

## POLITICAL TRANSITION IN TUNISIA\*

*Alexis Arieff*

### SUMMARY

On January 14, 2011, Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled the country after weeks of mounting anti-government protests. Tunisia's mass popular uprising, dubbed the "Jasmine Revolution," sparked anti-government movements in other countries across the region. Ben Ali's departure was greeted by widespread euphoria within Tunisia. Yet disputes over reform priorities, economic crisis, labor unrest, tensions between the privileged coastal region and relatively impoverished interior, and lingering insecurity are continuing challenges. The humanitarian and security impact of events in neighboring Libya present additional difficulties.

National elections were held on October 23 to select a National Constituent Assembly. The Assembly has put in place a transitional government and is expected to draft a new constitution, ahead of new elections that have yet to be scheduled. Thousands of candidates competed for seats in the Assembly, but the outcome showed popular support to be primarily focused on a handful of political parties. Harakat al Nahda (alt: Ennahda/An-Nahda), a moderate Islamist party, won 41% of the seats, and has formed a governing coalition with two center-left secular parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Democratic Forum of Labor and Liberties (FDTL/Ettakatol). Certain aspects of the Assembly's mandate, duration, and internal structure are still to be determined.

Prior to January 2011, Ben Ali and his Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party exerted near-total control over parliament, state and local governments, and most political activity. Tunisia cultivated strong

---

\* This is an edited, reformatted and augmented version of Congressional Research Service, Publication No. RS21666, dated December 16, 2011.