

# A Strategy of Indifference in Tunisia's Approach to Migration Policy

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## Introduction:

Though most have previously argued that states adopt either repressive or integrative policies regarding migrants, Kelsey Norman, in her book *Reluctant Reception*, proposed a third strategy, which she termed "strategic indifference" in which states look the other way to migrants' integration into informal economies. I extended this theory by testing its utility in explaining Tunisia's policies.

## Methods:

- Semi-systematic review of the literature
- Semi-structured interviewing

## Results:

The literature demonstrates strong support for policy ambiguity and a strategy of indifference. The results of the interviews are summarized below.

## Conclusions:

These results support the contention that Tunisia employed a strategy of indifference, but likely did not begin to do so until after the 2011 revolution because of a lack of CSOs to lean on before the country shifted to democracy. This study concludes that the Tunisian government implemented a strategy of indifference regarding migration policy but has not followed the same temporal trajectory as the cases examined in *Reluctant Reception*.

Interviewee	Key Takeaways
A	EU funding is hugely important in migration governance. There is a lack of access to residency/employment.
B	Pre-2011, if a person agreed to certain ground rules with officials, then cross-border activities were largely permitted. Now, some borders are less fluid and there is increasing securitization. The laws on the books are not the same as the laws that are enforced. After regime change, more CSOs began working on migration. They have not had an impact on how security forces practice their jobs though.
C	The government does not perceive migration as a priority, perhaps caused by a desire to avoid additional responsibilities. A lot of money and pressure is being channeled into Tunisia. Further, formal externalization has been happening for a while in Tunisia, but the financial incentives are not enough to make a difference. Tunisia takes agency in its decisions. Since the revolution, the landscape of organizations has flourished, but there are not many quality organizations working in migration.
D	EU member states make migration a priority, but it is not actually a priority for Tunisia. There is no facilitation of residency/work permits. Not many Tunisians are involved in CSOs.
E	The lack of a clear policy allows the government to maneuver more easily. Tunisian authorities attempt to make things difficult for refugees/migrants, even those who have obtained legal asylum. There are now CSOs in Tunisia, but most of them are externally financed and tend not to be strong players.

