

### General Political Environment:

The Tunisian political system is ostensibly a multi-party democracy. In practice, however, Tunisia's eight opposition parties are kept weak and political power remains highly concentrated in the Presidency and the ruling party, the Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD). Islamist parties are banned and the ability of other opposition parties to campaign politically is restricted by the government.

Parliamentary and Presidential elections held in October 2009 swept long-time president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to a fifth 5 year term, as he reportedly captured nearly 90% of the vote. The RCD also returned another solid majority in parliament.

By government accounts, approximately 99% of voters endorsed the government's sweeping constitutional reform package in a May 2002 referendum. The changes included the introduction of a bicameral Parliament, two-rounds of voting for Presidential elections, an extension of the powers of the Constitutional Council, and the strengthening of Human Rights in the Constitution. The most dramatic change was an amendment to remove the limit on the number of Presidential terms. The age for a presidential candidate was also increased from 65 to 75. The amendments made it possible for President Ben Ali to run for office again in the October 2009 presidential elections.

Topping the government's stated priority list are reducing unemployment levels (around 14%) and raising the standard of living by way of increased economic growth and foreign direct investment. In mid-2008, the cost of staple food items skyrocketed and the state was under considerable pressure to support households that were suffering as a result.

The Ben Ali regime's hold on power and Tunisia's political stability is underpinned by the government's focus on social welfare issues and the strength and effectiveness of the state security forces.

### Investment Environment:

Tunisia offers an attractive investment climate to foreign investors due its comprehensive range of investment incentives. The Tunisian dinar is convertible for current account transactions but restrictions and controls remain on capital account transactions.

While the constitution outlines the independence of the judiciary, there is some concern that the courts may be susceptible to political pressure. By regional standards, corruption levels in Tunisia do not pose a significant obstacle to foreign investment.

Tunisia and Libya are increasing their economic cooperation including the construction of an oil pipeline to Tunisia. A \$1B underwater electrical cable to Italy is also planned. Société Tunisienne d'électricité et de gaz is exploring the possibility of building a nuclear plant by 2020. Tunisia is also a key proponent of the Union for the Mediterranean (an amalgamation of states bordering the Mediterranean Sea sharing resources and ideas in management of energy, security, counter-terrorism, immigration and trade, corruption, terrorism, organised crime and people smuggling.)

### Political Violence:

Tunisia's security situation is stable, owing in large part to the effectiveness of its security services and the manageable size of its territory. Much of the country's Islamist opposition fled or was imprisoned in a security crackdown following a 1990 bomb attack on RCD party headquarters.

Recent events in Morocco and Algeria demonstrate increased activity of militant Islamic groups in the Maghreb region. Tunisian security forces are reported to have battled militants associated with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in December 2006 and January 2007, and in January 2007 police claimed to have dismantled a well equipped terrorist group that planned to attack embassies in Tunis. In March 2008, AQIM displayed its ability to attack outside Algeria by kidnapping two Austrian tourists in the Tunisian Sahara and holding them in Mali.

### Political Structure

Republic

### President

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (RCD)

**Prime Minister** (appointed by the President)

Mohamed Ghannouchi (RCD)

### Legislative Body

- Chamber of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwaab) – 189 seats
- Chamber of Advisors – 126 seats

### Major Parties

37 seats are reserved for opposition parties

- Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD) – 152;
- Mouvement des démocrates socialistes (MDS) – 14;
- Parti de l'unité populaire (PUP) – 11;
- Union Démocratique Unioniste (UDU) – 7 ;
- Mouvement de la Rénovation (MR) – Ettajdid – 3 ;
- Parti social-libéral (PSL) – 2

### Last Elections

Presidential & Parliamentary:  
October 25, 2009

### Next Elections

Presidential & Parliamentary:  
October 2014

### Press Freedom Survey:

- 2008 Score: 81 (Not Free)
- [freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org)

### Control of Corruption Index:

- 2008 Score: -0.04 (-2.5: Worst; +2.5: Best)
- [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org)

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### Political Outlook

Regime stability under current President Ben Ali and the ruling RCD party is expected to continue over the medium to long term. Succession issues have yet to be addressed and there is currently no viable heir to President Ben Ali. That said, the ruling RCD party would likely seek to ensure a peaceful political transition process by elevating a senior party member to the Presidency.

Increased activity of militant Islamist groups remains of some concern, particularly given the apparent difficulty in maintaining complete control over the desert border region with Algeria. However, Tunisian and Algerian counter-terrorism efforts in recent years have been highly effective.