

# **The Young and the Restless Revolution in Tunisia**

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## **Introduction**

In this lesson students will gain a better understanding of the social, economic, and political conditions in Tunisia that led to the massive youth rebellion beginning on December 17, 2010. Students will examine the many intended, and unintended, consequences of the political uprisings and change in regime.

## **Common Core State Standards: Social Studies & Science**

### ***Key Ideas and Details***

1. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

### ***Integration of Knowledge and Ideas***

1. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
2. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## **Specific Subject-Area Connections**

### ***Social Studies***

- Social, economic, and political conditions leading to revolution
- Rise and fall of dictatorial regimes
- The political and social conditions of developing nations
- U.S. foreign policy since World War II

## **Materials**

- World Political Map e.g., <http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/world.html>
- Computers with Internet access
- Attachments A

## **Student Preparation/Background Information**

Begin this lesson by having your students locate Tunisia using a political world map.

If your students are unfamiliar with the economic, political, and social conditions that led to revolution in Tunisia, have them compile a country profile comparing conditions in Tunisia with those in the United States. The profile work can be completed independently, in small groups, or as a class, and in a variety of formats: Word document, Powerpoint presentation, a large piece of chart paper, or using the attached grid. For a large-group activity, you may choose to assign one or two pieces of information to each student, have them quickly research the answer and contribute to a large, class profile. For a small group activity, you might assign groups of students a specific country or research area (GDP, population, etc.) and once the research is completed, have students break into new groups with one representative from the original country or research area in each new group to share their findings. The information required to complete the profile sheet can be found on the C.I.A.'s World Factbook web page (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>).

After completing the activity, have a brief discussion with your students asking them to compare statistics about life in Tunisia to statistics about life in the United States. Ask students to identify differences and/or similarities they found surprising, and elaborate on why this information caught their attention. Have students consider what data they believe was most instrumental in bringing about political revolution. Why?

### **Sparking a Revolution**

To help students understand how the lack of infrastructure and sense of hopelessness about the future could lead to revolution, have them read Ellen Knickmeyer's piece under the Pulitzer Center's *Untold Stories*, "Sidi Bouzid: A Young Man's Death and the Birth of a Revolution" (<http://pulitzercenter.org/blog/tunisia-sidi-bouzid-riots-mohammed-bouazizi-youth>) or her article for *Foreign Policy Magazine*, "The Arab World's Youth Army" (<http://pulitzercenter.org/articles/tunisia-riots-revolution-mohamed-bouazizi-arab-worlds-youth-army>)

*Note: Both pieces have similar content, you may choose to break students into smaller groups and allow them to choose which piece to read; or assign groups a specific article.*

As students read have them consider the following questions:

- What actual event sparked the uprising in Tunis?
- What demographic, social, and/or economic factors led to the uprising in Tunis?
- What is the youth bulge?
- What factors could lead to a nation with a youth bulge?
- In an interview with Knickmeyer, Tarik Yousef, the Dean of the Dubai School of Government explains, "The experts told governments the coming youth wave would create a 'precondition for problems, or a precondition for prosperity.'" What economic or employment supports could the government of Tunisia have put in place to better absorb the record number of young, educated citizens entering the workforce?
- In your opinion, how have social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter helped fuel the revolutions in North Africa?

If your students have studied U.S. History since World War II, you may choose to discuss similarities and differences between the North African "youth bulge" and the baby boom in the United States.

- Has anything similar ever occurred in the United States? If so, when?
- After the baby boom, did the U.S. government have a strategy for the large number of young people entering the workforce? If so, describe the strategy and how well it worked.
- What role has this generation played in shaping American economic, social, cultural, and political policy?

### **The Consequences of Revolution**

#### From Revolution to Lasting Change

Have students open Knickmeyer's article, "Tunis Transformed: Readjusting After the People's Revolution", which describes Tunis, the capital of Tunisia after the overthrow of former President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. (<http://pulitzercenter.org/articles/tunisia-popular-revolution-ben-ali>)

Ask students to consider the following questions as they read:

- By the end of January, had life in Tunisia returned to “normal”?
- What are examples of this “normalcy” returning?
- What are examples of the struggles that will continue to face the Tunisian people?
- What political, economic, and/or social structures need to be rebuilt, or revised, for the revolution to end in real and lasting change?

As students discuss the political, social, and economic conditions in Tunisia, ask them to reflect on everyday infrastructure that represent peace and prosperity in the United States and within their communities.

*(Ideas could include: jobs, public transportation, roads, affordable groceries, opportunities for career advancement, sufficient police presence, educational opportunities, etc.)*

### Building a Democracy

Finally, have students consider the difficulty the Tunisian people face as they look to replace an oligarchy with a democratic and representative government:

- Authoritarian and oppressive governments characteristically take pains to stamp out any organized rivalry. When those governments fall, they often represent the only working political organization in the nation. In the absence of a ready and organized political system, what other civic institutions might the populace look to in building a new government?
- What organizations might be able/attempt to mobilize politically in the immediate aftermath of such an upheaval?
- How does a country avoid the “One man-one vote-one time” scenario – slipping back into an authoritarian form of government?
- How does a country allow for dissenting opinions while still preserving the civil liberties of all groups regardless of race, gender, religious affiliation, or class?

The lack of a clear and organized opposition party is highlighted in this February 6, 2011 news clip from *Al Jazeera English*, “Fresh Violence Erupts in Tunisia”.

(<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/02/201126185250639125.html>)

A VOA article from February 4, 2011, “Return of Islamic Leader Worries Some Tunisian Women”, examines the impact the return of Islamic political leaders from exile could have on Tunisian law, in particular the rights of Tunisian women.

(<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/115291829.html>)

### **Conclusion**

The political, economic, and social ramifications of the uprising in Tunisia are still unfolding. This lesson serves as part of a larger classroom conversation on the events happening across North Africa, and the establishment of democratic rule. As the youth populations in Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, and Morocco begin to demand improved economic conditions and a more active role in their government, the long-term impact of the revolution in Tunisia will become clearer.