

**The democratic uprising in North Africa
Case study of Tunisia's Jasmine revolution**



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Abstract:

The research aims to identify the issue of democratization in Tunisia, especially after the Jasmine Revolution, a popular uprising in Tunisia that protested against corruption, poverty, political repression, and forced President. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down in January 2011, the purpose of this study was to Tunisia's stages of democracy by focusing on the most critical stages, such as the National Constituent Assembly and Tunisian Civil society, It is mainly based on a descriptive approach in analyzing the content of the study and measuring the variables and the study sets out that Tunisia is midway through a political revolution that has a relatively high chance of success.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratization, Tunisia, Arab revolutions. Arab spring.

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Introduction:

On 14th January 2011, president Ben Ali fled Tunisia after a twenty-eight-day protest that terminated his twenty-three-year-old regime, while of course we can always look back and rewrite history (and experts and academics are not immune to such proclivities), the truth is that by the dawn of the new millennium most of us middle east watchers had given up hope that any meaning full political reform would occur in the Arab world.

The uprising that has profoundly shaped the Middle East began in a remote outpost of southern Tunisia on December 17th, 2010 with the self – immolation of an unknown young man named Mohamed Bouazizi in protest against abusive and corrupt police. His act could have been yet another well-meant but meaningless protest in an obscure region, accomplishing little, yet something was different this time.

Within a month of this event and the first, minor Tunisian protests, hundreds of thousands of young Arabs took to the streets in nearly every Arab country.

Protestors in different nations chanted the same slogans “the people want to overthrow the regime!” and waved the same banner. They fed off each other’s reversals. Within less than a year, three Arab leaders, long in power, had fallen and others faced mortal challenges.

The rapid spread of protests across the entire region transformed what had begun as a fairly typical bout of turmoil on the periphery of the Arab world into a revolutionary moment over all. In this study we focused on Tunisia’s Jasmin revolution, all this events linked to entirely independently of the question will Tunisia that evolve democratic system such as prove to be highly susceptible to external penetration by way of covert support to political parties and movements? Or will they be largely immune to such manipulation as voters focus on domestic issues? What are the revolution's main challenges and prospects?

1. Conceptualizing the democratization:

Initial studies of democratization in the 1970s and 1980s presumed that the meaning of democratization was self-evident: it meant simply a transformation of the political system from non-democracy to words accountable and representative government.

These studies adopted a process-oriented approach, concentrating on identifying the mechanisms or paths that lead to democratization (Gurgel,2002,p.3).

In this study we focused to identify most relevant concept related to the case study such as “democratization” and “Arab spring”. Simply put

"democratization" refers to political change, in a democratic direction. When scholars study democratization, they are typically trying to identify the factors that cause a democratic regime to emerge.

A-Definition of the Arab spring:

Beginning in 2010 and 2011, a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region challenged some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The wave began when protests in Tunisia and Egypt toppled their regimes in quick succession, inspiring similar attempts in other Arab countries.

Looking back, the uprising, commonly known as the Arab revolution, produced modest political, social, and economic gains for some of the regions. Reviewing this debate over the many conceptualizations of democracy we identify several fundamental principles that most democratic theorists agree are absolutely essential for a system of government to be considered democratic. These include:

- The rule of law: the principle that the power of the state must be limited by law and that no one is above the law.
- Inclusion: democratic rights (e.g, the right to vote).
- Equality: democratic rights and freedoms are accorded to everyone on an equal basis (Malone, 2011, pp.63-64).

B-Definition of the Protest movements:

Strikes, uprisings, riots, boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations are examples of timely political actions that may or may not involve social movements and can take various forms (igi-global dictionary).

2. A historical over view of the Jasmin's revolution:

A- The Gafsa mineral field:

In early 2008, one of the most important movements in Tunisia since its independence in 1956 broke out. The protest movement happened in interior Tunisia, the region that had been neglected and even ignored by the Tunisian regime, in contrast to the coasts and the northern districts of the country.

The town of Gafsa had a tradition of trade union struggles and was sometimes called an "Indominated town" by Tunisians. The Gafsa mineral field is situated in a poor region at the frontier of Algeria. The Gafsa movement became the most extensive protest movement in Tunisia since the bred revolt of 1984.

Gafsa is an important mining center, the fifth largest in the world in terms of exploiting calcium phosphate, run by the CPG (Compagnie de Phosphate de Gafsa). In the previous decade, the company drastically reduced the number of its

workers from 15,000 to 5000, causing a high rate of unemployment and illnesses caused by mining under poor health conditions. (Khosrokhavar,2012, pp.28-29).

B- The 18 October movement for right and freedoms:

Opposition forces began to unify in 2005. A political alliance was arranged in October that included leftists, liberals, and Islamists, some legally recognized by the regime and some not and the four major demands:

- Legalization of other political parties.
- Release of political prisoners.
- Freedom of the media.
- General legal amnesty (Khosrokhavar,2012, p.31).

3- The Jasmin revolution's symbolic causes:

The underlying causes of the Arab uprising were a combination of neoliberal economies and neopatrimonialism regimes that were relatively uniformly present across MENA. The uprising also took the similar, and unprecedented, form of large scale peaceful mass protest against incumbent regimes, indicating similar high levels of social mobilization across the region. In our case study we focused for main's causes of Tunisian's revolution:

- The failure of a twenty-three-year-old police regime to totally stifle civil society and prevent it from communicating and expressing its craving for social and economic justice in the absence of organized structures.
- The breakdown of the psychological will of fear that subdued the people while depriving them of their dignity and basic freedoms.
- The unsustainability of economic and social development in a centrally-controlled, one-man state solely preoccupied with promoting the illegal financial pursuits of his family clan.
- Political elites in Tunisia lack a political vision for the future and play more the role of bureaucratic administrators.
- Than political players. Rather than promoting genuine democracy (Haddad, Bsheer & Abu-Rish, 2012, pp.60-62).

4- The effect of new communication on the jasmine revolution:

The internet, mainly Facebook and Twitter, played a major role in mobilizing the youth. The new technologies penetrated the area where information was controlled by the Tunisian government, but the government was notable for controlling it as tightly as traditional sources of information. When security forces forbade the zone of Sidi Bouzid, where Bouazizi had committed suicide, from being

exposed to the national and international media, a group of savvy bloggers, more than one hundred of whom had been censored during the previous months, succeeded in sidestepping government censorship and disseminating the news of the events in that town (Khosrokhavar, 2012, p.41). The number of connections (more than 1.5 million Tunisians, almost one out of six, use Facebook) made censorship more difficult for the government.

Social media played a major role in connecting the trade union movement with the young middle class and organizing demonstrations in Tunisia just before the downfall of the dictator.

5- The outcomes of the Jasmin's revolution:

The task facing the National Constituent Assembly is a challenging one to draw-up a new constitution that will provide a governmental and societal structure that is perceived to be representative of the values and interests of Tunisian citizens and, therefore, a legitimate expression of a new social contract. In order to attain this outcome, procedural factors as well as the content of the document will be crucial.

A- The Post-Transition Constitutional Process:

Following Ben Ali's departure on January 14th, 2011, Tunisia went through three interim arrangements before the October 2011 elections. Due to continued protester pressure, three reform committees were created, including the High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (also known as the Ben Achour Commission). This 150-member commission contained representatives from twelve political parties and eighteen civil society organizations. At this stage of the transition, the debate that polarized elites and protesters was what the next significant step should be; either a presidential election with constitutional continuity or elections for a constituent assembly. In view of the high level of mistrust of old elites and institutions, combined with the revolutionary fervor of the population, particularly through the so-called "Kasbah 2" sit-in, the Ben Achour Commission announced elections for a constituent assembly and then, on March 23rd, 2011, suspended the 1959 constitution. It was replaced as an interim arrangement with Decree Law 14, which empowered the interim government to make decisions with a limited mandate, such as adopting the new electoral law on April 12th, 2011, which favored a variation on closed-list proportional representation.

B- The National Constituent Assembly:

Elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) took place on October 23rd, 2011 and resulted in a three-party coalition, or 'troika' as it is now referred to. Ennahdha, the moderate Islamist party, gained the highest number of

seats, winning 89 out of a possible 217. It made a coalition agreement with both the Congress for the Republic (CPR) party, which gained 29 seats, and Ettakatol (or Forum Democratic pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL), with its 20 seats. These elections, while being correctly lauded as a success under the circumstances, were not controversy-free with regard to the resultant operating legitimacy of the NCA. First of all, there was a high level of public confusion over the purpose of the elections. According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) polling data from May 2011 (Daphne, 2011, p.16).

Less than half of eligible voters could identify that the elections were for a constituent assembly and not a legislature or executive. This lack of public awareness, combined with the closed-list system, has led some to suggest that the NCA began its mandate with a "credibility deficit" (Pickard, 2011, 641).

The NCA's mandate is write the new constitution and to prepare the country for presidential or parliamentary elections in November 2012, depending on what the agreed upon institutional arrangements call for. Beyond this mandate, the scope of what the NCA can do is not completely clear. It is also a sovereign body that has semi-legislative powers that enable it to determine how the country is governed in the interim. As Pickard notes, this has given rise to the unusual situation of sovereign authority being placed in a constituent assembly (Pickard 2011, p.642).

Referring back to the literature on this subject, this dual mandate may negatively impact the success of the constitution-writing process since it almost requires posturing for the upcoming elections in November through its semi-legislative powers, possibly resulting in the neglect in the constitution. The dual mandate means that the NCA's legitimacy and efficacy face another challenge. The expectations of swift change in the day-to-day lives of normal Tunisians have been soaring at a higher level than can be met in such a short time following the ousting of the previous regime. Economic and social issues are pressing, and having the same body try to tackle these and write a constitution may affect the legitimacy that the public is willing to give to the constitution if the NCA has failed to make progress in tackling these issues.

Following the elections, the first item on the NCA's agenda was to determine how it would function internally before beginning work on drafting constitutional articles. The representatives of Ettakatol and some other parties were keen, at this stage, to form a "government of national interests" in the NCA, or a grand coalition, with the vast majority of the seats in the assembly. However, they were unable to reach a unanimous agreement, and so the 'troika' was formed, and government positions were divided among the three parties. With the internal arrangements finalized only in January, the Assembly could finally turn to the discussion of the articles.

There are five main issue areas around which the debate has centered during the drafting of the constitution: the role of religion in public life; the separation of powers, women's rights and universal values, decentralization, and, finally, the 'style' of government, either presidential, parliamentary, or some mix of the two. While some of these debates are likely to be uncontroversial, others are likely to divide both the constituents and the Tunisian population at large. Given Tunisia's status as a relatively ethnically homogenous and non-sectarian nation.

C- Political Party Development:

In the last decade of Ben Ali's rule, the country's political system seemed increasingly out of touch with the majority of its people. The ruling party, which had existed in various forms since the country's inception, and its leader, Ben Ali, no longer enjoyed popular or grassroots support. The eight legal opposition parties were weak, only expressing muted dissent in exchange for the privilege to participate formally in the political system (Long, Reich & Gasiorowski 2010, p.519). The only group with the potential to transform itself into a major political force—Ennahdha—was banned from forming a party. In short, the ossified political system at the time of the uprising in Tunisia was unable to respond to rising demands and discontent. The fact that tens of thousands of Tunisians were driven into the streets to express their grievances revealed the extent to which the Tunisian population no longer felt that their formal political system was responsive to their demands.

With the opening up of the political system, Tunisians had the opportunity to organize themselves politically for the first time without any pressure from the regime. This hard-won right to form political parties freely did not come without serious challenges. The legacy of 60 years of dictatorship will linger for years to come.

The best organized and most experienced political organization under the old regime, namely the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), was disbanded in March 2011, causing many of the party's former members and some of the more politically-oriented Tunisians to disappear, at least temporarily, from the political scene. While the party had resorted to increasing levels of coercion to maintain its dominance, the RCD and its forerunners had enjoyed widespread support for periods of time under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. With 2.5 million members, 80,000 party activists, and 7,800 branches, the RCD monopolized the political space (Long, Reich & Gasiorowski, 2010, p.527) and its sudden demise has thus left an enormous gap for other parties to fill.

The NCA elections on 23 October 2011 provided the first real opportunity to evaluate the strength of the political parties, and as predicted, Ennahdha was the clear winner. However, many analysts did not anticipate the performance gap between Ennahdha and its secular rivals. Ennahdha captured 37% of the vote,

while the next closest party, Congress for the Republic, won only 8%. Of all the parties falling short of expectations at the polls, the PDP's (Progressive Democratic Party) poor showing came as the biggest surprise. The party captured only 3% of the vote, despite supposedly being well positioned as one of the main opposition parties under Ben Ali. The biggest surprise success story may have been Al-Aridha, a party that emerged from nowhere to place third in terms of seat allocations.

The distribution of seats between the parties is analyzed further below, but first, it is important to remember who the current NCA represents—half of all eligible voters who exercised their right to vote. Only two-thirds of those voters are now represented in the assembly by the party they selected. The other third voted for parties that did not receive enough votes to receive a seat in the NCA (Pickard 2011, p.639). In other words, the current composition of the NCA reflects the will of approximately 34% of the population of voting age.

For this reason and others, Ennahdha's victory does not lend itself to a clear-cut interpretation. Part of Ennahdha's success owes to its grassroots network of supporters and apparently deep financial resources, as well as its reputation for being effective and capable of getting things done. Moreover, Ennahdha enjoyed the greatest level of name recognition throughout the country due to its highly visible opposition to Bourguiba and Ben Ali, as well as its efforts to campaign in both rural and urban areas throughout the country.

D- Tunisian Civil Society After the Revolution:

Overview of Civil Society in Tunisia: To clarify the state of civil society in Tunisia, however, we must specify what we mean by "civil society". In her 1995 assessment of civil society in Tunisia, Eva Bellin described "civil society" as an "exquisitely ambiguous term...elastic enough to accommodate a wide variety of political ambitions but historically weighty enough to imbue each with a deep moral resonance" (Bellin 1995, p.120).

Civil society can be defined narrowly as the roster of registered NGOs in a country or broadly as all forms of "associational life", ranging from local soccer clubs to multi-billion dollar corporations. Regardless of the inclusiveness of our definition, civil society organizations should serve as a conduit for citizens' interests and as a check against government abuse. In authoritarian regimes, civil society does not properly perform this function. The authoritarian state co-opts and represses civil society, and the state's survival usually depends on keeping civil society weak and disorganized. Tunisia, from independence to the January 2011 revolution, was a classic case of a single-party state whose preservation was dependent on the ability of the party to "contain pluralistic competition within its own rules and organization or [to] skillfully manage the sources of pluralism so as to tame them within the single-party framework" (Zartman, 1991, p.11). In a healthy democracy, civil society is a central source of such pluralistic competition,

but throughout Tunisia's whole post-Independence history, civil society was effectively co-opted by the single-party state.

In Tunisia, the country's two single-party regimes between 1956 and 2011—Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destourian Party and later the Destourian Socialist Party (PSD) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD)—used different tactics to ensure that civil society in Tunisia remained fragmented and impotent, posing no serious opposition to their respective regimes.

Civil society in Tunisia today has been freed of nearly all of the restrictions of the Ben Ali regime, and as a result, thousands of new civil society groups have emerged throughout the country. The Law on Associations that allowed the Ben Ali regime to repress civil society was officially amended in a decree on September 24th, 2011 by the interim government; the new law makes it significantly easier for citizens to form associations, and removes all criminal penalties for activities associated with establishing or running civil society organizations. Now, citizens who wish to form civil society groups must only register with municipal authorities, instead of needing to obtain a visa from the Interior Ministry. An unofficial estimate by a Tunis-based scholar put the number of registered NGOs at 20,000 in the country by June 2011, compared to 8,000 in December 2010. The ease of registering new NGOs combined with the freedom with which groups can congregate has led to newfound cooperation across groups. NGOs have formed coalitions to address issues of mutual concern.

The Tunisian transition is currently tackling what Stephan describes as 'the Twin Tolerations'—namely, the toleration of religious citizens towards the state and the toleration of state officials and state law to permit religious citizens to freely express their views and values within civil society and in politics, as long as other citizens' constitutional rights and the law are respected (Stephan, 2012, pp.89-103).

Tolerance and the accommodation of difference initially enabled Tunisia to integrate important political actors into the transitional process, hold elections, and thus far navigate the divisions between secular and religious Tunisians. Divisions between secular and religious CSOs are re-emerging as Tunisia determines the degree to which the role of religious or secular identities of Tunisians shapes the state's future. Since the revolution, debate and associated fears over the separation of religion and state have become increasingly visible and divisive. Secularists fear that Ennahdha is creating a religious state by stealth.

For every organization in favor of democratization, there is likely to be another in favor of more conservative social values. The social capital, or value, of organized social voices is created where there are strong institutional frameworks to facilitate the expression of differing views and open debate. Difficulties tend to arise when civil society develops apace, but democratic institutions are not fully

entrenched. When democratic institutions are embryonic, the state and other elites are, as Snyder and Ballantine observe, 'forced to engage in public debate in order to compete for mass allies in the struggle for power'. (Snyder& Ballentine, 1996,p.14) A robust civil society can shape, support and sustain democratic movements, but it can also scuttle democratising efforts. While civil society can play a positive role in driving political, social and even economic outcomes, political associations and capable not crumbling institutions are as important as civil society instruments in determining the impact of civil society activism (Berman,1997,p. 429). Civil society and state institutions need to co-evolve in a mutually productive way. Compatible capacities are needed to offset transitional problems that threaten to polarise civil society positions.

E- Presidential Election in Tunisia :

The 2014 elections: As no candidate won a majority in the first round, a second round between incumbent Moncef Marzouki and Nidaa Tounes candidate Beji Caid Essebsi took place on 21st December. Official results released on 22 December showed that Essebsi won the elections with 55.68% of the vote (Carter center, p.04).

The 2014 elections demonstrated Tunisia's efforts to build permanent democratic institutions that guarantee the protection of human rights and ensure transparent and representative governance.

The 2019 elections: The results of the first round of the Tunisian presidential elections held on September 15th, 2019, indicated that independent candidate Kais Saied topped the list of candidates, followed by the currently imprisoned Nabil Karoui, while Ennahda candidate Abdelfattah Mourou came in third, according to the results announced by the Independent High Authority for Elections.

Independent candidate and constitutional law professor Kais Saied topped the list gaining more than 18% of the votes, while Nabil Karoui, the businessman arrested on charges related to corruption, money laundering, and tax evasion, came in second at 15%. Kais Saied's progress was not surprising, with several polls demonstrating his high ratings. The combined votes of the two winners represent 33% of the vote, which in turn makes up 45% of voters. This is not a decisive victory but serves as evidence of the fragmentation of the party map (the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2019).

6-Challenges and the future of the Jasmin's revolution:

A- Political issues:

Tunisian President Kais Saied abruptly suspended Parliament on July 25th, 2021 removed cabinet ministers including the minister of defense, assumed executive power over the judiciary, and deployed the military to enforce his rule.

The military subsequently prevented elected members of parliament from meeting. Parliament, for its part, has characterized Saied's actions as unconstitutional. Democracy advocates, both domestic and international, have called Saied's actions "a coup against the revolution and constitution".

Article 80 of Tunisia's 2014 Constitution allowed the president to take exceptional measures for 30 days "in the event of an imminent danger threatening the homeland's integrity or the country's security and its independence, in a way that results in the impossibility of carrying on with the normal functioning of state institutions." Saied argued that he had no choice but to unlock a political crisis that, he contends, has brought Tunisia to the brink of economic and public health collapse (the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021).

B- Terrorism and insecurity:

Overall the main challenge, facing the Tunisians Jasmin's revolution is security concerns such as violent extremist groups across North and West Africa are exploiting porous borders and the weaknesses of security forces. These groups—such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb(AQIM), its affiliates and break-away factions, and movements calling themselves Ansar AlSharia (Supporters of Islamic Law).

Several Tunisia-based extremist groups have emerged since 2011, including Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia and a cell known as the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade, which is reportedly active in an area known as Mount Chaambi, near the Algerian border. Insecurity along the Libyan border to the east and in the remote desert south is also of concern, as both areas appear to be key transit zones for regional smuggling networks. Some observers attribute the increase in Jihadist activity since 2011 to the release of over 1,000 "political prisoners" of various stripes in early 2011 (one of whom went on to found Ansar al Sharia), security force disorganization in the aftermath of the revolution; and events in Mali and Libya. Jihadist groups may also draw on support from Tunisian Salafist groups and communities. (Alexis, 2015, pp.08-09).

C-The economic challenges:

The Tunisian economy is not in good shape. It had been hit early on after the 2011 revolution by several negative shocks, including a collapse in tourism (especially after the rising insecurity of 2012-13, and the terrorist attacks of 2015-16), the loss of the Libyan market, and a fall in the production of phosphates and oil, due to badly managed work-related disputes in state-owned enterprises. These losses at 6% of GDP lost per year on average compared to 2010, and 14% of GDP lost relative to the GDP trend that existed in 2010 (Diwan, 2019).

These economic weaknesses can be largely related to the particular political developments that took place, notably the rise of the politics of consensus, which

may have been essential from a political point of view but have paralyzed the ability of addressing the important economic challenges facing the country.

Tunisia is facing a constitutional crisis rooted in challenges to the separation of powers and the reach of executive authority. The outcome has implications not only for Tunisia but prospects for democracy across MENA.

Conclusion:

So can we call the Tunisian uprising a revolution debate still rages among Tunisians themselves.

Many of those who remain unemployed, or who found that policies have gone their way, or that strike failed to secure their demands, may say nothing has changed yet no one who had visited Tunisia before January 2011 could deny that the country has indeed been transformed by late 2011, political parties were freely competing for popularity in a country that had essentially been a one party state since independence.

Anyone could organize and hold a peaceful protest or strike and they did so every day. The media has some way to go in overcoming its bad old habits, but journalists are mostly free to write who they want and criticize who they like. Tunisians can express their political views without fear of the secret police, now disbanded, and even if they are being watched.

The reality is that Tunisia is midway through a political revolution that has a relatively high chance of success. It has an educated population and an active civil society, an effective education system. The over whelming majority of its people are Muslims and tribal loyalties are weak, Minimizing the risks of sectarian or clan violence, over all Tunisia has a long history as a state.

It is not a country that was created by Imperial powers. Which are can be riddled with ethnic or regional divisions it has the basic institutions of a democratic state, a bicameral parliament needs to have its powers expanded, the presidency must be curbed and the justice system needs to be truly free of political interference there is much to build upon, but it takes decades to construct a culture of democracy.

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