

GREAT EXPECTATIONS IN TUNISIA

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Tunisian society is in transition, but without a clear vision to guide it on this journey. The Tunisian political elite forged a new constitution that redefines state-citizen relations, but they have not translated this agreement into practice. Meanwhile, political life is in disarray, state legitimacy is in question, and Tunisians are increasingly worried about the future. Delivering on the great expectations of Tunisians means living up to the fundamental principles enshrined in the constitution and their promise of social justice.

A Society in Transition

- In contrast to the positive developments on the political front, the socioeconomic policies of Tunisia's transitional phase following the popular protests that started in 2010 have not changed significantly since the pre-uprising period.
- There is a crisis of state legitimacy in the making. Tunisian citizens are extremely worried about their futures and concerned that their political elite are unable to deliver on the promise of a just and better future. They are increasingly disillusioned with the absence of leadership, dissatisfied with their standards of living, and apprehensive about the prospects of civil strife in their country.
- The continuity with the past amplifies Tunisians' disenchantment with the state and perpetuates the political and socioeconomic marginalization of the country's hinterland.
- There are few outlets through which Tunisians can voice their concerns. The regime of former president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali repressed civil society organizations, prevented politicians from becoming alternative centers of power, and tightly controlled opposition political parties. After the uprising, political life was thrown into disarray and no one has filled the void left by the collapse of the Ben Ali regime.
- Tunisian youth in particular are increasingly distant from formal institutions and political processes.
- While the idea of democracy is appealing to most Tunisians, they are not yet sure it will work for their country.

Ways to Manage Great Expectations

- Tunisia's leadership must tackle the structural political and economic challenges at the heart of its socioeconomic woes and implement a more inclusive development approach that moves away from Ben Ali-era policies and focuses more on regional investments based on economic complementarities.
- The trust of citizens is key. The government should work to win that trust and address the deep-seated discrimination against the inland regions.
- A tripartite socioeconomic dialogue that was established in 2012 is worth reinvigorating. Tunisia's leadership could use it to conduct transparent and open discussions about the country's five-year economic plan.
- The municipal elections planned for late 2016 may present an opportunity for the youth to engage more fully in the political process and make a difference in their own communities.

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