

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of Tunisia

**CAPITAL:** Tunis

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 164,150 Sq Km (63,379 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION:** 9,536,700

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Tunisia is located in North Africa. It is bound by Algeria to the west, Libya to the southeast and the Mediterranean Sea to the northeast and north. The country is divided into three distinct physical regions (1.) The Tell Atlas Mountains and the Dorsale Ridge separated by the fertile valley of the Medjerda River in the north. (2.) A wide and barren plateau south of the Dorsale Ridge with the western half of the plateau called the High Steppe and the eastern half the Low Steppe. (3.) The southern flat coastal plains and salt lakes, and beyond to the vast Sahara Desert region. The principal river is the Medjerda River which flows to the Gulf of Tunis from Algeria. Major Cities (pop. est.); Tunis 674,100, Safaqis 230,900, Aryanah 152,700, Ettadhamen 149,200 (1994). Land Use; forested 4%, pastures 20%, agricultural-cultivated 32%, other 44% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Tunisia has a Mediterranean climate modified by sea breezes and characterized by warm dry summers and wet winters. The inland regions experience hotter summers and more rainfall while there are two distinct seasons, a cool wet season from October to May and a warm dry season from May to September. Average annual precipitation varies from 420 mm (17 inches) in the north to more than 900 mm (35 inches) in the Tell Atlas Mountains while the southern desert region receives less than 350 mm (10 inches) annually. Average temperature ranges in Tunis are from 6 to 14 degrees Celsius (43 to 57 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 21 to 33 degrees Celsius (70 to 91 degrees Fahrenheit) in August.

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**PEOPLE:** The principal ethnic majority are of mixed Arab-Berber origin with pure Arabs constituting less than 10% of the population. Other ethnic minorities include pure Berbers, Jews, French, Greeks and Italians.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 53.7 persons per sq km (139.0 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 53.0% urban, 47.0% rural (1985). Sex Distribution; 50.7% male, 49.3% female (1991). Life Expectancy at Birth; 64.6 years male, 66.1 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 36% under 15, 29% 15 to 29, 17% 30 to 44, 10% 45 to 59, 6% 60 to 74, 2% 75 and over (1991). Birth Rate; 25.0 per 1,000 (1991). Death Rate; 6.3 per 1,000 (1991). Increase Rate; 18.7 per 1,000 (1991). Infant Mortality Rate; 44.0 per 1,000 live births (1993).

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**RELIGIONS:** The official religion is Islam with 98% of the population Sunni Muslims. The remainder consists of Jewish and Christian minorities.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is Arabic, although French is still widely used for commerce and government purposes.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 65.8%, Koranic education 1.2%, primary 17.5%, secondary 11.2%, vocational 0.8%, higher 1.7%, unspecified 1.8% (1984). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 3,315,000 or 65.3% (1990).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** In 1955 Tunisia was granted internal self-government from France. On Mar. 20, 1956 Tunisia gained full independence and in 1957 was declared a republic with Habib Bourguiba as its first President. France kept troops and military bases in Tunisia after their independence and in 1961 diplomatic relations were severed when Pres. Bourguiba demanded the withdrawal of the French troops. In 1967 there was an attempt at agricultural collectivization which resulted in the imprisonment of the minister concerned after output fell dramatically. In 1968 there were student and labor demonstrations in protest to economic conditions. In Sept. 1974 Pres. Bourguiba was elected President for life. In 1978 there was further civil unrest and in 1980 an unsuccessful coup attempt. In 1983 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) moved its base to Tunisia following its expulsion from Lebanon. In Mar. 1983 Tunisia and Algeria signed a treaty which ended a 20 year dispute. In 1984 serious riots erupted over government imposed price increases on essential goods. In 1985 diplomatic relations were broken off with Libya as a result of the forced expulsion of Tunisian nationals from Libya. In 1987 Prime Minister Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali removed Bourguiba from office and succeeded him. Pres. Ben Ali legalized opposition parties and in Sept. 1989 dismissed Prime Minister Hedi Baccouche and appointed Hamed Karoui to take his place. Throughout 1990 popularity grew for the Islamic Nahda Party, although it had not been officially recognized. In Oct. 1990 the Arab League headquarters located in Tunis was moved to Cairo, Egypt. In 1991 the government announced its opposition to the US-led coalition forces involvement in the Gulf War. In Jan. 1991 the second-in-command of the PLO, Abu Iyad, and two aides were assassinated. On Feb. 17, 1991 the headquarter's of the Rassemblement Constitutionel Democratique (RCD) was raided by security forces with three members arrested and later executed for allegedly committing treason. In Aug. 1991 the government arrested 300 Muslim fundamentalists, including the leaders of the Nahda Party, for plotting to overthrow the government. Also during 1991 financial aid was severely cut by the US while Kuwait withdrew all further investment in the country. In 1992 Pres. Ben Ali and the government actively countered growing fundamentalism and support for Rachid Ghannouchi's Nahda Party. In Jan. 1992 Algeria expelled 29 Nahda fundamentalists. In Feb. 1992 the government refused Iraq's request to return five civilian airliners as well as UN-imposed frozen funds. In Aug. 1992 some 141 Nahda members were imprisoned for lengthy sentences following their conviction

for plotting to overthrow the government while Ghannouchi fled to Britain. On Dec. 6, 1992 Pres. Ben Ali announced a meeting of RCD leaders to discuss plans for the establishment of a multiparty democracy. In June 1993 Pres. Ben Ali met with the Egyptian and Algerian Presidents to discuss measures to counter the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the region with all leaders condemning The Sudan for their involvement and assistance. In July 1993 five opposition parties petitioned the RCD to allow them to participate within the National Assembly. In Sept. 1993 the government held meetings with the PLO to discuss the future status of the organization within the country following the conclusion of an agreement between the PLO and Israel. In Nov. 1993 Pres. Ben Ali announced that the legal opposition could take part in the National Assembly. Also in 1993 the government's Foreign Minister, Habib Ben Yahia, visited Kuwait in the hope of rekindling Kuwaiti investment in the country.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Dinar (D) divided into 1,000 Millimes.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$15,332,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$7,627,000,000 (1993). Imports; D 6,647,300,000 (1994). Exports; D 4,696,600,000 (1994). Tourism Receipts; USD \$1,114,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; D -1,504,200,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 2,360,000 or 28.8% of total population (1989). Unemployed; 13.4% (1989).

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are France, Germany, Italy, the USA and Greece.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Barley, Citrus Fruits, Crude Oil and Natural Gas, Dates, Fish, Grapes, Iron Ore, Lead, Livestock, Olives, Phosphates, Salt, Timber, Tomatoes, Wheat.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Agriculture, Cement, Food Processing, Mining, Oil Refining, Phosphate Processing, Steel, Textiles, Tourism.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Chemicals, Crude Oil and Refined Products, Food, Phosphates, Textiles.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 2,242 km (1,393 mi) (1988), passenger-km 1,057,000,000 (657,000,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 1,968,000,000 (1,348,000,000 short ton-mi) (1990). Roads; length 29,183 km (18,133 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 321,101 (1989), trucks and buses 208,596 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 73 (1990), deadweight tonnage 442,429 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 1,528,000,000 (949,000,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 21,000,000 (14,383,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 7 with a total circulation for 4 of 190,000 (1994). Radio; receivers 1,700,000 (1994). Television; receivers 650,000 (1994). Telephones; units 421,400 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 35,500 (1995) total active duty personnel with 76.0% army, 14.1% navy and 9.9% air force while military expenditure accounts for 3.4% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).