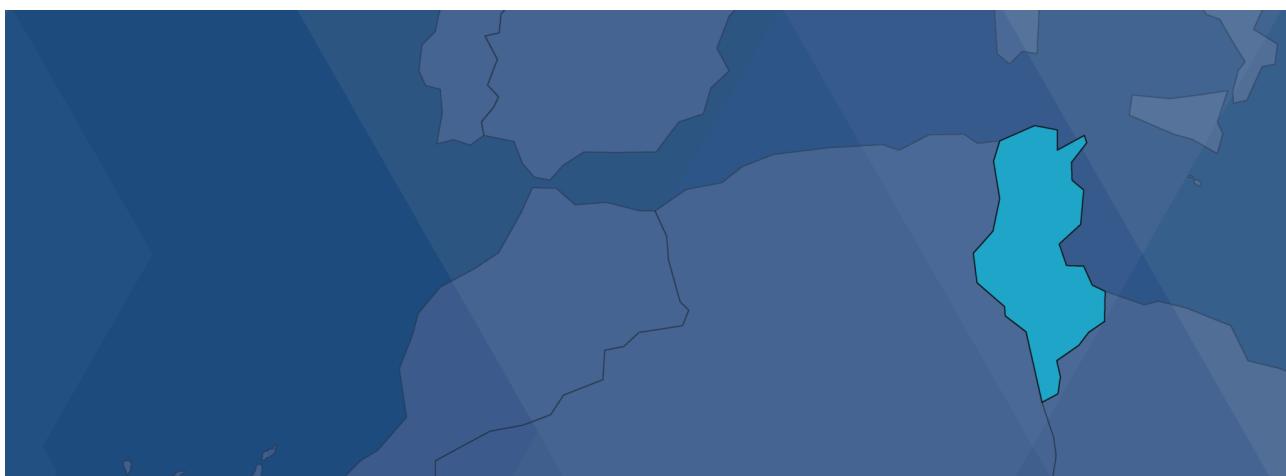


Tunisia

< CIVIC FREEDOM MONITOR



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Recent Developments

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Introduction

Civil society in Tunisia has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's political landscape, particularly since the 2011 Revolution. In the post-revolution period, civil society organizations (CSOs) were instrumental in advancing democratic reforms, including the adoption of a new constitution and the organization of free elections.

Tunisia's legal system follows the civil law tradition, with strong French influence. Decree No. 88 of 2011, adopted after the revolution, established one of the most enabling civil society frameworks in the Middle East and North Africa. It provides broad protections for freedom of association, prohibits state interference in CSOs' operations, and affirms CSOs' right to engage in public affairs.

In practice, however, civic freedoms have been increasingly restricted. Since 2021, President Kais Saied's consolidation of power and the adoption of a new constitution have led to the erosion of democratic safeguards. CSOs face growing administrative hurdles, legal threats, and state harassment. The exercise of freedom of expression is constrained by broad and punitive laws that criminalize criticism of public officials and online speech, resulting in the arrests of journalists, activists, and government critics. Meanwhile, the right to peaceful assembly remains governed by an extremely restrictive law from 1969 that grants authorities significant discretion to suppress public assemblies.

This Civic Freedom Monitor (CFM) country note was made possible through the research conducted by Mohamed Fadhel Hamdi, President of the Associations and Sustainable Development International Observatory, in Tunis, Tunisia.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Associations, Foreign Organizations, Networks
Registration Body	Secretary General of the Government
Approximate Number	Approximately 25,140 NGOs as of 2024
Barriers to Formation	Mandatory legal establishment by notification and various constraints on foreign organizations to be established and operate in Tunisia.
Barriers to Operations	No significant barriers.
Barriers to Resources	Foreign funding requires public notification, and may only come from a country with diplomatic relations with Tunisia.
Barriers to Expression	President Saied issued a decree against spreading false information and rumors online, with prison sentences of up to 10 years for those who violate the rules. In addition, many journalists have recently faced pressure to reveal the source of their information.
Barriers to Assembly	The government has unrestricted powers to prevent or disallow peaceful demonstrations and gatherings.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Tunisia's legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [collapse all subheadings](#).

▼ RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1969
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1969
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1967
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1985
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	No
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1992
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2008

Key Regional Agreements

Ratification

African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)	1983
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* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

▼ CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The 2014 Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia provided broad protection for individuals' right to freedom of association and assembly. Article 35 stated that “[t]he freedom to establish political parties, unions, and associations is guaranteed.” The only stipulation was that “[i]n their internal charters and activities, political parties, unions and associations must respect the provisions of the Constitution, the law, financial transparency and the rejection of violence.” The Constitution also stated, in Article 37, that “[t]he right to assembly and peaceful demonstration is guaranteed.”

The [new Constitution](#) for Tunisia was adopted on July 25, 2022. Under the new system checks and balances on executive power that had existed under the previous system have been removed.

▼ NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Relevant national legislation includes the following:

- Decree Number 88 of 2011 pertaining to the Regulation of Associations
- Decree Number 5183 of 2013 pertaining to the Control of the Standards, Procedures, and Criteria for Public Funding of Associations
- Law No. 69-4 of 1969 regulating Public Meetings Processions, Parades, Demonstrations, and Gatherings
- Presidential Decree No. 2021-117 dated September 22, 2021 relating to exceptional measures ([Arabic](#))
- Decree No. 2022-54 dated September 13, 2022, related to combating crimes related to information and communication systems ([Arabic](#) and [French](#))

▼ PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

Members of Parliament in Tunisia [introduced a new draft law](#), No. 027/2023, which is now under discussion and would amend Decree No. 88 of 2011. However, in July 2024, reports emerged that the government was also [drafting](#) its own separate amendment of Decree No. 88 after a ministerial council was held on July 5, 2024 to consider whether or not to amend or repeal Decree No. 88. Decree No. 88 regulates the work of associations and non-profit organizations and is considered by NGOs and international organizations as a cornerstone of freedom of association.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed its fear of the impact of the new draft law on the freedom of associations to organize in Tunisia. The High Commissioner noted that Parliament and the government are competing to issue new legislation to repeal Decree No. 88 of 2011 but both of them work without coordination with the other. This has led to the existence of two draft laws with similar goals, which is to narrow the margin of civil society freedoms in Tunisia. Civil society activists have also made clear their desire to not change Decree No. 88 of 2011 and are deeply concerned about the two drafts of the government and parliament, especially because of the severe restrictions on the right to obtain foreign funding and to form associations, which have become threatened under both drafts.

As of mid-2025, discussion is still ongoing regarding amending Decree No. 88 of 2011 at the level of the “General Legislation Committee,” which since October 12, 2023 has been in charge of the draft law introduced by members of Parliament. The draft law that the government has prepared is still being discussed internally and has not yet been referred to Parliament.

Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of other pending initiatives, write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Tunisia’s legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

▼ ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

Decree No. 88 of 2011 establishes three legal forms for civil society organizations (CSOs): associations, networks of associations, and foreign organizations. An association is defined as “an agreement between two or more persons by virtue of which they operate permanently to achieve objectives that do not include the realization of profits.” However, Article 47 of the Decree stipulates that the provisions of this decree “do not apply to associations that are regulated by special laws.” This exception has created ambiguity regarding which associations fall under special legal frameworks and are therefore exempt from the regulations set out in Decree No. 88.

▼ PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Decree No. 88 does not provide for public benefit status, nor does it provide tax or customs exemptions for associations. Article 39 of the Decree requires associations to adopt the same

accounting practices and comply with the same systems and standards as mandated for companies. This imposes significant costs on associations, both in terms of staff time and financial resources.

▼ PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The main laws and regulations affecting public participation in Tunisia include:

- [Prime Minister's Circular No. 31, 2014](#), which urged the government to adopt a participatory process when preparing legislative texts.
- [Bylaws \(Rules of Procedure\) of the Assembly of People's Representatives, 2023](#), which require plenary sessions to be public and provide civil society the right to comment on draft laws.
- [Local Communities Law, 2018](#), which mandates public participation at the local level.

In practice, however, these laws are no longer being implemented. The electronic platform used to publish legislative texts and receive comments has been suspended, and Organic Law No. 4 of 2025, completely excludes civil society from local affairs.

Accessibility of Draft Legislation

Under Prime Minister's Circular No. 31, the government should present draft legislation through the [legislation.tn](#) website for public consultation. Citizens are invited to provide comments and suggestions within a 20-day period for the government's consideration. Based on public input, the Government Legal Counselor may amend the draft laws and post them again or refer them to the relevant authority for ratification. Prime Minister's Circular No. 31 recommends that ministries adopt citizens' proposals whenever possible.

In practice, however, since 2018, draft legislation has not been posted on the [legislation.tn](#) website. In response to complaints from civil society about the lack of consultation and coordination, a new [digital platform](#) was launched on June 30, 2020, through which civil society could submit comments on draft laws presented to the Assembly. However, this platform was also short-lived and no longer exists, leaving civil society without a mechanism to propose draft laws or comment on legal texts currently under consideration by the House of Representatives.

Parliamentary Consultation with Citizens

Since Tunisia's revolution in 2011, the Assembly of People's Representatives has provided some avenues for civil society input to draft laws. Despite these efforts, parliamentary restrictions on participation have increased. Media and journalists have been barred from attending committee sessions, and decisions were implemented to exclude civil society representatives entirely from both special committee work and general parliamentary sessions.

Since the establishment of the new Parliament in 2023, internal regulations require plenary sessions to be public and grant civil society the right to comment on draft laws. However, they also grant the Parliament's office the authority to specify the modalities for implementing this right. As of September 2025, the new Parliament had not yet invited civil society to provide input.

Public Consultation in the Constitutional Process

The executive has also failed to sufficiently seek public input. During the 2022 constitutional process, the president organized an online "popular consultation" that engaged only about 500,000 citizens. A committee of experts was subsequently formed to draft the constitution; however, both the committee's recommendations and public input were ultimately disregarded.

Local-level Public Participation

Public participation was formalized with the adoption of the Local Communities Law in 2018, which stipulated ways to ensure the participation of residents and civil society representatives in local decision-making, especially regarding development programs. For example, Chapter 29 of the

Local Communities Law provided for the appeal of decisions made within the framework of development preparation programs without consulting civil society. Chapter 30 requires local governments to keep records of civil society's opinions and questions and responses to such questions. However, all municipal councils have now been dissolved and replaced by local councils that have an advisory role, but are not open to CSOs.

Marginalized Communities

Participation in public life remains severely restricted for some marginalized groups. Article 230 of the Criminal Code, for example, still prescribes prison sentences for consensual same-sex relations. In 2018, two individuals were [sentenced to imprisonment](#) under this provision. The law and its enforcement effectively exclude LGBTQ+ groups from public participation.

Electoral Abstention

On December 17, 2022, Tunisia [held](#) the first round of legislative elections amid calls from the opposition to boycott the process, arguing that President Kais Saied had illegally suspended parliament and redrawn the country's political map. Voter turnout in the preliminary round was just 11 percent. The first session of the new parliament, held in March 2023, convened without the presence of an independent press, further raising concerns about the openness and inclusivity of political processes.

▼ BARRIERS TO FORMATION

Article 40 of the 2022 Tunisian Constitution stipulates that “The freedom to form parties, unions, and associations is guaranteed. Parties, unions, and associations must adhere, in their statutes and activities, to the provisions of the Constitution and the law, to financial transparency, and to the rejection of violence.”

Only two individuals are required to form an association in Tunisia. Founders must be at least 16 years old and either Tunisian nationals or foreign residents. Founders are prohibited from holding management positions in political parties.

Association members must be Tunisian nationals or foreign residents; be at least 13 years old; accept the association’s bylaws in writing; and pay the association’s subscription fee.

To become legally established, an association must send a registered letter of notification to the Secretary General of the government and submit a copy to the *Official Gazette of Tunisia* for publication. This letter must include:

- A declaration providing the title, purpose, objectives, and address of the association and any branches it may have
- Copies of the national identification cards of the founders and the Tunisian residency permits for any foreign founders
- Two original copies of the articles of association, signed by the founders, which must specify:
 1. The official name of the association in Arabic and any other languages, if applicable
 2. The address of the association’s headquarters
 3. A statement of the association’s objectives and method of implementation
 4. Membership and termination criteria and members’ rights and duties
 5. A statement of the association’s organizational structure, election procedures, and powers of each administrative body
 6. Identification of the body authorized to amend internal bylaws and decide on dissolution, merger, or division
 7. Decision-making methodology and dispute resolution mechanisms
 8. The amount of monthly or annual membership fees, if any

A notary public must certify that the letter includes all required elements before it is submitted. Associations incur nominal costs for notification, including approximately \$50 in publication fees for the *Official Gazette*.

Under Article 12 of Decree 88, an association is deemed legally constituted on the date the notification letter is sent and acquires legal personality on the date that the notification is published in the *Gazette*. Until these steps are completed, associations cannot open bank accounts, enter into contracts or agreements, or undertake activities.

A significant barrier, however, arises from administrative practices. Authorities often fail to acknowledge receipt of registration documents, leaving associations unable to finalize their legal status or operate as legal entities.

An additional requirement stems from the National Registry of Institutions Law No. 52 of 2018, which mandates that all associations register with the National Registry. Noncompliance with this obligation exposes association to criminal penalties.

▼ BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

Since the dissolution of parliament and the suspension of the constitution in 2020, civil society activity in Tunisia has sharply declined and seemingly entered a state of paralysis.

Legally, however, Tunisian law does not impose significant restrictions on the operations of associations. Decree No. 88 stipulates that associations' activities and funding must adhere to the principles of the rule of law, democracy, pluralism, transparency, equality, and human rights. Associations may not incite violence, hatred, fanaticism, or discrimination or engage in commercial activities for members' profit or to evade taxes.

At the same time, the Decree explicitly guarantees a broad range of operational rights. Article 5 affirms associations' right to:

- Access information
- Evaluate state institutions and submit recommendations for improving their performance
- Organize meetings, demonstrations, conferences, and workshops, and engage in “all types of civil activities”
- Publish reports and other materials
- Conduct opinion polls

The government is also obligated to “make all necessary arrangements” to protect individuals from violence, threats, or coercion when exercising their right to freedom of association.

Associations face relatively limited reporting and other administrative requirements. Those with annual revenues exceeding 100,000 Tunisian Dinars (approximately \$45,000) must retain a state-approved auditor and submit the auditor's annual report, along with financial statements. These must also be published in a print media outlet and on the association's website. Associations receiving public funding must submit annual reports to the Accounts Department detailing funding sources and expenditures. Similarly, associations receiving foreign funding must notify the Secretary General by registered letter, specifying the amount, source, and purpose of the funds, and publish this information both in a print media outlet and on the association's website. Any revisions to an association's bylaws must also be reported within one month using the same procedure.

The Decree prohibits public authorities from impeding or hampering associations' activities, directly or indirectly, and specifically protects associations' bank accounts from being frozen except by judicial decision. Nevertheless, organizations continue to report harassment by security authorities, including unannounced visits to headquarters and interrogations of staff.

Barriers to International Contact

There are no major legal obstacles to international communication or cooperation. Decree No. 88 does not restrict associations from engaging with individuals or organizations outside Tunisia. However, foreign organizations seeking to register and operate in Tunisia face additional requirements. Although they follow the same notification process as domestic organizations, the government may reject their registration within 30 days of receiving the notification letter.

▼ BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

Tunisian law generally does not restrict associations from securing resources from private individuals or organizations within the country. However, access to foreign funding is subject to several conditions. Decree No. 88 prohibits associations from receiving funding from countries that lack diplomatic relations with Tunisia or from any country that “defends the interests and policies” of such states. Associations that receive foreign donations or grants must notify the Secretary General of the government of the source, value, and purpose of the funds in a registered letter, within one month of the decision to request or accept the funds. They must also publish this information on their website and in a print media outlet within the same timeframe.

In addition, since the suspension of the 2014 Constitution and subsequent adoption of the 2022 Constitution, there has been an increase in harassment against associations that receive foreign funds. Activists working with these organizations are often accused of being agents for foreign countries

Public funding is governed by Article 36 of Decree No. 88, which provides that the state will allocate budgetary funds to support associations based on their “efficiency, projects, and activities.” This framework is further detailed in Decree No. 5183 of 2013, which regulates the standards, procedures, and criteria for awarding public funds. While intended to support civil society, the implementation of Decree No. 5183 has proven problematic. A number of CSOs have called for its amendment to address these challenges.

Recent amendments to Tunisia’s Counterterrorism and Anti-Money-Laundering Law have further complicated CSOs’ access to resources. Tunisian Basic Law No. 26 of 2015, which addresses counterterrorism and anti-money laundering, prohibits non-profit organizations from receiving cash payments exceeding TND 500 (USD 170 as of September 2025) if the funds are disbursed through multiple linked transactions. This measure is intended to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. However, these organizations are permitted to accept funds through bank transfers. The law also allows a competent court to order an organization’s dissolution if its administrators or members are found guilty of crimes enumerated in the law. Following revisions to the law in 2019, some banks and financial institutions have refrained from allowing associations to open accounts, creating additional barriers to their financial operations.

▼ BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

The Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression. Decree No. 88 does not impose significant barriers on speech or advocacy, but prohibits associations from collecting or donating funds to support political parties or candidates. It only explicitly protects their right “to express its political opinions and positions vis-à-vis issues of public affairs.” As noted above, Article 5 also guarantees associations the right to evaluate state institutions and submit recommendations to improve their performance. These provisions provide broad legal protection for associations to engage in advocacy and reform efforts.

However, in practice, these protections have been undermined by recent government actions. In September 2022, President Kais Saied issued Decree No. 54, which criminalizes the spread of false information and rumors online. Under Article 24, individuals using information networks to “produce, promote, publish, transmit or prepare false news, statements, rumours or forged documents” that harm others’ rights, public security, or national defense face five-years’ imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 Tunisian dinars (\$15,600). The penalty doubles to 10 years if the intended target is a public official. Since the issuance of Decree No. 54, numerous journalists, civil society activists, and political opponents have faced arrest and imprisonment for their statements, advocacy, or critical positions.

Despite legal guarantees allowing journalists to protect the identity of their sources, many have faced pressure to reveal them. President Saied has also pressured judges to issue rulings against political opponents and human rights activists. The president has suspended 57 judges from their duties, despite judicial rulings calling for their reinstatement.

Arrests of journalists and political figures have also escalated. In April 2023, police detained Ennahda party leader Rached Ghannouchi as part of a broader crackdown on opposition voices. In January 2024, Al-Jazeera journalist Samir Sassi was arrested by “anti-terrorism” officers at his home in Tunis. His detention followed Al-Jazeera’s coverage of Tunisia’s racially charged crackdown on undocumented Black migrants and its increasingly authoritarian responses to criticism. Similarly, in December 2023, police arrested three journalists for allegedly “insulting” the commerce minister.

▼ BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

Article 42 of Tunisia’s 2022 Constitution guarantees the freedom of peaceful assembly and demonstration. However, Law No. 69-4 of 1969, which remains in effect, imposes strict regulations on public meetings, processions, parades, demonstrations, and gatherings and gives authorities broad powers to suppress almost any assembly. The State of Emergency Law, first imposed on November 25, 2015, and repeatedly renewed since, has further restricted assemblies by allowing authorities to impose curfews and ban public protests outright without a court order.

Vague Provisions

Law No. 69-4 empowers authorities to prohibit any protest deemed likely to “disturb the peace” or “public order.” These terms are undefined, granting officials wide discretion to restrict assemblies. If authorities block a planned assembly, organizers may challenge the decision. The law requires the Interior Ministry to “look into the issue,” but provides no clear appeals process or judicial involvement.

The law also places an unreasonable burden on organizers, holding them responsible for preventing illegal acts, speech deemed harmful to public security or morals, or incitement to crime during an assembly. This contravenes international human rights standards, which recognize that individuals do not lose their right to peaceful assembly because of sporadic unlawful acts by others if they themselves remain peaceful.

Advance Notification

Law No. 69-4 requires prior notification for any public meeting. At least two Tunisian citizens residing in the locality must notify authorities of the meeting’s location, day, time, and purpose at least three days in advance and no more than fifteen.

Spontaneous Assemblies and Counter-Demonstrations

The law makes no provisions for spontaneous protests, effectively banning unplanned demonstrations.

Time, Place, and Manner Restrictions

Law No. 69-4 prohibits assemblies on public roads and after midnight unless they take place near stores or businesses that are open, in which case they may continue until the businesses close.

Police Enforcement

While most peaceful assemblies since the 2011 revolution have proceeded without interference, there have been incidents in which security officials have used excessive force. In September 2015, for instance, security forces violently dispersed peaceful demonstrators in Tunis and Kairouan protesting a proposed economic reconciliation bill, injuring several participants.

Criminal Penalties Individuals organizing public meetings or assemblies without prior notification face up to three months in prison. If authorities reject a notification and the assembly proceeds, organizers and participants can face prison terms of up to two years.

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. The Historical Notes section contains links to past developments which ICNL has reported on. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

▼ GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best – worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	105 (2023)	1 – 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	76 (2024)	1 – 142
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index	92 (2024)	179 – 1
Transparency International	92 (2024)	1 – 180
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Partly Free Political Rights: 11 Civil Liberties: 33 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 – 0 60 – 0

▼ REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Tunisia UPR page
Reports of UN Special Rapporteurs	Tunisia
U.S. State Department	2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Tunisia
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index Reports	Tunisia
IMF Country Reports	Tunisia and the IMF
Human Rights Watch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Events of 2024 (2025)• Tunisia: Drastic Closure of Civic Space (2025)
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	Tunisia

▼ NEWS

Mass convictions in ‘Conspiracy Case 2’ deepen rule of law crisis (July 2025)

The mass conviction of opposition figures in Tunisia’s “Conspiracy Case 2” is a new example of the Tunisian authorities’ ongoing restrictions on civic space and erosion of judicial independence and fair trial guarantees, Amnesty International said. The case, based on vague terrorism and state security charges, is the latest in a series of politically motivated prosecutions that appear designed to silence peaceful dissent and intimidate and crackdown on critics of President Kais Saied’s government.

Tunisia’s civil society struggles to survive (July 2025)

In May 2024, Tunisian activist Cherifa Riahi was arrested just two months after giving birth, accused of harbouring illegal migrants. Over a year later, she is still in prison without charge. Rights groups see Riahi’s case as a symbol of accelerating repression of civil society under President Kais Saied, who dissolved parliament in 2021 and began ruling by decree. The crackdown marks a significant turnaround for Tunisia, where civil society groups flourished in the wake of the 2011 uprising that unseated President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, inspired other Arab Spring uprisings, and helped shape a democratic transition.

Migration in Tunisia: The government’s doublespeak (December 2024)

On May 8, police arrested Cherifa Riahi, former president of the association Tunisie Terre d’Asile (a branch of France Terre d’Asile), for embezzlement and helping sub-Saharan Africans to settle in Tunisia. The same month, Iyadh Bousselmi and Mohamed Joujou of the same association were also arrested. Before Riahi’s arrest and while she was on maternity leave, parliamentary deputy Badreddine Gammoudi called the public prosecutor to take action against her. Gammoudi made the request following an interview that aired on a private radio station in 2023 in which Riahi discussed the association’s activities. Among its projects, Terre d’Asile supported the social and economic integration of undocumented migrants, especially through the creation of micro-projects.

Tunisia investigates activists amid crackdown on the pro-Palestine movement (November 2024)

In Tunisia, authorities are investigating three additional pro-Palestine activists amid an escalating crackdown on the movement following President Kais Saied’s reelection. Pro-Palestine activists Maher Al-Kouki, Asrar Ben Jouira, and journalist Khawla Boukrim were released after hours of questioning at the Ben Arous court, near the capital Tunis. “While the activists have been released, the case remains open, and there is a possibility that four more activists may soon be summoned for questioning”, said Wael Nawar, a member of the Tunisian Coordination for Joint Action for Palestine.

Kais Saied’s Grip on Tunisia Comes at a High Cost (October 2024)

Tunisia’s extensive social expenditure has proven to be both unfair and inefficient, further worsening the country’s financial problems. However, this substantial spending has allowed Kais Saied’s regime to buy time and keep the country afloat until the elections. Now that the elections are over, persisting with this approach risks fueling a vicious cycle that could lead to social instability.

Tunisian lawyer sentenced to two years in prison (October 2024)

Sonia Dahmani, a well-known Tunisian lawyer and vocal critic of President Kais Saied, has been sentenced to two years in prison for insulting her country, according to her lawyer. The charges stem from comments Dahmani made during a local radio interview earlier this year, where she referred to Tunisia as a “racist country.” These remarks came after incidents of clashes between migrants and residents. Dahmani has been incarcerated since May and was previously sentenced in September to eight months in prison for stating that Tunisia was not a good place to live.

Tunisian President Kais Saied wins second term in landslide victory (October 2024)

Kais Saied has been re-elected president of Tunisia with 90.69% of votes cast, electoral authority ISIE said, although low turnout reflected widespread discontent in the cradle of the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings. Three years after Saied made a sweeping power grab, rights groups fear his re-election will entrench his grip on the only democracy to emerge from the 2011 protests.

Authorities Undermine Election Integrity (October 2024)

Tunisian authorities have undermined the integrity of the October 6, 2024 presidential election by amending the electoral law just days beforehand, Human Rights Watch said. The authorities excluded or arrested opposition candidates, and took arbitrary measures against political opponents, independent media, and civil society.

UN expert alarmed by arrests and smear campaigns against migrant rights defenders (October 2024)

The arrest of migrant rights defenders and the general climate of hate speech and smear campaigns against them in Tunisia is further evidence that the country is backsliding in its commitment to the protection of human rights, a UN expert said. “It is appalling to hear official statements accusing those who assist migrants, asylum seekers and refugees of being traitors and foreign agents,” said Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human right defenders.

At least 97 Arrested as Authorities Escalate Pre-election Crackdown (September 2024)

Tunisian authorities have stepped up their clampdown on the rights to freedom of expression and association ahead of the presidential elections on 6 October 2024, escalating their harassment of political opponents, restricting the work of journalists, human rights defenders and NGOS and taking steps to further undermine judicial independence. In the latest escalation at least 97 members of opposition group Ennahda were arrested between 12 and 13 September.

The July 25th Path, Democracy, and Dictatorship in Tunisia (August 2024)

Following one of the world’s most dramatic democratic transitions since the early 1990s, Tunisia’s descent into personalist rule has been equally stark. Although Kais Saied’s accumulation of power bears similarities to executive aggrandizement in other parts of the world, Saied’s regime is atypical in other ways that may be telling of the president’s assets and liabilities as he and his opposition navigate the first presidential elections since the coup.

How Tunisia’s upcoming presidential elections will erode its democracy (July 2024)

President Kais Saied of Tunisia, who was elected in 2019, has called for new elections this October. While a victory might seem to legitimize his presidency, the West should not be deceived. The upcoming elections are unlikely to be free and fair, due to ongoing crackdowns on opposition leaders and critics, persistent human rights violations, and the consolidation of power across all three branches of government. These elections will likely enable further consolidation of power and undo more than a decade of progress in building democratic institutions.

Lawyer arrested for TV remarks (May 2024)

On May 11, 2024, masked security forces in civilian clothing stormed the Bar Association offices in Tunis to arrest lawyer and media personality Sonia Dahmani. Two days later, an investigative judge in the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered her detention over critical remarks she made on a TV show. Sonia is accused of spreading false information under the harsh cybercrimes Decree-Law. This law carries a five-year prison sentence and a fine of 50,000 dinars (about 21,788 CAD). Sonia Dahmani is now arbitrarily detained in Manouba prison in Tunis.

Authorities escalate clampdown on media and freedom of expression (May 2024)

Tunisian authorities have ramped up their crackdown on media and freedom of expression in recent weeks, sentencing two journalists and a media founder to prison sentences, detaining another media figure, and intimidating private media, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities should immediately release those detained and drop all prosecutions for expression protected under international human rights law.

Tunisians rally against government crackdown on media (May 2024)

Two Tunisian media figures received one-year jail sentences after making comments the authorities deemed critical in the latest prosecutions under Decree 54 issued by President Saied that banned the “spreading of false news”. Broadcaster Borhen Bsais and political commentator Mourad Zeghidi were both jailed for a year – six months for spreading “false news” and a further six months for “spreading news that includes false information with the aim of defaming others”. After this, demonstrators shouted “down with the decree,” as they marched through Tunis.

Draft amendment risks subjecting associations to unjustified and excessive controls (February 2024)

In a communication to the Tunisian authorities, UN Special Rapporteur Clement Voule and fellow experts raised their concerns regarding a draft amendment to Decree-Law 2011-88, which risks subjecting associations to unjustified and excessive controls. They recalled that the right to freedom of association is an essential component of any democracy and that the right for civil society organizations to access funds is inherent to this right. They urged authorities to amend the bill in line with international human rights standards.

Al-Jazeera journalist Samir Sassi arrested in Tunis (January 2024)

Al-Jazeera journalist Samir Sassi has been arrested by Tunisian “anti-terrorism” officers at his home in Tunis. According to Sassi’s wife, a squad of officers raided their home, going through the family’s possessions and confiscating mobile phones from every member of the family as well as Sassi’s laptop and copies of novels he had written and published locally. Tunisia implements an automatic 48-hour period during which a detained person cannot access a lawyer if they have been arrested on “terrorism-related” charges.

Repressive NGO draft law threatens independent civil society (October 2023)

Tunisian lawmakers must refrain from adopting a highly restrictive NGO law that, if passed, would threaten independent CSOs in the country, said Amnesty International. A draft NGO law, submitted by a group of MPs on October 10, is due to be examined imminently by a parliamentary committee. The draft, which aims to replace the current NGO law of 2011, contains unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on the formation, activity and funding of CSOs and threatens their independence by allowing the government to unduly interfere in their work.

US lawmakers urge aid for Tunisia’s civil society as crackdown intensifies (May 2023)

As democratic norms erode in Tunisia, a bipartisan group of U.S lawmakers wants to ensure proposed aid cuts do not undermine the very civil society actors seeking to reverse the North African country’s democratic backslide. Tunisian authorities have ramped up their repression in the country considered the birthplace of the Arab Spring. Since mid-February, security forces have arrested some 30 political prisoners, including journalists, activists and business leaders.

Tunisia closes offices of opposition party Ennahdha after arresting leader (April 2023)

Tunisian authorities closed the offices of Islamist-inspired opposition party Ennahdha after arresting its leader Rached Ghannouchi. Ennahdha was the largest party in Tunisia’s parliament before President Kais Saied dissolved the chamber in July 2021.

Tunisian president’s racist speech incites a wave of violence (March 2023)

Tunisian authorities should ensure an immediate end to the wave of attacks against Black African migrants across Tunisia, which started in early February and accelerated following racist and xenophobic comments made by President Kais Saied on February 21, Amnesty International said. The authorities must investigate and hold perpetrators to account, including, in particular, where police officers were involved in the assault.

Tunisia’s Saied to dissolve municipal councils ahead of local elections (March 2023)

Tunisian President Kais Saied said he will dissolve municipal councils months before they were due to be elected, further dismantling the systems of government developed after the 2011 revolution that brought democracy. Elected municipal councils were introduced after the 2014 constitution called for decentralization.

European Parliament condemns Tunisia’s crackdown on journalists (March 2023)

As President Kais Saied continues his unrelenting persecution of journalists, the dramatic deterioration in Tunisia has clearly not gone unnoticed by MEPs, who passed a resolution on March 16 that strongly criticizes his increasingly authoritarian stance on public freedoms, urges the Tunisian authorities to end “the ongoing crackdown on civil society,” and calls for the release of Radio Mosaïque FM director Noureddine Boutar, who was arrested on February 13.

[President intensifies attacks on judicial independence](#) (February 2023)

Tunisian authorities should immediately reinstate judges and prosecutors President Kais Saied arbitrarily dismissed as part of what he called an anti-corruption campaign, and reverse all measures taken to crush judicial independence, Human Rights Watch said. The Justice Ministry has refused to reinstate 49 magistrates – a term that includes both judges and prosecutors – despite an administrative court order on August 9, 2022 to do so. Instead, the justice minister appointed by Saied announced the preparation of criminal cases against the dismissed judges.

[Government tightens grip on journalistic sources](#) (December 2022)

Tunisian journalists face daunting challenges in citing official sources who fear criminal or administrative penalties. Legal advisor for the Violations Monitoring Unit at the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT), Mundhir Al Sharni, states that, “Tunisian law granted journalists the right to source protection, allowing them not to disclose the identity of their sources in order to protect journalists and ensure the continuity of their sources,” but “many journalists have faced pressure during preliminary interrogations (by the police) to reveal the source of their information.”

[ICJ urges the authorities to halt attacks on the rule of law](#) (November 2022)

The ICJ calls on the Tunisian authorities to accept the recommendations made by various UN Member States during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). On November 8, 2022, during Tunisia’s fourth UPR, UN Member States expressed concern about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Tunisia, and, among other issues, urged the Tunisian authorities to: uphold the separation of powers, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary; end all violations of the rights to a fair trial and to freedom of expression; and protect the rights to freedom of assembly and association.

[Tunisian journalists denounce prison terms for false information](#) (September 2022)

Tunisia’s president decreed a law imposing prison terms for spreading false information or rumours online, a move immediately denounced by the main journalists’ union as an assault on freedom of speech. If the target of the false information or rumours is an official, the prison term can be 10 years, the new law states.

[Tunisian president issues new electoral law](#) (September 2022)

Tunisian President Kais Saied has issued a new electoral law ahead of the parliament elections in December. Under the new law, people would vote for individuals rather than lists as in the previous elections. Saied suspended the parliament in July 2021 and seized executive power in a move his critics called a coup.

▼ ARCHIVED NEWS

[Questions surround amendment of Tunisia’s elections authority law](#) (May 2022)

[Dissolution of High Judicial Council undermines rule of law in Tunisia](#) (February 2022)

[Tunisian civil society and the shrinking margin of freedom](#) (June 2021)

[Tunisia-Abir Moussi: Parliamentary assistants are paid by foreign organizations](#) (November 2020)

[Presidential statement in favor of death penalty is shocking](#) (September 2020)

[Tunisia issues the National List of Persons, Organizations and Entities associated with terrorist crimes](#) (September 2020)

[National Registry of Institutions, stepping on the toes of Tunisia’s civil society organizations](#) (September 2018)

[The Quiet Threat to Human Rights in Tunisia](#) (August 2018)

[U.S. Congress sounds alarm over Tunisia’s proposed NGO law](#) (July 2018)

[Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society and Human Rights to conduct regional consultation meetings \(April 2018\) \(Arabic\)](#)

[Municipal elections will be held in Tunisia \(April 2018\) \(Arabic\)](#)

[Tunisia Passes Controversial Law, Undermining Democratic Transition \(October 2017\)](#)

[Draft Law Could Return Tunisia to a Police State \(June 2017\)](#)

[Tunisia cracks down on NGOs \(June 2017\)](#)

[Revolution a Fading Memory, Economic Frustrations Grow in Tunisia \(October 2016\)](#)

[Tunisia: LGBT Group Suspended \(January 2016\)](#)

▼ HISTORICAL NOTES

Since independence in 1956—and particularly after Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s rise to power in 1987—civil society had withered under authoritarian rule. The governing law on associations, Law No. 154 of 1959, required associations to obtain approval from the Ministry of Interior, limiting operations to organizations that enjoyed state favor. By the time street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation sparked mass protests in late 2010, civil society organizations (CSOs) were few in number and institutionally weak after decades of repression.

The 2011 Revolution marked the beginning of a new era for civil society and civic freedoms in Tunisia, with CSOs playing a crucial role in the transition period and the post-revolutionary state. Civil society pressure was instrumental in securing a constitution with expansive human rights protections and enabling free and fair democratic elections. The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet—comprised of four CSOs—won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its role in brokering negotiations and compromises among opposing political factions.

A post-Revolution decree governing CSOs—Decree Number No. 88 of 2011—replaced Law No. 154 and established one of the most enabling civil society frameworks in the Middle East and North Africa. The Decree guarantees broad protections for freedom of association, prohibits state interference in CSO operations, and provides for public funding of associations.

Tunisia entered a State of Emergency on November 25, 2015, following a terrorist attack on a presidential security bus in Tunis. The measure granted authorities broad powers to restrict civic freedoms, including the ability to impose curfews and ban public protests without judicial oversight. While initially justified on security grounds, the State of Emergency has since been repeatedly renewed, contributing to a sustained narrowing of the space for civic engagement.

In 2018, high-profile associations campaigned to preserve Decree No. 88 amid fears that proposed government amendments to the law would curtail civic space. In early 2019, the government pledged not to amend or replace the decree but to introduce complementary laws to address gaps and challenges. However, the legislative and presidential elections later that year, coupled with mounting political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a worsening economic crisis, postponed further discussions on reform. Despite this, authorities began requiring associations to register in the National Register of Institutions, in apparent violation of Decree No. 88’s guarantees.

On July 25, 2021, President Kais Saied invoked Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution to justify exceptional measures in response to what he described as an imminent threat to national security arising from parliamentary dysfunction and mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis. These measures included:

- Freezing and later dissolving Parliament
- Lifting parliamentary immunity and initiating legal proceedings against some deputies
- Dismissing the government and appointing a new government accountable only to the president

- Suspending most provisions of the Constitution and announcing a temporary reorganization of powers
- Dissolving the Supreme Judicial Council and appointing a replacement
- Dissolving the Independent High Commission for Combating Corruption and suspending its head
- Restructuring the Independent Electoral Commission

On July 25, 2022, a constitutional referendum was held on a draft text prepared by the president. Roughly one-quarter of registered voters approved the new Constitution, while the remainder boycotted the process. The new Constitution dramatically expands presidential powers, effectively halting Tunisia's democratic transition and establishing a more centralized political system.

Since then, civil society has increasingly been treated as a “political actor” and subjected to tighter government oversight. Beginning in 2022, CSOs have also faced a coordinated smear campaign accusing them of being linked to financial and political corruption, terrorism, money laundering, fraud, and illegal involvement in electoral campaigns.

▼ Key Events

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association [visited](#) Tunisia on June 10, 2021, where he raised several matters with the Tunisian government, including the legislative framework for the work of CSOs in the country and the involvement of civil society in drafting legal documents related to the financing of CSOs.

More than one year later, in September 2022, Diego García-Sayán, the Special Rapporteur on Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and Clément Nyaletossi Voule, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, both [expressed](#) grave concern over the excessive restrictions on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association of judges who were peacefully protesting Presidential decrees in Tunisia.

More recently, in February 2024, UN Special Rapporteur Clement Voule and fellow experts raised their concerns regarding a draft amendment to Decree-Law 2011-88, which risks subjecting associations to excessive restrictions. They urged authorities to amend the Law in line with international human rights standards.