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DASHED HOPES
AND EXTREMISM IN TUNISIA

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Geoffrey Macdonald, *the principal researcher for democracy and governance at the International Republican Institute (IRI), lectures on political science at George Washington University.* **Luke Waggoner,** *a senior governance specialist at IRI, has served as an IRI program officer in Tunisia.*

Since its revolution in 2011, Tunisia has been hit by a number of high-profile terrorist attacks. On 18 March 2015, three gunmen opened fire on a group of patrons entering the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, the capital. Several Tunisians and twenty foreign tourists died. Three months later, on June 26, a lone gunman killed 39 people, most of them British tourists, at a beach resort near the city of Sousse. On November 24, a suicide bomber killed a dozen presidential bodyguards on a bus in downtown Tunis. In November 2016, Islamist extremists murdered a Tunisian soldier in his home. On 1 November 2017, a knife-wielding Islamist wounded two police officers in Tunis. Although the country has not experienced any spectacular attacks in the last year, small-scale incidents persist.

Only four years before the Bardo assault, Tunisia had sparked the cascading uprisings of the Arab Spring and launched the most successful democratic transition the Middle East has seen. While Egypt reverted to authoritarianism and Syria and Libya descended into civil war, Tunisia drafted a constitution and elected a president and a parliament. Ennahda, the country's leading Islamist party, sacrificed several planks of its religious platform and joined secular parties in a governing coalition that formally designated the al-Qaeda–linked Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization. Tunisia, the BBC concluded in 2015, is "a model for compromise between rival political groups in North Africa."[1]

The dual trends of rising violent extremism and deepening democratization since the 2011 fall of authoritarian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali present a puzzle. Some scholarship suggests that we should have expected to see radicalization declining as the country became more

democratic. Alan Krueger concluded in his 2007 study of extremism that "terrorists are more likely to come from countries that suppress political and civil rights."[2] In January 2015, Arch Puddington of Freedom House claimed that "over 90 percent of terror attacks in 2013 occurred in Not Free or Partly Free countries."[3] Yet by 2015—the year Tunisia first received Freedom House's "Free" rating—an estimated seven-thousand Tunisians had gone to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This was a very sizeable contingent, especially given that Tunisia's population as a whole is only about eleven million.[4]

Why have the side effects of Tunisia's democratization process included a surge in terrorist recruitment? The 2011 revolution created a combustible mix of rising and unmanaged social expectations and declining institutional capacity, in a climate of persistent socioeconomic grievances. For decades, Ben Ali's Tunisia had known no free expression, governmental transparency, or channels of political participation not under the dictator's tight control. The fall of authoritarianism gave Tunisians high but unrealistic hopes about the future—hopes that their political and civic leaders did too little to temper. At the same time, the progress of nascent Tunisian democracy has been slow, as the country has found itself consumed by the challenges of drafting a constitution, electing leaders, forming coalition governments, passing laws, and debating the nature of a postautocratic Tunisia.

The resulting chasm between winged aspirations and the grinding realities of national life has left many Tunisians feeling cruelly let down. Public services remain spotty, jobs scarce, and government at all levels rife with corruption. Disillusionment and even despair have been on the rise. Within this governance vacuum, the violent religious extremism preached by ISIS and other jihadist groups seems to some to offer a sense of identity and opportunity. It has not helped that Tunisia is in one of the world's toughest and most chaotic neighborhoods, where the territories of Iraq, Libya, and Syria all contain radical groups whose sharp-eyed recruiters have been well poised to seek Tunisian converts. Although security assistance from abroad has helped Tunisia to reduce terror attacks inside its own borders, governance deficiencies and susceptibility to grievance-driven radicalism remain widespread.

Original national-level survey data, focus groups with sympathizers of ISIS and other extremist groups, and in-depth interviews with the families and friends of ISIS fighters[5] provide firsthand evidence of the expectations-versus-reality gap that troubles so many Tunisians and makes some among them prone to choose violent extremism, for reasons both ideological and material. We focused our efforts to gather qualitative data on Beja in the northwestern part of the country. This inland city of seventy thousand, located in a region of farms and olive groves about a hundred kilometers from Tunis, has seen an alarming number of its residents leave to join ISIS or other extremist groups.

We argue that our findings from Beja are generalizable to a particular subset of marginalized Tunisians across the country and constitute important evidence of the perils of mismanaged democratization under specific conditions. We are not arguing that democratization necessarily produces violent extremism, or that democratization should be avoided in conflict-prone societies. Rather, we think that the evidence from Tunisia shows something else. It teaches that during times of transition elected officials, constitutional designers, and the international community should take special care to ensure inclusive and efficient governance while properly managing sociopolitical and economic expectations. Doing these things will give the fledgling democratic order its best chance of keeping violent ideologies at bay.

Democracy and Violent Extremism

Scholarly study of the relationship among democracy, democratization, and terrorism has been extensive, yet firm conclusions are few. Studies of what drives violent extremism focus on a mix of disparate but often interrelated factors that range from individual psychology to global politics. Many studies suggest that democracy can prevent radicalization, a view strongly held in the policy community. Yet others indicate that democratic institutions or the democratization process itself can sow instability and conflict.

The most common framework for understanding violent extremism's causes includes "push" and "pull" factors.[6] Push factors revolve around grievances that could drive someone to embrace a radical ideology. These include real or perceived social and economic marginalization and oppression; local or global cultural subjugation; corruption and other aspects of poor governance; and extrajudicial state violence. Pull factors that can draw people into extremism include the desire for wealth or social status and the prospect of gaining a sense of self-efficacy and belonging. When organizations and recruiters promise these benefits, they become pull factors too. Push and pull factors often go together: Violent extremist organizations tailor their recruiting messages around contextualized grievances.[7]

In order to prevent the emergence of push factors that can drive individuals toward radicalization, many policy makers and academics advocate democratization as a means of addressing grievances and mollifying potential radicals. For example, the Obama administration's 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism argues that "promoting representative, responsive governance is a core tenet of U.S. foreign policy and directly contributes to our CT [counterterrorism] goals . . . Governments that are responsive to the needs of their citizens diminish the discontent of their people and the associated drivers and grievances that al-Qa'ida actively attempts to exploit."[8]

A 2017 Brookings Institution report, sounding a note often heard from think tanks, states that "democracies are less likely to spawn internal armed conflicts or experience deadly terrorism because they channel dissent through nonviolent means and manage violence through respect for the rule of law and human rights."[9] While acknowledging the potential pitfalls of incomplete democratization, the report concludes that strengthening features of liberal democracy is the only way to counter violent extremism.

The academic debate on the relationship between democracy and terrorism is more discordant. Some studies suggest that the process of political transition and the institutions of democracy can lead to political violence and terrorism while constraining the state's ability to wield the force of law against radicals.[10] This debate about the potential dangers of democratization, though, was overshadowed in the Tunisian case by the transition's moderation: Parties compromised and political violence dissipated. But underneath this successful change in the political order, the economic, social, and political marginalization that motivated the 2011 uprising has endured.[11]

Since the Arab Spring, Tunisia has achieved only limited socioeconomic progress. Journalist Robin Wright noted in 2017 that Tunisians' average level of schooling has risen dramatically over the last three decades while their country's economy still produces mostly low-skill jobs, with youth unemployment in 2015 hovering around 40 percent.[12] Meanwhile, political participation by young people has plummeted since the revolution.[13] The implications of this growing disengagement amid continued suffering are grim. A 2016 report held that "marginalization and powerlessness were dramatically accelerated by the disappointments of the Arab Spring," which has undermined both liberal and mainstream Islamist parties while legitimizing violent alternatives around the Middle East.[14] A year later, Wright warned that "in the future, jihadist groups will try to further exploit socioeconomic grievances."[15]

Building on these studies, our field research confirms that the wide expectations-versus-reality gap since 2011 has left many Tunisians with intense feelings of disillusionment that ISIS and groups like it have been only too ready to exploit for violent purposes. Our argument is based on a mixed-methods research design that includes national-level survey data combined with focus-group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews conducted in Beja in late 2016.[16] We chose Beja because it is an economically marginalized community that has seen its residents increasingly recruited into violent extremism. While not all Tunisian extremists are poor, many do come from economically underprivileged areas. Moreover, by working with participants who were all at much the same economic level, our focus groups could probe for variation on other factors that contribute to extremism.

Using a prescreening questionnaire administered randomly to pedes-

trians, our Tunisian consultants[17] asked respondents about their level of support for Tunisians who had become foreign fighters in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, and then formed five focus groups divided by gender, age, and support for foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). These groups consisted of 1) young men [aged 20–35] who support foreign fighters; 2) adult men [aged 36 and over] who support foreign fighters; 3) adult women who support foreign fighters; 4) young men who do not support foreign fighters; and 5) young women who do not support foreign fighters. We took support for foreign fighters as an indicator of "vulnerability" to becoming a violent extremist, while taking lack of support for them as an indicator of "resiliency." This created a comparison of three "vulnerable" groups with two "resilient" groups that allowed us to search for systematic differences in attitudes and experience that could explain differing levels of support for violent extremism.

In order to validate the information that we gleaned from our focus groups, we also did in-depth interviews. We conducted thirteen interviews with friends or relatives of Beja residents who had left for Iraq, Libya, or Syria in order to fight on behalf of extremist groups. Because the FGDs could identify only factors unique to those who *supported* FTFs, it was important to explore whether these same factors were also present among those who *actually became* ISIS fighters. We combined the data from our interviews and FGDs with the results of several national-level surveys that we had commissioned since 2011 under the auspices of the International Republican Institute (IRI). The latest of these had been done in the final quarter of 2016, at about the same time as our focus groups and interviews. We used these survey results to link interview and FGD responses with national trends in Tunisia across time.

Tunisia's Incomplete Revolution

Tunisia's democratic revolution created significant expectations for the state that have gone largely unmet and unmanaged. Our polling up to and including our 2016 national-level survey reveals a steady decline in positive attitudes toward the state. Focus groups in Beja show that those who sympathize with ISIS fighters are more likely than others to feel intense hopelessness and powerlessness, to have negative interactions with police, and to find justifications for violence within Islamic texts.[18] Interviews with the families and friends of FTFs from Beja identified grievances among actual fighters that resembled grievances expressed by FTF sympathizers in our "vulnerable" focus groups. Overall, this evidence demonstrates an important link connecting expectations and grievances to violent extremism in democratic Tunisia.

The disillusionment with the state seen in the 2011–16 polling, the

focus groups, and the interviews is all the more alarming when viewed against the backdrop of World Values Survey (WVS) data from the same period, which show that Tunisians still harbor significant expectations about what their government should be able to do. The WVS 2010–14 wave finds 44 percent of Tunisians "agree[ing] completely" that "the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for." More than 40 percent of Tunisians said that they saw state-furnished unemployment aid as an "essential characteristic of democracy," while 30 percent said that taxing the rich to subsidize the poor was similarly essential.[19] Earlier WVS waves did not pose these questions, so no trend is traceable, but the 2010–14 answers leave little doubt that citizens' expectations of their government were high following the dictatorship's end.

A clear divergence emerges between the expectations expressed in the WVS data and the actual perceptions of the state revealed by our 2011–16 polling.[20] Since 2011, the proportion of Tunisians who see their country as moving in the wrong direction has increased by 28 points to 72 percent. Since 2011, the percentage saying that the economic situation is "very good" or "somewhat good" has declined by 15 points to 14 percent, while the share that answers "very bad" or "somewhat bad" has increased by 19 points to 85 percent. Tunisians are also increasingly critical of state performance. Seventy-eight percent say that corruption is worse than it was before the revolution. Seventy-three percent agree that politicians "do not listen to the needs and ideas of young people."

The growing negativity toward the economy and state has led to troubling trend lines for several metrics of democratic quality. Between November 2015 and December 2016, the number of Tunisians "very" or "somewhat" likely to vote declined by 8 points while the number "very unlikely" to vote increased by 7 points. By December 2016, half of Tunisians said "a prosperous economy" was "definitely" more important than "a democratic system of government" (an increase of 42 points since November 2015). While overall satisfaction with democracy as a system of government remained steady as of December 2016, 33 percent of Tunisians were "not very satisfied" or "not satisfied at all" with Tunisia's democracy. The most recent IRI poll in Tunisia, taken in April 2017, shows these trends largely continuing.[21]

Of course, Tunisia is hardly unique in having large numbers of people who expect a lot from the democratic (or democratizing) state while taking a dim view of its capacities and performance. Across the globe, faith in democracy is declining.[22] Yet the speed with which Tunisia reeled from democratic revolution to democratic disillusionment has few contemporary parallels. The precipitous rise in disillusionment with democratic performance since the revolution likely fed the appeal of radical alternatives to democracy.

Indeed, participants in our focus groups often compared the period since the revolution unfavorably to the time before it. Across the male focus groups especially, participants cited stagnant or declining quality of life since 2011. Fadi, a young man whose expressed attitudes placed him in the "vulnerable" group, said that he could see no difference following the revolution. "The northwest is marginalized compared to coastal regions," he complained.[23] "The situation has deteriorated," added another "vulnerable" young man. Anwar, a "resilient" young man, lamented that "it seems as if we had no revolution."

The three "vulnerable" focus groups—those whose members expressed support for foreign fighters—were more likely to express a deep sense of hopelessness and powerlessness in their lives; to report negative dealings with and bitter feelings toward the police; and to condone religious violence. Although there was variation among the "vulnerable" groups, the presence of these sentiments was higher among the "vulnerables" as a whole than it was in any group of "resilients."

Hopelessness and Powerlessness

Expressions of hopelessness and despair were common across all groups, both vulnerable and resilient. Life in Beja is hard; opportunities are few. Yet an analysis of the FGDs revealed greater degrees of negativity among "vulnerable" groups, particularly young men. Asked to evaluate his life in Beja, one participant named Mohamed said, "We can't call it a life. There are no jobs. I wake up every day just to go to the coffee shop and then I come back home to sleep." Another young man named Karim said, "Before, I used to manage . . . Now the world . . . is stagnating. There is nothing." Discussing growing poverty since the revolution, Wael said, "There is discrepancy in living. Now, we have two classes. One of them is below zero [below poverty line]. They have shattered us to pieces until we have become like grains of sands [*sic*]." Aliya, a "vulnerable" adult woman, spoke of a general lack of activities and opportunities in Beja, particularly for youth: "They don't have good youth houses. If somebody has a talent, this gift does not find the opportunity to be developed. Our children are lost in the streets."

Adult men in the "vulnerable" category were similarly disillusioned with their lives, citing a lack of job prospects for themselves and for young people. One participant named Imran said, "There are opportunities in Beja and everywhere, but the poor have no chances to get any." Kadir added, "There are no job opportunities and the authorities keep promising that they are going to provide many job opportunities but nothing happens." He concluded, "There are no horizons for the poor people." Another complained, "Our youth graduate but cannot find any job opportunities." A "vulnerable" adult man named Yusuf observed, "I have tried everything and have provided all necessary documents that

prove my handicap and bad situation, but [the government] have [*sic*] offered me no opportunities."

For those vulnerable to extremist appeals, this sense of powerlessness and despair was often closely tied to poor governance. While complaints about the actions of state institutions and officials were not unique to vulnerable groups, they provide important context for understanding vulnerable individuals' distinctively negative attitudes. Vulnerable young men often felt there was no forum to voice complaints. One said, "Our complaints have never reached their destination. Even when sometimes they did, they would be thrown away. We send our complaints to God." Another said, "Your complaint will not reach its address. . . . If I send this complaint to the minister, who would support my cause? Who would hear me?" A young man named Suhail explained that he was injured while in the army, but now had to pay his own bills: "I gave everything to this country," he explained. Now, he said, "I don't trust the state institutions like the municipality or the [parliamentary] delegation. I do not trust any governmental institution."

"Vulnerable" adult men and women also lamented the state's lack of responsiveness. A vulnerable adult woman said that she had asked for aid after her husband died, but had been refused. "My kids are orphans," she said, "and I am unable to provide anything. I can't pay for the electricity, the water, the living." Another "vulnerable" adult woman, Najat, said, "The problem is that [the government] does not take care of people." She opined that officials should have a system for finding out who was in need and getting them help. "I wanted to go complain," said Esma, another adult woman, "but [the government] don't [*sic*] listen to me."

Claims of state corruption also contributed to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness among "vulnerable" groups. Yusuf, the "vulnerable" adult man, said, "I think all problems are interconnected but the biggest issues are tightly linked with a few corrupt barons." Wahid, an adult man, said, "Administrations in Beja reflect all other administrations in the whole country. The general secretaries of these administrations are the same of the previous era. The corrupt people are still there. Nothing has changed." Another adult man, Imran, said, "Opportunities are for relatives and friends not for everyone. Those who do not have connections or who do not give briberies have no chances and no opportunities." "If they have an opportunity to give ten jobs for example," said another adult man, "they would give these jobs to the relatives and connections of the governor or the mayor."

Corruption also rankled "vulnerable" young men and adult women. One such woman, Rabia, said that when trying to receive state services, "Everything works with nepotism. . . . If I know someone, they greet me; they welcome me and I pass. However, because they don't know me, they keep telling me 'not yet.'" Another adult woman agreed: "There are no jobs here in Beja; everything depends on nepotism; there is mis-

treatment." Young men in the "vulnerable" category voice similar complaints. "If you want to get a job for 500 dinars a month," said a young man, "you have to pay 1,000 dinars at the beginning." Suhail, a young man, said "for the administrative services, every action costs a specific amount of money." The state's inability to combat corruption in private business also came up for mention. A "vulnerable" adult woman said, "They are not solving the problem of monopoly for example. If you want to buy oil, you have to buy something else with it. They even oblige you to buy tomato if you want to buy potato."

Bitterness Toward the Police

Most "vulnerable" men reported distinctly negative interactions with Tunisian police and security forces. By contrast, both "resilient" and "vulnerable" women were more likely to say that their dealings with the police were positive. Young men in the focus groups reported police abuse of power. One participant said, "I swear that every time I go out to smoke a cigarette, the cops appear . . . and they order me to go home." Another said, "If you are unemployed, the cops humiliate you." Imad, a young man, said the police "can accuse you of anything and use the law against you although you did nothing." Wael said, "Before the revolution, cops used to talk to you, joke with you and ask you to give them even cigarettes. . . . A cop nowadays talks to you as if he owns the country." Another young man claimed that police pressure shopkeepers to inform on young men whom officers find suspicious.

There were also reports of physical abuse or other derelictions by police. One young man said that when he tried to enter a government building to demand services, "The cops came, closed the gate and beat us. . . . Even after we came out, we were beaten. Why do they beat us? I just wanted to talk to the governor. I want to work." One participant said that as a child, he had been beaten "terribly on my back and face" by the police after being falsely accused of theft. "There is no enforcement of the law," said Imad. Another young man said, "We call the police but they show up 10 hours later. There can be dead victims." Another agreed: "If I call the police and I explain the emergency, they would answer, 'It's OK. Let them die and we'll come tomorrow look whose fault it is.'" These negative experiences and perceptions have escalated tensions between youth and the police: "Since in all cases the police officers would not leave you alone, you start looking for confrontation yourself," said one "vulnerable" young man.

Participants in the "vulnerable" category also alleged police corruption. Raed, an adult man in this group, said, "Things are becoming worse. In the past, [the police] used to ask for briberies secretly; now, things are done publicly." In particular, participants blamed the police for ignoring or targeting the poor. One adult man said, "The relationship

between the police and the people is not good. The poor people are not getting their rights. In addition, the police . . . still take advantage of the people and the problem of corruption still exists."

A striking difference between "vulnerable" young males and all other FGD participants was the males' heightened willingness to find justifications for violence within Islam. While some "vulnerable" young men disagreed with religious justifications for violence, the tendency to voice them was more prevalent among younger males who reported sympathy for foreign fighters than among any other group. Other FGD participants often sought to distinguish "real" Islam from what ISIS and other violent factions promote. "Islam has nothing to do with violence" was a common sentiment.

Views about Islam and violence among "vulnerable" young men were more mixed, however. When asked if Islam justifies violence, several participants answered with conditional affirmatives: "within limits"; "'use the stick on the disobeyers [those who worship other gods] as the saying goes"; and "Islam forbids violence in cases and allows it in other cases." Another said, "When you kill a Jewish, you have a big reward from God." Dissenters in the "vulnerable" young-male group called Islam a "religion of peace" and said that "it is not jihad when you kill Muslims." Yet some vulnerable young men made distinctions regarding who is a real Muslim. "I wouldn't obey [Tunisian president Beji Caïd] Essebsi because he is a vendor of wine. Likewise, [Syrian dictator] Bashar [al-Assad] shouldn't be obeyed because he is disobeying God." Another young man said that in his view Kurds, Shias, and Houthis "are not Muslims." He claimed that only Sunnis could qualify as Muslims.

Another young man said that he would join ISIS for entirely economic reasons. "In jihad, the person who kills says, 'In the name of God. Allah Akbar,'" said a young man named Wael. "I don't get this. What matters is that I would get something in return for fighting. Give me a financial reward and I will go with you anywhere." He continued, "I would side with anyone [in Syria] that pays me more. . . . I would go in order to feed my wife and my two kids."

To supplement and validate the FGD findings, we also interviewed friends and family members of thirteen Beja residents who had left to fight with ISIS in Iraq, Libya, or Syria.[24] Because "vulnerable" FGD participants were people who had merely expressed sympathy with foreign fighters, it was important to try to discover whether *actual* fighters harbored similar political, social, and economic grievances. This would help us to confirm or deny the claim (often advanced as an argument against the notion of grievances fueling actual radicalization) that the grievances of actual fighters and the grievances of those who stopped at sympathizing with those fighters might be fundamentally different. Although the fighters themselves could obviously not be interviewed,

their friends and families provided insight into their lives. These interviews revealed dynamics similar to those displayed by FGD participants who felt sympathetic toward ISIS: The revolution had come and gone but opportunities for bettering one's situation had remained scarce, and despair had risen.

Beja's FTFs were often described by their relative or friend as having seemed increasingly listless and hopeless prior to radicalization. A mother of a man who had died fighting in ISIS ranks said, "You could say Beja is a forsaken place. There are no opportunities for youth to work. My kids are lost. There are no employment opportunities here." Her son had returned to Beja from college only to endure stretches of having no job or only a menial job. "He spent his entire day at the café," she said.

Tales about dropping out of school—or of suffering underemployment even after completing higher education—mark the lives of Beja's FTFs. One woman left high school, found no opportunities, and married a man who took her to Syria. Another woman, according to her cousin, was raped, beaten by disbelieving police, and became "psychologically ill." When asked what could be done to prevent Tunisians from leaving to fight with ISIS, the FTFs' friends and family members looked to the state. "The government needs to find solutions for several sectors: the economic, the social, etc.," said the brother-in-law of an FTF. The friend of an FTF said, "The state has to help its citizens, and reduce unemployment."

The interviews also illuminated the conjunction of poor governance and sudden radicalization—circumstantial evidence for our thesis that the democratic transition's deficiencies have been contributing to violent extremism in Tunisia. The cousin of an FTF said, "The MPs came here twice during the campaign for the parliament. They made promises, but as you can see none were fulfilled. You can see, there is nothing but unemployment." An FTF's friend said, "Local officials in Beja do not listen to concerns of citizens . . . That's because most of the inhabitants are poor and unable to pay bribes." The cousin of an FTF said, "There is a lot of injustice. The police are always unfair and harsh. I know some people who were victims and now hold a grudge and hate the country and even living here." Across interviews, these friends and family members of FTFs said that radicalization happened suddenly and postdated the 2011 revolution. The FTFs had often been nonpracticing Muslims who smoked, drank, and wore Western clothes before either embracing radicalism on their own or falling under the sway of Islamist recruiters.

In sum, the interviews provide evidence that postrevolutionary disillusionment with the socioeconomic situation and with the political system's lack of responsiveness has fed violent extremism. While FTFs' relatives and friends cannot provide the exact mental state of these fighters, those personally close to FTFs are a useful source of informa-

tion—and may be the best one readily available to researchers seeking insight into the true grievances of violent extremists. Tellingly, the FTF grievances that these relatives and friends recounted and the grievances that were aired in our focus groups of "vulnerables" were remarkably similar. Moreover, the timing of these FTFs' radicalization also constitutes important evidence. Had the radicalization process begun before the revolution, that would undercut our thesis. Instead, it began after, which is consistent with our argument.

Grasping Democratization's Complexity

Why have instances of terrorism in Tunisia spiked since the country's democratic transition? Tunisia's revolution raised expectations for better governance that neither national nor local officials even took steps to manage, much less meet. Although Tunisia undoubtedly has a more representative and accountable government than it had before 2011, officials elected since that revolutionary year have failed to provide adequate services and opportunities for many of their constituents. Disillusionment with democratic performance exists elsewhere, but Tunisia's situation is unique. In the wake of a democratic revolution, expectations regarding what the state could deliver rose dramatically, only to be met with crushing disappointment. Longstanding discontents continued to simmer. Extremist ideologies began spreading throughout the broader Middle East, including among Tunisia's neighbors. This perfect storm of domestic and regional factors created conditions conducive to extremist recruitment.

The data collected in this study validate this argument. Our survey data show growing dissatisfaction among Tunisians with their country's overall direction, with the state of economic opportunity, and with the government's performance. Meanwhile, key indicators of democratic quality are declining. Data from other surveys reinforce this picture: The dispiriting realities contrast harshly with Tunisians' high expectations of the state.

Our focus groups explored the implications of these attitudes for violent extremism. These discussions revealed important variations between those who sympathized with foreign fighters ("vulnerable" groups) and those who did not ("resilient" groups). The former reported stronger and more frequent feelings of discontent and even despair. Finally, interviews with family members and friends of FTFs furnished evidence confirming that our "vulnerable" discussants and actual FTFs had life experiences and grievances in common.

Terrorist attacks have slowed in Tunisia during the past year, but this cannot be ascribed to improved governance, for both outside experts and Tunisians themselves continue to give poor marks on that score. Instead, the decline in terror assaults has probably been due to increased secu-

rity assistance from the West. According to the Center for International Policy, Tunisia received more than US$80 million in military and police aid in 2016, on top of significant prior aid and arms sales since the 2011 revolution.[25] What we have been seeing in Tunisia, in other words, has been not the curing of terrorism, but the abatement of its symptoms: The circumstances that breed extremism are still in place. If weak governmental performance persists and radical ideologies continue to flourish in the region, then Tunisia will remain under the shadow of violent extremism.

The evidence suggests that mismanaged democratization has been one of the things making Tunisia vulnerable to such extremism. Of course, the Tunisians who feel disaffected far exceed in number those who have actually joined ISIS or committed terrorist acts. When polls have been taken, only a sliver of the populace has been willing to express support for ISIS, al-Qaeda, or terrorism.[26] Governance-related grievances are not a sufficient condition for engaging in violent extremism. Everyone's story is different, and factors operating at the level of the individual surely matter. But within the limits of our data, consistent trends are evident. The findings from Beja comport with national-level survey data, and Beja's socioeconomic and governance conditions are common throughout the country. It is therefore reasonable to assume that our argument regarding the governance-related drivers of violent extremism may hold across large parts of Tunisia.

The policy implications are clear: The authority gained from winning a free and fair election is not enough to sustain popular support. In fledgling democracies especially, where institutions are raw and unproven, citizens will weigh the state's performance constantly as they ponder whether and when to give or withhold their consent. When the democratic state falters, some subset of citizens will look for alternatives, including extremist ideologies.

This raises the stakes for good governance in Tunisia and other democratizing societies. For new states, responsive, representative, and effective governance is a matter of survival. For international actors involved in democracy assistance, Tunisia confirms the oft-heard insight that democracy is more than just elections. The exuberance surrounding Tunisia's flawed but successful political transition has obscured persistent state corruption and poor performance. The belief that democracy by itself could address longstanding grievances has been belied by the lived reality of many Tunisians. Their festering disappointment has fed a growing embrace of radical Islamism.

The lesson of Tunisia is not that democratization necessarily involves the risk of terrorism, but that it could under certain conditions. If local and national governments fail to manage effectively the democratization process, they risk feeding grievances that can help to drive some toward violent extremism. As Tunisia's 2011 revolution itself testifies, even

small local grievances matter: The upheaval began with one obscure man's desperate protest against petty police abuses in a single out-of-the-way town. Democratic leaders must take the lesson to heart. They need to pay careful attention to redressing grievances and injustices, and must do all they can to keep expectations and reality at least within hailing distance of each other.

NOTES

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2. Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75.

3. Arch Puddington, "Democracy Is the Best Defense Against Terrorism," *Freedom at Issue,* 13 January 2015, *https://freedomhouse.org/blog/democracy-best-defense-against-terrorism*.

4. Soufan Group, "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," December 2015, *http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf*.

5. This research was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy and implemented by the International Republican Institute.

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15. Wright et al., "Jihadi Threat," 32.

16. A complete overview of our methodology and focus-group and interview findings can be found in the focus group report "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia," Center for Insights in Survey Research, International Republican Institute, 2017, *www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-6-1_vea_report_-_beja.pdf.*

17. This research was conducted in collaboration with ELKA Consulting, the Tunisia-based research firm whose Arabic-speaking employees administered the prescreening questionnaire, moderated the focus groups, and conducted interviews.

18. Given the sensitivity of the topic discussed, we have changed the FGD participants' names for their safety.

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23. All quotes from participants in focus groups and interviewees come from recordings that were transcribed and translated from Arabic into English by ELKA Consulting.

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