

# Tunisia

Last update:	13 november 2020
Population:	11,694,719 million (World Bank 2019 est.)
Prime minister:	Hichem Mechichi
President:	Kais Saied
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	Ennahda, Democratic Bloc (Democratic Current & People's Movement), Tahya Tounes, Tunisian Alternative
Last election:	2019 (parliamentary and presidential elections)
Next election:	2024 (parliamentary and presidential elections)
Sister parties:	Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL) - Ettakatol

After President Beji Caid Essebsi passed away in 2019 a new president was chosen in October of that year, law professor Kais Saied. A month later Tunisia also held parliamentary elections that led to a four month long political crisis over the formation of a government. After the elections, the biggest party Ennahda proposed a prime minister from its own ranks, namely agricultural engineer Habib Jemli. In January 2020 Jemli proposed a cabinet made up of independent technocrats in a bid to satisfy the population who had continuously protested against the deteriorating conditions in the country. However, this proposal was rejected, with only 72 of 217 seats backing it, including by Ennahda's potential coalition partners. Ennahda was therefore forced to compromise. It was then up to president Saied to choose a new candidate for prime minister. He chose former finance minister Elyes Fakhfakh, linked to the Ettakatol party, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, hoping that his economic background would help save the worsening economy in the country. However, on 15 July 2020, he resigned in the wake of controversy regarding alleged conflict of interest with company shares he owned. However, this has never been proven. Since September 2020, Tunisia's new prime minister is the independent Hichem Mechichi.

The prolonged political crisis, the persistent economic instability, increased social tension and high unemployment caused Tunisia to ask the IMF for a four year program (the Extended Fund Facility) to support their economic modernization plan, the country's development model and help reduce existing vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic only made the structural problems the country is facing even more apparent, so in April 2020 the IMF Executive Board approved a \$745 million disbursement to Tunisia to address the Corona crisis. A couple of months later in June 2020 the IMF also approved a four year loan of \$2.9 billion to support the authorities' economic agenda aimed at promoting more inclusive growth and job creation, while protecting the most vulnerable households.

## Political Situation

### Tunisian revolution and the political situation under Ben Ali

The current political situation in Tunisia is the result of the popular unrest that erupted in the first half of 2011 after a young man set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010. The frustration of the man concerning the high unemployment rate, living conditions, the economic situation and annoyance with the ruling elite was shared by many Tunisians. Demonstrations occurred around the country for weeks and resulted in the ouster of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. Fouad Mebazaa, the speaker of the Tunisian parliament, was sworn in as the country's interim president on 15 January. On 17 January a new government was formed by Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi. A day later three ministers stepped down denouncing the new administration as a betrayal, since the government included several ministers from the former ruling party, the RCD. It is said that over 338 people were killed during the Tunisian uprising. Before the popular uprising and Tunisia's legislative elections of 2011, the country underwent a long period of authoritarian rule. The bicameral legislative authority was controlled by former President Ben Ali's political party the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD). Although the role of political parties used to be defined by the constitution as "political parties help to educate citizens so as to organise their participation in political life", only 20 per cent of the Chamber of Deputies was granted to opposition parties. Tailor-made laws prevented the candidates from some of the stronger opposition parties from running and severe constraints on freedoms of expression, the press, and assembly deprived challengers from making

their case to the public. It was therefore inevitable that Ben Ali and his party the RCD won both elections with a majority of the votes.

### **Gender representation and minority rights**

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

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

Other than that, many minorities suffer under current religion-based laws. Protests for more rights of LGBT+ groups have been shut down for various reasons. Hate speech in public media is very common and government statements on the situation are very rare, although discrimination from TV stations and news agencies is forbidden. Homosexuality remains illegal and punishable in Tunisia under article 230 of the penal code. Critics have been repeatedly saying that article 230 violates constitutional rights such as equality before the law (article 21) and personal privacy (article 24). Through a new committee, established by the president, women's rights and the status of the LGBT+ community have been discussed and might be reformed through bills in the parliament. The most recent improvement in Tunisia was the founding of the region's first queer radio station 'Shams', which against many death threats, still broadcasts on the daily lives of LGBT+ individuals.

## **Elections**

### **2014 new constitution and the political system**

Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly approved a new constitution for the country on 25 January 2014, three years after dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted by a popular uprising. It was praised as one of the Arab World's most progressive charters, by recognising Islam as the state religion, but also protecting freedom of belief and gender parity in politics and society. It also ensures political pluralism by affirming the opposition's rights. Although Tunisia's new constitution reaffirms the pre-existing Republican system, in which the executive power is held by the president for five years with the help of the prime minister, it modified the legislative power. Until January 2014 the parliament was bicameral, composed of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Advisors. Today, it is composed of a sole Chamber, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. The leader of the majority party or coalition after elections is designated by the president as prime minister. One of the great improvements in the 2014 constitution is the creation of a Constitutional Court, which restricts the legislative power and prevents laws that would go against rights and freedoms from being ratified. Tunisia is administratively divided in 24 governorates, headed by governors who are appointed by the president. The country enjoys competitive elections thanks to lively partisan life which is constitutionally guaranteed by article 35.

## **Parliamentary Elections**

On October 6th 2019 parliamentary elections were held in Tunisia. These were the first parliamentary elections since 2014 where catch-all secular party Nidaa Tounes (also known as 'Call of Tunisia') became the biggest party with 86 seats, followed by the Ennahda movement (a moderate Islamic party) with 69 seats.

The voter turnout was approximately 41%, which is slightly lower than that of the first round in the presidential elections of the previous month where the voter turnout was about 49%. The election results produced a fractured parliament with none of the parties receiving more than 20% of the votes. The Ennahda Movement received the highest percentage of votes with 19.93% of the votes which translates into 52 seats. This constitutes a loss of 17 seats in comparison to the previous parliamentary elections but an increase of 5 percentage points in comparison to that of what its presidential candidate Abdelfattah Mourou received less than a

month earlier. Two factors can explain the quick voter share increase. The first is that Ennahda endorsed Kais Saied, the winner of the first round of the presidential elections. Saied did not belong to or endorse any political party and therefore his voters were up for grabs in the parliamentary elections. Ennahda not only endorsed Saied but attempted to convince his voters that Ennahda was their best hope for forming a government that was friendly to a Saied presidency. Second, after Ennahda's own presidential candidate Mourou finished third place in the presidential election, they reevaluated their campaign strategy. For the parliamentary election Ennahda focused on two fundamentals, namely religion and the revolution which in the end proved successful.

The second-largest party was the centre-left secular newcomer 'Heart of Tunisia' party. The party was established on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 by Nabil Karoui. Houda Knani was named the party's president. She was a former member of the Free Patriotic Union that won 16 seats (third-biggest party) in the last election. However, due to internal disputes, many of its members resigned so the Free Patriotic Union decided to merge with Nidaa Tounes in 2018. Another newcomer to parliament was the right-wing secular Free Destourian Party, founded by former members of Tunisia's pre-revolution ruling party, which became the third biggest party winning 6.63% of the votes and was appointed 17 seats. Up until August 2016, the party was called Destourian Movement. The movement participated in the 2014 parliamentary election but did not win any seats. Dignity Coalition also came new to the scene winning 21 seats, making it the fourth-largest party. The alliance was formed in February 2019 and consists of several parties and independents, such as the Tunisian Reform Front, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Justice and Development Party. Their main goal is to advance the goals of the revolution, in which 'dignity' was one of the main slogans. Just ahead of the Dignity Coalition, Democratic Current won 22 seats making it the third-largest party. Democratic current is a social-democratic party and was established in 2013. In the 2014 parliamentary election, the party just won 3 seats. In fifth place finishes the People's Movement party with 15 seats. The party is socialist, secular and Arab nationalist in nature. Closely following behind, in sixth place, came in secular party Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia) with 14 seats. This party was formed in January of 2019 and consist mostly of former members of the Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia) party after mass defection over internal disagreements whether or not president Essebsi's son (Hafed Caid Essebsi) was fit to run the party. As a result, Nidaa Tounes' seats fell from 86 in the 2014 parliamentary election to just 3 in the 2019 election.

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

## Official election results

Party	Votes	Seats
Ennahda Movement	561,132	52
Heart of Tunisia	415,913	38
Free Destourian Party	189,356	17
Democratic Current	183,464	22
Dignity Coalition	169,651	21
People's Movement	129,604	15
Tahya Tounes	116,582	14
Republican People's Union	59,924	3
Aïch Tounsi	46,401	1
Tunisian Alternative	46,046	3
Afek Tounes	43,892	2
Nidaa Tounes	43,213	3
Machrouu Tounes	40,869	4
Popular Front	32,365	1
Democratic and Social Union (VDS-PR-MDS)	29,828	1
Errahma	27,944	4
Current of Love	17,749	1

Socialist Destourian Party	16,235	1
Farmers' Voice Party	9,366	1
Green League	5,667	1
Other parties/lists	590,602	0
Independent lists	82,384	12

### Forming the government

Since the parliamentary election, the process of forming a government has been challenging. In November Ennahda proposed Habib Jemli, an agricultural engineer, as prime-minister. Even though Jemli presented himself as independent, it is widely known that he has close ties to Ennahda. In January of 2020, Jemli proposed a cabinet made up of independent technocrats to avoid political polarization and prevent parliamentarians from objecting to the government. However, parliament rejected the proposed cabinet with only backing it with 72 of the 217 votes. One argument for why the government was rejected was that some members of parliament preferred a candidate that did not have close ties to Ennahda but was instead independent. The cabinet was by many seen as a move by Ennahda to press its allies into government since upon closer inspection the proposed cabinet was not as independent as it may seem, just like Jemli. Another argument was that some members of parliament preferred a candidate with an economic background that could help save the worsening economy. Since the proposal for a new government was rejected, it was up to president Saied to choose a new candidate for prime-minister within 10 days. On January 20<sup>th</sup> he chose former finance minister Elyes Fakhfakh. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February Fakhfakh proposed a new government half of which was made up of independents and half of party politician. However, Fakhfakh left the 'Heart of Tunisia' and the Free Destourian party out of its formation. Ennahda refused to back a government that did not represent all parties and therefore Fakhfakh was forced to start negotiations since the proposal included 6 Ennahda members in government. Since the election the People's movement has formed a parliamentary block with Democratic Current and independents (41 seats), which voted in favour of the proposal on the 26th of February 2020. In total 129 out of 217 members backed the new cabinet which meant that Tunisia's four-month-long political crisis had come to an end. However, this was only short lived.

After only five months in power, prime minister Fakhfakh had to resign due to claims of conflict of interest. He allegedly was involved in businesses that received millions of dollars worth of government contracts. Even though the prime minister denied any wrongdoing and the claims were never proven to be true, the Ennahda party, making use of the momentum to get rid of the government, put forward a vote of no confidence. Fakhfakh wanted to avoid a political crisis in which institutions were forced against each other and therefore resigned on 15 July 2020. Within two weeks, president Saied appointed Hichem Mechichi as new prime minister. Mechichi, an independent, chose to form a technocratic government, which Ennahda was not happy with as they want the government to represent the elected political parties of parliament. Since Ennahda is the biggest faction, this would be most beneficial for them. However, they did realise that the country could be thrown into a new political crisis if Mechichi's government would not be accepted. Therefore, at the beginning of September, the technocratic government received a cross-party vote of confidence, with 137 Members voting in favour and 67 against. The new government has 25 ministers and three secretaries of state, of which eight are female.

### New composition of parliamentary blocs (27 October 2020)

It is not uncommon in Tunisian politics that members of parliament switch allegiance and change party or become independents. Based on this, the support for the government also changes. These changes are every time announced by the Speaker of the House of People's Representatives (HRP) Rached Ghannouchi. The latest change involved the resignation of seven MP's from the al-Watania group. The new composition of the parliamentary blocs now stands as follows: Ennahdha: 54 MPs, Democratic Bloc: 38 MPs, Qalb Tounes: 30 MPs, al-Karama Coalition: 18 MPs, National Reform Bloc: 16 MPs, Free Destourian Party: 16 MPs, Tahya Tounes: 10 MPs, al-Watania Bloc: 9 MPs and independent MPs: 26.

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### National Constituent Assembly elections 2011

On 23 October 2011 Tunisia held free elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) for the first time in history. The task of the 217-seat NCA was to write a new constitution for the country and to form an interim government. The two most important issues in the campaign were the questions of the place of religion within the new constitution and how to deal with the remaining old RCD regime representatives. On 21 November 2011, a coalition of Ennahda, CPR and FDTL/Ettakotal was formed holding a majority of 138 seats in the assembly. They agreed to share the three highest posts in the Assembly. Therefore Ettakotal/FDTL leader Mustapha Ben Jaafar was elected President of the Assembly and Meherzia Labidi (Ennahda) and Larbi Abid (CPR) were elected vice presidents. The Assembly also performed normal parliamentary functions in that year, such as government oversight and the drafting of new legislation.

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## Presidential Elections

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

In the first round, independent candidate Kais Saied came in first out of 26 candidates, of which two were women. Saied was a newcomer to Tunisian politics but received more than 18% of the votes. Before the revolution, Saied was involved in academics but nevertheless became a well-known media figure through his comments on constitutional and legal issues after the fall of former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He gained a huge following online, especially among young people, for his spontaneity, sincerity and comfort with public speaking that distinguished him from the traditional stereotype of politicians. The runner up in the first round of the election was Nabil Karoui of Qalb Tounes (also known as Heart of Tunisia party) who ran his campaign from prison. Karoui was arrested on August 23<sup>rd</sup> on charges of corruption and money laundering. Before the first round of the election, the Assembly of Representatives (Tunisia's legislative branch of government) passed an amendment to the law that prohibited candidates with a criminal record, as well as those who run charitable organizations or received foreign funding for political advertising in the year preceding an election, from running for president. The amendment caused a lot of controversies and a motion was filed by several political parties that called the move unconstitutional.

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

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

### Official election results

Candidate	Party	First Round Votes - Percentage
Kais Saied	Independent	620,711 - 18.40%
Nabil Karoui	Heart of Tunisia	525,517 - 15.58%
Abdelfattah Mourou	Ennahda Movement	434,530 - 12.88%
Abdelkrim Zbidi	Independent	361,864 - 10.73%
Youssef Chahed	Long Live Tunisia	249,049 - 7.38%
Safi Saïd	Independent	239,951 - 7.11%
Lotfi Mraïhi	Republican People's Union	221,190 - 6.56%
Seiffedine Makhlouf	Dignity Coalition	147,351 - 4.37%
Abir Moussi	Free Destourian Party	135,461 - 4.02%
Mohamed Abbou	Democratic Current	122,287 - 3.63%
Moncef Marzouki	Movement Party	100,338 - 2.97%
Mehdi Jomaa	Tunisian Alternative	61,371 - 1.82%
Mongi Rahoui	Popular Front	27,355 - 0.81%

### Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties / Ettakatol (FDTL)

Party Leader: Khalil Zaoui

Number of seats: 0

<http://ettakatol.org/>

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

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

### Movement Party

Party Leader: Moncef Marzouki

Number of seats: 0

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

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

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

### Ennahda Movement (or simply Ennahda)

Party Leader: Rached Ghannouchi

Number of seats: 54

<http://www.ennahdha.tn/>

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

described as political pluralism.

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

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

The Ennahda Movement stepped down in January 2014 since the neutral interim government was established to make the final draft of a constitution, followed by early elections based on this new constitution. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the party came in second with 69 seats (losing almost half of its seats) after the Nidaa Tounes party.

In the parliamentary election of 2019 the Ennahda Movement came in first with 52 seats, 17 seats less than they won in 2014. After the election Ennahda proposed ally Habib Jemli as prime-minister but that choice was not backed by parliament. The new candidate, Elyes Fakhfakh, proposed a cabinet in early 2020. Ennahda initially disagreed with the formation but after many negotiations the parliament backed the proposal with the support of Ennahda on the 26th of February.

#### Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia)

Party Leader: Nabil Karoui  
Number of seats: 29

Qalb Tounes was first established on the 20th of June 2019 by media mogul Nabil Karoui. Soon after, in October 2019, the party participated in its first parliamentary election. It won 38 seats and became the second largest party. However, in the proposal of the new cabinet prime-minister candidate Fakhfakh decided to not include Heart of Tunisia in the formation. The party's leader Nabil Karoui, the owner of a major television company, has repeatedly been accused of corruption and actually ran his campaign for the presidential election in September 2019 from prison. The parliamentary vote on the new cabinet was held on the 26th of February 2020 and received the backing of 129 out of 217 members. Therefore, Heart of Tunisia will be part of the opposition in the new cabinet.

#### Democratic Current

Party Leader: Mohamed Abbou  
Number of seats: 22

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

#### Dignity Coalition (Itilaf al-Karama)

Party Leader: Seifeddine Makhlouf  
Number of seats: 19

In the 2019 parliamentary election the relative newcomer Dignity Coalition won 21 seats, making it the fourth largest party. The

coalition was formed in February 2019 and consist of several different parties and independent people. The most notable of which are the Tunisian Reform Front, the Congress of the Republic (CPR), and the Justive and Development Party. Its manifesto unites those who aim to advance the goals of the revolution because to the coalition they seem uncompleted. In the 2011 revolution, one of the main slogans was "Karama", which translates to "Dignity".

### Free Destourian Party

Party Leader: Abir Moussi  
Number of seats: 17

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

### People's Movement

Party Leader: Zouhair Maghzaoui  
Number of seats: 15

The current People's Movement is a socialist, secularist and Arab nationalist party that was established in April 2011. However, before April 2011 there was a political party with the same name that merged the Progressive Unionist Movement in March 2011. The new party was called the Progressive Unionist People's Movement. When some members disagreed with the merger they left and formed a new party which they again called the People's Movement party. There slogan became "freedom, socialism, unity" and their leader became Mohamed Brahmi. However, in 2012 the Progressive Unionist People's Movement and the People's Movement decided to merge and continued under the name People's Movement. The leader of the party continued to be Mohamed Brahmi. The party belongs to the Popular Front coalition and is aligned with workers groups. In 2013 Brahmi was shot dead in front of his house and Zouhair Maghzaoui became the new leader. Even though the party is part of Popular Front, it decided to run on its own in the 2019 parliamentary election where it finished sixth with 15 seats.

### Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia)

Party Leader: Youssef Chahed  
Number of seats: 14

Tahya Tounes (Long Live Tunisia) was formed in early 2019 by political leaders that were formally associated with the president Beji Caïd Essebsi's ruling party Nidaa Tounes. Disagreements within Nidaa Tounes, in particular about whether or not president Essebsi's son Hamed Caïd Essebsi was suitable to lead the party, caused prime-minister Youssef Chahed his membership. It was then that prime-minister Chahed and other prominent former members of Nidaa Tounes decided to form Tahya Tounes.

The goal of the party is to implement efficient economic reforms in an attempt to return hope to the frustrated Tunisians. In the 2019 parliamentary election Tahya Tounes won 14 seats, making it the seventh biggest party.

### Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia)

Party Leader: Hamed Caïd Essebsi  
Number of seats: 3

Nidaa Tounes was created in June 2012 under the impetus of Beji Caïd Essebsi, a former Tunisian ambassador close to Habib Bourguiba and member of former President Ben Ali's government. The party highlights several objectives: the introduction of a

Constituent Assembly that will draft a solid constitution, a plan to save the national economy based on national consensus, a process of transitional justice aiming at finalising Tunisia's post-Ben Ali transition, safeguarding individual freedoms and ensuring the neutrality of mosques. During the launch of the party on 16 June 2012, Essebsi asked all Tunisians to unite in favour of transition. Nonetheless, its creation has led to a bipolarisation of party politics in the country, by attracting all opponents to Ennahda.

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

### Popular Front (el-Jabha)

Party Leader: Hamma Hammami  
Number of seats: 1  
<http://front-populaire.org/>

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

After the revolution in 2011, leftist parties decided to form the Popular Front in order to better consolidate the previously divided Tunisian left wing so as to be able to compete more effectively in the parliamentary elections in 2014. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, the Popular Front became fourth and gained 15 seats. However, in the 2019 parliamentary election it only received 1 seat.

### Machrou Tounes

Party Leader: Mohsen Marzouk  
Number of seats: 0

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

## Biographies

### Kais Saied

President

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

In 2019 Saied ran for president and won with a 72% majority. Saied was deemed an unlikely winner, but his openness and

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

### Hichem Mechichi

Prime Minister

Hichem Mechichi was born in January of 1974. He studied Law at Tunis El Manar University in addition to Law, Political Science and Public Administration at Ecole Nationale d'Administration.

Starting in 2011, he was part of the National Commission of Investigation on Corruption and Embezzlement. Three years later, he became Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Transport, followed by the same position at both the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs. His last post, before becoming President Kais Saied's first advisor in Legal Affairs, was Director General of the National Agency for the Sanitary and Environmental Control of Products.

In February 2020, Mechichi became Minister of Interior under prime minister Elyes Fakhfakh. On 25 July of that same year, President Saied chose him to replace Fakhfakh. Mechichi officially became prime minister on 2 September 2020, after the House of Representatives voted confidence.

### Elyes Fakhfakh

Former Prime Minister

Elyes Fakhfakh was born in 1972 in Tunis. He studied Mechanical Engineering at the National Engineering School of Sfax where he graduated in 1995. He did his masters degree at the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Lyon and later did another masters degree in Business Administration at University of Évry Val d'Essonne in France. In 1999 he started as an engineer for the French oil corporation Total S.A. and after that worked for Total in Europe, America and Asia. In 2004 he joined Tunisian leaf spring manufacturing company Cortrel and later became its Deputy Director General. After the revolution, as a member of Ettakatol, he joined the Jebali Cabinet as Minister of Tourism. In 2012, he also took charge of the Ministry of Finance.

In the following 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections Ettakatol lost all of its seats and is not represented in parliament. In 2019 Fakhfakh decided to run in the presidential election, but he only won 0.34% in the first round. A few months later, on the 20th of January 2020, Fakhfakh was appointed prime-minister by president Saied after the cabinet of prime minister-designate Habib Jemli failed to get backing in parliament. Fakhfakh formed his own cabinet which was backed by parliament on 27th of February 2020.

Fakhfakh was asked to resign on 15 July 2020 by president Saied because of a looming vote of no confidence put forward by the Ennahda party. While he denied any wrongdoing and it has never been proven, Fakhfakh allegedly had a conflict of interest while being prime minister. The allegation stated that he was involved in businesses that had received government contracts worth millions of dollars.

### Beji Caid Essebsi

Former President

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

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

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

### Rached Ghannouchi

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

Rached Kheriji, known as Rached Ghannouchi (1941) is one of the most prominent politicians in Tunisia. He co-founded the Ennahda Movement and is seen as its intellectual leader.

Ghannouchi graduated from Zaytuna University in Tunis in 1962 before he attended Cairo University (Egypt) to study agriculture. After he was expelled from Egypt due to a row between former presidents Bourguiba and Abdel Nasser, Ghannouchi went to University of Damascus (Syria) where he majored in philosophy, and graduated in 1968. Ghannouchi started forming his political views as a university student. Despite the fact that he initially joined a socialist party, his views gradually changed towards a more religious ideology. Ghannouchi then attended the University of Paris, Sorbonne. After studying there for a year, he returned to Tunisia and founded an organization to initiate reforms in the country. Based on his Islamic convictions, he among other, established the Islamic Tendency Movement in 1981 to fight political pluralism and call for economic reconstruction.

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

His party, Ennahda, won 89 of the 217 seats in the Constituent Assembly's elections in October 2011, the second largest party following far behind with 29 seats. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, Ennahda almost lost 20 seats (to 69 seats) and in the 2019 parliamentary election this number dropped even further to 52 seats.

### Khalil Zaouia

Party leader of Ettakatol

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

### Moncef Marzouki

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

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

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

During Tunisia's first free presidential elections, Marzouki was defeated by Beji Caid Essebsi.

### Youssef Chahed

Party leader of Tahya Tounes and former Prime-Minister

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

After the Arab Spring in 2011 he returned to Tunisia. In 2013 he joined the party of Béji Caïd Essebsi, Nidaa Tounes. After winning the elections of 2014 he became secretary of agriculture and fisheries in the cabinet of Habib Essid. In 2016, after a shuffle in the cabinet, he became minister of Local Affairs. After the ousting of prime minister Habib Essid in the summer of 2016, president Essebsi asked him to become Prime Minister and form a new cabinet. As a technocrat, he was relatively unknown. His cabinet was seen as progressive when he appointed many young state officials and eight women, one of which is his Finance Minister. However, disagreements within Nidaa Tounes, in particular about whether or not president Essebsi's son Hafedh Caid Essebsi was suitable to lead the party, caused Chahed his membership. It was then that he and other prominent former members of Nidaa Tounes decided to form Tahya Tounes in early 2019. Chahed was appointed leader.

### Abir Moussi

Party Leader of Free Destourian Party

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

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

She also advocates for systemic imprisonment of homosexuals and opposed the plan for the government to grant man and women the same inheritance rights.

She ran in the 2019 presidential election in which she came in ninth in the first round with 4.02% of the votes. The Free Destourian Party came in third in the parliamentary election of the same year, winning 6.63% of the votes which translated into 17 seats.

### Nabil Karoui

Party leader of Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia)

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

record label. In 2009 he became the head of the company's television company named Nessma.

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

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

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

Thus, even though Karoui was allowed to run, his imprisonment in August meant that he was forced to lead his campaign from prison. Despite of his incarceration Karoui came in second in the first round of the presidential election, winning nearly 16% of the votes with Elyes Saied only winning 2% more.

Karoui was released from prison on October 9th 2019, just a few days before the second round of the presidential election. He was beaten in this round by Elyes Saied who received over 72% of the votes.

His party, 'Heart of Tunisia', did better in the 2019 parliamentary election where it came in second after Ennahda Movement (19.63%) with 14.55% of the votes. However when it came to forming a new cabinet, Heart of Tunisia was left out of the formation after countless accusations of corruption. The party now serves in the opposition.

### Mohsen Marzouk

Party leader of Machrou Tounes

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

### Mohamed Abbou

Party leader of Democratic Current

Mohamed Abbou was born on May 10th 1966. He received his master degree in Law and a DEA in criminology. On August 28th 2012 he presented his doctoral thesis on private law at Tunis - El Manar University. The subject of his research was limits of freedom of the press.

Before receiving his doctorate but after the revolution, Abbou was elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia before being appointed adviser to the prime-minister on December 24th 2011. In this position he was in charge of Administrative Reform in the Hamadi Jebali government.

In May 2012 Abbou was appointed secretary general of Congress for the Republic party (CPR), a position which he held until March 2013. In May 2013 he established his own party 'Democratic Current' of which he became the leader until March 2016. He was once again appointed leader in April 2019 so he could run in the 2019 presidential election. He came in tenth in the first round with 3.63% of the votes.

### Hamma Hammami

Party leader of the Popular Front

Hamma Hammami was born on the 8th of January 1952 in El Aroussa.

In 1972 Hammami participated in the student revolt as well as in the banned opposition movement El Amal Ettounsi, for which he was sent to prison by then president Habib Bourguiba. He was only released six years later when Amnesty International started advocating for his release.

In 1986 Hammami founded the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party (PCOT) of which, in one form or the other, he has been leader ever since. The party became officially legal after the 2011 revolution and in 2012 PCOT formed an alliance with several other parties to better streamline the Tunisian left wing, which became known as Popular Front. Hammami was named its leader.

He was also tortured and imprisoned for his political activism against the rule of former president Ben Ali because he was considered to be strong opposition. On January 12th 2011 he was again arrested for speaking to journalists about the Tunisian revolution, but he was released three days later when Fouad Mebazaa became interim president.

After disputes within Popular Front about who should run in the 2019 presidential election on their behalf, Hammami decided to run as an independent. He only receives 0.69% of the votes. In the parliamentary election of the same year Popular Front also suffered major losses. It only won one seat, which is 14 seats less than in the 2014 parliamentary election.

### Hafedh Caïd Essebsi

Party leader of Nidaa Tounes

Hafedh Caïd Essebsi was born on the 1st of August 1961. He is the son of former president Béji Caïd Essebsi who died in office on the 25th of July 2019 at the age of 92.

Before the revolution Hafedh was part of the Social-Liberal Party. After the revolution he joined the Nidaa Tounes party, which was founded by his father. Hafedh tried to head the party list during the 2014 parliamentary election, but his inexperience and proximity to members of the former Democratic Constitutional Rally (the party in charge before the revolution), ignited a lot of criticism from the left wing and many members of the party. This caused him to renounce his candidacy on August 22nd 2014.

He was named executive director of Nidaa Tounes in 2016, which prompted secretary general Mohsen Marzouk to leave and found his own party; Machrouu Tounes. On the 19th of October 2018 Hafedh became president of the party on the occasion of the merger with the Free Patriotic Union.

During the 2019 parliamentary election Nidaa Tounes only received 3 seats, which is a 83 seat decline since the 2014 parliamentary election.

### Source

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