

## TUNISIA'S CORRUPTION CONTAGION: A TRANSITION AT RISK

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Corruption is a destabilizing force in Tunisia, infecting all levels of its economy, security, and political system. Once tightly controlled under former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, corruption has now become endemic, with everyday citizens engaging in and benefitting from corrupt practices. Numerous legal measures and civil society initiatives have been working to fight corruption, but it is perceived to be even more pervasive today than it was under Ben Ali. For the democratic transition to survive, Tunisia must fight a two-front war to simultaneously address the former kleptocracy and the emergence of widespread petty corruption. And to be successful, government and civil society must first agree on a framework for understanding and implementing the war. The international community should then support this framework with targeted funding and assistance.

### Effective Measures

Government mechanisms to address corruption are failing for two primary reasons. First, the government is focused largely on enacting legislation to sideline the bad actors of the postrevolutionary environment and to deter individuals from engaging in corrupt practices. Meanwhile, conversely, civil society is focused on transitional justice and reconciling with the past. Second, the government's top-down method of addressing corruption, evident by the economic reconciliation bill, has led to mistrust and a lack of public buy-in. To address the most damaging forms of corruption, the Tunisian government should:

- Implement and enforce existing laws, beginning with the enforcement of the law requiring Tunisian officials to publicly declare their assets.
- Involve civil society in the creation and implementation of anticorruption measures to ensure public buy-in of reforms.
- Prioritize the establishment of the constitutional court and ensure the independence of the Financial Judiciary Pole,
- charged with investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating financial corruption cases.
- Digitize government processes by reinvigorating the Tunisia Digital 2020 initiative and using the proposed national identification system to help capture the informal sector.
- Invest heavily in the border regions to provide exit options from the informal sector, such as education and private sector jobs.

### Targeted Support

If left unaddressed, corruption will remain a central roadblock to Tunisia's democratic consolidation and increasingly add to the region's serious economic and security challenges. To help reduce corruption, the international community should:

- Prioritize funding of Tunisia's anticorruption bodies, including the National Anti-Corruption Authority and the Financial Judiciary Pole, as well as civil society watchdog groups, such as Al Bawsala and I Watch.
- Continue to strengthen civil society and ensure that Tunisia maintains a free media.
- Call out the government when it backtracks on anticorruption efforts.

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