

Why Economic Reform Failed in Tunisia:

Assessing Four Donors and a Country in Transition

by [Sabina Henneberg \(/experts/sabina-henneberg\)](/experts/sabina-henneberg)

Aug 19, 2026

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Sabina Henneberg \(/experts/sabina-henneberg\)](/experts/sabina-henneberg)

Sabina Henneberg is a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of its Junior Research Program.



In-Depth Reports

International actors, while expressing confidence in the country's political progress, struggled to adapt to economic resistance from the national labor union, the destabilizing effects of terrorism, and interference from outside actors.

In the decade after the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Tunisia emerged as the region's best prospect for a transition to democracy, boasting achievements such as a new constitution, free and fair elections, and commissions addressing corruption, media freedom, and women's rights. International actors responded by offering strong rhetorical support for the North African country along with substantial pledges of financial aid. Yet even while recognizing that Tunisia's political success must be built on economic reforms, these actors failed to adapt to troubling developments such as resistance to change from the national labor union, the destabilizing effects of terrorist violence, and interference from outside actors.

DOWNLOAD A PDF OF THIS STUDY.

([HTTPS://WWW.WASHINGTONINSTITUTE.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/PDF/POLICYFOCUS183HENNEBERGV2.PDF](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/policyfocus183hennebergv2.pdf))

In this detailed study, Sabina Henneberg traces the efforts of four donors—the World Bank, IMF, United States, and European Union—to bolster economic reform during Tunisia's postrevolutionary decade. The door may appear closed today amid President Saied's consolidation of power, but this study explains how future efforts could yield greater success if they focus on a longer timeframe, condition aid on reform, and prioritize sustained outreach to a domestic audience. ❖

RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

Despite Pipeline Talks, Hormuz Will Remain Key to Iraq’s Oil Exports

Aug 18, 2026

Noam Raydan

(/policy-analysis/despite-pipeline-talks-hormuz-will-remain-key-iraqs-oil-exports)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Five Years of Taliban Diplomacy: Recognition Without Concessions

Aug 18, 2026

Aaron Y. Zelin

(/policy-analysis/five-years-taliban-diplomacy-recognition-without-concessions)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The Other Phosphate: What Washington’s Moroccan Fertilizer Waiver Overlooks

Aug 18, 2026

Salma Annasse

(/policy-analysis/other-phosphate-what-washingtons-moroccan-fertilizer-waiver-overlooks)

TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Democracy & Reform (/policy-analysis/democracy-reform)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

North Africa (/policy-analysis/north-africa)