, but have rebounded recently in step with Europe's improving outlook.

**Manufacturing:** Tunisia's manufacturing industry centers on the production of automotive and aeronautic components, machinery and equipment, steel and construction materials, and, to a lesser extent, shipbuilding. Many of these products are bound for export, primarily to European countries. Although textiles were Tunisia's leading export in the early 2000s, other manufactured goods such as automotive components, chemicals, and fertilizers have surpassed textiles. In 2018, Tunisia exported an estimated $11.9 billion in manufactured products (Photo: Workers at Starz Electronics in Bizerte, Tunisia).

## Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for only about 10% of Tunisia's total GDP and employs 13% of the labor force. Tunisia's primary agricultural exports are olives (exported in the form of olive oil) and cereals, both of which are primarily grown in the North. Other prominent crops include tomatoes and other fruit, peppers, artichokes, and potatoes, while the most popular types of livestock are cows, sheep, and goats. Tunisia is a regional standout for its self-sustaining production of dairy products, vegetables, fruit, and red meat.

Most of Tunisia's arable land is divided into small, unmechanized farms of less than 50 acres. Due to their inefficiencies in production, these farms suffer low yields. The government has enacted measures to increase capacity and use of available water (see *Sustenance and Health*), although agricultural yields vary greatly due to Tunisia's unpredictable rainfall.

**Fishing:** Home to 41 fishing ports and 165 fish-processing plants, Tunisia supports a fishing industry that employs 53,000 people. Although pollution has begun to deplete fish populations in the Mediterranean, the fishing and fish farming sector produces 120,000 tons of fish per year, most of which are for internal consumption. This subsector accounts for 8% of Tunisia's GDP.

## Currency

The currency is the Tunisian dinar (TND), which is subdivided into 1,000 ***millimes***. The dinar is issued in 5 banknotes (TND 5, 10, 20, 30, 50), 3 dinar coins (TND 1/2, 1, 5), and 5 ***millim*** coins (5, 10, 20, 50, 100). In early 2020, the value of the dinar averaged 2.90 TND to 1 US dollar (USD), a decrease from the 2010 average of 1.43 (Photo: Front and back of a 1 TND coin). Strictly enforced laws prohibit both Tunisian citizens and foreign visitors from taking dinars out of the country to give Tunisia more control over its currency's value.

## Foreign Trade

Most of Tunisia's trade is with Europe. Since the 2008 free trade agreement between Tunisia and the European Union, the exports to Europe have boosted Tunisia's economic growth significantly. Product exportation totaled $15.5 billion in 2018, of which over 50% went to European countries. Around 40% of total foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from Europe. FDI currently represents 10% of productive investments, generates one-third of exports and over 15% of the total number of jobs.

Tunisia's product importation equaled $22.7 billion in 2018, $7.2 billion more than exports, and created a trade deficit in 2018.

Imports are primarily textiles, machinery, hydrocarbons, chemicals, and foodstuffs. Tunisia's major import partners include Italy, France, China, Germany, Turkey, and Algeria.

### Foreign Aid

Many foreign governments and non-governmental organizations have offered generous aid to help support and improve Tunisia's struggling economy and bolster its fledgling democracy (see *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Former Tunisian Ambassador Mohamed Salah Tekaya and Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signing a 2012 agreement for aid to Tunisia).

Between January 2011 and November 2012, the US government, the European Union, and the World Bank provided $300 million, $400 million, and $500 million in aid, respectively. In 2012 alone, the Qatari and Libyan governments provided $500 million and a $132 million development package, respectively. For 2013 the Tunisian government predicted it would require $4.4 billion to support job creation programs, limit budget deficits, and control inflation. In 2017 and 2018, Tunisia received $2.48 billion and $1.61 billion, respectively. Over 60% of total official development assistance (ODA) comes from Europe: the EU, France and Germany are three of the largest providers of Tunisia's ODA.

**Debt Repayment:** Former President Ben Ali accrued large public debts to fund his regime and lavish lifestyle; he and his cronies often squandered the money through mismanagement, used it to bribe opponents or pocketed it themselves. After his ouster (see *History and Myth*), the interim government debated whether Tunisia should pay the debts of its former dictatorial regime since they were incurred without the people's consent. Since 2011, Tunisia's foreign public debt has increased substantially – 41% of GDP in 2010 to 71% in 2018. In 2018, debt service payments reached a record 22% of the country's budget.

# 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

## Overview

To support economic growth, the current and previous Tunisian governments have prioritized infrastructural upkeep and technical development, as evidenced by Tunisia's good roads, ports, rail systems, and airways. Even though former President Ben Ali used censorship and restrictions on technology to help maintain his power (see *History and Myth*), Tunisia's interim government allowed the growth of independent media outlets and relatively unrestricted Internet access.

## Transportation

Most Tunisians do not own cars and thus rely on public transportation such as buses or private modes of transport like bicycles, motorbikes, or walking for local travel. Tunisia features one of Africa's only metro and light rail systems in the greater metropolitan area of Tunis (see "Railways" below). Taxis are also a viable option for local travel in larger cities.

Common means of transportation for longer trips between cities include trains, full-sized domestic buses, and ***louages***, shared 8-seat minibuses that follow no set schedule and depart only when full. Although trains are generally the fastest means of transportation between major cities, ***louages*** are often the most convenient and sometimes the only option to reach smaller, less accessible towns.

**Roadways:** Tunisia has 12,066 miles of roadways, almost 9,169 miles of which are paved. Most paved roads are 2-lane, well-maintained, and well-traveled and located in the more heavily populated North. While roads in and around large cities are often congested, secondary roads and most roads in the South and West are unpaved and often in poor condition (Photo: Road along an ancient Roman aqueduct in northern Tunisia).

Tunisian drivers tend to be unsafe: motorists often ignore speed limits and traffic signals and rarely maintain situational awareness when changing lanes. Bicyclists and motorcyclists are also negligent, often darting in and out of traffic or traveling too close to the edge of the road.

**Railways:** As of 2016, Tunisia had a total of 1,394 miles of railway. The Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Tunisiens (SNCFT) operates Tunisian trains, which travel at relatively slow speeds, but are usually on schedule. The main line runs from Tunis to Gabès via Sousse and Sfax with multiple lines branching off the main North-South line. Most of Tunisia's rail traffic is dedicated to moving freight rather than passengers. The few existing passenger trains are modern and climate controlled, although overcrowding can be a problem in less expensive 2nd-class compartments.

In addition to intercity freight and passenger rail options, Tunisia developed and expanded an above-ground metro line in 1985 to serve the greater Tunis metropolitan area. This metro line is slated to expand annually through 2021.

**Airways:** Tunisia has 29 airports and airstrips, 15 of which have paved runways. The country's largest airport is Enfidha-Hammamet International Airport, located 60 miles south of Tunis in the city of Enfidha. Other international airports are in Djerba, Gabès, Gafsa, Monastir, Sfax, Jendouba, Tozeur, and Tunis. The national airline, Tunisair, offers international flights to 22 European and 12 Arab and African destinations. Tunisair's subsidiary Sevenair offers a limited number of domestic flights. Several smaller Tunisian airlines service international cities and provide private charter service. Foreign carriers such as Air France, British Airways, Lufthansa, and Egyptair connect Tunisia to several global gateways.

**Ports and Waterways:** Tunisia's location on the Mediterranean Sea provides convenient access to Europe. Each of the 7 large commercial ports along Tunisia's 807 mile coast—Bizerte, La Goulette (serving Tunis), Rades, Sousse, Sfax, Gabès, and Zaris—provides specific services. For example, Bizerte

specializes in petroleum activities, while La Goulette concentrates on passenger travel. Multiple ferry companies transport people and their vehicles between Tunisia and Europe, including popular destinations like Genoa and Palermo in Italy and Marseille in France. Depending on the season, ferries run once each weekly or daily. In addition, domestic ferries run between Sfax and the Kerkennah Islands and between El-Jorf and Djerba Island.

## Energy

Unlike oil-rich Algeria, Tunisia has limited hydrocarbon resources and must import oil and natural gas to meet its growing energy demands. As of 2018, Tunisia produced enough oil, natural gas, and renewable energy to supply over 85% of its own energy needs. A significant share of the country's energy imports is in the form of gas sourced from Algeria, either as a transit fee for gas destined to Italy or as imports. Nearly all electricity in Tunisia is generated by fossil fuels, only 3% of its grid capacity is supplied by renewables. Thanks to the former government's investment, Tunisia's 100% rate of electricity coverage is one of Africa's highest.

## Media

Under former President Ben Ali's regime (see p9-10 of *History and Myth)*, the government controlled all state media broadcasts. Consequently, Tunisians tended to prefer larger international media outlets, such as France 24 and Al-Jazeera, to local or national sources for their news and analytical commentary.

After the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" (see p10 of *History and Myth*), Tunisia's media gained unprecedented freedom, although many media outlets still lack professional standards, produce inferior content, and are biased. Despite the new constitution's promise for even greater social freedoms (see p3 of *Political and Social Relations*), it will take time to implement change (Photo: Tunisian journalists at a 2011 US-sponsored best practices in journalism workshop).

**Radio and TV:** As of 2016, nearly 98% of Tunisians had television access, mostly through free satellite dish channels. The main Free-to-Air channels are state-run Wataniya 1 and 2 and privately owned Messma TV and Hannibal TV. Since the revolution (see p10 of *History and Myth*), most Tunisian TV stations have expanded their programing, while formerly state-run channels are under new management. As of 2017, there were also more than a dozen privately-owned TV channels. Tunisian radio's coverage is more limited, so post-revolution changes have been less extensive. In 2017, there were more than 20 commercial radio outlets.

**Print Media:** Both established and new print media outlets are adjusting to Tunisia's new press freedoms. Since former President Ben Ali's ouster following the "Jasmine Revolution," over 200 new print publications have emerged. Many have used their platforms to settle political scores or they have employed sensationalism simply to make money. In 2013, several major daily newspapers existing under the previous regime were transitioning from publishing political propaganda to providing more objective and impartial coverage and analysis.

## Telecommunications

Tunisia has one of the best developed telecommunications markets in North Africa. As of 2017, there were over 13 Internet service providers (ISPs). In 2018, the overall Internet penetration rate was 64%, with higher rates for urban and more affluent areas. Most Tunisians access the Internet at work, school, or ***publinets*** (Internet cafés). With nearly 12 times as many cellular phones as landlines, many Tunisians can also access the web through their cellular phones.

Tunisia's former regime strictly controlled ISPs and curtailed access to websites that contained critical political and social opinions. Under the interim government, the public generally enjoys access to most Internet content, although sites that are considered offensive to public decency remain restricted.

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