

Author:

¹ Ahmad Ash Shiddieqy,
² Padlan Padil Simamora,
³ Dinda Difia Madina

Affiliation:

¹ Ezzitouna University, Tunisia
^{2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri
Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta,
Indonesia

Corresponding author:

* ahmadassadiqi9@gmail.com

Doi: 10.32332/milrev.v3i1.8976

Dates:

Received 04 Desember, 2023
Revised 20 February, 2024
Accepted 04 April, 2024
Published 11 April, 2024

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CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC POLITICS IN TUNISIA: THE JOURNEY OF ISLAMIC DEMOCRACY POST-ARAB SPRING

Abstract: This study aimed to examine contemporary Islamic politics in Tunisia, specifically the democratic system Post-Arab Spring. The political struggle of Muslim countries triggered the Arab Spring movement, with Tunisia pioneering a Jasmine Revolution from 2010-2011 to obtain global attention. Furthermore, the investigation constitutes a literature review to analyze contemporary Islamic politics in Tunisia, specifically Post-Arab Spring. The influence of Islamic politics is an important issue, specifically in strengthening demands for democracy by analyzing the struggle in Tunisia. Therefore, this study provides the main focus of state democracy, which is a phenomenon of historical studies and political struggles. The analysis process is carried out in four stages, namely source finding, criticism, interpretation, and writing. The results show that there is a harmonious coexistence between Islam and democracy in Tunisia compared to other countries in the Middle East. The principles of democracy are evident in the organization of elections, freedom of speech, religious tolerance, and recognition of gender equality.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Contemporary Islamic, Democracy, Politics.

INTRODUCTION

The intricacies of national and state life are connected with socio-political dynamics and tensions, particularly evident in Muslim countries such as Tunisia. In this context, there is an increase in reviving the values of Islamic teachings in aspects of national

and state life.¹ The change is seen in line with the democratization process after the fall of the authoritarian regime in Tunisia. Countries governed by monarchical systems are experiencing governmental transformation in response to the populace's calls for a democratic framework upholding rights. In addition, the political event is referred to as "*al-Tsaurat al-Arabiyyah*", a revolution expected to change the order towards an ideal society and country after a long period of authoritarian rule, unlimited power, and restrictions on people's freedoms resulting in a gap between the elites living in luxury and the poor.² Westerners called the concept the Arab Springs (*al-Rabi' al-Arabiyy*) which triggered the growth of democracy.³

Political upheaval, sparked by grievances against injustice within authoritarian systems, has catalyzed a wave of significant protests across various countries and this is similar to the events witnessed during the Arab Spring Movement in several Middle Eastern countries. The Arab Spring started in 2010 when a student and fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in front of government offices as a form of disappointment with the government's injustices.⁴ A protest movement, referred to as the "Jasmine Revolution" in the media, quickly spread across the country. The Tunisian government attempted to end the unrest by using force against street demonstrations and by offering political and economic concessions.⁵

In October 2011, Tunisians participated in free elections to elect members of a council tasked with drafting a new constitution. The democratically elected president and prime minister assumed office in December 2011, and the new constitution was

¹ Khaled Igbaria, "Arab Spring Revolutions throughout Modern Arabic Poetry," *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 8, no. 4 (31 Agustus 2020), <https://doi.org/10.24203/ajhss.v8i4.6214>.

² Sean Yom, "The Arab Spring: One Region, Several Puzzles, and Many Explanations," *Government and Opposition* 50, no. 4 (Oktober 2015): 682-704, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2015.19>.

³ Azyumardi Azra, "Pemerintah Harus Tangkal Sektarianisme," *Satu Harapan* (blog), 2014, <https://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/azyumardi-pemerintah-harus-tangkal-sektarianisme>.

⁴ Ahmad Sahide, "Demokratisasi Era the Arab Spring di Negara-Negara Arab (Studi Kasus Tunisia, Mesir, Dan Suriah)" (Dissertation, Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2016).

⁵ Sevinç Alkan Özcan, "The Role of Political Islam in Tunisia's Democratization Process: Towards a New Pattern of Secularization?," *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 1 (1 Januari 2018): 209-25, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2018201.12>.

promulgated in January 2014. In October - November 2019, the country became the first to participate in the Arab Spring protests to experience a peaceful transfer of power from a democratically elected government to another.⁶

Democratic governance continues to operate despite various challenges, where Islamic politics coexist with democracy, which has caused debate.⁷ Islamic political revivalism is reflected in the rise of religious activities, such as political parties and movement groups. Political Islam is a new style of the modern movement to create a model of a truly Islamic society.⁸ Islam is not only a religion but also a political ideology used as a tool to achieve goals, reflected in the use of symbols and concepts in the public sphere.⁹ Therefore the conduction of Islamic politics in Tunisian democracy should be studied, specifically in the contemporary era.

Various studies discussing political Islam have been conducted. Luqman Al Hakim and Moh Abdulloh Hilmi examined the dynamics and contestation of Egyptian Islamic politics, stating that radical Islam had a major influence on Egyptian society.¹⁰ Sevinç Alkan Özcan examines the rise of political Islam after the Jasmine Revolution,¹¹ and Anne Wolf discusses the Islamist movement and political Islam in the Arab world. The evolution of Ennahda's ideological and strategic orientation in a changing political context conflicts with ambitions among cadres.¹² Therefore, this study is related to contemporary Islamic politics, specifically addressing the journey of democracy Post-Arab Spring. The implementation of democracy in Muslim countries is an interesting aspect to study in the

⁶ Editor, "Arab Spring," *Britannica.com* (blog), t.t., <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>.

⁷ Guilain Denoëux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," *Middle East Policy* 9, no. 2 (Juni 2002): 56-81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4967.00057>.

⁸ Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, ed., *Pathways to Contemporary Islam: New Trends in Critical Engagement* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvv417f6>.

⁹ Mohammed Ayoob, "The many faces of political Islam: Religion and politics in the Muslim world," dalam *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*, t.t.

¹⁰ Luqman Al Hakim dan Moh Abdulloh Hilmi, "Contemporary Islamic Political Dynamics Arabic Republic of Egypt," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (30 Juni 2022): 115, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v7i1.4292>.

¹¹ Alkan Özcan, "The Role of Political Islam in Tunisia's Democratization Process."

¹² Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190670757.001.0001>.

modern world. There is variation in the drafting of constitutions and diversity in the implementation of the state form when societies decide to adopt the concept of the state.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A library method with a historical approach including four stages was used. The first stage included the collection of data from sources such as books, journal articles, and websites relevant to the context of Middle Eastern countries, particularly Tunisia. The second stage comprised critiquing the material collected from these sources to evaluate the validity of the information contained in the books, articles and websites. The third stage included in-depth analysis and interpretation of the collected and evaluated material. Finally, the fourth stage includes the writing process to present the findings in a paper.

The examination of contemporary Islamic politics in this study appears to represent an emerging and undeniable force, particularly Post-Arab Spring. The influence of Islamic politics is an important issue, specifically in strengthening demands for democracy by analyzing the struggle in Tunisia. Therefore, this study provides the main focus of state democracy, which is a phenomenon of historical studies and political struggles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Photographing the Tunisian State: Pre-Arab Spring Political Upheaval

Tunisia is a country located on the African continent, precisely in North Africa. Furthermore, it is located on the coast of the Mediterranean, and bordered by al-Jazair and Libya to the south and east. Tunisia is predominantly Muslim, occupying a geographical position as a connection between Europe and Africa as well as the East and West of the Arab world. The country also has the official name Republic of Tunisia known as *al-Jumhuriyah at-Tunisiyah*.¹³

¹³ *Ensiklopedi Islam 5 Sya-Zun* (Sukabum: PT Ihtiar Baru van Hoeve, 1999).

This geographically and strategically located country is a destination for colonizers. Several countries were recorded to have colonized Tunisia, such as Funisia and Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, to the French. Tunisia is also inhabited by the indigenous Berber tribe and before transitioning into an Islamic state, Tunisia is referred to as *Ifriqiya*.

The formation of the Tunisian state traces back to the 7th century with the advent of Islam, spearheaded by the influential figure Sahabat Uqba bin Nafi, whose role was important in the propagation of Islam. In addition, Tunisia was ruled by other nations, and this is also a record of the Islamic daulahs, such as the Umayyads, Abbasids, Aghlabids, Fatimids, Ziridids, al-Muwahhidun, Hafsiyyahs and Ottoman Turks. Furthermore, the Islamic daulahs took turns to occupy and control Tunisia and Ottoman Turkish Caliphate was the last Islamic caliphate to rule over the country before becoming a republic.¹⁴

Historically, Tunisia was under Ottoman Turkish rule until May 12, 1881, when France took over through the Treaty of Bardo.¹⁵ French colonial rule brought significant developments in agriculture, education, and changes in land laws. The Alliance Francaise and the Catholic Church became agents of educational modernization, including Zaitunah Mosque College.

Even though the political situation during colonization was relatively stable, Tunisian people were dissatisfied with French domination. In 1919, demands for independence and self-determination were made but rejected by France.¹⁶ This event became the forerunner of the formation of the Destour Party, which was divided into Old Destour and Neo Destour, led by Habib Bourguiba.¹⁷ The French government arrested

¹⁴ Muhammad Hanif, "Sejarah Tunisia: Situs Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia Tunisia," *Angelfire* (blog), 2011, <http://www.angelfire.com/planet/ppitunisia/tunisia/sejarah.html>.

¹⁵ Wahyu Anggorowati Dwi, "Kajian Tentang Jatuhnya Kekuasaan Ben Ali Di Tunisia Tahun 2011," *Risalah* 3, no. 12 (2016), <https://journal.student.uny.ac.id/index.php/risalah/article/view/4918>.

¹⁶ Ira M Lapidus, *Sejarah Sosial Umat Islam Bagian Ke Dua* (Jawa Barat: Raja Grafindo Persada, 1987).

¹⁷ Shafira Elnanda Yasmine, "Arab Spring: Islam dalam gerakan sosial dan demokrasi Timur Tengah," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 28, no. 2 (1 April 2016): 108, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V28I22015.108-115>.

Bourguiba and dissolved the party, but was released when Tunisia was occupied by Germany and Italy during World War II.

After World War II, Tunisia was controlled by France, but the spirit of nationalism instilled by Bourguiba grew stronger. In 1950, physical resistance broke out, spearheaded by the Neo Destour Party which advocated anti-colonialism. France responded with the arrest of resistance leaders, but this fueled a greater spirit of resistance. Therefore, France granted a referendum in 1955, and on March 20, 1956, Tunisia became independent.

In 1950, the Tunisian people resisted the French colonizers with physical struggle. This was inseparable from the influence of Bourguiba with the Neo Destour party which echoed the anti-colonialism attitude. Subsequently, French government arrested the leaders of the resistance, namely Bourguiba, Mohammad Chenik, and Salah Ben Youssef.¹⁸

On March 20, 1956, Tunisia became independent from France and Habib Bourguiba as the leader of the Destour Party became Prime Minister. Bourguiba formed an institution in charge of drafting the Tunisian constitution known as the National Constituent Assembly.¹⁹ On July 25, 1957, the country decided to become a republic, replacing the bey monarchy existing before France came to power. Bourguiba became the first president of Tunisia after the French colonization and on June 1, 1959, Tunisia enacted constitution.²⁰

In the early 1970s, Tunisia experienced an Islamic revival that had been dormant for decades. This was influenced by the Neo-Destour Party led by Habib Bourguiba who was committed to the path of modernization.²¹ Bourguiba led Tunisia post-independence, forming the National Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution. On July 25, 1957, the

¹⁸ Yasmine.

¹⁹ Ahmad Sukandi, "Politik Bourguiba Tentang Hukum Keluarga Di Tunisia (1857-1987)," *Jurnal ASAS* 8, no. 2 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.24042/asas.v8i2.1252>.

²⁰ Muhammad Agastya ABM, *ARAB SPRING: Badai Revolusi Timur Tengah Yang Penuh Darah* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2015).

²¹ Douglas K. Magnuson, "10 Islamic Reform in Contemporary Tunisia: Unity and Diversity," dalam *Tunisia*, ed. oleh I. William Zartman (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), 169-92, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685853211-014>.

country became a republic and replaced the monarchy with Bourguiba as the first president. In 1987, Bourguiba was replaced by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on health grounds, which were found to be fabricated.²²

The Development of Democracy in Tunisia: From Dictatorship to Revolutionism

Before the revolution, Tunisia was under dictatorship when Bourguiba and Ben Ali were in power. For instance, Bourguiba implemented reforms aimed at modernizing and westernizing Tunisia but the administration curtailed the freedom of citizens.²³ During Bourguiba's time, several elections were held but only the PSD party participated in the elections. Furthermore, Bourguiba was very powerful in Tunisia and was declared president in 1975.

Tunisia has a parliamentary system of government, such as Pakistan. As for the issue of the state, Tunisia broke away from France in 1956, and one year later officially became a republic. The country's *Dustur al Jumhuriyah al Tunisiyah*, or Tunisian Constitution, was subjected to many changes. Initially, the 1959 Constitution was in effect, which was ratified on June 1, 1959. Subsequently, this constitution was amended five times, namely in 1988, 1999, 2002, 2003, and 2008.

The An Nahdah Party founded in the early 1970s by Rached Ghannouchi, continued to develop the existence as an Islamic movement over the years and gained an identity as a political party.²⁴ Rashid al-Ghannousyi, a thinker and founder of the al-Nahdhah political party, pioneered the contemporary Islamic revival in Tunisia. The courage and pioneering work contributed to the realization of Zainal Abidin Bin Ali's authoritarian regime.²⁵ An Nahdah's innovation of bottom-up reforms contributed to the

²² Venti Nurbaiti, "Venti. Transisi Demokrasi di Tunisia Pasca Arab Spring" (Bachelor thesis, Lampung, Universitas Lampung, 2018).

²³ Sukandi, "Politik Bourguiba Tentang Hukum Keluarga Di Tunisia (1857-1987)."

²⁴ Ramazan Yildirim, "Transformation of the Ennahda Movement from Islamic Jama'ah to Political Party," *Insight Turkey* 19, no. 2 (1 April 2017): 189-214, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2017192.10>.

²⁵ Lukman Thaib, Barakat Hamad Bara'al-Gharibeh, dan Bharuddin ChePa Zaidi, "Rasyid Al Ghannousyi's thought on Islamic Democracy," *Jaqfi: Jurnal Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam* 1, no. 1 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15575/jaqfi.v1i1.1687>.

success of the democratization process, including inclusive leadership and flexible governance.²⁶ The An Nahdah Party adopts the values of political modernity and does not establish an Islamic state.²⁷ Furthermore, the party retains Islamic references as a source of governance. This is understood as an attempt to harmonize Islam and secular democracy in the constitution.²⁸ Ghannouchi implements a state system less authoritarian and intrusive in personal and religious affairs.²⁹

The government formed a Constituent Assembly after the Tunisian Revolution in 2013-2014, which succeeded in creating a new constitution ratified on January 26, 2014. Article 1 of the Constitution addresses the role of Islam "Tunisia is an independent, free, and sovereign state, with Islam as the official religion, Arabic as the official language, and a republican system of government." The Islamic legal system is next to the French civil legal system and the High Council of Magistracy is the highest judicial body. The parliamentary system used is unicameral, with the People's Assembly (*Al-Majlis Nawwab Esh-Sha'b*) as the only chamber and consisting of 217 members elected through elections.

The Arab Spring was a wave of grassroots movements seeking significant change to improve living conditions. Situations and conditions are increasingly uncertain in various countries where the economy is weakening. This is because poverty and unemployment continue to increase, social inequality occurs, and freedom of life is restricted by the ruling regime. The Arab Spring can also be said to be a revolution preferring a democratic system of government.

²⁶ Ali I. Al Mohammad, "Political Islam and Democratic Transition in the Middle East and North Africa: The Puzzle of Contradictory Trajectories in Egypt and Tunisia a Comparative Analysis of the Ennahda Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood" (Thesis, UPPSALA UNIVERSITET, 2023).

²⁷ Houssein Ben Lazreg, "Post-Islamism in Tunisia and Egypt: Contradictory Trajectories," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (3 Juni 2021): 408, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060408>.

²⁸ Zuly Qodir, "Post-Islamism and Reform Islamic Law: The Challenges and Future of Political Islam In Indonesia," *Ahkam* 23, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v23i2.31484>.

²⁹ Omair Anas, "Rached Ghannouchi and his Political Discourses between Tunisian and Global Islamism," *Sociology of Islam* 9, no. 3-4 (21 September 2023): 250-65, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-09030005>.

This situation can be understood when looking at the situation of Arab leaders who have been in office for a long period and decades. This makes the regime more powerful and tends to be authoritarian. Arab Spring is a new political term in the Middle Eastern political lexicon. The term symbolizes the collapse of authoritarian leaders in Middle Eastern countries, particularly Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and other Arab countries. Furthermore, it is considered a driving force and a valuable opportunity that will lead to a great awakening and change.³⁰

The Arab Spring wave that swept through most countries occurred in Tunisia. The incident was triggered by the self-immolation of a young graduate student who was selling fruits. The desperate act was carried out by Muhammad Bouazizi because of deep frustration with the attitude of the authorities. This was a response and strong protest against the arbitrary and unfair behavior of the authorities and local government under the dictatorial regime of Zainal El Abidine Ben Ali.

Mohamed Bouazizi was not a visionary, a leader of a movement, or a great orator passionate about great ideals. The actions are considered an individual response to a situation. However, this behavior proved to be a substitute for what ideologues, movement leaders and orators in Arab countries have failed to achieve. All the different ideological backgrounds and agendas in almost all Arab countries over the past four decades have failed to change the repressive political conditions, the economic monopoly surrounding the rulers, and social injustice.

Considering the attitude of authoritarian leaders, changes were not made to prevent the opposition from acting in self-defence. Ben Ali's leaders monitored the intellectuals' every move and dissolved the Islamic Party to warn enemies.

Mohamed Bouazizi succeeded in the great task of overthrowing Tunisia's long-standing dictatorship.³¹ Bouazizi's self-immolation caused widespread reactions through

³⁰ Ahmad Sahide, *Gejolak Politik Timur Tengah (Dinamika, Konflik dan Harapan)* (Yogyakarta: The Phinisi Press, 2017), <http://repository.umy.ac.id/handle/123456789/19999>.

³¹ Sukandi, "Politik Bourguiba Tentang Hukum Keluarga Di Tunisia (1857-1987)."

national and international media coverage, and the demonstrations shook the power of Tunisia's authoritarian regime. The massive citywide demonstrations forced Ben Ali's regime to step down from the iron fist rule.³² Bouazizi shattered the myth of failed dictatorships, with the death dispelling fear and galvanizing people's courage to stand up to oppressive autocratic rulers.

The collapse of the Ben Ali regime had a domino effect on neighboring countries such as the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt. This was because the same problems also occurred in the economic, social and political sectors of Arab countries.³³ Therefore, the Arab Spring phenomenon continues in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. In most Arab countries, societies are led by regimes that are authoritarian, closed and resistant to criticism.

Most of the regimes have been in power for decades, from Zannar El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, Bassa al-Assad in Syria.³⁴ The same thing happened in Libya, where Muammar Kaddafi better known as Gaddafi was tragically overthrown after 42 years in power. This political event is referred to as "The Arab Spring" and the event brought hope for a better life with a democratic system.³⁵ This event, widely known as the Arab Spring, brought dreams for Arab societies to live a better life under a democratic system.³⁶

Perhaps political change in Arab countries must be achieved through violence (revolution), and this is the destiny of history. The people have decided to break away from the oppression of authoritarian regimes. Jaber states that freedom of thought, freedom of opinion, freedom of choice, and established political parties have been the "consensus" of

³² Sahide, *Gejolak Politik Timur Tengah (Dinamika, Konflik dan Harapan)*.

³³ ABM, *ARAB SPRING: Badai Revolusi Timur Tengah Yang Penuh Darah*.

³⁴ Machmudi Yon dan Riyan Hidayat, *Sejarah Timur Tengah Kontemporer: kepemimpinan di Arab Saudi dan Libya* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia (UI-Press), 2016).

³⁵ Sahide, "Demokratisasi Era the Arab Spring di Negara-Negara Arab (Studi Kasus Tunisia, Mesir, Dan Suriah)."

³⁶ Ahmad Sahide, Yoyo Yoyo, dan Ali Muhammad, "Tunisia's Success in Consolidating Its Democracy One Decade Post-the Arab Spring," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 26, no. 1 (29 Juni 2022): 49, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.65912>.

Arab societies for decades. Arab countries have an alarming record of democratization and this process has come at a great cost.

Several years of change processes are estimated to have claimed tens of thousands of human lives. This is ironic because the important purpose of the formation of the "aspired" society and state is to protect the children of the nation.³⁷ After the collapse of authoritarian regimes in numerous Arab countries, spearheaded by Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, the prompt restoration of security and stability proved elusive, exerting adverse effects on social, economic, and political conditions. The freedom has created new problems as well as tribal and sectarian disputes have become increasingly prominent and fierce. Every tribe and sect is fighting for victory, and everyone wants to win by any method both positively and negatively.

Groups that previously rejected democracy used this freedom to pursue an agenda, often becoming more radical and outspoken, to the point where sectarianism was a challenge. The Arab Spring wave had a significant impact on the ebb and flow of contemporary Middle Eastern politics. This phenomenon assisted Tunisia to become the first Middle Eastern country to revolutionize towards a more democratic state system.³⁸

The struggle of the people to regain political rights based on Islam has been a very steep and long road. However, the Tunisian populace mobilized and ousted a government that prioritized self-interest, oppressed marginalized communities, persecuted dissenters, and infringed upon the rights of its citizens.

Activists during Bin Ali's reign experienced many struggles to survive while in exile.³⁹ The year 2014 marked the inception of a period dedicated to advancing the

³⁷ A. Salim, N.U. Khan, dan M. Kaleem, "Contemporary Digital Age and Dynamics of E-Jihad in the Muslim World: Case Study of Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 11, no. 4 (2019): 102-14.

³⁸ Tariq Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab awakening* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁹ Mohammad Dawood Sofi, "Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda: By Anne Wolf, London, Hurst and Company, 2017, Xv + 269 Pp., £30.00 (Hardback), ISBN 9781849048262, £18.99 (Paperback), ISBN 9781787380332," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 6 (2 November 2019): 1046-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2018.1527084>.

construction of democracy and this step brought great hope to Tunisian society after political instability.⁴⁰ The new 2014 constitution is a major democratic milestone that respects freedom of association and religion, guaranteeing checks and balances relating to the executive and recognizes gender equality.

Contemporary Tunisian Democratic Life: Flexibility and Accommodation in State Life

The situation of democracy in Arab is at a difficult stage, with each country facing its challenges. Some countries, specifically Tunisia, continue to strive to advance the democratic process. Tunisia is the hope for Islamic countries in the Middle East to develop from a long period of difficulty. The country is leading the way on the road to democracy, despite having to build the system from scratch and win back the trust of the people. Even though the Arab Spring started in 2010, significant democratic progress has not been reported. However, Tunisia was an exception since the wave became a symbol of the fall of authoritarian regimes and a sign of hope to start the journey towards democracy.

After the Tunisian Revolution, Rached Ghannouchi as the leader of An Nahdah separated the party from the Islamic paradigm, becoming a religious movement separate from politics (*al- Siyasi and al-da'awi*).⁴¹ In this context, An Nahdah proves that Islamic politics can be in line with democracy.⁴² The existence of the Arab Spring phenomenon opened the door for various Islamic parties to compete with each other in the elections.

Democracy has been categorized as a successful concept because the practice has developed and meets the criteria of the state. This success is supported by the encouragement of civil society and political actors with an open perspective.⁴³ Tunisia's

⁴⁰ Muhammad Fauzan Irvan dan Yon Machmudi, *Consolidation of Democracy in Tunisia After the Arab Spring Perioded 2014-2020* (Jakarta: Sekolah Kajian Stratejik dan Global Universitas Indonesia, 2022), 2014-20, <https://lib.ui.ac.id/m/detail.jsp?id=9999920517968&lokasi=lokal>.

⁴¹ Ben Lazreg, "Post-Islamism in Tunisia and Egypt."

⁴² John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn, dan John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195147988.001.0001>.

⁴³ Sahide, Yoyo, dan Muhammad, "Tunisia's Success in Consolidating Its Democracy One Decade Post-the Arab Spring."

example shows that Islam and democracy can coexist harmoniously, refuting the notion of incompatibility.

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the transitional government was led by Prime Minister Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi. Different political reform programs were carried out by releasing prisoners, punishing corruptors, and drafting regulations for holding legislative elections. Tunisia succeeded in holding peaceful elections and political competition among parties, which competitively took place. Moreover, there is no monopoly of power on individuals, and political parties compete for public support, creating a significant difference from other countries. In Tunisia, women have equal opportunities to take an important role in practical politics.

In October 2011, Tunisia held legislative elections to fill 217 seats in parliament. The elections were participated in by political parties, namely An-Nahdah, The Congress for the Republic, Ettakatol, as well as the Modernist Democratic Pole and Democratic Progressive Party.⁴⁴ In this election, An Nahdah Party won 41% of the seats or 89 out of 217 seats in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA).⁴⁵

During the Pre-Arab Spring, Tunisia used an electoral democracy system where the president was elected with a five-year term. However, Zainal Abidin bin Ali was frequently elected president, supported by the Constitutional Democratic Party which dominated more than 80% of the seats in parliament. Activists and opposition groups have always been closely monitored by the regime, hindering development and reducing people's participation in socio-political dynamics. However, during Post-Arab Spring and fall of Bin Ali, various political parties were developed with four dominating the Tunisian political map, such as An-Nahdhah, The Congress For the Republic, Ettakatol, and the Modernist

⁴⁴ M. Hamdan Basyar, "Politik Islam di Negara Yang Terdampak Arab Spring: Tunisia, Mesir, Dan Libya," dalam *Many Faces of Political Islam in the Middle East: Arah Baru Gerakan Politik Islam Pasca-Arab Spring/Nostalgia* (Ed) (Jakarta: LIPI Press, 2020).

⁴⁵ The Carter Center, *National Constituent Assembly Elections in Tunisia* (Atlanta: The Carter Center, 2011).

Democratic Pole and Democratic Progress Party. Currently, An-Nahdhah is a popular Islamic party and dominates the majority of votes, followed by the other parties.⁴⁶

An-Nahdhah Party campaigns as a moderate Islamic party that values religious freedom, as well as rights of the minorities and women. In January 2014, the Tunisian National Assembly approved the country's new constitution. This was an important milestone in building democracy after three years of the fall of the Bin Ali regime. The constitution is seen as a dream of the people, marking the revival of the revolution and efforts to create a democratic civil state. This achievement distinguishes the country from others in the region transitioning from Post-Arab Spring, such as Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen, plagued by internal conflicts. The new constitution propels Tunisia as the most progressive country in the region, with guarantees of equal rights between men and women, prosecution of corruption, and division of powers between the prime minister and president.

Tunisia became an inspiration for Muslim countries in the Middle East to rise from the depths of despair, sectarian conflict and civil war. Democracy requires time to flourish considering Western principles such as the separation of powers, free and fair elections, civil liberties, equitable laws, respect for human rights, freedom of expression, and religious tolerance. The process is complicated, specifically in the Middle East where democracy is still an abstract idea. Despite the difficulties, the Middle East is making strides towards democratic principles in the governance systems. This has been proven by Tunisia through successful elections, recognition of freedom of speech, tolerance of different faiths, and upholding of gender equality.⁴⁷

1. Status of Islam

⁴⁶ Muhammad Fakhry Ghafur, "Agama dan Demokrasi: Munculnya Kekuatan Politik Islam di Tunisia, Mesir dan Libya," *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 11, no. 2 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.14203/jpp.v11i2.203>.

⁴⁷ Sahide, Yoyo, dan Muhammad, "Tunisia's Success in Consolidating Its Democracy One Decade Post-the Arab Spring."

The preamble of the 2014 Constitution, emphasizes the sovereignty of the people and the democratic, participatory and republican government of Tunisia. Regarding religious foundations, the Constitution declares the attachment of the people to the teachings of Islam, which are characterized by the values of openness and moderation.⁴⁸ Islam is the religion of the State, but this must not impede the freedom of religion for followers of others.

2. Status And Rights Of Women

The state guarantees the protection of women's rights and recognizes the role as partners of men in nation-building. Article 20 of the draft Constitution of 1 June 2013 recognizes the equality of men and women in rights and duties, and before the law without discrimination. In addition, Article 46 explains that the State guarantees the protection of women's rights and equality of opportunity between men and women. The State shall also take all necessary measures to eliminate violence against women.⁴⁹ The revolution has opened the eyes of the Tunisian people that women must also obtain the same position as men in various fields. In the field of government, Souad is the first woman to serve as Mayor of Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.⁵⁰

3. Blasphemy And Its Relationship With Freedom Of Religion, Expression And Belief

The Tunisian constitution prohibits all forms of disrespect for religious processions, hate speech, insults, and violence. The state strives to spread the values

⁴⁸ "the Constitution of Tunisia," Pub. L. No. 2014 (t.t.).

⁴⁹ Firmanda Taufiq dan Zezen Zainul Ali, "Gender and Politics in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: Women Leaders within Local Oligarchy Networks: By Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, Atika Nur Kusumaningtyas, Fatimah Fildzah Izzati, and Esty Ekawati, 2022, Indonesia, BRIN, Paperback 169 Pp. ISBN 978-981-19-1733-2," *Gender, Place & Culture* 30, no. 10 (3 Oktober 2023): 1506-8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2023.2199519>.

⁵⁰ Sahide, *Gejalah Politik Timur Tengah (Dinamika, Konflik, Dan Harapan)*, t.t.

of moderation and tolerance.⁵¹ The freedom to express religious beliefs was banned by previous governing regimes, but also live under a state that defends and guarantees religious values.⁵² Religious freedom has also increased Islamic recitations and talims in large mosques scattered throughout the country. In addition, there are many growing communities and associations in Tunisia such as public festivals, conferences and charity events.⁵³

Tunisia continues to pursue the development of democracy while upholding the values of the Islamic religion that the majority of people follow. There are complexities in the relationship between Western democracy and the Islamic teachings. The political dynamics have intensified since 2011 with conflicts between political parties such as An-Nahdah, which adheres to moderate Islam, and secular groups. The existence of liberalization politics opens space for fundamentalist Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi, and ISIS which are firmly opposed to liberalization in reform.⁵⁴

The secular group opposed Islamists to save Tunisia from the domination of religious politics. According to Gannouchi, the biggest obstacle to the growth of democracy is the division of society due to ideological differences, between Islamist and secular groups, as well as between pro- and anti-revolution, creating complicated problems in political dynamics.

The Tunisian people's long journey to independence from the oppression of the government was a journey full of obstacles and suffering. Many individuals were physically and mentally victimized due to revolution. However, this struggle was not only about

⁵¹ Mazen Shaqoura dan Annali Kristiansen, *Islam and Human Rights: The Constitutional Debate In Tunisia* (Denmark: The Danish Institute for Human Rights Denmark's National Human Rights Institution, 2015).

⁵² Rory McCarthy, "Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia's Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the Challenge of Free Speech," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2 Oktober 2015): 447-64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1005055>.

⁵³ Ibnu Burdah, *Islam Kontemporer: Revolusi dan Demokrasi* (Malang: Intrans Publishing, 2014).

⁵⁴ Teije H Donker, *Islamist Movements during the Tunisian Transition and Syrian Crisis The Power of Practices* (UK: Edinburgh Studies of the Globalised Muslim World Published, 2024).

religion but also about human rights and humanitarian obligations. Despite the heavy casualties, Tunisian society continues to move forward on the long journey towards democracy.

The complexity of the process and the dynamics of the democratic journey in the Middle East do not cast doubt on the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Islam champions the values of freedom, equality, human rights, justice and humanity. Even though doubts arise from the West and within Islamic political thought, some understandings are rejected.

Tunisia became the hope for other countries in the Middle East to rise after conducting democratic elections and inaugurating a constitution that recognizes gender equality.⁵⁵ The country aims to renew democracy by shedding the influence of extreme ideologies, both secular and religious, and abandoning the monarchy. Even though comparisons with other Islamic governments are difficult, Tunisia remains a model for renewing democracy, marking a transition to maturity amidst all the dynamics faced.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islam and democracy were thriving in Tunisia through the existence of national dialogues between groups. Tunisia's revival after the political turmoil was carried out quickly compared to other Middle Eastern countries in terms of implementing democratic principles. Furthermore, the principles of democracy were evident in the organization of elections and the participation of many parties in the electoral process, recognition of freedom of speech, and tolerance of different beliefs. In addition, the inauguration of a constitution that recognized gender equality made Tunisia a pioneer of feminism, and upholding gender equality.

⁵⁵ Ismail Al Faruqi dan Lamya' Al Faruqi, "The Cultural Atlas of Islam: By Ismail and Lamya' al Faruqi," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 3, no. 1 (1 September 1986): 169-70, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v3i1.2768>.

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