

# World Report 2025



## Tunisia

### Events of 2024

Demonstrators wave Tunisian flags and raise placards during a demonstration organized by the Tunisian Network for Rights and Freedoms in Tunis, Tunisia, on September 22, 2024.

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Tunisian authorities intensified repression of political opposition and other critical voices by carrying out mass arrests, imprisoning journalists, and targeting civil society groups.

As of November, over 80 people were detained on political grounds or for exercising their fundamental rights, including [political opponents](#), activists, [lawyers](#), [journalists](#), human rights defenders, and social media users.

Authorities [undermined](#) the integrity of the October 6 presidential election to ensure President Kais Saied's re-election, including by excluding or imprisoning prospective challengers and amending the electoral law just days before the election.

Tunisian security forces continued abuses against migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees with impunity. The European Union continued efforts to enhance migration cooperation with Tunisia despite ongoing violations.

## Presidential Election

In October, President Kais Saied was [re-elected](#) for a second term with 90.69 percent of the vote on 28.8 percent voter turnout.

Tunisian authorities intensified repression in the run-up to the [election](#) and targeted several potential presidential challengers to Saied. They [convicted or detained](#) at least 10 prospective candidates, as well as several members of their campaign teams, while harassing and intimidating others.

On August 10, the electoral commission [approved](#) only three candidates for the presidential election and [rejected](#) 14 others. Several candidates [filed appeals](#) before the administrative court, and three of them won, but the electoral commission disregarded the rulings.

On September 2, authorities arrested Ayachi Zammel, one of just three approved presidential candidates. On September 18, a Jendouba court [sentenced](#) him to 20 months in prison, and on September 25, it sentenced him to an additional six months. On September 30, a Tunis court [sentenced](#) Zammel to 12 years' [imprisonment](#) and a ban on voting, on [charges](#) of falsifying endorsements' signatures. A member of his campaign team arrested on September 27 was [sentenced](#) to 12 years in prison.

Tunisia's electoral commission, which Saied [restructured](#) in 2022 to place under his control, arbitrarily [denied](#) accreditation to two leading election observation groups, I Watch and Mourakiboun, under the pretext of "suspicious foreign financing." Both groups are now facing investigation.

## Political Crackdown

Authorities carried out a wholesale political crackdown leading up to the October elections. In September, security officers [arrested](#) over a hundred members or supporters of the Ennahda opposition party under Tunisia's [counterterrorism law](#). They were released after several days in custody, except for four who were placed in pre-trial detention.

On July 18, a Tunis court [sentenced](#) Lotfi Mraibi, leader of the Republican People's Union and prospective presidential candidate, to eight months in prison and imposed a lifetime ban on running for office for allegedly "making donations in cash or in kind in order to influence voters." His party's executive director and three other members were also convicted and sentenced.

On August 5, a Tunis court [sentenced](#) five other prospective presidential candidates, Abdellatif Mekki, Nizar Chaari, Mourad Messaoudi, Mohamed Adel Dou, and Leila Hammami to eight months in prison and a lifetime ban on running for office, on the same charges.

That same day, a Tunis court also [sentenced](#) Abir Moussi, president of the Free Destourian Party, to two years in prison under Decree-Law 54 on Cybercrime for "spreading fake news" about the electoral commission.

On August 14, a Jendouba court [sentenced](#) a rapper and prospective candidate, Karim Gharbi, to four years in prison and a lifetime ban on running for office, on charges of buying endorsement signatures. Four people volunteering for Gharbi's campaign were also [sentenced](#) to prison terms.

## Judicial Independence

Saied's government [continued](#) to systematically [undermine judicial independence](#), targeting judges and using the judiciary to serve his political ends. On October 3, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights [ordered](#) the suspension of the presidential decree giving the president [authority to dismiss](#) magistrates and the decree by which Saied dismissed 57 judges and prosecutors in 2022.

On September 27, Tunisia's Assembly of the Representatives of the People passed a [new law](#) stripping the Administrative Court of jurisdiction in electoral matters, preventing it from acting as a check on abuses.

## Freedom of Expression

Authorities continued to use repressive laws to muzzle freedom of expression, including Decree-Law 54 on Cybercrime, which violates the right to privacy and provides harsh sentences for vaguely defined speech offenses.

On January 31, the Monastir Appeals Court sentenced Rached Tamboura to two years in prison under Decree 54, in connection with graffiti showing a portrait of Saied flanked by the words “racist vassal greed fascist.”

On March 7, the Kef Military Court sentenced Nasreddine Halimi to seven years in prison under the Cybercrime Law and Tunisia’s military justice code for Facebook posts criticizing the president and the military. The sentence was later reduced to two years and Halimi was released in June.

Between October and November, several social media influencers were sentenced to prison terms in connection with content deemed “offensive to public morals and decency.”

## Media Freedom

Authorities ramped up their crackdown on media freedom, gradually wiping out criticism and diversity from the media landscape. At least five media professionals were behind bars for their work or opinions as of November.

According to the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists, at least 39 cases were brought against journalists for their work since May 2023, including under the Cybercrime law and the counterterrorism law.

On January 10, a Tunis court sentenced journalist Zied El-Heni to a six-month suspended prison sentence for “insulting” the trade minister at the time, Kalthoum Ben Rejeb, after he criticized her on a radio show.

On July 6, a Tunis court sentenced Sonia Dahmani, a lawyer and media commentator arrested on May 11, to a year in prison for critical remarks on a TV show, under Decree-Law 54. Her sentence was later reduced to eight months. On October 24, she was sentenced in another case to two years in prison for her statements.

On May 22, a Tunis court sentenced Borhen Bsaias and Mourad Zeghidi, both prominent journalists, to a year in prison under the same law. Their sentences were later reduced to eight months.

On April 17, journalist Mohamed Boughalleb was sentenced to six months in prison for defaming an official after he criticized the religious affairs minister. He has been detained since March 22.

## Attacks on Civil Society

Authorities have targeted several civil society groups and activists with arrests, interrogation, and by opening investigations into their financing. Authorities clamped down on solidarity with migrants and arrested members of organizations providing aid to asylum seekers and refugees, fueling an even more dire situation.

Between May 3 and 13, security forces arrested at least six members of three legally registered nongovernmental organizations working on migration, asylum, and racial justice: Mnemty, the Tunisian Refugee Council (TRC), and Terre d’Asile Tunisie. Members of other organizations were investigated and summoned during the same period.

TRC's director, Mustafa Djemali, and its project director, Abderrazek Krimi, were [arrested](#) on May 2 and placed in pretrial detention on charges of illegally sheltering persons in Tunisia. TRC, which was shut down by authorities at the time, was a key partner of UNHCR in Tunisia, primarily responsible for collection and screening asylum applications, and arranging emergency accommodation and medical assistance for refugees and asylum seekers.

[Saadia Mosbah](#), head of the anti-racism organization Mnemty, was arrested on May 6. Mosbah was later placed in detention pending investigation into alleged financial crimes under [Tunisia's 2015 counterterrorism law](#) in connection with Mnemty's funding and activities.

Two current or former members of Terre d'Asile Tunisie were in pretrial detention, pending investigation into the organization's funding.

On August 1, a judge [detained](#) former president of the Truth and Dignity Commission, Sihem Bensedrine, on charges of "using her position to gain unfair advantage," "fraud," and "forgery" in connection with the commission's final report. On August 8, three UN experts [said](#) Bensedrine's arrest "could amount to judicial harassment...for work she has undertaken" as head of the commission.

## Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees

As of October, there were over 15,600 refugees and asylum seekers [registered with the UN refugee agency \(UNHCR\)](#) in Tunisia, including over 7,400 Sudanese nationals, many of whom had fled Sudan's conflict since April 2023.

UN experts [expressed](#) alarm over "shocking reports" of human rights violations against migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking. During 2024, security forces, notably the National Guard, continued unlawful and abusive collective expulsions of hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers to the borders of Algeria and Libya, leaving people in remote desert areas in life-threatening conditions – an ongoing pattern [since 2023](#). In one instance in early May, shortly after a [Rome meeting](#) on migration between the interior ministers of Algeria, Italy, Libya, and Tunisia, security forces [raided](#) two makeshift camps and a [youth hostel](#) in Tunis, evicting hundreds of Black African migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. At least 80 were [arrested](#) and 400 or more were [expelled](#) to the country's borders, including [Sudanese asylum seekers](#).

President Saied [claimed](#) on May 6 that foreign funding was being funneled through national organizations to settle migrants in Tunisia illegally, referring to their heads as "traitors." This followed his 2023 tirade against migrants from African countries, which set off a [wave](#) of violent, xenophobic attacks.

The EU continued its migration management cooperation with Tunisia, building on a 2023 memorandum of understanding that increased EU funding to the Tunisian authorities to stem irregular sea migration to Europe, without adequate human rights safeguards. The EU failed to speak up against authorities' violations of migrant rights and attacks against civil society groups.

## Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Tunisia is still facing an economic crisis with high public debt and inflation affecting economic and social rights. Public debt in 2024 [reached](#) about 80 percent of GDP, and according to the [National Institute of Statistics](#), inflation stood at 6.7 percent as of September and food prices increased by 9.2 percent compared to 2023.

As of June, at least several [hundred people were in prison](#) solely for writing checks they were later unable to pay, amounting to imprisonment for debt and violating international human rights law. Insolvent people [were](#) imprisoned or forced to live in hiding or exile, fueling a cycle of

indebtedness and reducing entire households to hardship.

On July 30, the Assembly of People's Representatives adopted a [new law](#) that reduced prison sentences and financial penalties for unpaid checks. The law mandated that prosecution for bad checks is no longer automatic, required the public prosecutor to explore mediation before prosecution, and allowed for detainees to request release. According to the [Justice Ministry](#), over 500 people have been [released](#) since the new law came into effect on August 2.