

Key Developments in Tunisia and U.S. Responses Since July 25, 2022

POLITICAL EVENTS IN TUNISIA	ARRESTS IN TUNISIA R RELEASED HS HUNGER STRIKE S SENTENCED MC INVESTIGATED/TRIED IN MILITARY COURT	2022	U.S. RESPONSES
<p>President Kais Saied's new constitution garners 94.6% approval in the national referendum, though only 30% of eligible voters went to the polls. The charter expands his powers and removes key checks and balances in parliament and the judiciary.</p>	 <p>Rached Khiari Former MP, al-Karama Party</p> <p>S MC</p>	<p>JULY</p> <p>25</p> <p>28</p> <p>AUGUST</p> <p>3</p> <p>9</p>	 <p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken statement: “We share the concerns expressed by many Tunisians that the process of drafting the new constitution limited the scope for genuine debate and also that the new constitution could weaken Tunisia’s democracy and erode respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”</p>
 <p>Saied issues decree eliminating electoral lists, altering districts, requiring prospective candidates to gather 400 signatures, and eliminating gender parity rules for parliamentary seats.</p>	 <p>Ghassen Ben Khalifa Editor-in-chief, <i>Inhiyez</i> newspaper</p> <p>R</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER</p> <p>6</p> <p>15</p> <p>16</p>	 <p>Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf visits Tunisia and underscores that the “partnership is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democracy and human rights,” emphasizing “the importance of achieving economic reforms that will lead to equal measures of prosperity for all Tunisians.”</p>  <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at AFRICOM ceremony: “Across Africa, those who support democracy, freedom, and the rule of law are battling the forces of autocracy, chaos, and corruption. And we can feel these headwinds in Tunisia... Today, Tunisia’s dream of self-government is again in danger. But the United States stands committed to supporting our friends in Tunisia who are trying to forge open, accountable, and inclusive democracies.”</p>
<p>Saied issues decree imposing harsher prison sentences and fines on those accused of spreading “false information” online.</p>  <p>Tunisian government reaches preliminary agreement with IMF for \$1.9 billion package.</p>		<p>OCTOBER</p> <p>15</p> <p>19</p>	 <p>AFRICOM head Gen. Michael Langley meets with Tunisian defense minister and service chiefs, underscores the importance of the “longstanding” bilateral military partnership.</p>



The first parliamentary election under Saied's new constitution is held with only 11.2% turnout.



Ali Laarayedh
Former prime minister, Ennahda



Round two of the parliamentary election takes place with only 11.4% turnout. Pro-Saied candidates win the majority of seats; just 16 seats go to female candidates.



Seifeddine Makhoulf
Head of al-Karama Party



Anis Kaabi
Head of UGTT trade union highway branch

DECEMBER

7



National Security Council coordinator Brett McGurk visits Tunisia, underscores “the historic nature of the bilateral partnership, now in its third century, and opportunities for strengthening the partnership over the coming year, including in the areas of bilateral security and counterterrorism cooperation.”

14

Secretary Blinken meets with Saied at U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, where he reiterates America’s “deep commitment to Tunisian democracy and to supporting the aspirations of the Tunisian people for a democratic and prosperous future,” notes that the relationship “is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democracy and human rights,” and emphasizes the importance of free and fair December 17 parliamentary elections as well as inclusive reforms to strengthen democratic checks and balances and the protection of fundamental freedoms.”



17

18

19

2023

JANUARY

S

MC

21

29

30

31



Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT): “Another round of shockingly low turnout in Tunisia’s parliamentary runoffs suggests that the Tunisian people have lost all faith in these elections and the direction that President Saied is taking their country. His consolidation of power and turn toward authoritarianism has severely weakened Tunisia’s democracy while also failing to bring any relief to the ongoing economic crisis.”



State Department Spokesperson Ned Price: “The parliamentary elections that took place in Tunisia represent an essential initial step toward restoring the country’s democratic trajectory. However, the low voter turnout reinforces the need to further expand political participation over the coming months.”



Abdelhamid Jelassi
Former Ennahda leader



Kamel Eltaief
Businessman;
confidant of
the late
President
Ben Ali

Khayam Turki
Former
finance
minister,
Ettakatol
Party



HS

11

Taieb Rached
Former head of the
Court of Cassation



Bechir Akremi
Former prosecutor,
First Instance Court

12

13



Noureddine Bhiri
Former justice
minister, Ennahda

R



Lazhar Akremi
Cofounder, Nidaa
Tounes Party



Noureddine Boutar
Director, Radio
Mosaïque FM

R

15

22

Issam Chebbi
Head of
al-Joumhouri
Party



Chaima Issa
Senior official, National Salvation Front

R

MC



Riadh Bettaieb
Former
development
minister, Ennahda



HS



Ghazi Chaouachi
Secretary-
general,
Attayar
Party

HS



Jaouhar Ben Mbarek
Senior official,
National Salvation
Front; head of
"Citizens Against
the Coup"

23

24

25

27



Ridha Belhaj
Senior official,
National
Salvation Front

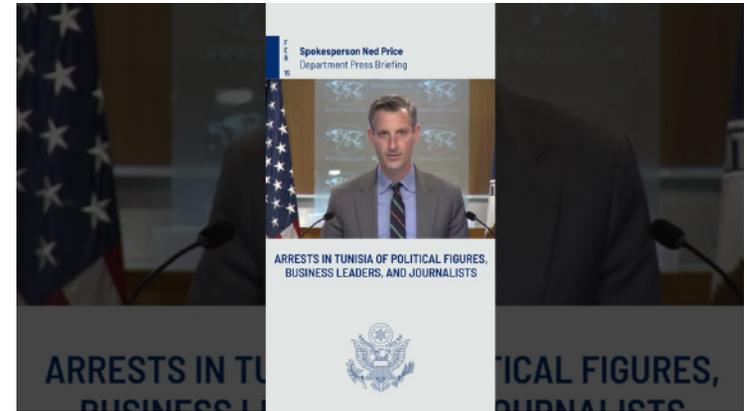


Said Ferjani
Senior official,
Ennahda

HS

Spokesperson Price:

"We are deeply concerned by the reported arrests of multiple political figures, business leaders, and journalists in Tunisia in recent days. We respect the aspirations of the Tunisian people for an independent and transparent judiciary that is able to protect fundamental freedoms for all."



Ambassador Joey Hood meets with then-prime minister **Najla Bouden** to "discuss expanding bilateral relations through economic growth and job creation."





First session of new parliament is held with Saied ally Brahim Bouderbala elected speaker. Independent journalists are banned from the event.



Authorities shut down Ennahda headquarters in Tunis and other cities.



Mohamed Ben Salem
Former agriculture minister, Ennahda



Rached Ghannouchi
President of Ennahda



Ahmed Mechergui
Chief of staff, Ennahda



Yousef Nouri
Member, Ennahda Shura Council

MARCH

1

NSC Coordinator McGurk's phone call with then-prime minister Bouden "reaffirmed their mutual commitment to continuing to strengthen bilateral diplomatic engagement, including by supporting the work of the diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and the Tunisian Embassy in Washington."



2

Spokesperson Price: "We are alarmed by reports of criminal charges against individuals in Tunisia resulting from meetings or conversations with U.S. embassy staff on the ground. This is part of an escalating pattern of arrests against perceived critics of the government."

3

9



Biden administration requests \$68.3 million in Tunisia aid for 2024 budget, down from \$106 million in 2023. Plan features significant cuts to economic aid but only slight cuts to security assistance.

13

14

Ambassador Hood meets with Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine, underscores "the shared democratic values of upholding the rule of law and respecting human rights."



22

Secretary Blinken Senate testimony: "We are indeed concerned about what we've seen over the last year...The most critical thing [Tunisia] can do on the economic side is actually get an IMF agreement, and we've been strongly encouraging them to do that because the economy risks falling off the deep end. So we need to see that, but we also want to see steps taken to put Tunisia fully back on the democratic path it was on."

23

Assistant Secretary Leaf, Reuters interview: "What we've seen in the last year and a half is the government taking Tunisia in a very different direction. There have been a number of moves...by the president that frankly have weakened foundational principles of checks and balances."

APRIL

17

State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel: "[Arrests] of political opponents and critics are fundamentally at odds with the principles Tunisians adopted in the constitution. The arrest of Rached Ghannouchi, the closure of [Ennahda] headquarters, and the banning of meetings held by certain opposition groups...represent a troubling escalation...against perceived opponents."



18

19



Judge bars independent radio and TV journalists from reporting on a conspiracy case against multiple opposition figures.

Appeals court judge orders the release of Lazhar Akremi and Chaima Issa without lifting their charges; rejects release requests for more than 20 other prisoners.

Tunisia signs a memorandum of understanding with the EU for €1 billion in aid in exchange for curbing irregular migration across the Mediterranean.

Saudi Arabia pledges \$400 million in soft loans and a \$100 million grant to buoy Tunisia's economy.



Saied dismisses Prime Minister Bouden and replaces her with Ahmed Hachani, a former Central Bank executive largely unknown to the public.



Sahbi Atig
Member, Ennahda Shura Council

HS

MAY

6

31

JUNE

17



Zeid Heni
Radio journalist

R

21

JULY

13



Assistant Secretary Leaf states that the 2024 budget request “reduces overall support for programs that benefit the government of Tunisia...At the same time, the request prioritizes support for the Tunisian people and civil society as they grapple with an economic crisis.”

Sen. Murphy disagrees: “This budget doesn’t communicate the values that we share in that it doesn’t make any significant changes to the way in which we flow dollars to countries that...have worsening human rights records like Tunisia.”

Senate Foreign Relations Committee advances the Safeguarding Tunisian Democracy Act, which conditions 25% of U.S. security assistance and certain other aid on “Saied ending the nationwide state of emergency declared on July 25, 2021.” The act would preserve funding for Tunisian civil society, authorizing \$100 million in 2024-25 for the “Tunisia Democracy Support Fund.”

16

20

AUGUST

1

