



العرفاء : مجلة الشريعة والاقتصاد الإسلامي والقانون

AL-ARFA: Journal of Sharia, Islamic Economics and Law

Journal website: <https://al-arfa.my.id>

E-ISSN: 2988-0483

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61166/arfa.v2i1.46>

Vol. 2 No. 1 (2024)


pp. 48-58

Research Article

Islamic Movements Face an Emerging Threat and Tunisian Political Environment: Presidential Coup, Democracy, and Aristocracy

Muhammad Asad Latif

Department of Islamic Studies, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur Pakistan

E-mail: rockybaba091@gmail.com 



Copyright © 2024 by Authors, Published by AL-ARFA: Journal of Sharia, Islamic Economics and Law. This is an open access article under the CC BY License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Received : March 05, 2024
Accepted : August 26, 2024

Revised : June 17, 2024
Available online : October 02, 2024

How to Cite: Muhammad Asad Latif. (2024). Islamic Movements Face an Emerging Threat and Tunisian Political Environment: Presidential Coup, Democracy, and Aristocracy. *Al-Arfa: Journal of Sharia, Islamic Economics and Law*, 2(1), 48–58. <https://doi.org/10.61166/arfa.v2i1.46>

Abstract. In 2011, the popular revolt brought about change in the Tunisian presidential palace as it transitioned from authoritarianism to a condition of liminality. However, following the Tunisian President's proclamation, only the democratic success story of the Arab Spring is under jeopardy after ten years of democratic transition. This article seeks to show how the President has increased his authority by invoking Article 80 of the Constitution. It also explains how this action violates the constitution and has a detrimental effect on the political environment. As a result, Tunisia's Islamic movement has dominated the political landscape of the nation since the 2011 uprising and is seen as the leader of the Islamic identity and democratic movement. Finally, it comes to a conclusion that

a coup from the Tunisian president occurred amid Rashid Al-Ghannouchi, the Movement's founder and speaker of the Parliament, showing leniency toward Islamic doctrine. Although it appears that the situation is still precarious, Al-Nahda leadership is once again playing a crucial role in fostering a stable political environment through discussion. The main and secondary data in this article have been evaluated using the Discourse Analysis method and its Critical Discourse Analysis method.

Keywords: Tunisian Political Struggle, Environmental Politics, Democracy, Islamic Movements, Political Repression.

INTRODUCTION

The social, legal, political, and other spheres of society are all actively engaged by Islamic political movements. Political Islam is viewed differently by academics and decision-makers. Researchers have been more interested in the increasing role of Islamic groups in their various fields as a result of the post-Arab Spring reality. This study claims that among other Islamic movements, Tunisian "Ennahda," which is led by Muslim activist and scholar Rashid Al-Ghannouchi, took the initiative to turn all other struggles into political ones. Thus, in light of his new understanding, it is actually a paradigm shift example rather than a reference to Political Islamism (Ghanouchi, 2016). But on July 25, 2021, President Saied announced that he would rule by decree for the time being following a decade-long "Arab Spring" that had moved Tunisia toward freedom, freedom of speech, rights, and democracy. He also dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi. (Draegon and Dennison, 2021) The 63-year-old, austere former professor of constitutional law Kais Saied considers it his duty to end corruption and restore justice to the nation. In an effort to protect Tunisia from greedy elites who have mishandled the country since the 2011 revolution, he justified his efforts to take further authority. The president, who sacked Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the parliament and courts, has been accused of orchestrating a "coup" against the mutiny and constitution, according to Tunisia's major political parties.

Along with the Islamist parties Ennahda, Karama Coalition, Democratic Current, the secular party Qalb Tounes, and others, the four biggest parties in the Tunisian parliament have denounced the president's unlawful acts. (Amara and McDowell, 2021) Falor make the following claim in this regard: The Tunisian parliament enacted a constitution in 2014 that established a semi-presidential system, meaning that President Kais Saied would share power with the prime minister who exercises his authority before the parliament. The current political activity among these political players, respecting their separate powers, was initiated as a result of this rift. Such power struggles led to a confused response to the COVID-19 outbreak, which made Tunisia's economic and political situation worse. (Falor, 2021) Additionally, the major thrust of this piece is on how the present political climate in Tunisia is a difficult test

for democracy, which will soon mark the tenth anniversary of the Arab Spring. Since that time, the unconsolidated democracy has been placed in a temporal condition where it is being closely watched and assessed using a dichotic scale between democracy and authoritarianism. (Radeck, 2022)

METHOD

For main and secondary data, this research work uses critical discourse analysis (CDA). By employing discourse analysis, we must first establish the fundamental concepts relevant to this research, such as democracy, aristocracy, the Islamic movement, and politics. Additionally, the design of this research study is interpretative, and we utilized this methodology to concentrate on many research publications and leadership interviews to gain in-depth understanding about the subject.

DISCUSSION

Meanings and Fundamental Presumptions

Politics is defined as "the art or science concerned with gaining and maintaining control over a government" in the Merriam Webster dictionary. An aristocracy, in Aristotle's opinion, is "the rule of the few or by the minority." In contrast, "'Democracy' means government by the people or rule of the majority." (Merriam, 2023) Political scientists and academics have used several metaphors to explain political Islam, Islamic movements, and royalty. "Any interpretation of Islam as a source of political identity and action," according to John Voll, is political Islam. (Voll and Sonn, 2019)

Tunisian Political Environment in Flashback

In 1956, Tunisia gained its independence from France. The leader of the country's independence campaign and its first President, Habib Bourguiba, was elected in 1957. Habib Bourguiba announced to his country that he would bring about Islamic reform. He used the popular phrase of religion to motivate the populace throughout his political campaign (Esposito, 2016, 176-80). But after a few years, he had a change of heart and began to create a secular state. The political beliefs and actions of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, the creator of Modern Secular Turkey and a staunch liberal in his outlook, were a major influence on him. He began to change his state along purely western lines shortly after independence in the early 1960s and said that we should emulate western political and economic practices. According to Esposito (185-90) As a result, the individual who had inspired the people to organize on the basis of Islam changed his approach and followed western secular principles. He had fundamentally altered his nation's educational system and cleared the path for the adoption of secular principles. He switched Arabic for French

because he was adamant that doing so would lead his nation toward prosperity and advancement.

In addition, he enacted and made official other legislation that were thought to be in opposition to Islam. He changed the country's divorce and marriage rules, which sparked fierce opposition, particularly from religious groups. Additionally, he helped make abortion rights legal. He forbade women from covering their heads in public and institutional settings. He said that "We have an enemy to conquer the poverty" and singled out Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Islam, as the cause of the country's decreased economic output (Esposito, 195-200). As a result of these drastic reforms, powerful religious figures and political organizations saw him as someone who was deeply liberal and secular. Later, following the same guidelines set down by Habib Bourguiba, Bin Ali ruled the nation. Rashid Ghannouchi, who graduated from Zaytouna University at the time these changes were being implemented in the nation, traveled to Cairo and Damascus to further his education. In 1979, after his return, he created Jammah al-Islamiyya, an Islamic organization that functioned more like a political organization than a party.

Later, in 1981, Rashid Ghannouchi and Abd al- Fatah Morou turned the Islamic Association into the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), a political party. In the beginning, there were other religious movements besides the Islamic Tendency Movement. Other organizations were the Hassan Ghodbani-led "Islamic Shura Party," "Islamic Tendency Movement," "Islamic Vanguard," and "Islamic Liberation Movement." His strong dedication to democracy, as well as his clarity on the idea that Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive, made him popular with the Tunisian people (Ghanouchi, 49-60). Ghannouchi also argue that: If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government currently in use in the West, a system in which the populace freely selects its representatives and leaders, and in which there is an alternation of power, as well as freedom and human rights for the populace, then the Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy, and it is not in their interest to do so anyway. (181)

Workers for the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) had previously held group talks, produced journals, and assembled and organized university students. The dictatorial government consented to register further political parties in 1981. MTI made a request, but the government denied it since it was a political party. But in 1987, when Zainel el Abidine bin Ali overthrew the reign of the nation's longtime president and combatant, Habib Bourguiba, it was forced to stop owing to the need for reform. A 'ray of optimism' of fresh political opportunity was brought about by Bin Ali's ascent. Bin Ali said that he is ushering in a new political period in Tunisia while granting political prisoners and activists their release and liberty. The authorities under Bin Ali rejected MTI's second request for political recognition after it changed its name to Hizb Ennahda (The Renaissance Party). (Esposito and Sonn, 61) 1989 saw the first election held following the emergence of the Bin Ali

administration. Independent Ennahda candidates received 13% of the total vote cast and, according to some other figures, 30% of the vote in metropolitan areas. Following the Islamists' triumph, the authorities felt endangered and began to stifle the movement. Numerous Ennahda members had them detained, subjected to torture, and prohibited from participating in school and economic pursuits. Ghannouchi and other movement leaders were sent into exile. Ennahda continues to fight for existence as a proscribed underground organization from 1989 until 2010. (Esposito and Sonn, 63-66)

A decades-long authoritarian administration was finally overthrown in December 2010 when a street seller named Mohammad Bouzaizi set himself on fire in front of a local government building to protest the abuse he had been subjected to. His suicide sparked a revolution, and in less than a month, widespread demonstrations swept throughout the nation, forcing Bin Ali to escape. (Kienly, 2012) Ennahda members joined other Tunisians in protest. However, they refrained from using party flags to avoid giving the Bin Ali administration the justification that the opposition parties were fomenting instability in the nation in order to seize power. (Ghanouchi, 70-75) The march against the dictatorship was effectively organized in large part because to social media. Nearly 91 percent of Tunisian university students, according to the report, had active Facebook sites where they disseminated information and attracted followers. Despite their best efforts, the dictatorship was unable to manage that instrument. (Esposito and Sonn, 189) In other nations like Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Syria, the fall of Bin Ali and the resurgence of the Ennahda movement spurred similar protests against oppression, corruption, unemployment, and subpar living conditions as well as for the rights to political freedom, democracy, and freedom of speech. (Jaboun, 2014)

Ennahda's grassroots network and vocal opposition to the dictatorship helped it win by a significant margin in the first free elections. However, Ennahda formed a coalition government with two other secular parties for the sake of the nation's development and unity, and thus established a great example for other Arab countries. (Ghanouchi, 65-70) Ennahda has chosen to work toward peace and compromise over retaliation in the interest of the nation's development. Prior to the country's unification, Ennahda's lawmakers decided to design a mixed presidential-parliamentary system and compromised on the idea that the constitution would not recognize Shari'ah as a source of law. Ennahda had previously advocated for a parliamentary system. (Netterstorm, 2015) Two well-known secular figures were assassinated as a result of a series of attacks carried out by extreme Salafists when Ennahda's coalition government was in office, notably in 2013. The opposition connected Ennahda to these murders, and as a result several parliamentarians abstained from taking part in the constitution-writing process. Ennahda ceded control of the government at that time and gave the technocrats the authority to form it. Ennahda's goals were to enable the national constituent assembly to finish

drafting the constitution and provide the groundwork for a democratic Tunisia, not to maintain its own position of power. (Ghanouchi, 85-90)

2014's presidential and parliamentary elections turned out to be a turning point in the nation's political transformation. The authoritarian dictatorship of previous President Bin Ali was overthrown by the Arab Spring, and the new democratic leadership made considerable strides toward establishing democratic institutions and behaviors in the nation. Following two years of discussion and compromise, the leadership finally sat down at a table, which cleared the path for them to create a new constitution. During this time of change, a vibrant political environment began to take shape. From a country with de facto one-party control to one with over 90 political parties, Tunisia underwent change. (Willis, 2004, 35) In order to guide the nation through the transition, Ennahda, the dominant party in the ruling coalition, extensively examined the opposition groups.

However, in 2013, the murders of two prominent opposition activists sparked nationwide outrage and led to a political impasse that imperiled the transition process. Under these conditions, they came to an agreement on a plan to end this transitory phase through a national discussion process supported by well-known civil society organizations and political parties. The approval of a progressive constitution, the election of a new parliamentary assembly, and president were all required under that roadmap, which also prompted the coalition government to hand over authority to a caretaker administration. In 2014, general elections were conducted in accordance with the new constitution. Nida Tunis Party (Tunis Calls), which ran on an anti-Islamist platform, secured 85 of the 217 seats in the legislature. As a consequence, Nida Tunis was granted the authority to form a coalition government and appoint a prime minister. Ennahda political party, which had until that time dictated the parliament and ran on a stage of rational Islamism, won 69 seats. Ennahda conceded defeat and joined Nida Tunis in the coalition administration to bring about national prosperity. Despite making so many sacrifices, Ennahda won 69 seats in the 2019 parliamentary elections, becoming the majority party in Tunisia.

Present Challenges and Political Struggle

All the significant difficulties the movement is currently facing will now be covered in this study piece. Since the founding of Ennahda, the authoritarian government of the nation has begun its cruelties and oppressions. Following the Arab awakening, the movement also had to contend with foreign operations intended to undermine Tunis's fledgling democratic process, but they were successful across all borders. Because they saw themselves as the forerunners of democracy, political freedom, and free speech, the Tunisian Islamic movement has faced more and more obstacles as a result of the current situation (Draegon and Dennison, 2021). For the sake of the development and unity of the nation, they have

made concessions and chosen the path of reconciliation. Therefore, since Tunisia's Arab Spring upheaval, the moderate Islamist party has been the most powerful political force in the nation. It has a significant number of seats in parliament. Since the 2011 revolution, it has been clear that some gulf nations are not happy with the democratic process and are attempting to interfere with it through the use of money and the media in order to undermine the democratic political system and to cause problems and internal conflicts in the nation. (Netterstorm, 2015) Ennahda persevered through all of these challenges with patience and sacrifice in order to establish a democratic government in the nation.

Thus, President Kais Saied has received support from the military and regional forces in previous crises. The Ennahda movement has urged the President to unfreeze the parliament and conduct business in conformity with the law. Additionally, they highlighted and reminded Kais Saied that the best way to resolve political conflicts is via communication. Additionally, the campaign calls on all political parties and legal associations to join in on the conversation to safeguard democracy of Tunisian. (Yerks, 2023) Additionally, on August 24, 2021, immediately following the issuance of a new proclamation, the president of Tunisia once more prolonged the suspension of the parliament until further notice. The people in Tunisia are concerned about this action's impact on the democracy that the nation enacted following the 2011 revolution. After ten years of revolution, Kais Saied has started to place the political establishment under house arrest, including a number of officials and former ministers, and has imposed travel restrictions on elected officials, businesspeople, the legislature, and the judiciary. Within the party's executive committee, Rashid Ghannouchi has come under fire for allegedly failing to handle the recent political problems, and as a result, he dissolved the executive committee. He made this option in response to major party leaders' demands that he step down from the leadership position as a result of making poor strategic decisions since the 2019 elections. Because of these changes in power, President Kais Saied used Article 80 of the constitution to assume control.

Behind the Scenario of Article 80

In accordance with Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution, the president may retain exceptional powers for a period of 30 days "in the event of impending danger" to the state or its operations. (Bou and Nassif, 2022) But even a layperson can see that Article 80 of the constitution also grants the power to consult the prime minister and the speaker of the house and that the parliament remains in "a state of continuous session throughout such a period," not suspended. Additionally, the constitutional court—which has still not been established—was to be the venue that could determine whether or not Article 80 was implemented correctly. The constitution required the establishment of this court. However, no party was able to agree on the court's membership due to Tunis's fractured political scene. As a result

of the president's action, the situation worsened when Rashid Ghannouchi, Samira Ghannouchi, and other legislative leaders attempted to convene a session of parliament in defiance of Saied's order. However, a military squad barred access for lawmakers. The army, police, and Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) appear to have supported Saied's choice and proven their devotion to him while also voicing worries that he would adhere to the 30-day limit and not exercise his power any further. Though he increased his authority, Kais Saied has been on a purge campaign against political rivals, the legislature, and the judiciary since the Presidential Coup. (France 24, 2023)

Tunisia's potential courses of action

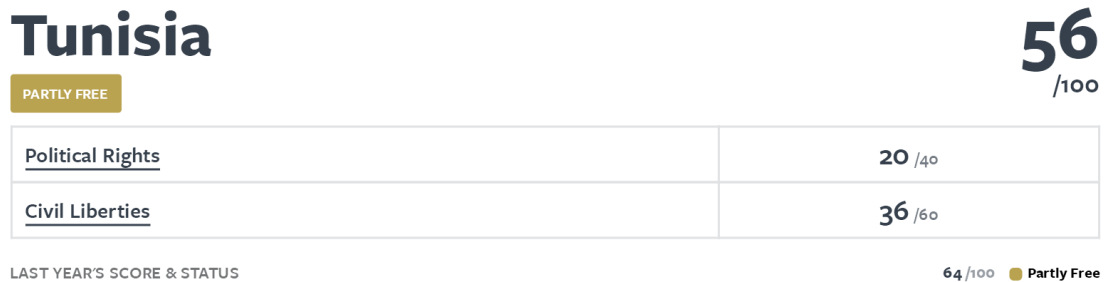
The use of Article 80 of the constitution by Kais Saied to seize power would have many, conflicting implications for Tunisia's future. First of all, based on the evidence, scholars believe that the president's actions will return the nation to a dictatorship. Second, rather than the semi-structured system, the events could finally push Tunisia towards presidential democracy, which gives the president more aggressive power. Therefore, both positions are in favor among think tanks; but 'time' will determine which strategy is best for the nation's future.

Analytical Verdict making

Additionally, the study's findings indicate that Tunisia's democracy is still in jeopardy and that President Kais Saied's latest attempt to seize control by suspending parliament and ousting the prime minister has hampered the democratic process. Despite his claims to the contrary, the suspension of the parliament is temporary. His mandate is democratic, and regardless of how troublesome a parliament is, it is wiser to remove it at the voting box rather than by lethal force. So, we might conclude that Tunisia can emerge from this chaotic position through a process of genuine conversation. A few Gulf countries are working to destroy democracy because they regard it as a threat to their own system of governance. As a result, they should also be obliged to do their share. Ennahda's demand for a dialogue from all parties is the only option to save the nation from this predicament. According to Ennahda, the ruling regime should take note of its shortcomings and learn from past disasters. Additionally, we shall continue to strive for democracy. Furthermore, the suspension's extension until further notice might intensify the political upheaval already present in the country.

Last but not least, President Saied used Article 80 of the constitution to support his seizure of power. A constitutional referendum on July 25, 2022, and fresh parliamentary elections at the conclusion of 2022 were both part of the proposal that was "said" offered. Therefore, the president has scheduled a constitutional referendum for July 25, 2022, although figure 1 shows the previous political results.

Figure 1. Indicates the Tunisian's Previous Political Results.



Source (Freedom House, 2023)

The major goal of the referendum was to approve a new constitution that would explain and remedy the revolution's path as well as the president's coup against the elected parliament in 2021. With a low turnout, the referendum results reflect a resounding victory for the president. The referendum was boycotted by opposition parties because they believed Kais Saied was using it to establish his legitimacy. Tunisia continues to be marked by political unrest and economic distress. However, policymakers and onlookers have consistently been astounded by Tunisia's politics. The political climate in Tunisia right now is worrying. The destiny of Tunisia is expected to be decided by time and the whole scenario is stuck in 2023 yet. (Freedom House, 2023)

CONCLUSION

The popular movement in Tunisia against corruption, poverty, and political persecution, which prompted President bin Ali to resign from office in January 2011, is in jeopardy with the new edict, the study piece says. The uprising that transformed the Tunisian presidential palace and transitioned the country from a dictatorship to a consolidated democracy is once more in jeopardy. When a young Tunisian named "Mohamed Bouazizi" set himself on fire in front of a government building on December 17, 2010, the protests against repression in the town of "Sidi Bouzid" took off. In his family, Mohamed Bouazizi was the sole provider of income. After many requests for bribes from him, the local officials finally took his goods away. He complained to the authorities about the offenders, but they wouldn't listen. He then doused himself in gasoline and lit himself on fire as a result. His predicament sparked a public rebellion and outrage that subsequently evolved into a symbol of tyranny, injustice, and the severe economic misery that many Tunisians were experiencing. Therefore, this occurrence sparked nationwide public protests against political repression, excessive unemployment, and poverty. Due to popular outrage and protest, the dictatorship era came to an end, and the nation began a new chapter under the democratic system, which will have been in place for ten years as of 2021.

However, the democratic transition gave political stability to the nation after a protracted period of Bin Ali's tyranny and political unpredictability. However, that ambiguity gave rise to the subsequent crises, which increased Tunisians' dissatisfaction. Consequently, the following ideas are highlighted in this study article: First off, it became out that the 2014 Tunisian constitution was a result of concessions made by the political elites to calm unrest in the nation. However, because of the power-sharing agreement among political elites set down in the constitution, competition, political sluggishness, and legislative impasse have persisted in the nation. Second, Tunis's poor economic situation didn't help the populace or satisfy their needs. Additionally, the Covid-19 outbreak has increased Tunisians' sense of unease. As a result of the epidemic and poor government management, the general populace experienced a high number of fatalities and economic difficulties. These are the problems that gave President Kais Saied his chance and made the political system tense and unstable.

REFERENCES

- Amara T and McDowel A .2021. "Tunisian Democracy in Turmoil after President Sacks Government". *Reuters*, online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/tunisian-democracy-crisis-after-president-ousts-government-2021-07-26/> Consulted on 08.07.2023.
- Dennison J and Jonas D .2021. "The Dynamics of Electoral Politics after the Arab Spring: Evidence from Tunisia". *The Journal of North African Studies* 26 (4): 756-780, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2020.1732216>
- Esposito JL , Sonn T and Voll JO .2016. *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito JL and Voll JO .2010. *Makers of Contemporary Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Falor S .2021. "Explained: Why Tunisian president has suspended the PM, dissolved Parliament," *The Guardian*, online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/tunisian-crisis-escalates-as-president-dissolves-parliament> Consulted on 09.07.2023
- France 24 .2023. "Tunisia President Fires Prime Minister Najla Boudin". *France 24*, online: <https://www.france24.com/en/afrique/20230802-tunisian-president-fires-prime-minister-najla-bouden> Consulted on 01.08.2023
- Freedom House .2023. "Tunisia's Political Score. Freedom House". Online: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2023> Consulted on 02.08.2023
- Ibrahim SE .2007. "Towards Muslim Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 18 (2): 5-13. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-muslim-democracy/>

- Jebnoun N .2014. "Tunisian at the Crossroads: An Interview with Shiekh Rashid Al-Ghannouchi. ISSUU, online https://issuu.com/georgetownsf/docs/noureddine_jebnoun_tunisia_at_the_c Consulted on 01.08.2023
- Kienle E .2014. "Egypt without Mubarak, Tunisia after Bin Ali: Theory, History and the 'Arab Spring.'" *Economy and Society*,41 (4): 532-557, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2012.719298>
- Merriam .2023. Dictionary of Politics. Merriam Webster, online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politics> Consulted on 09.07.2023
- Nassif HB .2022. "Why the Military Abandoned Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 33 (1): 27-39. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-the-military-abandoned-democracy/>
- Netterstrøm KLY .2015. After the Arab Spring: The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 4: 110-124. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/after-the-arab-spring-the-islamists-compromise-in-tunisia/>
- Radeck M .2022. "Tunisian's Deadlocked Situation: President Saied Takes the Authoritarian Exist". *Behorizon.Org*, online: <https://behorizon.org/tunisia-deadlocked-situation-president-saied-takes-the-authoritarian-exist/> Consulted on 09.07.2023
- Voll JO and Sonn T .2019. "Political Islam. Oxford Bibliographies, online:<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0063.xml> Consulted on 10.07.2023
- Willis JM .2014. *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Yerks SE .2022. "The End of Tunisian Model: The Countries Democracy Has Died". *Foreign Affairs*, online: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/tunisia/end-tunisia-model> Consulted on 01.08.2023