Pressure Points: Assessing Vulnerability to Protests in Tunisia

Introduction

Observers often refer to Tunisia as the single success story of the Arab Spring. This obscures the major challenges Tunisia faces more than eight years after its revolution. Those residing in the interior continue to face marginalization compared to those in coastal areas. As a result, Tunisia has witnessed several waves of protests over persistently poor socioeconomic conditions since the first post-revolutionary polls in 2014. Tunisia is scheduled to hold its next round of general elections in November 2019. The government is likely to continue to contend with protests in the preceding months as citizens express frustration over the persistently poor socioeconomic conditions. As such, this project aimed to identify which areas in Tunisia are most vulnerable to protest.

Methodology

This project used specific criteria to determine which of Tunisia’s 268 delegations (administrative level 2) are most vulnerable to protests. The demographic and socioeconomic indicators include the rate of male unemployment, the percentage of males aged 15-29 years-old, and the rate of unmarried males. The former two datasets were taken from Tunisia’s 2004 census results, while the latter was taken from the most recent 2014 census. Therefore, this project had several limitations. First, the lack of consistent census data was a challenge. The dataset for the rate of unmarried males was taken from Tunisia’s 2004 census, as that data was not available in the most recent 2014 census. Therefore, data on male unemployment and male youth was gathered from separate census results. Second, because the data on places of worship and government services was gathered from crowdsourced, open-source data, it is possible that not all locations were included in the datasets. This may have been exacerbated by the limited access to Tunisia’s south and border areas with Algeria and Libya. Finally, the weighting and scaling of the data, as well as the decision to use manual breaks in determining proximity based on walkability, likely impacted the results.

Results

The results of this analysis show that the eleven delegations with the highest vulnerability to protest are largely located in Tunisia’s south and southwest: Metlaoui, Oum Larais, and Redeyef in the southwest governorate of Gafsa; Majel Belabbes in the southwest governorate of Kasserine; Faouar in the southwest governorate of Kebili, Tamraghtaz in the Southwest governorate of Tozeur, Dhibi and Remada in the southern governorate of Tataouine; Skhira and Sidi Ali Ben Aoun in the central governorates of Sfax and Sidi Bouzid respectively; and Ezzouhour in the governorate of Tunis, near the capital. With the exception of Ezzouhour, all are located in areas that have witnessed anti-government protests over socioeconomic grievances in the last five years. The fact that delegations in the south have less proximity to mosques as potential protest gathering places compared to the north does not appear to significantly reduce the vulnerability of those delegations.

Cartographer: Elissa Miller
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
Course: DHP P207: GIS for International Applications
Date: May 5, 2019 (Spring 2019)
Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 32N
Data Sources: Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM), Humanitarian Data Exchange, OpenStreetMap, Tunisia National Institute of Statistics, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ESRI