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The Fight for Democracy in the Birthplace of the Arab Spring

This article has been produced by the efforts of the following members:

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Tunisia was the first country to go through what was termed the Arab Spring, sparking a movement for democracy across the Middle East. It was sparked by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi. The result was the ousting of long term president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Following this, elections were held and a democratic government was established. In the first free election held in the country, the Islamist party known as Ennahda won a majority.

In the most recent election, held on Sunday October the 26th, the political landscape of Tunisia changed and the transition of Tunisia from a dictatorship to democracy is slowly becoming a reality. Citizens voted and the secular party known as Nida Tounes (Call of Tunisia) won a majority of seats, at 85 of the nation's 217 seats. Meanwhile, the Ennahda party won 69 seats. The election is significant because of the fact that Nida Tounes will be forced to form a coalition with other parties in parliament. The stability of the coalition will be a determining factor in the sustained success of democracy in the country. Nida Tounes essentially has two options – it can form a coalition with the Ennahda party, or form a coalition with the other secularist parties in parliament. Both sides have their positives and negatives. A coalition with the Ennahda party would ensure a majority of Tunisians represented, with both Islamist and secular values being covered in government. However, a coalition with the Ennahda party could also spark instability and conflict, as the two are ideologically at odds with one another. On the other hand, forming a secular coalition would keep out conflicting ideology and potentially provide more stability in the government. The problem is, a significant portion of Tunisia is Islamist, and a perceived lack of representation could spark instability and unrest within the state.

Tunisia is a nation with a high Human Development Index (HDI), and has a strategic location in the Mediterranean. Further to this, it possesses an association agreement with the European Union (EU), and is a member of the African, Arab, and Arab Maghreb Unions. These factors make Tunisia an attractive place for investment. The recent elections demonstrate that Tunisia is on the path to both democracy and stability, and a successful coalition will only reinforce this. If these peaceful, orderly and democratic developments continue to occur, there is great incentive and safety for investment in Tunisia. Ultimately though, only time will tell if Tunisia and its people can successfully maintain the democracy they so bravely fought for.

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