



PERCEPTIONS

PEACE IN A COMPLEX CONTEXT

The Case of Tunisia

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Tunisia's political transition opened some space but also paved the way for polarisation and the growing importance of identity. Tunisia has comparatively low levels of physical violence.



Perceptions of peace show slightly differing views across gender and generational lines with women and youth favouring security and tranquillity while men prioritise justice.



Achieving peace in Tunisia requires concerted efforts and a multidimensional approach. Tackling fundamental socio-economic problems and promoting social cohesion and livelihoods for youth is a key necessity.

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1

INTRODUCTION – THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH OF PEACEPTIONS

The PEACEptions project is a collaborative and participatory project between the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Berlin, various national FES offices and many local researchers and partners. The overall objective is to identify and analyse the understanding and perception of peace by different actors and the general population in the six countries participating in the study (Colombia, Venezuela, Cameroon, the Philippines, Tunisia and South Sudan).

It was Willy Brandt who coined the famous phrase *'Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing'*. Many political sermons, national and international policy documents postulate 'peace' as a goal. This is nothing new; it permeates time and space. However, there are differences in the underlying definitions and concepts of peace, as well as in the answers to the question of how to achieve and maintain peace. Understandings of peace and its goals vary among external and internal actors at the international, national and local levels, as well as among different population groups. Understanding these differences is key to developing context-specific strategies for sustainable peacebuilding.

The project follows a common methodology using the same key concepts in order to set the necessary scientific standards for the comparability of the country studies.

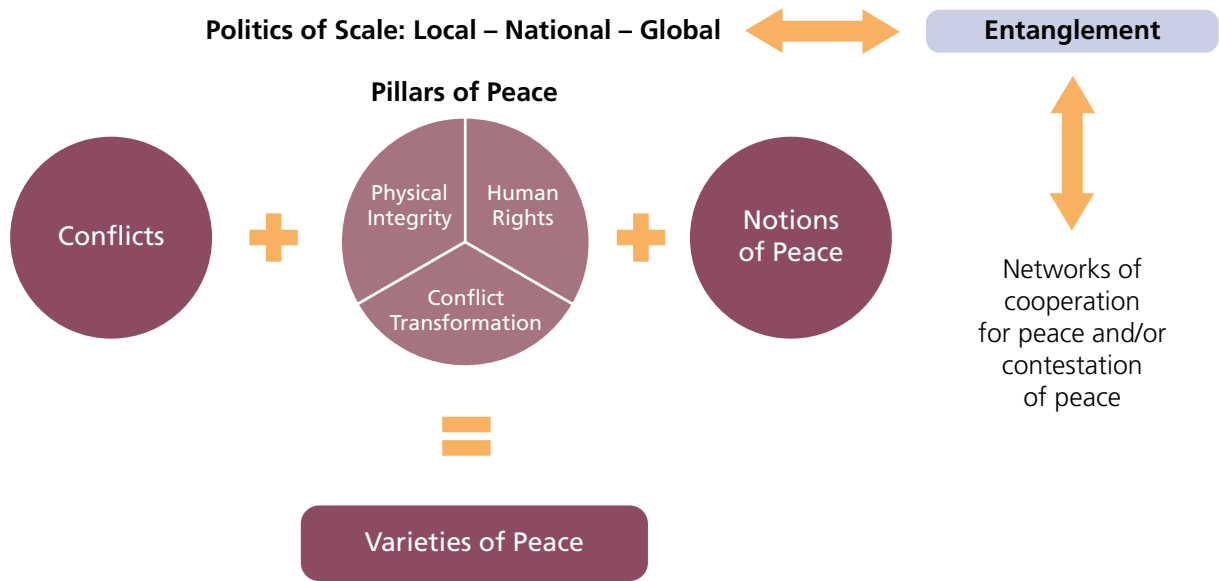
The core of the project is to provide a conceptual framework within which different conceptions of peace can be highlighted and their differences analysed in order to formulate concrete proposals for peacebuilding. The concept of peace is based on three basic functions of any society across time and space, across historical and cultural boundaries: (i) security, i.e. physical integrity; (ii) participation, i.e. individual and collective human rights; and (iii) a set of norms and values that enable constructive conflict transformation. However, the specific forms these three pillars take vary according to historical and cultural legacies as well as political and economic developments, among other factors. From this perspective, peacebuilding is a non-linear and multi-scalar process, shaped by local, national and international developments and dynamics, and by a variety of actors.

The case studies use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. As a first step, the main conflicts (and their actors) are analysed at different levels. Qualitative and quantitative data on the three pillars of peace make it possible to identify deficits as well as opportunities for peacebuilding. Quantitative data are drawn from international sources in order to make the results comparable across case studies, while available national and sub-national data are used to complement and deepen the analysis. Qualitative case studies from local contexts of varying degrees of peace provide nuanced information on specific conflicts, actors and contexts. The picture is rounded off by a survey of the prevailing notions of what peace means to different groups of actors at the local, national and international levels, as well as to the state and society (see Figure 1). The survey serves as a baseline for the needs and preferences of the respective society.

1. The overall objectives of the project are therefore to understand peace by analysing the underlying conflicts and the conceptions of peace of different actors and levels within and between societies on the basis of a consistent framework;
2. to assess peace by comparing the status of the three main pillars of peace at the national, sub-national and transnational levels and their interrelationships; and
3. to promote peace by developing policy recommendations that can bridge different meanings and conceptions of peace in the cases analysed and more generally for FES and other actors.

Beyond the policy level, the results of the project can also be useful for the strategic planning of the participating FES offices. They help to analyse the interrelationships and trade-offs between different areas of FES work at the country level and the development of peace as an overarching goal.

Figure 1:
The PEACEptions methodology



Source: Kurtenbach (2021, 345).

2

THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT IN TUNISIA

Since independence, the Tunisian state has invested heavily in building a sense of belonging to a national community through the administrative reorganisation of the country and an integrated education policy. This has had the effect of marginalising traditional and tribal forms of solidarity, but also of reducing the influence of religious institutions in national public life. With the implosion of the Ben Ali regime in 2010, a process of transition to democracy began. The institutions of the former regime, including the former state party, were dissolved, the 1959 constitution was suspended and new liberal legislation on freedom of expression and association was promulgated. Elections were held in October 2011 for the National Constituent Assembly, which was tasked with drafting a new constitution. However, political violence, including lynchings and two assassinations of opposition leaders, a rise in terrorism and a critical economic and social situation quickly pushed the country towards a deadlock between the different political formations. The situation was defused thanks to the mediation of civil society and professional organisations formed in 2013 as the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, including the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT, *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail*), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA, *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, *La Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*) and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (*Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie*).

A deadline was set for the end of the Constituent Assembly, some guidelines on national identity were formulated and legislative elections were called for 2014. The Quartet was awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts to prevent the political crisis from turning into a violent confrontation. The 2014 elections marked the first peaceful transfer of power, with a second peaceful transition being marked by the 2019 elections, which were held under exceptional circumstances following the death of the incumbent president a few weeks before the end of his term. However, many of the institutions provided for in the constitution, such as the Constitutional Court, have not seen the light of day, and Tunisians have not seen any significant improvement in their living conditions. The Covid-19 crisis, which claimed more than 30,000 victims, and accusations of mismanagement aggravated the economic and social situation. On 25 July 2021, President Kais Saied declared a state of imminent

danger, freezing the activities of the People's Assembly (ARP, *Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple*) and later dissolving it. He dismissed the head of government and some ministers and gradually dissolved other bodies (municipal councils, the Supreme Judicial Council, the provisional body responsible for verifying the constitutionality of draft legislation, etc.). In December 2021, he unilaterally launched a roadmap announcing a new constitutional process, a new provisional organisation of public powers, the formation of a new government and legislative elections one year later.

All in all, Tunisia is a very interesting case from a peacebuilding perspective, as it has managed a difficult transition process without resorting to massive violence as in other countries in the region. However, it remains to be seen whether the authoritarian backlash will lead to a violent escalation of the main conflicts in the country, despite the fact that the government is organising referendums on important political issues such as the amended constitution in August 2024.

3

MAIN CONFLICT STRUCTURES

The transition from a de facto single-party state with a façade of multi-partyism to a genuine multi-party system in a transitional and constituent context (2011–2014) paved the way for polarisation along ideological lines – reinforced, as in many countries around the world, by social networks. Questions of identity have become prominent in the political debate: the Islamist camp, for example, has proposed to incorporate Sharia law as a source of legislation and to end Tunisia's orientation towards the Mediterranean world. On the other hand, the modernist camp stands by the achievements of the state since independence, in particular the separation of religion from the workings of the state and its openness to the Mediterranean, Africa and the Arab-Muslim world. Opinion is structured around these two main camps.

The population accepts the rules of the political game as a mechanism for resolving conflicts and dealing with grievances, provided that these rules are perceived as fair and effective. However, the post-revolutionary socio-economic configuration has challenged this perception. Support for the new democratic system has been undermined by poor economic performance and slow improvement in the living conditions of Tunisian citizens, as well as by a series of political scandals. These conditions have encouraged citizens to retreat into their own identities and change their allegiances. The interests of the national community are becoming less important than those of one's family, tribe or region – a state of mind that is difficult to reconcile with the objectivity and attachment to a common destiny required by democratic life. The recent political transition has been characterised by a very rapid shift in priorities, making it difficult to identify the most important conflicts. Three conflicts cut across public life after 2011: the conflict over social justice and equality, the conflict over the political transition process, and the conflict over identity.

3.1 THE CONFLICT OVER SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUAL CONDITIONS

The Tunisian revolution was partly motivated by a sense of injustice between regions and classes shared by certain sections of the population. However, despite the state's efforts to improve the distribution of public investment between regions, »the gaps in terms of education, health, poverty, infrastructure and access to employment continue to widen« (Oxfam 2019).

Most private investment is concentrated in the coastal regions, where »92 per cent of private companies [are] based«, and the rate of public investment is still too low to ensure equity in the »availability of basic infrastructure and equipment [or] access to health services« (Magouri et al. 2018). As for education, which is supposed to limit conflicts by legitimising the societal distribution of positions and resources through meritocracy (Dubet 2010), it no longer fulfils its traditional function as a social elevator, nor as a guarantee of access to employment. The risk of unemployment varies greatly depending on one's region of birth: »the chances of being 'active' at the age of 30 for a Tunisian increase if they were born in the governorates of Monastir, Zaghouan, Greater Tunis or Nabeul, and decrease if they were born in the governorates of Tataouine, Gabès, Medenine or Kebili« (Magouri et al., 2018). If you come from Tataouine, you are three times more likely to be unemployed than if you come from Monastir (Oxfam 2019). The population's sense of injustice is therefore not diminishing: the hope inspired by the democratic revolution has brought this issue to the forefront of the media and political scene. A 2022 FTDES study shows that »60 per cent of respondents believe that the gap between rich and poor has increased over the last 5 years« (Mahjoub et al., 2022). This demand for social justice is expressed in particular through social movements, which we propose to classify into three main types according to the nature of their actors:

1. Social movements that are independent of established organisations and have local or regional demands (sit-ins by unemployed workers in the mining basin, the Kamour sit-in in 2017, the Kerkennah sit-in in 2016, the Jemna sit-in in 2016, to name only a few that have achieved national visibility). These movements are spontaneous and uncoordinated. They often denounce what they see as the usurpation of the fruits of natural resources extracted from their territories (phosphate in Gafsa and oil in Tataouine) and demand investment and job creation. Some of these movements are then co-opted by an existing entity, such as the substitute teachers' movement: the two national coordinations of substitute teachers (primary and secondary) are autonomous, but their demands are taken up by the teachers' unions, which support their negotiations.

2. Social movements organised around local or regional civil society coalitions. They put forward demands for regional development and are organised around regional sections of the UGTT, UTICA, LTDH, the National Bar Association and other associations, often local or regional. These coalitions negotiate with regional and national authorities and organise protests.
3. Social movements involving national or sectoral organisations. One example is the teachers' unions, which have organised social movements every year since 2014 to demand better pay and working conditions for their members. This example is quite significant given that teachers mobilise on a massive scale as part of trade union activities. There are also other egalitarian movements, such as the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, which are structured around associations that are well established in the Tunisian associative landscape.

3.2 THE CONFLICT SURROUNDING THE POLITICAL TRANSITION PROCESS

The political transition that began after the 2011 revolution is now entering a new phase. The two main political camps of 2014, unable to agree on the nature of the political system, gave rise to a *sui generis* system, neither parliamentary nor presidential, as identified by Professor Rafâa Ben Achour (2021). The 2014 constitution contained a number of ambivalent provisions that were at the root of many of the political crises and deadlocks that would characterise the 2014–2021 period.

However, 25 July 2021 ushered in a new political order. The 2022 constitution introduced a presidential system that was very reminiscent of the pre-revolutionary regime. There is currently a conflict between opponents and supporters of this new fundamental institutional reform. Its supporters argue that it will make it possible to break with the political instability and dominance of the political parties of the first phase, while its opponents see it as the installation of monocratic power concentrated in the hands of the President of the Republic. In addition, the President of the Republic has made no secret of his hostility to intermediary bodies, especially political parties, which is also a source of conflict. At the same time, social demands and policies appear to be undermined by the slowdown in social negotiations between the state and the UGTT.

3.3 THE CONFLICT OVER IDENTITY

The issue of identity is not clear-cut and is a recurrent theme in public debate. While the republican nature of the state is questioned by only a very small minority, the role of religion in the state and society is contested, as is the question of belonging to the Islamic, Arab or Mediterranean cultural spheres. The reorientation decided by the President of the Republic after 25 July brings this question back on the agenda, in particular through new articles reaffirming Tunisia's membership of the Islamic community, the Arab nation, the Maghreb and Africa as a whole, without mentioning its belonging to the Mediterranean world.

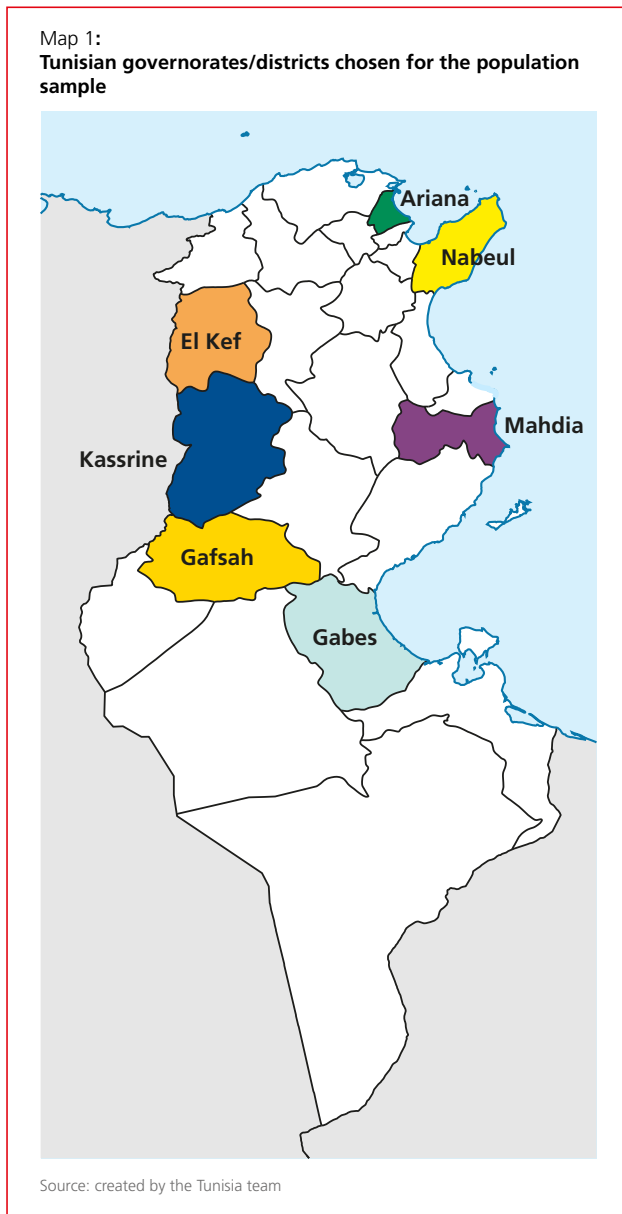
The common denominator of these three conflicts is the revolutionary process of 2010 and the political transition that began in 2011. This process is rooted in the demands for social justice and freedom that swept away the *ancien régime*. However, the transition from the revolutionary state to the organisation of the transition by the political elites meant that issues of equality and social justice took a back seat to issues of politics and identity. Indeed, between 2011 and 2014, the question of the modalities of the political transition, as well as the question of identity introduced into the public debate by the Islamists, dominated public life – both the debates and the political action itself.

As social conditions and the economy continued to deteriorate, large sections of the population increasingly felt that the revolution had been hijacked by the political elites. This feeling of being left behind was rekindled by the perceived mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis by the three successive governments of Chahed, Fakhfakh and Mechichi, and the Ennahdha movement's insistence that the state continue to pay compensation to its activists who were victims of the dictatorship, against a background of tight public finances. This partly explains the public approval of the events of 25 July 2021 and the low level of popular support for the ousted political establishment.

4

THE THREE PILLARS OF PEACE AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

The map below provides an overview of the regions selected for this study, which are representative of the country as a whole in terms of socio-demographic criteria.

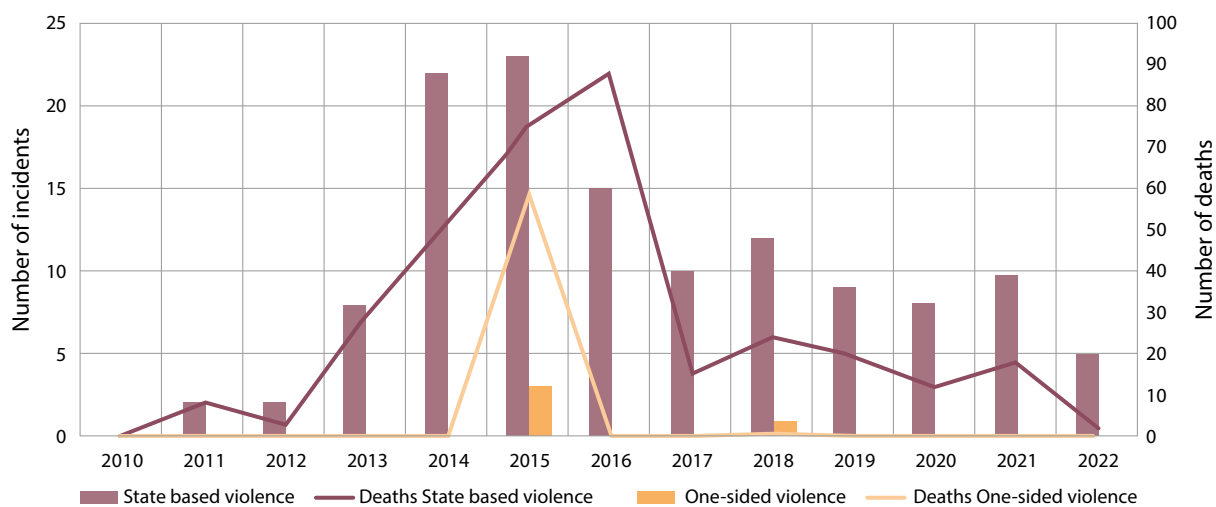


4.1 PHYSICAL INTEGRITY

In the group of countries selected for the PEACEptions project, Tunisia has the lowest overall level of organised violence. Officially, there is no foreign armed presence in Tunisia outside the framework of security cooperation and experience-sharing agreements, notably with the United States. The country is not currently involved in any armed conflict and maintains a neutral stance with regard to tensions and conflicts involving other states in the region (notably internal conflicts in Libya or tensions between Algeria and Morocco). Tunisia's territory is fully demarcated and security is the exclusive responsibility of the state. There are no disputed zones in Tunisia or territories claimed by a neighbouring state. However, as a result of the post-revolutionary national context, Tunisia has experienced an increase in jihadist terrorism, the most violent activities of which took place between 2014 and 2015. Since then, the security situation has improved: only 4 incidents were recorded in 2021, compared to 19 at the peak of terrorist activity in 2015. International data on armed conflict reflect this trend (Figures 2–5).

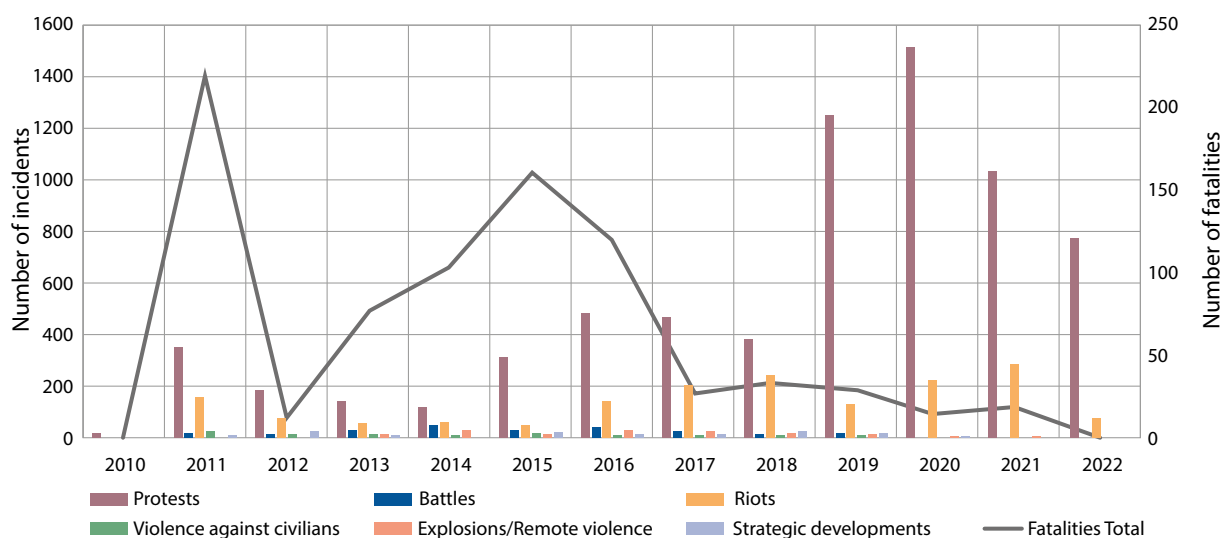
Although very limited and always condemned by public opinion, there have been several acts of violence over the past decade. First, there was violence caused by violent extremism, including terrorist violence perpetrated by jihadist groups, mainly between 2014 and 2017. Second, the decade was not free of political violence (see Figures 3 and 4): Nidaa Tounes' regional coordinator, Lotfi Nagdh, was lynched on 18 October 2012 by supporters of the Troika, the three-party coalition that ruled Tunisia following the 2011 Constituent Assembly election. Two left-wing opposition leaders, Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi, were assassinated on 6 February 2013 and 25 July 2013 respectively. In 2012, there was a violent crackdown on a social movement in the town of Siliana demanding the resignation of the governor appointed by the Ennahda government. Police fired buckshot at demonstrators, injuring several in the eyes. Last but not least, a number of social movements were violently repressed by the forces of law and order, in particular peasant movements in certain areas, certain youth movements and supporters of sports clubs.

Figure 2:
Armed Conflict (UCDP) – Violent incidents and deaths in Tunisia 2010–2022



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Date of retrieval: 23/09/05) UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: ucdp.uu.se, Uppsala University.

Figure 3:
Political Violence & Protest Events 2010–2022 (ACLED)



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); retrieved 27 July, 2023, from acleddata.com.

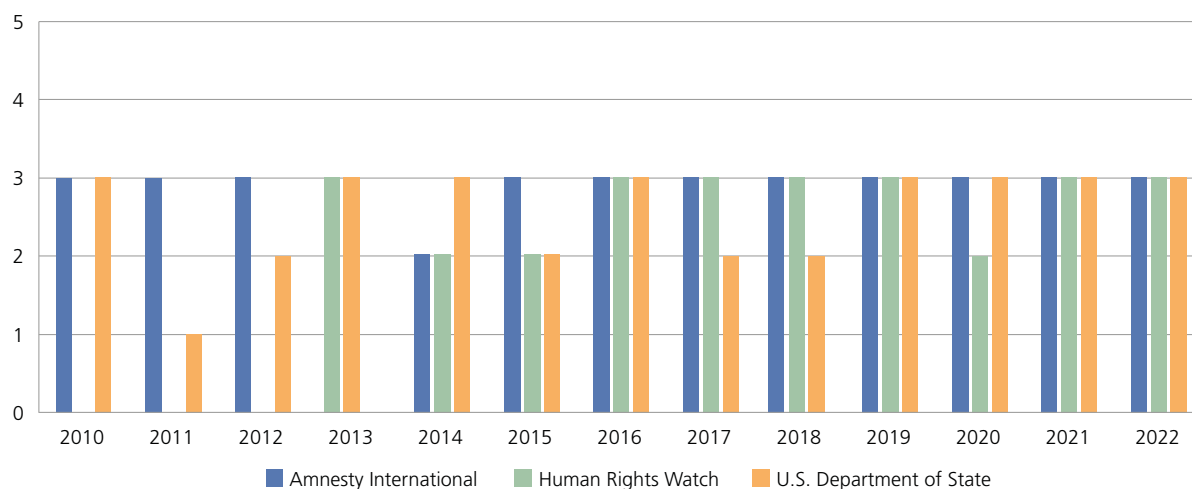
However, it should be remembered that violent acts related to conflicts remain sporadic and that most conflicts involve peaceful, non-violent movements, such as the Bardo sit-in (2013–2014), strikes and other forms of non-violent action. Finally, it is worth mentioning that violent crimes and other incidents regularly shake public opinion, although it is difficult to quantify this phenomenon due to the lack of official and/or reliable figures. In this respect, we would like to highlight the increase in violence against migrants, as well as the violence perpetrated by migrants against the population, which has been documented by various civil society organisations and the Tunisian government.

Nevertheless, the perspectives of young people are interesting. In an interview on the current crisis, prospects for peace and relevant indicators, one of the activists who has suffered violence at the hands of state institutions gave the following

response: »In Tunisia, we are experiencing a crisis in terms of peace and the marginalisation of young people. Young people are experiencing a kind of injustice from many sides, even though they are one of the age groups that most influence peace. The main indicators are illegal emigration, high unemployment, high crime rates, marginalisation of young people and poverty, which are also among the indicators that threaten peace«. (Final Report 2023, p. 109)

Overall, physical integrity is expressed as a precondition for the productive transformation of the conflicts mentioned above. Thus, state violence by the police and political violence challenge the legitimacy of the institutions responsible for transforming conflicts and lead individuals to resort to violence.

Figure 4:
Political Terror Scale (PTS) Tunisia



Source: Gibney, Mark, Linda Cornett, Reed Wood, Peter Haschke, Daniel Arnon, Attilio Pisanò, Gray Barrett, and Baekkwon Park. 2022. The Political Terror Scale 1976–2021; available on the Political Terror Scale website: <http://www.politicalterror scale.org>. (last accessed: 30.09.2023).

Definitions used to define the levels of political terror in Figure 4:

Level 1: Countries with a secure rule of law, where people are not imprisoned for their views and torture is rare or exceptional. Political killings are extremely rare.

Level 2: There is some imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few people are imprisoned, and torture and beatings are rare. Political killings are rare.

Level 3: There is extensive political imprisonment or a recent history of such imprisonment. Executions or other political killings and brutality may be common. Indefinite detention, with or without trial, for political opinions is accepted.

Level 4: Violations of civil and political rights have spread to large sections of the population. Assassinations, disappearances and torture are commonplace. Despite its generality, terror at this level primarily affects those with an interest in politics or ideas.

Level 5: Terror has spread to the entire population. The leaders of these societies set no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue their personal or ideological goals.

Source: Political Terror Scale Data • The Political Terror Scale

4.2 HUMAN RIGHTS

Issues of human rights and equality appear to be central to the Tunisian conflict landscape. They were crucial to the emergence and triggering of the 2011 revolution, and continue to be expressed today through numerous social movements with demands that are potentially compromising to peace.

The project's quantitative survey allows us to identify which human rights are most important to the respondents:

The first group of rights considered important or very important: the right to vote (75%), the right to education (72%) and the right to freedom of expression (70%). These rights are seen as important demands of the 2011 Tunisian revolution. Political rights and access to education are important issues for Tunisians. Education is still important for Tunisian families, although the social lift based on education has faced difficulties in recent years.

The second group brings together a second set of rights that respondents consider important or very important: rights related to health (63%), freedom (62%), peaceful assembly (62%) and property (62%). Here we find a combination of political rights, such as freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and fundamental rights, such as access to health care and private property. The deterioration of health services

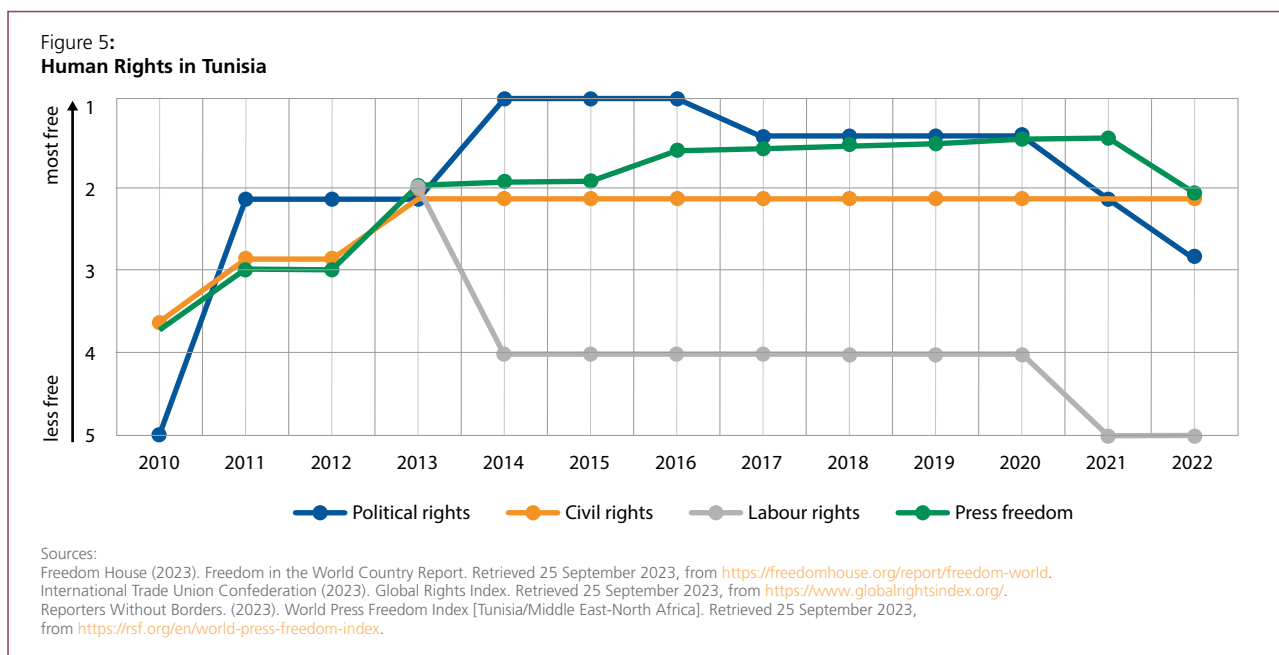
in Tunisia, due to poor infrastructure and low quality of care, is a major concern for many Tunisians. The right to property is seen as a necessary condition for flourishing in society.

The final group concerns the right to housing, physical integrity and employment. These rights are also considered important or very important. The right to housing is seen as a major concern (60%), as is the right to life and physical integrity (60%). The right to employment (50%) is also seen as important, although the results show a slight tendency for it to be seen as less important than the other rights in this group.

Finally, the right to sexual orientation is not considered important at all by a large majority of respondents (66%), reflecting the persistent taboo surrounding this issue in Tunisian society.

These results highlight the different perceptions and priorities of rights within Tunisian society. They also underline the importance of taking these different views into account when developing policies and measures to promote and protect human rights in the country.

The results of the survey also reveal a high level of concern among respondents about respect for human rights in their community (see Table 1 below). In fact, more than half of the respondents (56.2%) expressed strong disagreement



with the idea that human rights are respected. This figure is significant and highlights the need to pay particular attention to this issue. On the other hand, 25.5 per cent of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that human rights are respected. Although this percentage is lower than that of those who disagreed, it shows that there is a proportion of the population who feel that human rights are respected in their community.

Table 1:
Are human rights respected in your community?

	Number	Percentage
Strongly opposed	334	30.4
Opposed	284	25.8
Neither in favour nor opposed	182	16.5
Favourable	246	22.4
Strongly favourable	34	3.1
Doesn't answer	20	1.8
Total	1100	100

Source: Tunisia Survey

These results highlight the need to work on the issue of human rights, both in terms of public policy and in terms of public awareness and education. It is essential to promote and guarantee respect for human rights in order to respond to the concerns expressed by a large proportion of the population.

Looking more closely at the results and grouping them according to opinion, we can see that the institutions that play an important role in guaranteeing human rights in the respondents' community are the judicial and executive institutions (presidency, army and police). The executive and marginal role played by the legislative institution since independence has resulted in a legacy of political culture that has given greater importance to the judicial and executive institutions than to the legislative institutions. The devaluation of the latter has worsened since 2011 as a result of the political

conflicts that have shaken it, which as a consequence have had a negative impact on its performance, leading in part to a popular uprising against it and ultimately to its dissolution. It is important to take these perceptions into account and to rebuild the legislative institutions in order to strengthen their role and effectiveness in the protection of human rights. This could include institutional reforms, capacity-building measures and raising awareness of the importance of the legislative institution as a guarantor of human rights.

4.3 INSTITUTIONS FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

As in other contexts, conflict transformation is crucial in Tunisia, as it has prevented the country from descending into violence. An important example is the democratisation process mentioned above, which has been relatively peaceful but has also seen an increase in some manifestations of violence. At least in theory, democratic institutions are sought to transform conflicts. State and non-state judicial institutions play an important role here.

The overall rule of law scores provided by the world justice project are the only ones available that allow a comparative assessment of the PEACEptions case studies. From this perspective, Tunisia performs better than the other countries, whose scores for 2022 are lower than Tunisia's.

From the perspective of Tunisian citizens, however, a much more critical view of the institutions emerges.

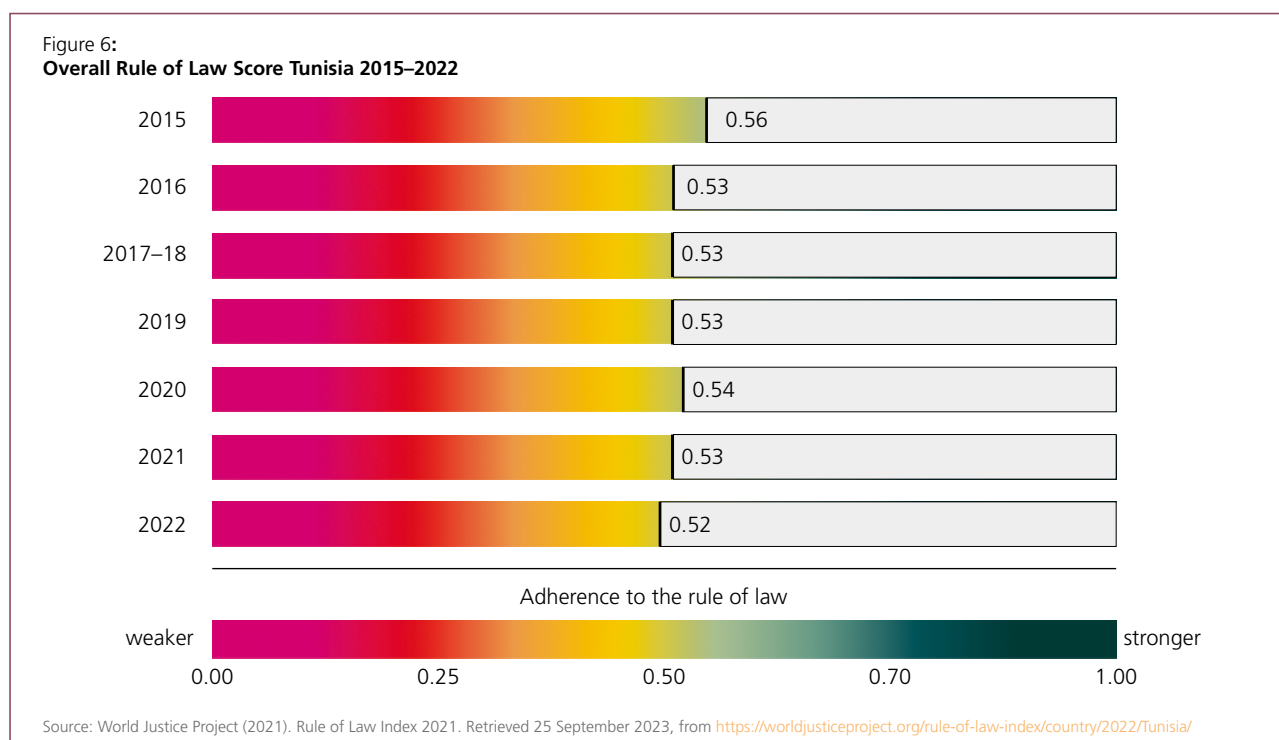


Table 2:

Appreciation of respect for the law in Tunisia

	Per cent
Well respected	24.5
Not respected	73.6
Don't know	1.8

Source: Tunisia Survey

The results of the survey show that the majority of respondents have a negative opinion of the application of the law (73.6%). This rate is in line with previous results, which underline the importance of justice as an essential pillar for achieving peace. It is important to note that equality before the law is a fundamental principle of the constitution. A perceived lack of respect for this principle can lead to social and political instability. Public confidence in the justice system is crucial to maintaining order and social cohesion.

These findings therefore highlight the need to improve the application of the law and to strengthen public confidence in the judicial system. Reforms aimed at ensuring equality before the law and strengthening the independence and effectiveness of judicial institutions could help to address these concerns and promote a more peaceful and stable society.

However, the survey results also show that respondents attach great importance to certain institutions in their community. The army, the president, the police and the judiciary are considered important or very important institutions by a large majority of the population. The army is considered important or very important by 81 per cent of respondents, reflecting the trust placed in this institution to ensure the security and stability of the country. The President was also considered important or very important by 63 per cent of respondents, underlining the importance of this position in governance and decision-making. The police were considered important

or very important by 63 per cent of respondents, reflecting the importance attached to law enforcement and maintaining public order. Finally, the judiciary is considered important or very important by 60 per cent of respondents, underlining the importance of this institution in the protection of human rights and the administration of justice. It is essential to address these perceptions and ensure that these institutions play their role effectively, transparently and with respect for human rights. This requires continued efforts to strengthen public confidence in these institutions and to promote the accountability and independence of the judiciary.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations are also important, for example in promoting human rights values and putting pressure on official institutions to ensure respect for these rights. International organisations were seen as important or very important by 44 per cent of respondents, showing that these organisations are seen as playing an important role in disseminating human rights values and promoting respect for them. On the other hand, respondents do not consider terrorists to be important for human rights. The vast majority (96%) consider them to be of little or no importance, indicating a clear rejection of their ideology and actions in terms of respect for human rights.

The results of the survey suggest that parliamentary and municipal institutions, as well as the executive institution of the governor, are not well regarded in terms of protecting human rights in the respondents' community. This may be a cause for concern as these institutions are directly involved in providing services and interacting with citizens on a daily basis. It is essential to instil the values of human rights and citizenship and to build a relationship of trust with elected representatives and senior officials.

These results underline the need to look closely at the reasons for this perception and to work to strengthen these institutions so that they can better meet citizens' expectations. It is also crucial to promote the transparency, integrity and efficiency of these institutions in order to regain citizens' trust. This can be achieved by improving communication and cooperation with the public, strengthening accountability and ensuring informed and inclusive decision-making.

woman who participated in the focus group conducted as part of this study in Tunis:

»Peace is tolerance, reconciliation and a feeling of security, because peace can only be put into practice when people are reconciled with themselves and with others. Peace emerges from within the human being as a principle and an idea that is reflected in practice through a system of living with oneself and with others.« (Final Report 2023, p. 101)

Generational differences: When we analyse the responses by age, we see significant differences. Concern for peace changes with age. Younger people (aged 18–29) place more emphasis on respect, while older generations (aged 50 and over) place more emphasis on legality and justice. This development probably reflects the different life experiences and perspectives that change with age.

What emerges from the focus group of young people is similar to the women's focus group in that the majority of them associate peace with a feeling of security. Secondly, participants in this age group mention the feeling of individual calm and tranquillity as being at the heart of peace. Some young people also see peace as synonymous with freedom, understood as a guarantee of mutual respect. By way of illustration, here is the response of Iskander, a young Tunisian who took part in the focus group conducted as part of this study in Tunis:

»The concept of peace can be divided into an individual/collective duality, because it is the opposite of social violence, i.e. violence exerted by individuals on individuals, and also the opposite of collective violence, which manifests itself above all during war. This is the case when the individual finds himself in a place or a society marked by insecurity. The family is the nucleus for the development of the concept of peace, which is transformed into violence as soon as the family does not assume its primary social role.« (Final Report 2023, p. 100)

Regional variations: Finally, the responses by region of residence show marked differences. Each region has its own priorities when it comes to peace, depending on the socio-economic and cultural characteristics and specific needs of the local population. For example, in some regions (EL KEF and GAFSA) the priority is respect, while in others it is justice (ARIANA) or health (EL KEF). This shows that the perception of peace can be influenced by the regional context.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis highlights the importance of taking into account the diversity of opinions and priorities for peace within society. Policies and initiatives to promote peace should be sensitive to these differences by gender, age and region. However, it is also interesting to note that certain values such as justice, legality and respect remain constant concerns across the sample, indicating a degree of convergence in opinions on the essential elements of peace.

The results of the second axis, the conception of peace, highlight the importance attached to security, tranquillity, stability and calm in terms of quality of life. These aspects are considered essential for a satisfying and dignified life. However, other elements such as freedom and respect seem to be less important for the majority of the sample. Definitions of 'the opposite of peace' mainly reflect concepts such as war, violence, disorder and insecurity, but there is also a move towards a more modern understanding of peace that takes into account individual aspects such as discomfort and injustice. It is crucial to take these priorities and new dimensions of peace into account when formulating policies to improve the quality of life and promote peace and stability in society.

For vulnerable socio-professional groups, peace is primarily associated with security and access to basic needs such as health and food. Mohamed also believes that peace lies in accepting others despite differences and disagreements. However, one sub-Saharan immigrant interviewee did not provide a concrete definition of peace. In the same vein, and by way of illustration, here is the response of Mehrez, a street vendor working in the informal sector who was interviewed in Tunis as part of this study:

»Peace means mutual respect, humanitarian treatment and respect for others, even if you don't share the same opinion. No one has the right to interfere in other people's affairs, because interfering in other people's affairs creates an atmosphere of tension and violence.« (Final Report 2023, p. 102)

Researchers describe peace in different ways, but most see it primarily as a social climate free of violence. Hanen sees peace as a state of mind, while Amira believes that the notion of peace necessarily encompasses international relations, human rights and social justice. The following is the response of a sociologist interviewed as part of the empirical research, a response that we find highly significant because it encapsulates the Tunisian elite, academic and progressive discourse on peace and conflict in the country:

»Peace is above all behaviour, attitudes, lifestyles, a regulatory ideal towards which we must all strive. Peace is something that is built, not something that comes naturally. Peace is a construct; it means peaceful relations between citizens, harmonious relations between social groups without conflict. It is manifested in the absence of unrest and violence within a community, society or family. It represents social peace, coexistence, and is characterised by the absence of struggles between social categories. Peace is also a political duty, an imperative of political reason, and we citizens are the peacemakers. Peace cannot be established by decree; it is essential for growth, peace of mind and social equilibrium.« (Final Report 2023, p. 102-103)

6

KEY ACTORS IN PEACEBUILDING

The question, then, is which actors are seen as promoting or threatening peace in Tunisia. As the context is not one of war or other forms of organised violence, the main focus is on preventing the escalation of conflict.

The results of the assessment of the role of actors and institutions in achieving peace show a positive tendency towards the president and the security institution, but a more divided opinion on the judicial institution and non-governmental and international organisations. With regard to the president, a majority of 40 per cent of respondents had a positive opinion (good to very good) of his role in achieving peace, while 25 per cent had a negative opinion (bad to very bad) and 31 per cent an average opinion. These results indicate an overall positive assessment of the president's leadership in promoting peace.

When asked about the role of the police, a majority of 46 per cent of respondents had a positive opinion (good to very good) of their role in keeping the peace, while 26 per cent had a negative opinion (bad to very bad) and 25 per cent an average opinion. This suggests a degree of confidence in the work of the police in maintaining public order and safety. However, interviews show that this perception is not shared by all, as illustrated by the response of Haithem, a civil society and political party activist interviewed for this study in Tunis:

»Peace and the police? That's a difficult question. I don't trust the police, even though I have nothing to do with them; I've seen interactions with people other than myself that don't indicate a very professional attitude towards citizens, because a policeman who acts according to the instincts of an ordinary citizen can't fulfil his duty. He has to deal with people with the instinct of a policeman, which is determined by the law and not by what is illegal. The police officer in Tunisia treats the citizen in a personal way, which deprives him of his status as a police officer and can lead to provocative reactions, thus reducing his credibility in the eyes of the citizen.«(Final Report 2023, p. 103)

Opinions are more divided when it comes to the judicial system. 27 per cent of respondents had a negative opinion (bad to very bad), 33 per cent an average opinion and 32 per cent a positive opinion (good to very good). This reflects a certain ambivalence about the effectiveness and impartiality of the judicial system in achieving peace.

Regarding non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 35 per cent of respondents had a negative opinion (bad to very bad), 25 per cent an average opinion and 21 per cent a positive opinion (good to very good). For international organisations, 31 per cent of respondents had a negative opinion (bad to very bad), 23 per cent an average opinion and 26 per cent a positive opinion (good to very good). Since 2011, many foreign actors have played a more or less direct role in the Tunisian conflicts mentioned above. Through diplomacy, lobbying or funding and/or leading civil society initiatives, the role of states and international organisations and bodies has been significant. For example, President Marzouki and the Ennahda movement shared the position of Turkey and Qatar on the Syrian conflict and organised an international 'Friends of Syria' conference in 2012, bringing together forces and countries opposed to the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Dealing with the various non-Tunisian actors is a rather delicate matter because they are so diverse, with different interests, often antagonistic and sometimes conflicting. Those who have had the greatest impact on the conflicts in Tunisia are the European Union, the United Nations and the Arab states.

EU: Tunisia has been linked to the European Union through various cooperation agreements since the Barcelona Process in 1995. This partnership has been steadily strengthened since then, particularly since the revolution, which has opened up new prospects in areas such as civil society, democracy and human rights, going beyond the purely economic framework imposed by the authoritarian pre-revolutionary system. To this end, the EU provides Tunisia with logistical and financial support, both for the reforms needed for the democratic transition (at the level of the state, the media and civil society) and for the energy and environmental transition, as well as for bringing Tunisia up to European standards, since the EU is home to some of Tunisia's leading economic partners (first Italy, then France and Germany). Negotiations between Tunisia and the EU to establish a deeper partnership called ALECA (*Accord de Libre-Échange Complet et Approfondi*) failed due to opposition from civil society, NGO experts and part of the political opposition. However, the issue of migration has become a key European concern for Tunisia. This led to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic and Global Partnership between Tunisia and the EU on 16 July 2023, which appears to be the new reference framework for the development of Tunisian-European relations after 25 July 2021 (European Commission, 2023).

UN: Tunisia joined the UN immediately after its independence in 1956. It is committed to international legality, as defined by UN instruments, and contributes according to its means to peacekeeping missions decided by the Security Council. It participates in UN bodies, subsidiary bodies and specialised agencies. Tunisia was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2021. In July 2011, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights opened an office in Tunis, the first OHCHR office in North Africa. This office provides technical assistance to improve human rights in Tunisia, in addition to the various programmes implemented and supported by the United Nations as part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

World Bank/IMF: Since 2011, Tunisia has strengthened its partnership with the UN's financial institutions, namely the World Bank and the IMF. The World Bank is involved in the financing of several development projects. On 6 March 2023, the World Bank decided to suspend its partnership framework in accordance with its charter against racism, following events related to this issue. On 15 June of the same year, the World Bank announced the launch of a new partnership framework with Tunisia. The International Monetary Fund is also one of Tunisia's main financial backers, and Tunisia has been negotiating with the IMF since 2021 for a new, politically controversial loan. The President of the Republic has spoken out on the issue on several occasions, complaining that the loans are restrictive and have high interest rates. The situation is currently stalemated and little information is publicly available.

Arab states: During the struggle for independence, the Tunisian national movement established relations with already independent Arab countries, and Tunisia has been a member of the League of Arab States since 1958. Since then, Tunisia has been committed to supporting the independence of Arab countries still under occupation and was among the first countries to recognise the independence of Mauritania in 1960 and Algeria in 1962.

The two countries that share land borders with Tunisia, Libya to the east and Algeria to the west, are both members of the Arab League. There are no border disputes with these countries. In geopolitical terms, Algeria has an interest in maintaining political stability in Tunisia. Tunisia is keen to maintain good relations with Algeria, which is one of its main energy suppliers (natural gas) and a partner in the fight against terrorist groups based in the mountainous and heavily forested border regions. The two countries also cooperate in the fight against forest fires. Since 2011, the unstable situation in Libya has had a significant impact on Tunisia, given the important relations between the two countries and the existence of a large Tunisian diaspora in Libya and a Libyan diaspora in Tunisia. Tunisia has adopted a position of neutrality in the Libyan conflict,

In 2012, Tunisia severed diplomatic relations with Syria. Diplomatic relations were re-established under President Caïd Essebsi, first at consular level and then at embassy level in

2023, when Syria was readmitted to the League of Arab States. Since 2015, Tunisia has also participated in the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, initiated by Saudi Arabia. Tunisia has had good relations with Egypt since the late 1970s. Tunisia has good relations with the Arab-Persian Gulf countries, which are involved in international investment in Tunisia. A number of Tunisian managers and workers are based in the Gulf countries. Tunisia is strongly committed to the Palestinian cause and refuses to normalise relations with Israel until the Palestinian situation is resolved in accordance with international law.

The Arab Maghreb Union is a regional organisation of the five Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) founded in 1989. The AMU is not a very active organisation due to strained relations between Algeria and Morocco. Tunisia currently holds the position of Secretary General.

Overall, the survey results show a degree of uncertainty and a lack of clear consensus about the role of NGOs and international organisations in peacebuilding. It is important to note that these results were obtained before the wave of arrests of politicians and activists in February 2023, which may have influenced perceptions and opinions. It would be interesting to conduct a new survey to assess the impact of these events on attitudes towards peace-related actors and institutions.

Turning the question around, the survey results also indicate the existence of four different groups of opinion regarding the role of institutions in threatening peace:

- The first group (34%) considers the role of the governor, the local council, the police, NGOs and international organisations to be unimportant or not important at all.
- The second group is slightly more likely to think that the role of the president is not important or not important at all (46%) and the mayor is not important or not important at all (37%).
- The third group does not see the army as an institution that threatens peace (29%), but rather as a guarantor of peace. They consider its role in maintaining peace to be important or very important.
- The last group considers the parliament and terrorists to be a threat to peace. They consider parliament to play an important or very important role (60%) in threatening peace, while terrorists are considered important or very important (69%) in threatening peace. This negative attitude towards terrorists may be related to past experiences of losses caused by terrorist operations in the country.

Allegations of corruption and nepotism in the judiciary also influenced responses, with 45 per cent considering it to be important or very important in threatening peace. These results highlight the different perceptions that respondents have of the role of institutions in threatening peace. It is important to take these different perceptions into account when designing policies to strengthen peace and promote

respect for human rights. It is also important to work to build trust between institutions and society and to respond to people's expectations and concerns in order to promote sustainable peace.

These findings underline the importance of people's perceptions of the various actors and institutions in achieving peace. They also highlight the different levels of trust and satisfaction with these actors, which can have implications for policies and peacebuilding efforts in society.

7

SPECIFICS OF PEACEBUILDING AND LESSONS LEARNED

With regard to the PEACEptions conceptual framework – human rights, physical integrity and productive conflict transformation – the Tunisian case study offers some general observations: First, it appears that the issues of human rights and equality are central to the Tunisian conflict landscape. They were crucial to the emergence and triggering of the 2011 revolution and continue to be expressed in numerous social protest movements today, potentially jeopardising peace.

Second, conflict transformation is essential as it has prevented the country from descending into violence. Social and political negotiation and social cohesion are factors that have allowed the democratic transition to continue peacefully, despite periodic outbreaks of violence (political assassinations, terrorist attacks, etc.), as demonstrated by the 2014 national dialogue. However, parts of the population reject these mechanisms because their economic demands have not been taken into account.

Finally, physical integrity is a prerequisite for the productive transformation of the above-mentioned conflicts. Police and political violence undermine the legitimacy of the institutions responsible for conflict transformation and encourage individuals to resort to violence.

The qualitative survey highlights the diversity of perceptions of peace according to different social categories, age and gender. The notions of security, freedom, access to basic needs and justice are all components of peace that vary from one perspective to another. Threats to peace are also perceived differently, whether in terms of violence and its normalisation, the economic crisis or deteriorating living conditions. A common thread among respondents is distrust of public institutions such as the local council, parliament or government, while trust in the army is often higher. Opinions on the police, judiciary and presidency were more mixed, oscillating between relative trust and distrust.

Options for securing peace include reforming the education system, implementing and revising laws, and developing the economy. Social equality, particularly the rights of women, children, young people, the poor and marginalised minorities, is also emphasised. Promoting the role of civil society is also mentioned, with the idea that everyone has a contribution to make to peace and that the responsibility for maintaining

peace is shared between state actors, activists and citizens. In short, this survey highlights the complexity of the concept of peace and the diversity of perspectives on how to guarantee it. It also highlights the importance of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to peacebuilding, taking into account different voices and working together to address the social, economic and institutional issues that threaten peace.

The focus group activists came up with a number of alternatives and recommendations to promote peace and justice in society. Here are some of their proposals:

The young people in the focus group made some key recommendations to improve the situation. They stressed the importance of guaranteeing human and minority rights. This means enacting laws and policies to protect the fundamental rights of all and fighting discrimination, intolerance and injustice. They also called for a reform of the education system, including a revision of school curricula to promote values such as tolerance, respect for others and equality. The aim is to prepare young people to become responsible and open-minded citizens. In the same vein, young people insisted on the effective and fair application of justice mechanisms in all areas of life. This approach aims to prevent the normalisation of violence and to guarantee fair and equal treatment before the law for all. They also underlined the importance of strengthening the role of civil society in promoting peace and justice. They strongly recommend promoting the active participation of citizens and non-governmental organisations in public life and decision-making processes. Finally, the young people stressed the importance of sound and fair parental education. They recommend that parents be made aware of the importance of passing on to their children values such as tolerance, respect and acceptance of others. These alternatives and recommendations highlight the importance of promoting human rights, education and justice, and strengthening civil society in building a peaceful and just society. They also emphasise the role of individuals and families in transmitting the values needed to build a harmonious environment.

The women's focus group put forward a number of alternatives and recommendations for promoting peace and justice in society. These proposals represent a global and thoughtful approach to improving our society. Here is a summary of their proposals:

The participants also stressed the importance of reforming educational institutions, with particular emphasis on teacher training. They felt that education plays a crucial role in promoting values such as tolerance, equality and mutual respect. Unlike other focus groups, women stressed the importance of working on the effective application of laws before changing them. They felt that it was essential to strengthen the application of existing laws in order to guarantee justice and prevent impunity. The participants also expressed the need to reform the political system to avoid any possibility of autocracy and to promote citizen participation. They considered democratic governance and transparency to be key elements of peacebuilding. The importance of a healthy social upbringing of children was stressed, with an emphasis on learning values such as tolerance, respect and cooperation from an early age. They believe that promoting these values helps to build a more peaceful and inclusive society. Finally, the participants emphasised that achieving peace is a shared responsibility that requires the active participation of all members of society. They encouraged cooperation and solidarity between the various social actors in order to build a peaceful and just future.

In conclusion, achieving peace in Tunisia requires concerted efforts and a multidimensional approach. The recommendations set out in this report provide a solid framework for addressing fundamental issues and promoting social cohesion and political stability. It is essential to take concrete measures to combat inequality, strengthen the independence and effectiveness of the judicial system, guarantee human rights for all, strengthen democratic governance, raise awareness and educate the population, and enhance cooperation with civil society and international institutions. By adopting these recommendations, Tunisia can move towards a more peaceful and equitable society that respects fundamental rights. However, it is also important to recognise that the implementation of these recommendations will require continued commitment, adequate resources and strong political will. Tunisia has the potential to become an inspiring example of positive transformation, and we urge all stakeholders to work together to achieve this common goal of peace and prosperity for all Tunisians.

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PEACE IN A COMPLEX CONTEXT

The Case of Tunisia



Tunisia managed a difficult transition process to democratization without the resort to massive violence. But the despotic backlash since 2021 may escalate other conflicts such as inter-regional and inter-class injustice among certain sectors and regarding latent identity conflicts. The notions of peace vary a lot but highlight equality, justice, respect, personal safety and tranquillity.

Achieving peace in Tunisia requires concerted efforts and a multidimensional approach emphasizing concrete measures to combat inequality, strengthen the independence and effectiveness of the judicial system, guarantee human rights for all, reinforce democratic governance with a specific focus on youth and women.