

Tunisia

Last update:	30 juni 2022
Population:	11,935,764 (World Bank 2021)
Prime minister:	Najla Bouden
President:	Kais Saied
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	Ennahda, Tahya Tounes, Tunisian Alternative
Last election:	2019 (parliamentary and presidential elections)
Next election:	December 17, 2022 (parliamentary elections)
Sister parties:	Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL) - Ettakatol

Tunisia, the only democracy to have arisen from the 2011 Arab Spring, has been in turmoil in recent years. Although the 2011 'Jasmine Revolution' had toppled the corrupted Ben Ali regime that was in power since 1989, the new administration remained unable to lift Tunisia from its economic woes. At first, the new political set-up was perceived legitimate, and the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet was hailed in accommodating Tunisia's path to democracy. In latest years, public support for the post-2011 set-up deteriorated.

In July 2019, Tunisia's first democratically chosen president Beji Caid Essebsi passed away. Kais Saied became his successor after a landslide victory at the 2019 parliamentary polls. Since then, Tunisia is in turmoil. The socio-economic situation was worsening, and demonstrations against incumbent parties over the bad handling of the coronavirus pandemic, corruption and government dysfunction were ongoing.

On July 25, 2021, Saied suspended parliament, dismissed PM Mechichi and ended immunity for parliamentarians. Tunisia is in a process of democratic backsliding ever since and Saied is de facto ruling by presidential decree. He took control over the judiciary and electoral commission and under his rule, security forces repress civil activists, journalists and parliamentarians. Saied also appointed the first female PM, Najla Bouden, in September 2021. Her appointment seemed rather symbolic, as she holds no effective power without a functioning parliament.

In December 2021, Saied proposed a timetable towards a constitutional referendum (July 25, 2022) and early elections (December 17, 2022). Towards the referendum, an online consultation process should advise amendments towards a constitutional commission. Civil society organizations and political parties have withdrawn their support for this process altogether, as Saied has taken power over all policy outcomes. In June 2022, Saied's intents towards authoritarianism became more clear as he sacked 57 judges unilaterally. The Tunisian civil society has planned massive protest to demand a return towards the democratic path.

Political Situation

Tunisian revolution and the political situation under Ben Ali

The current political situation in Tunisia is the result of the popular unrest that erupted in the first half of 2011 after a young man set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010. Before the popular uprising and Tunisia's legislative elections of 2011, the country underwent a long period of authoritarian rule. The frustration of the man concerning the high unemployment rate, living conditions, the economic situation and annoyance with the ruling elite was shared by many Tunisians. Demonstrations occurred around the country for weeks and resulted in the ouster of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. Fouad Mebezaa, the speaker of the Tunisian parliament, was sworn in as the country's interim president on 15 January and on 17 January a new government was formed by Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi. It is said that over 338 people were killed during the Tunisian uprising.

2014 new constitution and the political system

Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly approved a new constitution for the country on 25 January 2014. It was praised as one of

the Arab World's most progressive charters, by recognizing Islam as the state religion, but also protecting freedom of belief and gender parity in politics and society. It also ensures political pluralism by affirming the opposition's rights. On October 26, 2014, the country's first parliamentary elections under the newly adopted constitution were set to take place. Although Tunisia's new constitution reaffirms the pre-existing Republican system, in which the executive power is held by the president for five years with the help of the prime minister, it modified the legislative power.

Until January 2014 the parliament was bicameral, composed of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Advisors. Today, it is composed of a sole Chamber, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. The leader of the majority party or coalition after elections is designated by the president as prime minister. The prime minister is tasked to form a government and functions as the head of government, mainly being responsible for domestic policies. The parliament consists of 217 seats, which are elected based on party-list proportional representation for a term of five years. However, parliament can be dissolved by the president under special circumstances. Tunisia is administratively divided into 24 governorates, headed by governors who are appointed by the president. The country enjoys competitive elections thanks to lively partisan life, which is constitutionally guaranteed by article 35.

Lack of a Constitutional Court

One of the great improvements in the 2014 constitution is the creation of a Constitutional Court, which restricts the legislative power and prevents laws that would go against rights and freedoms from being ratified. However, the Constitutional Court has so far not been full-functioning. The political parties in parliament have only been able to appoint one judge so far, leaving three vacant posts in the Court made up of twelve judges. Part of the reasons that parliament has only appointed one judge so far, is that choosing judges is a polarizing process, just like in the United States. Another cause was the coalition's desire to avoid polarizing for the sake of stability and consensus. When in April of 2021 the parliament passed a bill to finalize the set-up of the Constitutional Court, in order to resolve the power conflicts between the president and prime minister, President Saied refused to ratify the bill.

President Saied's election as a turning point

After President Beji Caid Essebsi passed away in 2019 a new president was chosen in October of that year, law professor Kais Saied. A month later Tunisia also held parliamentary elections that led to a four month long political crisis over the formation of a government. After the elections, the biggest party Ennahda put forward a prime minister from its own ranks, namely agricultural engineer Habib Jemli. In January 2020 Jemli proposed a cabinet made up of independent technocrats in a bid to satisfy the population who had continuously protested against the deteriorating conditions in the country. However, this proposal was rejected by parliament, with only 72 of 217 seats backing it, including by Ennahda's potential coalition partners. Ennahda was therefore forced to compromise.

It was then up to President Saied to choose a new candidate for prime minister. He chose former finance minister Elyes Fakhfakh, linked to the Ettakatol party, on the 20th of January 2020, hoping that his economic background would help save the worsening economy in the country. However, in July 2020, he resigned in the wake of controversy regarding alleged conflict of interest with company shares he owned. This has never been proven though and in 2022 his name was legally cleared. From September 2020, Tunisia's new prime minister is the independent Hichem Mechichi. As Saied, he had no previous experience in politics and initiated the formation of another cabinet made up of independents. However since then he has come under more pressure from parliament though, who have raised their price for support, demanding more representation.

As a result, without the consent of President Saied, Mechichi reshuffled his cabinet in January of 2021. Four ministers considered loyal to President Saied were replaced. The largest party in parliament, the Ennahda movement, had been most vocal pushing for a cabinet with more "political colour". President Saied was not amused by Mechichi's decision and has called the reshuffle unconstitutional. Whether Saied is correct in saying this cannot be decided though, because Tunisia still lacks a full-functioning Constitutional Court, which was created in 2014. Parliament had for years been unable to appoint three judges. When it did so in April of 2021, Saied refused to accept the appointment of the judges, illustrating how Tunisia's power struggles between the president, prime minister and parliament have led to a political deadlock. Tunisia is struggling in an economic crisis, which was only worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, in the beginning of 2021 protests erupted, and have been ongoing, in multiple Tunisian cities. People are disillusioned by the political process, which in their eyes was transformed by political parties into a clash of ambitions and personalities.

Saied's July 25 "self-coup"

Events really unfolded on July 25, 2021, when President Saied dismissed Mechichi and ended the activities of the Tunisian

Assembly under Article 80 emergency powers under the constitution. Saied said to take this decision after fierce protests against Ennahda, economic problems and an enormous surge in coronavirus cases that had rocked the country's fragile healthcare system. Political parties in the Assembly reacted furious to Saied's actions to suspend parliament, and asked their supporters to rally against Saied. In response to the fierce protests, Saied imposed a month-long curfew from 26 July onwards. On 24 August 2021, Saied said to extend the period of "extraordinary measures" until further notice. As of June 2022, it is still in place. Meanwhile, various activists and journalists were arrested and prosecuted for comments against Saied, starting a period of severe crackdown on civil society in Tunisia. From 25 July onwards, Saied starting ruling by presidential decree, completely sidelining Tunisia's parliament.

President Saied has defended his actions by saying that they are needed to address a crisis of political paralysis, economic stagnation and a poor response to the coronavirus pandemic. He has promised to uphold rights and not become a dictator. Nevertheless, critics are skeptical of these promises, and domestic pressure has been mounting.

On 22 September, Saied signed a decree that gave him extensive presidential powers, such as directly making changes to Tunisia's constitution and parliament, giving him the power to dissolve parliament. Meanwhile, the crackdown on Tunisia's civil activists and post-2011 institutions continued. Two prominent members of parliament, Faycal Tebbini and Seifeddine Makhoul, were jailed and the freedom of various judges was severely restricted. The repression on journalists has been severe. After July 25, arbitrary detention, judicial prosecution and illegal censorship has been documented widely. On September 29, Saied appointed Najla Bouden as Tunisia's new PM and gave her the mandate to form a new government. Bouden is the first female PM in Tunisia and the Arab world. On October 11, a new administration commenced under her lead. The Bouden-administration seemed largely symbolic, as legislation cannot pass the suspended parliament.

Whereas Saied had provisional support in Tunisia on the eve of his coup, this support had now deteriorated. The economic crisis seemed only to be worsening and Saied had been unable to present any perspective to the future. The powerful labor union UGTT called for early elections in December 2021. It had previously supported Saied, but said that concrete reform was taking too long. On the 13th of December President Kais Saied announced a new set of measures: a referendum on the constitution will be held on July 25th 2022, followed by parliamentary elections on December 17th 2022.

Towards the July 25 consitutional referendum

Despite Saied's framework towards 2022 elections, the situations kept escalating towards authoritarianism. Various civil society organizations united and public opinion turned against Saied and protests against the president's power grab became more frequent. At a violent crackdown on protests on January 14, 2022, 57-year old protester Rhida Bouziane was killed, only increasing the social unrest surrounding Saied's policies. Oppositional parties and civil society organizations also started to work together to mobilize a united political front against Saied under 'Citizens against the Coup'.

Meanwhile, an online consultation process had commenced on January 15, 2022, in which Tunisians can participate in shaping political reform. From Jan. 15 until March, Tunisians can voice their opinion on six topics. Saied has hailed it as a success, and 100,000 allegedly joined. The consultation process seems problematic, as one-third of Tunisians have no internet access. Furthermore, it is marred in privacy issues. Lastly, Saied has the final say in the constitution, as he appoints the commission responsible in drafting it.

On February 7, president Saied has dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council (CSM). The CSM was installed in 2016, and oversees the independence of Tunisia's judicial system. Saied accuses the council of corruption, noting it "sells positions, appointments according to affiliations" and that "you cannot imagine the money that certain judges have been able to receive, billions and billions". Activists and international observers had denounced the suspension of the CSM. Saied afterwards said he will establish a new CSM, which he will appoint. On February 24, Saied said he intends to ban foreign funding for domestic civil society organizations because he wants to "end foreign interference".

New developments followed in March 2022, as Tunisia's speaker of parliament Ghannouchi said he wanted to hold two sessions of Tunisia's suspended parliament, defying Saied. In reaction, the president – further cementing the belief that he is working towards implementing authoritarian rule – completely dissolved parliament. Political parties and civil organizations reject the dissolution, many of which also say to boycott the July 25 referendum. On the Tunisian streets, protests against Saied intensified as many defy the ban on gatherings – this was especially visible later on May 15 when thousands of Tunisians took to the streets to protests against Saied.

More unilateral decisions by presidential decree follow suit. On March 6, Saied changes the electoral law – parliamentarians will not be elected in two rounds and individually rather than by list at the December 17 polls. On March 22, he takes control over the electoral commission, replacing all members. In May, Saied commenced his 'national dialogue' on the constitution after ending the online consultation process. Almost all civil society organizations and political parties have rejected participation in this dialogue, citing the complete control of Saied over the process and its outcome.

On June 1, Saied sacked 57 judges, massively harming Tunisia's judicial independence again. Massive protests followed, and the Tunisian judiciary issued a one-week strike. Meanwhile the UGTT is preparing a massive strike on June 16, further pressurizing Saied.

A timeline of events since July 25

July 25, 2021	Kais Saied suspends parliament, imposes curfew, cracks down on journalists
August 24, 2021	Saied prolongs extraordinary measures 'until further notice'
September 22, 2021	By presidential decree, Saied assumes far-reaching powers such as dissolving the parliament
September 29, 2021	Saied appoints Najla Bouden as Tunisia's first female President
October 11, 2021	The Bouden-administration commences, with new ministers. The parliament is still dissolved
December 5, 2021	Tunisia's mighty labor union UGTT denounces Saied's snap elections
December 13, 2021	Saied presents a timetable towards a constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections (December 17, 2022)
January 15 – March 15, 2022	Start of an online consultation process on a new Tunisian constitution
February 7, 2022	Saied dissolves the Supreme Judicial Council
February 18	Saied extends state of emergency until December 31, 2022
February 24	Saied outlaws foreign funding of civil society organizations
March 30	Saied dissolves Tunisia's parliament altogether
April 6	Saied changes the electoral law for the December 17 elections
April 22	Saied takes control over electoral commission, replacing all members
May 15	Thousands of Tunisians protest against Saied, demanding his resignation
May 31	UGTT calls for massive strike on June 16
June 1	Saied sacks 57 judges, massive protests follow

IMF bailout

The prolonged political crisis, the persistent economic instability, increased social tension and high unemployment caused Tunisia to ask the IMF for a four year program (the Extended Fund Facility) to support their economic modernization plan, the country's development model and help reduce existing vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic only made the structural problems the country is facing even more apparent, so in April 2020 the IMF Executive Board approved a \$745 million disbursement to Tunisia to address the Corona crisis. A couple of months later in June 2020 the IMF also approved a four year loan of \$2.9 billion to support the authorities' economic agenda aimed at promoting more inclusive growth and job creation, while protecting the most vulnerable households. During 2021-2022, the economic situation deteriorated further due to Saied's power grab and subsequent increasing international isolation. Tunisia remains in talks with the IMF, as with other parties such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE for an alleviation of its economic needs.

Gender representation and women's rights

Tunisia is often said to be the most progressive Arab country in terms of women's rights. In fact, female representation in parliament has risen to 31% since 2011. The constitution of 2014 not only grants equality of men and women but also includes a "guarantee of equality of opportunity" and aims "to achieve equal representation...in elected councils" in article 46, stating clear goals. In 2017 two further laws, which strengthened women's rights, passed the parliament. Since June domestic violence has been criminalized and Muslim women are able to marry non-Muslim men (interfaith marriages), which according to Islamic law, is not allowed.

Additionally, the parliament abolished a reform which would have allowed rapists to escape punishments by marrying the victim.

However, progress has its barriers in Tunisia. Men are still considered to be the one who takes care of the family and its finances, although a growing number of female workers has been entering the labour market. Restrictions come from the rulings of the Islamic law, highly influential religious institutions and most importantly society itself. Former president Beji Caid Essbsi's steps towards giving women more rights (mainly to show the world how modern Tunisia is), have been heavily criticised as "stateimposed feminism". Many say that the government is touching Tunisian cultural roots and strongly oppose new laws like the inheritance law, granting women the same amount as men.

LGBTI rights

The LGBTI community continues to suffer on Tunisia's religion based laws. Protests for more rights of LGBTI groups have been shut down for various reasons. Hate speech in public media is very common and government statements on the situation are very rare, although discrimination from TV stations and news agencies is forbidden. Homosexuality remains illegal and punishable in Tunisia under article 230 of the penal code. Critics have been repeatedly saying that article 230 violates constitutional rights such as equality before the law (article 21) and personal privacy (article 24). Through a new committee, established by the president, women's rights and the status of the LGBTI community have been discussed and might be reformed through bills in the parliament.

The most recent improvement in Tunisia was the founding of the region's first queer radio station 'Shams', which against many death threats, still broadcasts on the daily lives of LGBTI individuals. When in 2019 LGBTI activist Mounir Baatour announced he would be running for president, he became the first openly gay presidential candidate in the Arab world. Despite progress in such areas, in 2020 LGBTI people continued to be arrested on the ground of same sexual relations, referred to a "indecency" and "offensive to public morals". Cross-dressing is not illegal, but transgender people and gay people are can be accused of violating Article 226, that considers it as "outrages against public decency". Moreover, even though the UN's proposal to end anal testing was accepted by the Tunisian government, it has not taken steps to live up to its promises.

Parliamentary Elections

2019 parliamentary elections

On October 6th 2019 parliamentary elections were held in Tunisia. These were the first parliamentary elections since the 2014 parliamentary election, in which catch-all secular party Nidaa Tounes (also known as 'Call of Tunisia') became the biggest party with 86 seats, followed by the Ennahda movement (a moderate Islamic party) with 69 seats. The voter turnout was approximately 41%, which is slightly lower than that of the first round in the presidential elections of the previous month where the voter turnout was about 49%. The election results produced a fractured parliament with none of the parties receiving more than 20% of the votes.

The Ennahda Movement received the highest percentage of votes with 19.93% of the votes which translates into 52 seats. This constitutes a loss of 17 seats in comparison to the previous parliamentary elections but an increase of 5 percentage points in comparison to that of what its presidential candidate Abdelfattah Mourou received less than a month earlier. Two factors can explain the quick voter share increase. The first is that Ennahda endorsed Kais Saied, the winner of the first round of the presidential elections. Saied did not belong to or endorse any political party and therefore his voters were up for grabs in the parliamentary elections. Ennahda not only endorsed Saied but attempted to convince his voters that Ennahda was their best hope for forming a government that was friendly to a Saied presidency. Second, after Ennahda's own presidential candidate Mourou finished third place in the presidential election, they reevaluated their campaign strategy. For the parliamentary election Ennahda focused on two fundamentals, namely religion and the revolution which in the end proved successful.

The second-largest party was the centre-left secular newcomer 'Heart of Tunisia' party. The party was established on the 20th of June 2019 by Nabil Karoui. Houda Knani was named the party's president. She was a former member of the Free Patriotic Union that won 16 seats (third-biggest party) in the last election. However, due to internal disputes, many of its members resigned so the Free Patriotic Union decided to merge with Nidaa Tounes in 2018. Another newcomer to parliament was the right-wing secular Free

Destourian Party, founded by former members of Tunisia's pre-revolution ruling party, which became the third biggest party winning 6.63% of the votes and was appointed 17 seats. Up until August 2016, the party was called the Destourian Movement. The movement participated in the 2014 parliamentary election but did not win any seats.

Dignity Coalition also came new to the scene winning 21 seats, making it the fourth-largest party. The alliance was formed in

February 2019 and consists of several parties and independents, such as the Tunisian Reform Front, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Justice and Development Party. Their main goal is to advance the goals of the revolution, in which 'dignity' was one of the main slogans. Just ahead of the Dignity Coalition, Democratic Current won 22 seats making it the third-largest party.

Democratic current is a social-democratic party and was established in 2013. In the 2014 parliamentary election, the party just won 3 seats.

In fifth place finishes the People's Movement party with 15 seats. The party is socialist, secular and Arab nationalist in nature. Closely following behind, in sixth place, came the secular party Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia) with 14 seats. This party was formed in January of 2019 and mostly consists of former members of the Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia) party after mass defection over internal disagreements whether or not president Essebsi's son (Hafed Caid Essebsi) was fit to run the party. As a result, Nidaa Tounes' seats fell from 86 in the 2014 parliamentary election to just 3 in the 2019 election.

International observers

According to the joint international election observation mission of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), Tunisians were overall able to participate in a well-administered election despite confusion created by the overlapping presidential election and the shortened electoral timeline. De lower voter turnout of 41% compared to the 2014 parliamentary election where turnout was approximately 60% can according to the NDI and IRI be attributed to the continued frustration with persistent corruption and the ongoing economic crisis, as well as the lack of speed to implement reforms. This dissatisfaction is also reflected in the election results. Moreover, the election was held amidst high-security threats of terrorism which could have impacted voter turnout. However, officials overall did what they could to facilitate the election which is evident from the increase in protection at polling stations. The election observation mission of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) stated as well that it had not found any serious election violations, echoing what the NDI and IRI said about Tunisians being able to participate in a well-administered election.

Official election results

Party	Votes	Seats
Ennahda Movement	561,132	52
Heart of Tunisia	415,913	38
Free Destourian Party	189,356	17
Democratic Current	183,464	22
Dignity Coalition	169,651	21
People's Movement	129,604	15
Tahya Tounes	116,582	14
Republican People's Union	59,924	3
Aïch Tounsi	46,401	1
Tunisian Alternative	46,046	3
Afek Tounes	43,892	2
Nidaa Tounes	43,213	3
Machrouu Tounes	40,869	4
Popular Front	32,365	1
Democratic and Social Union (VDS-PR-MDS)	29,828	1
Errahma	27,944	4
Current of Love	17,749	1
Socialist Destourian Party	16,235	1
Farmers' Voice Party	9,366	1
Green League	5,667	1
Other parties/lists	590,602	0
Independent lists	82,384	12

Presidential Elections

The President

The head of state in Tunisia, the president, is directly elected by the electorate for a five-year term. Within a month of his or her election, the president must appoint a prime minister, who is tasked to form a government. The president in Tunisia is not merely a ceremonial position, but holds many executive powers. To illustrate, Article 77 of the Constitution of Tunisia states that the president is also the commander-in-chief of the Tunisian Armed Forces. In general, the president is mainly responsible for foreign policy, defense and national security, while the prime minister is responsible for domestic affairs. However, with powers to sign and execute laws and appoint and dismiss ministers, the president also holds a powerful position when it comes to domestic politics. On several domestic issues it remains unclear where the power exactly lies, with disputes between the president and prime minister as a consequence.

2019 presidential elections

On September 15th 2019 Tunisia held the first round of the presidential elections, followed by a second round on October 13th 2019. This was the second presidential election after the 2011 revolution. The election was originally planned on the 17th and 24th of November 2019, but because of the death of incumbent president Beji Caid Essebsi on the 25th of July, they were moved. According to the Tunisian constitution, a new president has to take office within 90 days because any interim president is only allowed to sit for that amount of time.

In the first round, independent candidate Kais Saied came in first out of 26 candidates, of which two were women. Saied was a newcomer to Tunisian politics but received more than 18% of the votes. Before the revolution, Saied was involved in academics but nevertheless became a well-known media figure through his comments on constitutional and legal issues after the fall of former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He gained a huge following online, especially among young people, for his spontaneity, sincerity and comfort with public speaking that distinguished him from the traditional stereotype of politicians.

The runner up in the first round of the election was Nabil Karoui of Qalb Tounes (also known as Heart of Tunisia party) who ran his campaign from prison. Karoui was arrested on August 23rd on charges of corruption and money laundering. Before the first round of the election, the Assembly of Representatives (Tunisia's legislative branch of government) passed an amendment to the law that prohibited candidates with a criminal record, as well as those who run charitable organizations or received foreign funding for political advertising in the year preceding an election, from running for president. The amendment caused a lot of controversies and a motion was filed by several political parties that called the move unconstitutional.

However, outgoing president Essebsi failed to ratify the legal amendment before he died which made it possible for Karoui to form the 'Heart of Tunisia' party and run for president, after all, winning nearly 16% of the votes. In third place, Ennahda's candidate Abdelfattah Mourou came in a full five points behind Saied. The winner of the 2014 legislative elections, the Nidaa Tounes party, was completely absent from the presidential election after the death of former president and Nidaa Tounes founder Beji Caid Essebsi. After Essebsi's death, the leaders of the party and its supporters all dispersed.

The second round of the election saw Saied and Karoui go head to head. Saied won by receiving 72.7% of the votes. Voter turnout was estimated at 55%. The Sigma polling institute determined that 90% of young people between 18 and 25 voted for Saied, compared to the 49.2% of voters over 60. The election day itself went by without any incidents, but despite that national and international observers reported that there were problems with the transparency and the integrity of the electoral contest. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), who held a joined international election observation mission in Tunisia, for example, reported that they had concerns about candidates' level of media access as well as about the coverage of the electoral campaign

Official election results

Candidate	Party	First Round Votes - Percentage
Kais Saied	Independent	620,711 - 18.40%
Nabil Karoui	Heart of Tunisia	525,517 - 15.58%
Abdelfattah Mourou	Ennahda Movement	434,530 - 12.88%
Abdelkrim Zbidi	Independent	361,864 - 10.73%

Youssef Chahed	Long Live Tunisia	249,049 - 7.38%
Safi Saïd	Independent	239,951 - 7.11%
Lotfi Mraïhi	Republican People's Union	221,190 - 6.56%
Seiffedine Makhlouf	Dignity Coalition	147,351 - 4.37%
Abir Moussi	Free Destourian Party	135,461 - 4.02%
Mohamed Abbou	Democratic Current	122,287 - 3.63%
Moncef Marzouki	Movement Party	100,338 - 2.97%
Mehdi Jomaa	Tunisian Alternative	61,371 - 1.82%
Mongi Rahoui	Popular Front	27,355 - 0.81%
Hechmi Hamdi	Current of Love	25,284 - 0.7

Social Democratic Parties

Democratic Current

Party Leader: Mohamed Abbou

Number of seats: 22

<https://attayar.net/ar/>

Le Courant Démocrate was founded by Mohamed Abbou in May 2013. He was succeeded by Ghazi Chaouachi at the first congress of the party in March 2016. The party focuses on ICT to improve governance and in turn improve the standard of living of Tunisia's citizens. The goal is to develop a digital culture. Furthermore, Courant Démocrate wants to guarantee rights and freedoms of all, and seeks an Arab federal state that brings together the Arab nations liberated from dictatorships. In the latest parliamentary elections of 2019, the party won 22 seats making it the third largest party. After the election, Democratic Current agreed to form a parliamentary bloc with the People's Movement.

The party can best be described as a centre-left party, with a progressive third way ideology. The leader of the Democratic Current, Abbou, is recognized for his activism with regards to human rights and formerly worked as a lawyer. By gaining 22 seats in the 2019 parliamentary election, the party increased its amount of seats by 19, as it only held 3 seats after the 2014 election. This made the party the election's biggest winner, after the newly formed Heart of Tunisia party.

Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties / Ettakatol (FDTL)

Party Leader: Khalil Zaoui

Number of seats: 0

<http://ettakatol.org/>

Established in 1994, just a month before the country's legislative elections, the Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL) is a centre-left secularist party. Its establishment was the result of a call by 200 democrats, academics and defenders of human rights in 1993 for the unification of democratic forces. The party that was established by its current Secretary-General Mustapha Ben Jafar was only legalised in 2002. However, it failed to obtain government positions or seats in the parliament in the 2004 elections.

In the Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011, FDTL won 20 seats and took part in the coalition that consisted of Ennahda and the CPR. Its stated core values are transparency and openness. Its leader Ben Jafar was elected President of the Constituent Assembly in November 2011. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the FDTL lost all seats. However, it is still a member of the Socialist International and the Progressive Alliance and an observer by the Party of European Socialists. In the 2019 parliamentary election FDTL did not win any seats either.

Movement Party

Party Leader: Moncef Marzouki
Number of seats: 0
www.alirada.tn

Moncef Marzouki formed the centre-left secular political party Congress for the Republic (CPR) in 2001. The CPR's main objectives included transparent and free elections, independence of state institutions and the judiciary, to guarantee public liberties and defend human rights and to affirm the Arab Muslim identity within the framework of respect for universal humanitarian values as they are stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The party has been labelled Islamist, but rejected it and finally became legal after the revolution in 2011. The party was seen as a counterweight to the moderate Islamist party which became the country's dominant political force in the 2011 elections. CPR participated in the 2011 parliamentary election where it received 8.7% of the votes which translated into 29 seats.

In December of that year, CPR's leader Marzouki was elected interim president. However, in 2012 CPR started to experience problems when several members left the party and established the Independent Democratic Congress party. On 20 December 2015 former president Moncef Marzouki founded a new political party: Harak Tunis Al-Iradah, or just Al-Irada. Three months later, in February 2016, what remained of the CPR decided to dissolve and merge with the Al-Irada.

In September 2018, 80 of Al-Irada's members left the party because they believed it was impossible to reform the party at the political and organizational levels, and simultaneously facilitate the presidential ambitions of Marzouki. The latter made it difficult for the party to position itself against the ruling coalition, even though they accused them of dragging Tunisia into an unprecedented political crisis, contributing to the increasing poverty in the country and the continuous corrupt practices. After the defection, in April 2019, the party decided to change its name to the Movement Party. Later that year the party participated in the parliamentary election but did not win any seats.

Other Parties

Ennahda Movement (or simply Ennahda)

Party Leader: Rached Ghannouchi
Number of seats: 54
<http://www.ennahdha.tn/>

Initially established as Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) in 1981. The party is theoretically shaped by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its key intellectual in the 1950s and 1960s, Sayyid Qutb. The party began as a rather radical one, but started to be described as moderate Islamist in the 1980s and changed its name to the current one in 1988 after Ben Ali's National Pact that sought to separate religion from politics. They advocate democracy and a Tunisian form of Islamism also described as political pluralism.

In elections held in 1989, Ennahda came in second place to the RCD. Shortly afterwards, Ennahda was banned, and its leader Rachid Ghannouchi fled the country for the UK as he and other Ennahda members were prosecuted for "membership in an illegal organization." After the collapse of the Ben Ali regime the Tunisian interim government granted the group permission to form a political party. The Ennahda party became the biggest and best organised party and won 89 seats in the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections.

Ennahda sees itself as an advocate of Islamic democracy, like Turkey's ruling Justice and Development (AKP) party. The party can be seen as a centre-right party that is sympathetic towards economic liberalism. Ennahda's leadership has stressed that it supports equal rights for men and women, although only two women are at first position for the NCA election. Nevertheless, secularists remain wary of Ennahda, whose party's strongest support comes from Tunisia's rural interior.

The Ennahda Movement stepped down in January 2014 since the neutral interim government was established to make the final

draft of a constitution, followed by early elections based on this new constitution. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the party came in second with 69 seats (losing almost half of its seats) after the Nidaa Tounes party. In the parliamentary election of 2019 the Ennahda Movement came in first with 52 seats, 17 seats less than they won in 2014. This says something about how fractured the political landscape had become.

After the election Ennahda proposed ally Habib Jemli as prime-minister but that choice was not backed by parliament. The new candidate, Elyes Fakhfakh, proposed a cabinet in early 2020. Ennahda initially disagreed with the formation but after many negotiations the parliament backed the proposal with the support of Ennahda on the 26th of February. Ennahda did this for the sake of the country's stability. Since then the party has been putting more and more pressure on the technocratic cabinet of Prime Minister Mechichi, making him replace 11 technocratic ministers with more "politically coloured" ministers.

Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia)

Party Leader: Nabil Karoui

Number of seats: 29

<https://9albtounes.com/ar>

Qalb Tounes was first established on the 20th of June 2019 by media mogul Nabil Karoui. Soon after, in October 2019, the party participated in its first parliamentary election. It won 38 seats and became the second largest party. However, in the proposal of the new cabinet prime-minister candidate Fakhfakh decided to not include Heart of Tunisia in the formation. The party's leader Nabil Karoui, the owner of a major television company, has repeatedly been accused of corruption and actually ran his campaign for the presidential election in September 2019 from prison. Karoui was only allowed to run in the end, because the controversial bill to ban people from running if they had served prison time, was never ratified. Former President Beji Caid Essebsi died in July of 2019 before he could.

The parliamentary vote on the new cabinet was held on the 26th of February 2020 and received the backing of 129 out of 217 members. This gave Heart of Tunisia a place in the opposition, despite being the election's biggest winner. The party has not been stable in the years afterwards though. With resignations of several party members, Heart of Tunisia's number of seats has dropped from 38 to 27 in less than two years' time. The party is classified as a left-wing populist party, also having a secular ideology. The party is very much built around its leader Karoui.

Dignity Coalition (Itilaf al-Karama)

Party Leader: Seifeddine Makhlouf

Number of seats: 19

In the 2019 parliamentary election the relative newcomer Dignity Coalition won 21 seats, making it the fourth largest party. Since then two members have resigned from the party. The coalition was formed in February 2019 and consists of several different parties and independent people. The most notable of which are the Tunisian Reform Front, the Congress of the Republic (CPR), and the Justice and Development Party. Its manifesto unites those who aim to advance the goals of the revolution because to the coalition they seem uncompleted. In the 2011 revolution, one of the main slogans was "Karama", which translates to "Dignity".

The party can be classified as a far-right party. It is an Islamist party and considered a party in which populism and salafism are combined. The party fights for the implementation of Sharia law. Other party positions include its support for the death sentence penalty, its opposition towards gender equality and a proponent of further criminalisation of homosexuality. The party's leader Makhlouf is also highly critical of France, the country's former overlord. Given all of this, the party is considered to be quite controversial.

Free Destourian Party

Party Leader: Abir Moussi

Number of seats: 16

<https://www.facebook.com/M.destourien>

The Free Destourian Party was established on the 23rd of September 2013 by former members of the Democratic Constitutional Assembly. Former president Ben Ali, who fled to Saudi Arabia during the revolution to avoid prosecution, belonged to this party. After the revolution the Democratic Constitutional Assembly was banned and was eventually dissolved in March 2011. Up until August 2016 the Free Destourian Party was known under the name 'Destourian Movement' but decided to change the name around the same time it appointed new leader Abir Moussi. During the 2019 parliamentary election the party received 17 seats, making it the fifth biggest party.

People's Movement

Party Leader: Zouhair Maghzaoui

Number of seats: 15

<https://www.facebook.com/Echaab.Tunisie>

The current People's Movement is a socialist, secularist and Arab nationalist party that was established in April 2011. However, before April 2011 there was a political party with the same name that merged the Progressive Unionist Movement in March 2011. The new party was called the Progressive Unionist People's Movement. When some members disagreed with the merger they left and formed a new party which they again called the People's Movement party. Their slogan became "freedom, socialism, unity" and their leader became Mohamed Brahmi. However, in 2012 the Progressive Unionist People's Movement and the People's Movement decided to merge and continued under the name People's Movement.

The leader of the party continued to be Mohamed Brahmi. The party belongs to the Popular Front coalition and is aligned with workers groups. In 2013 Brahmi was shot dead in front of his house and Zouhair Maghzaoui became the new leader. Even though the party is part of the Popular Front, it decided to run on its own in the 2019 parliamentary election where it finished sixth with 15 seats. This proved to be a successful move for the party, as the Popular Front only received one seat in total. Since then the party has formed a parliamentary bloc together with the Democratic Current.

Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia)

Party Leader: Youssef Chahed

Number of seats: 14

https://www.facebook.com/tahyatounes.tn/?ref=page_internal

Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia) was formed in early 2019 by political leaders that were formally associated with the president Beji Caïd Essebsi's ruling party Nidaa Tounes. Disagreements within Nidaa Tounes, in particular about whether or not president Essebsi's son Hafedh Caïd Essebsi was suitable to lead the party, caused prime-minister Youssef Chahed his membership. It was then that prime-minister Chahed and other prominent former members of Nidaa Tounes decided to form Tahya Tounes. The goal of the party is to implement efficient economic reforms in an attempt to return hope to the frustrated Tunisians. In the 2019 parliamentary election Tahya Tounes won 14 seats, making it the seventh biggest party. The party can best be classified as a centre and secular party.

Machrou Tounes

Party Leader: Mohsen Marzouk

Number of seats: 4

Machrou Tounes was founded by former member of Nidaa Tounes, Mohsen Marzouk, in March 2016. It includes members of the 'Al-Horra'-bloc and several political figures, such as former minister Sadek Chaâbane. Important issues are the fight against terrorism and major reforms to improve the social and economic conditions. The party focuses on young people and women. With respect to the government, the party has an ambiguous stance. In its first parliamentary election in 2019, the party received 4 seats. Machrou Tounes is best classified as a big-tent centrist party, with a secular and nationalist ideology.

Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia)

Party Leader: Hafedh Caïd Essebsi
Number of seats: 3

Nidaa Tounes was created in June 2012 under the impetus of Beji Caid Essebsi, a former Tunisian ambassador close to Habib Bourgiba and member of former President Ben Ali's government. The party highlights several objectives: the introduction of a Constituent Assembly that will draft a solid constitution, a plan to save the national economy based on national consensus, a process of transitional justice aiming at finalising Tunisia's post-Ben Ali transition, safeguarding individual freedoms and ensuring the neutrality of mosques. During the launch of the party on 16 June 2012, Essebsi asked all Tunisians to unite in favour of transition. Nonetheless, its creation has led to a bipolarisation of party politics in the country, by attracting all opponents to Ennahda.

During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the party won significantly and became the biggest party with 86 seats. However, it had some significant losses in March 2016, when Mohsen Marzouk announced the official creation of the Movement of Tunisia's Project party. During the split in December of 2015 Marzouk brought several prominent former Nidaa Tounes members with him including more than twenty deputies in the parliament. In June 2016 there were several smaller transfers of deputies between the Free Patriotic Union and Nidaa Tounes, so in October 2018 the two parties merged and continued under the name 'Nidaa Tounes'. However, the continuous internal disputes and disagreements about who should lead the party were reflected in the 2019 parliamentary election where Nidaa Tounes only received 3 seats, 83 less than in the previous election. The party is considered to be a centre-left third-way party with a secular ideology.

Popular Front (el-Jabha)

Party Leader: Hama Hammami
Number of seats: 1
<https://www.facebook.com/Front.P.Tn/>

The Popular Front was formed in October 2012. It is a leftist political and electoral alliance in Tunisia. The front consists of nine political parties. It brings mainly left wing Tunisian parties together, including the Democratic Patriots' Movement, the Workers' Party, Green Tunisia, the Movement of Socialist Democrats, the Tunisian Ba'ath Movement, the Party of the Democratic Arab Vanguard, two different parties of the Iraqi branch of Ba'ath Party, and other progressive parties.

After the revolution in 2011, leftist parties decided to form the Popular Front in order to better consolidate the previously divided Tunisian left wing so as to be able to compete more effectively in the parliamentary elections in 2014. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the Popular Front became fourth and gained 15 seats. However, in the 2019 parliamentary election it only received 1 seat. This has much to do with the left-wing party the People's Movement deciding to run the election campaign by itself, receiving 15 seats.

Biographies

Kais Saïed

President

Kais Saïed was born on the 22nd of February 1958 and grew up in a modest but intellectual household. He was a law professor at the University of Tunis until he retired in 2018. He served as the Secretary-General of the Tunisian Association of Constitutional Law between 1990 and 1995 and has been vice-president of the organization since 1995. Saïed also served as Dean of the Law Department at the University of Sousse, as a legal expert for the Arab League and the Arab Institute for Human Rights. He was also part of the expert committee that was invited to offer comments on the draft Constitution of Tunisia in 2014. He was considered an outsider to politics before he was elected as president.

In 2019 Saïed ran for president as an independent candidate and won with a 72% majority. Saïed was deemed an unlikely winner,

but his openness and obsession with equity connected with the Tunisian youth. Saied vowed to fight corruption and increase social justice, such as access to healthcare and water for all. Even though Saied has some conservative views on homosexuality and gender equality, he vowed to respect the social freedoms enshrined in law in recent years. The youth especially saw Saied as an honest leader that offered a future to Tunisia which was reflected in the presidential election results. It was estimated that 90% of young people between 18 and 25 voted for Saied.

On July 25, President Saied assumed executive authority after sacking the prime minister and suspending parliament. Since then, he has continually lengthened the state of emergency, and last week he brushed aside much of the 2014 constitution, giving himself power to rule by decree. President Saied has defended his actions by saying that they are needed to address a crisis of political paralysis, economic stagnation and a poor response to the coronavirus pandemic. He has promised to uphold rights and not become a dictator. Since July 25, Saied has constantly meddled in Tunisia's judiciary and other important safeguards of its nascent democracy. He is therefore seen as the prime culprit for Tunisia's post-2021 backsliding into authoritarianism.

Najla Bouden

Prime Minister

On September 29, 2021, Kais Saied appointed the at the time unknown former engineer Najla Bouden, 63, as the first female Prime Minister in Tunisia and the Arab World. She replaced Hichem Mechichi who was ousted on July 25, 2021. Her appointment was very surprising as she has almost no policy expertise and has no political affiliation.

Before being appointed as PM, Bouden was working at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research on World Bank programme implementation. Bouden has limited power in the current Tunisian political set-up as Saied has taken much of the political power and is effectively ruling by decree.

Rached Ghannouchi

Party leader Ennahda / Speaker of the House of People's Representatives

Rached Kheriji, known as Rached Ghannouchi (1941) is one of the most prominent politicians in Tunisia. He co-founded the Ennahda Movement and is seen as its intellectual leader. He graduated from Zaytuna University in Tunis in 1962 before he attended Cairo University (Egypt) to study agriculture. After he was expelled from Egypt due to a row between former presidents Bourguiba and Abdel Nasser, Ghannouchi went to University of Damascus (Syria) where he majored in philosophy, and graduated in 1968.

Ghannouchi started forming his political views as a university student. Despite the fact that he initially joined a socialist party, his views gradually changed towards a more religious ideology. Ghannouchi then attended the University of Paris, Sorbonne. After studying there for a year, he returned to Tunisia and founded an organization to initiate reforms in the country. Based on his Islamic convictions, he, among others, established the Islamic Tendency Movement in 1981 to fight political pluralism and call for economic reconstruction.

Ghannouchi along with his followers was sentenced to 11 years in prison in 1981 where he was tortured. Many Tunisians across the political spectrum protested against their torture. Ghannouchi was released in 1984. After being sent back to prison in 1987 with a life sentence, he was released again in 1988. Eventually Ghannouchi was exiled to Algeria, and from there he moved to England in 1991 where he lived for over twenty years. During his exile, Ghannouchi was a tireless critic of the political regime in Tunisia. On 30 January 2011 Ghannouchi returned to Tunis for the first time in two decades.

His party, Ennahda, won 89 of the 217 seats in the Constituent Assembly's elections in October 2011, the second largest party following far behind with 29 seats. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, Ennahda almost lost 20 seats (to 69 seats) and in the 2019 parliamentary election this number dropped even further to 52 seats. However, Ennahda had become the largest party in parliament though. Since 13 November 2019 Ghannouchi has been the speaker of parliament and in that position has been the most vocal in opting for more "political colour" in the country's cabinets.

Beji Caid Essebsi

Former President

Beji Caid Essebsi was born on 29 November 1926 in Sidi Bou Said in Tunisia. He is a great-grandson of Ismail Caïd Essebsi, who was raised within the ruling family in the beginning of the 19th century and later became an important member in the government. Essebsi studied law in Paris and became a lawyer in 1952.

He was a follower of Tunisia's post-independence leader Habib Bourguiba. He joined Bourguiba as an adviser following the country's independence from France in 1956. From 1957 to 1971, he held various functions, such as Interior Minister from 1965 to 1969 and as Ambassador in Paris. In April 1981, he came back to the government under Mohamed Mzali as Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving until September 1986. From 1990 to 1991, he was the President of the Chamber of Deputies. In the aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution in 2011, Essebsi was appointed as new Prime Minister.

After the elections in 2011, when the new interim President Moncef Marzouki was appointed, Essebsi was replaced as Prime Minister. He then founded the secular Nidaa Tounes party, which won the parliamentary elections in 2014. He was also the party's candidate in Tunisia's first free presidential elections in 2014. In December 2014, in the second round of voting, official results showed that Essebsi won the presidential race. On 31 December 2014, Essebsi was sworn in as the first free elected President of Tunisia. Essebsi died on the 25th of July at the age of 92.

Khalil Zaouia

Party leader of Ettakatol

Khalil Zaouia (1961) is a Tunisian politician and former minister. Currently, he is the leader/Secretary-General of the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties – Ettakatol. Zaouia served as Minister of Social Affairs in the Jebali Cabinet, the first democratically elected government (2011-2014) after the end of the dictatorship. Apart from his political career, Zaouia has been a professor and orthopaedic surgeon at the Charles-Nicolle Hospital in Tunis. He is one of the founding members of Ettakatol (1994).

Moncef Marzouki

Former interim President of Tunisia and Founder of the Congress for the Republic (CPR)

Moncef Marzouki (1945) studied medicine in France. He was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful resistance and travelled to South Africa to study its transition from Apartheid. After he returned to France he joined the Tunisian League of Human Rights and became an active human rights campaigner. He is widely respected for his opposition to former president Ben Ali which led to several arrests during his lifetime. In 2001 he founded the Congress for the Republic, which was banned in 2002. Still, Marzouki moved to France and continued running it. He only returned home after Ben Ali was ousted.

The interim parliament voted to elect Marzouki as president on 12 December 2011. He was elected as part of a power-sharing deal between the moderate Islamist Ennahda party and its two smaller secularist coalition partners, Ettakatol and Marzouki's Congress for the Republic. The deal gave the president limited powers. He was allowed to set Tunisia's foreign policy in consultation with the prime minister. The president was also commander-in-chief of the armed forces but could only appoint or fire senior officers in consultation with the prime minister. During Tunisia's first free presidential elections, Marzouki was defeated by Beji Caid Essebsi.

Youssef Chahed

Party leader of Tahya Tounes and former Prime-Minister

Youssef Chahed was born on 18 September 1975 in the capital of Tunis. He studied agricultural engineering at the National Agricultural Institute of Tunisia, and after graduating in environmental economics in France, he obtained a PhD on measuring the liberalization of agricultural trade. As an expert on agriculture and economics he wrote several reports for the European Commission and the US Department of Agriculture during his career.

After the Arab Spring in 2011 he returned to Tunisia. In 2013 he joined the party of Béji Caïd Essebsi, Nidaa Tounes. After winning the elections of 2014 he became secretary of agriculture and fisheries in the cabinet of Habib Essid. In 2016, after a shuffle in the cabinet, he became minister of Local Affairs. After the ousting of prime minister Habib Essid in the summer of 2016, president Essebsi asked him to become Prime Minister and form a new cabinet.

As a technocrat, he was relatively unknown. His cabinet was seen as progressive when he appointed many young state officials

and eight women, one of which is his Finance Minister. However, disagreements within Nidaa Tounes, in particular about whether or not president Essebsi's son Hafedh Caid Essebsi was suitable to lead the party, caused Chahed his membership. It was then that he and other prominent former members of Nidaa Tounes decided to form Tahya Tounes in early 2019. Chahed was appointed leader.

Abir Moussi

Party Leader of Free Destourian Party

Abir Moussi was born on the 15th of March 1975. She received a master degree in law and a DEA in economic and business law. She became a lawyer at the highest court in Tunisia (Court of Cassation) after graduation. She also became president of the litigation committee and member of the national forum for lawyers of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) and secretary general of the Tunisian Association of Victims of Terrorism.

After the 2011 revolution she joined the Destourian Movement. When she was appointed leader of the party in 2016, she changed the name to Free Destourian Party. The party is often called far-right and brings together supporters of the pre-revolutionary dominant Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) who are nostalgic for the authoritarian dictatorship of former president Ben Ali. Moussi therefore does not recognize the new Tunisian constitution that was established in 2014.

She also advocates for systemic imprisonment of homosexuals and opposed the plan for the government to grant men and women the same inheritance rights. She ran in the 2019 presidential election in which she came in ninth in the first round with 4.02% of the votes. The Free Destourian Party came in third in the parliamentary election of the same year, winning 6.63% of the votes which translated into 17 seats.

Nabil Karoui

Party leader of Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia)

Nabil Karoui was born on the 1st of August 1963 in Bizerte. Karouis started his career in marketing and sales at several multinational corporations. He founded his own communications agency (KNRG) in 1996 together with his brother. In 2002 Karoui and his brother also founded a public relations firm named Karoui & Karoui World. The firm quickly grew and had offices all over the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time he established his international public relations company, Karoui also expanded his domestic business. He created subsidiaries around audiovisual production, digital media, urban advertising and he created a record label. In 2009 he became the head of the company's television company named Nessma.

During the 2011 revolution, Karoui used Nessma to begin a political debate on the ongoing protests after the government stopped several other channels from reporting on the unrest. After the revolution, Karoui continued using Nessma to provide the Tunisian people with new and quickly grew to one of the country's leading sources for information.

In October 2011 Karoui faced charges of "violating sacred values" and "disturbing public order" after showing the film 'Persepolis' on his channel. He was found guilty and ordered to pay a fine of 2400 dinars (approximately €1500). However, Karoui's criminal record did not stop there. On the 8th of July 2019 Karoui and his brother were charged with money laundering after NGO I-Watch accused them several times in 2016. He was arrested on the 23rd of August.

However, in June 2019 Karoui had announced his candidacy for the 2019 presidential election of which the first round was to be held on the 15th of September. Quickly after Karoui announced his intent to run, the parliament passed amendments to the country's electoral law blocking candidates with a criminal record from running. Immediately after, members of Nidaa Tounes and Popular Front filed a motion in parliament calling the move unconstitutional. This had little effect. The only reason the amendments did not go through in the end was because president Essebsi had not come around to signing them before his death, This meant that Karoui was still allowed to run. During that same time Karoui established a new political party named "Heart of Tunisia".

Thus, even though Karoui was allowed to run, his imprisonment in August meant that he was forced to lead his campaign from

prison. Despite his incarceration Karoui came in second in the first round of the presidential election, winning nearly 16% of the votes with Elyes Saied only winning 2% more. Karoui was released from prison on October 9th 2019, just a few days before the second round of the presidential election. He was beaten in this round by Elyes Saied who received over 72% of the votes

His party, 'Heart of Tunisia', did better in the 2019 parliamentary election where it came in second after Ennahda Movement (19.63%) with 14.55% of the votes. However when it came to forming a new cabinet, Heart of Tunisia was left out of the formation after countless accusations of corruption. The party now serves in the opposition and has been in decline, as its share of seats dropped from 38 to 27. 11 party members have resigned in less than two years. Meanwhile, Karoui has been detained again in December of 2020 on the charge of tax evasion and money laundering and has been in prison since then. His party emphasized that he had not been found guilty.

Mohsen Marzouk

Party leader of Machrou Tounes

Mohsen Marzouk was born in the city of Sfax in 1965. He studied political sociology and international relations in Tunis. He worked as coordinator for the Arab Institute for Human Rights since 1989. Marzouk became secretary-general of the NGO Arab Democracy Foundation in 2008. He was one of the co-founders of Nidaa Tounes in 2012. However, he left the party after disagreement with the party's direction in January 2016, and founded the party Machrou Tounes. Currently, he is secretary-general of the party. In the 2019 parliamentary election the party won only 4 seats.

Mohamed Abbou

Party leader of Democratic Current

Mohamed Abbou was born on May 10th 1966. He received his master degree in Law and a DEA in criminology. On August 28th 2012 he presented his doctoral thesis on private law at Tunis - El Manar University. The subject of his research was limits of freedom of the press. Before receiving his doctorate but after the revolution, Abbou was elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia before being appointed adviser to the prime-minister on December 24th 2011. In this position he was in charge of Administrative Reform in the Hamadi Jebali government.

In May 2012 Abbou was appointed secretary general of Congress for the Republic party (CPR), a position which he held until March 2013. In May 2013 he established his own party 'Democratic Current' of which he became the leader until March 2016. He was once again appointed leader in April 2019 so he could run in the 2019 presidential election. He came in tenth in the first round with 3.63% of the votes. His party did well in the following parliamentary elections. It gained 22 seats, increasing its number of seats by 19. After this election win Abbou decided to form a parliamentary bloc with the People's Movement.

Hamma Hammami

Party leader of the Popular Front

Hamma Hammami was born on the 8th of January 1952 in El Aroussa. In 1972 Hammami participated in the student revolt as well as in the banned opposition movement El Amal Ettounsi, for which he was sent to prison by then president Habib Bourguiba. He was only released six years later when Amnesty International started advocating for his release. In 1986 Hammami founded the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party (PCOT) of which, in one form or the other, he has been leader ever since. The party became officially legal after the 2011 revolution and in 2012 PCOT formed an alliance with several other parties to better streamline the Tunisian left wing, which became known as Popular Front. Hammami was named its leader.

He was also tortured and imprisoned for his political activism against the rule of former president Ben Ali because he was considered to be strong opposition. On January 12th 2011 he was again arrested for speaking to journalists about the Tunisian revolution, but he was released three days later when Fouad Mebazaa became interim president. After disputes within Popular Front about who should run in the 2019 presidential election on their behalf, Hammami decided to run as an independent. He only receives 0.69% of the votes. In the parliamentary election of the same year Popular Front also suffered major losses. It only won one seat, which is 14 seats less than in the 2014 parliamentary election.

Hafedh Caïd Essebsi

Party leader of Nidaa Tounes

Hafedh Caïd Essebsi was born on the 1st of August 1961. He is the son of former president Béji Caïd Essebsi who died in office on the 25th of July 2019 at the age of 92. Before the revolution Hafedh was part of the Social-Liberal Party. After the revolution he joined the Nidaa Tounes party, which was founded by his father. Hafedh tried to head the party list during the 2014 parliamentary election, but his inexperience and proximity to members of the former Democratic Constitutional Rally (the party in charge before the revolution), ignited a lot of criticism from the left wing and many members of the party. This caused him to renounce his candidacy on August 22nd 2014.

He was named executive director of Nidaa Tounes in 2016, which prompted secretary general Mohsen Marzouk to leave and found his own party; Machrouu Tounes. On the 19th of October 2018 Hafedh became president of the party on the occasion of the merger with the Free Patriotic Union. During the 2019 parliamentary election Nidaa Tounes only received 3 seats, which is a 83 seat decline since the 2014 parliamentary election. The party has been in opposition since then and the party's role has been marginalised.

Source

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