

# Tunisia

## *Ethnicity in Tunisia*

### *Power relations*

After Tunisia gained independence in 1956 the new regime began making distinctions between Arabs and foreigners living in Tunisia. The majority of French and Europeans (roughly two thirds, or 170,000) left Tunisia between 1955 and 1959. Less than 1% of Europeans remained (not included in coding because the population is politically irrelevant).

By 1967, an estimated 40,000 Jews left Tunisia, and further were socially discriminated against during the Six-Day War. Less than 1% remain between 1967 and 2013 (not included in the coding because the population is politically irrelevant).

Tunisia's population after 1956 independence is largely homogeneous with around 98% Sunni Muslims with otherwise few social divisions or cleavages (<sup>4564</sup>). According to multiple sources, Tunisia's ethnic composition since 1946 has consisted of an overwhelming majority of Arab-Berbers, and the remaining share of the population is made up of minority communities of ethnic Jews (less than 1%), native Berbers (less than 1%), and Europeans (less than 1%). Despite the presence of these ethnic groups, a strong sense of national unity and Arab identity has been the historical experience across the Tunisian population, with the ethnic minorities rarely, if ever, experiencing a unified political identity specifically representing the separate interests of the ethnic group. Arabs are coded as dominant, with some token members of other groups (next minister of Tourism will be Jewish, (<sup>4565</sup>)). Ethnicity is otherwise politically irrelevant.

<sup>4564</sup> [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

Post-independence, ethnic minorities have been historically respected and well treated, emphasized by recent establishments of cultural associations to promote its diverse ethnic heritage: Ennahda has issued numerous public statements of its commitment to protecting the rights of minorities. Underscoring the party's position, in advance of the October 2011 elections Rachid Ghannouchi remarked, "until now, Tunisia has not been a society of minorities; it is a Muslim society whose religious minorities are respected. [R]eligious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution and the values of Arabic Islamic culture" (<sup>4566</sup>). The closest case that somewhat resembles ethnic politics in Tunisia's political history (after obtaining independence in 1956) was a certain priority awarded to representatives of the Sahel region, home to Tunisia's president and "founding fa-

<sup>4565</sup> [Algemeiner, 2014]

<sup>4566</sup> [Freedom House, 2012]

ther" Habib Bourguiba. However, over time, their political advantage (which was not so dominant) decreased.

There are conflicting reports of attitudes towards Jews between 1967 and 2013. There are records of clashes and anti-Jewish sentiment and violent clashes, particularly after the Arab Spring (post 2011). However, these incidents have been deemed by political officials to have been individual and not systematic, or otherwise motivated by extremist groups. Government policy in rhetoric and practice appears to have consistently been one of encompassing ethnic inclusion (<sup>4567</sup>).

<sup>4567</sup> [Jewish Virtual Library, 2014]

The President is Beji Caid Essebsi, who took over from the interim president in December 2014 as the first elected president following the Arab Spring and dismounting of the former regime from power in late 2011. The party he represents and founded, the "Nidaa Tounes" party, stands for secularism and stability, thus supporting the EPR coding of irrelevance for ethnicity, as politics remains de-ethnicised in this time period. There have been some claims that the "black" minority, many of whom are migrant workers and therefore are not included in the population statistics, are excluded from areas of public life and have fewer rights (<sup>4568</sup>; <sup>4569</sup>). Some sources cite that the "black" minority, or "brown Arabs" number up to 15% of the population, yet this is not supported by the CIA world fact book - such official sources simply list them as part of the "Arab" group, as the EPR coding has done.

<sup>4568</sup> [Al Jazeera, 2016]

<sup>4569</sup> [Huffington Post, 2015]

However, there may be notable distinctions between the darker Arabs and other Arabs: Many of the former group retain the names "abid" or "atig" for "slave" or "former slave", with the surname of their owners (or former owners), according to local investigative journalist sources (<sup>4570</sup>). This leads to discrimination against them, with socio-economic divisions between communities of white and black Arabs, and inter-marriages frowned upon (Al Jazeera 2016). Ultimately, the reason that this issue is not further discussed in this data-set or in official statistics, is due to a lack of clarity as to the nature of the "black" community - ie, whether they are citizens, refugees, or migrant workers from sub-saharan countries. Furthermore, there is no evidence that they are actively politically discriminated against, or represented by a significant political actor. The fact that we cannot conclusively say that this group is distinct from other Arab in the first place means that the coding should remain the same, with Arabs as "irrelevant". This is admittedly a conservative coding, but in lieu of concrete statistics regarding to Black Arab population, it is the best one possible

<sup>4570</sup> [The New Arab, 2016]

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## *Political status of ethnic groups in Tunisia*

*From 1956 until 2017*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.98	IRRELEVANT



Figure 939: Political status of ethnic groups in Tunisia during 1956-2017.

## *Conflicts in Tunisia*

*Starting on 1953-04-29*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	National Liberation Army		1953-04-29			

*Starting on 1961-07-19*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	Government of Tunisia		1961-07-19			

*Starting on 1980-01-26*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Tunisia	Résistance Armée Tunisienne		1980-01-26			

*Starting on 2015-03-17*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Tunisia	IS		2015-03-17			